

DIOCESAN NEWS

Famed rabbi, producer to kick off Bible series

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In the beginning, there was Bill Moyers hosting a series of discussions about the Book of Genesis on the PBS television network.

Five years after the much-acclaimed journalist brought the views of Christian and Jewish scholars and theologians into living rooms throughout the country, his 10-part series, "Genesis: Living Conversations," is still influencing interfaith discussions here.

Dozens of people in this area have attended year after year of interfaith discussions on the Hebrew Scriptures. The discussions have been cosponsored by the Jewish Community Federation and the Rochester Commission on Christian Jewish Relations of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, an ecumenical organization to which the Catholic Diocese of Rochester belongs.

This year's series of discussions will kick off Tuesday, Sept. 11, at 7:30 p.m., at Temple Beth El, 139 Winton Road South, with two speakers: Catherine Tatge, who produced and directed "Conversations," and Rabbi Burton Visotzky, professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. The rabbi's long-running interfaith dialogues on Scripture in the Big Apple inspired Moyers to create "Conversations."

Rabbi Visotzky is the author of *The Genesis of Ethics*, the guidebook for this upcoming series of discussions. The book examines the ethical questions raised by the Genesis stories.

This year's series is "Genesis: Back to the Beginnings" and, after the kick-off discussion, will take place the second Wednesday of the month from October to May, from noon to 1 p.m., at the federation, 441 East Ave. The discussions are free and open to



the public. More information is available from the federation at 716/461-0490.

Moyers himself has praised Rochester for being one of the few communities in the country to keep discussions on the Hebrew Scriptures going in the years after the series aired. Moyers complimented the Rochester community in a recent e-mail message sent to Isobel Goldman, JCF's director of community relations.

"You and your allies did it better than anyone," Moyers wrote.

That thought was echoed by Rabbi Visotzky in a phone interview from New York City. A number of communities have slated interfaith discussions based on the original series when it has been rebroadcast in recent years, he said. However, Rochester went outside the series' parameters to talk about biblical texts other than Genesis.

"I can think of very few communities that have achieved what Rochester has done," he said. "It's exactly what we've hoped for, and maybe beyond what we

hoped for when we conceived of the series."

Catholic speakers at the discussions have included Bishop Matthew H. Clark and Father Joseph P. Brennan, adjunct professor in the department of religion and classics at the University of Rochester. Father Brennan is slated to co-host the Nov. 14 discussion on "The Other Woman/Ishmail's Baby" with Rabbi Alan Katz of Temple Sinai.

Father Brennan said the scriptural discussion series inspired by the Moyers' series are one of the many fruits of Christian-Jewish dialogue that has been taking place in the Rochester area for more than three decades. A member of the Christian Jewish commission, Father Brennan said both faiths share a common love for Hebrew scriptures.

"People love the Bible and these books and these passages," he said. "We never get tired of studying them because they reflect our own experience."

He added that he has gained much from studying the Bible with Jews because, un-

like many Christians, Jewish readers of Scripture may be more interested in the questions biblical stories raise rather than the answers Scripture provides. Although the Bible contains such absolutes as "Thou shalt not kill," it also contains many characters who were extremely flawed human beings, and their motives for doing things are not always clear to the reader. Hence, such ambiguity leaves room for discussion by readers of what they themselves would do when confronted with some of the situations biblical characters faced, he noted.

Goldman said the discussions allow Christians and Jews to examine stories they both revere.

"It's not meant to be a ... course," she said. "It's really just meant to inject something special into your life, to hear these voices that are different from your own."

She added that the series even inspired a dialogue last year on the Koran, Islam's sacred book, and the Torah, the first five books of Scripture, between Muslims and Jews. Both faiths revere such figures as Abraham and Moses, she said.

Goldman said that most of the sessions over the past five years have drawn no fewer than 50 people, and sometimes more than 110. On some occasions, she's even had to turn people away, she said.

Two regulars at the discussions have been Milton and Dvora Lederman, who attend Temple B'rith Kodesh in Brighton. Lederman chaired the Women's Interfaith Coalition, a Christian-Jewish group, for 12 years until June of this year. She said she and her husband enjoy the series because it gives them a chance to learn why people of both faiths revere the Scriptures.

"The people who come and the people who speak out ... are good people, and they are interesting people, and I think we all get stimulated by that."

Stores promise diocesan teachers discounts

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

It's little secret that Catholic school teachers earn less than their public-school counterparts do. To help offset that difference, the Monroe County Catholic School Board has been collaborating with merchants from Rochester to Newark and Elmira on a program that will give Catholic school teachers discounts on certain merchandise.

The board hopes the program, which begins next month, eventually will extend to all areas of the diocese.

"Our teachers dedicate themselves to our children and the Catholic School system for less money than they can make elsewhere," board Chairperson Matt O'Connor stated in a news release. "We need to recognize their gift to us and return the goodness whenever and wherever they can."

Mike Coniff, a Monroe County Catholic School Board member, said the idea grew out his daughter Kimberly's experience of buying a Rochester house through the "Teacher Next Door" program of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. The program provides a 50-percent discount for single-family homes that are available because their owners defaulted on FHA-insured mortgages. It requires that purchasing teachers work in the areas in which their new homes are located.

This month Kimberly begins her third year of teaching at Aquinas Institute. She walks the five or six blocks from her new home, which also is near the family's parish, Sacred Heart.

Although the HUD program planted the seed, Kimberly said there is more to her father's idea for Catholic school teacher discounts.

"He sent all five of us through Catholic schools," she said. "I think he was thinking of the teachers at Sacred Heart as

well. I know he's appreciated everything that they've done for him over there."

The youngest of Mike and Marlene Coniff's children is at Sacred Heart School now, Kimberly said. She and her siblings also went on to Catholic high schools.

She said she's looking forward to discounts for Catholic school teachers.

"I think it's a good program. You always need stuff, unfortunately," Kimberly said. "I've been in the house four months now; already my fridge is gone. ... I anticipate taking advantage of the program. I think a lot of other teachers will, too."

Mufflers, carpeting, cars, farm products and more will be offered at discounts of at least 5 percent and as high as 20 percent, Coniff said.

"It's a real potpourri of businesses," said Mercy Sister Edwardine Weaver, a board member helping coordinate the program. "I would think as a start we'll have somewhere between 15 and 20, and our hope is we'll continue to get more."

"It's the kind of initiative where we said let's start small and build. Just with a small start, we haven't had anyone we approached say no," Sister Weaver added.

Dominican Sister Elizabeth Meegan, diocesan superintendent of schools, is expected to formally announce the program to teachers Oct. 5 at superintendent's day. Sister Weaver said she expects that membership cards and booklets about the pro-

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gram will be available that day.

"Our goal here is to provide teachers additional support on the quality of life," Coniff said. "If they can get their car cheaper, or sofa cheaper, it kind of compensates for their not getting what their public school peers are."

Especially involved thus far are family-owned businesses whose owners had gone to Catholic schools, or whose kids are going to Catholic schools, Coniff said.

Interested merchants may call Coniff at 716/428-7612, or Sister Weaver at 716/275-7833.

RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

For testing an investigational drug for the prevention of colds

The University of Rochester Vaccine Testing Unit is conducting a clinical research study to evaluate an investigational medication for prevention of colds. Volunteers are currently need to participate in this study. The study requires seven visits over a twelve week period.



Healthy adults ages 18 to 74
Compensation available
For more information
please call

716-271-3990

Thoughts to Consider



EDWIN SULEWSKI
Funeral Director

When a pet dies what can I do for my child?

A child may be quite upset when a pet dies. One way you can help is to plan a ceremony with the child for saying goodbye. A pet funeral gives the child a feeling of being in control and allows him to express some feelings about the loss. Finding a box to place the pet in, digging a grave and holding a ceremony also satisfies a child's natural curiosity about the physical aspects of death. When a pet dies a child may continue to be sad, for several days then, as a rule, they turn their attention to other matters. Listen to your child when he expresses his feelings and be available to answer any questions your child might have.

SCHAUMAN-SULEWSKI FUNERAL HOME

NEW LOCATION

1717 Portland Avenue
Just North of Ridge Road

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