

# CONTINUED...

## Catholic press

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Livingston counties, the Southern Tier and the Finger Lakes region.

Another possibility being considered would be to produce a *Catholic Courier Weekly* in Spanish for parishes, regardless of region, with predominately Hispanic populations. Should this go into effect, the *Courier* would join a growing trend of Catholic publications reaching out to Spanish readers. Nine U.S. dioceses and archdioceses currently produce Spanish-language newspapers, and that number will likely rise in the years to come, said Oscar Reyes, editor of *El Pregonero*, a weekly Spanish newspaper published by the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

"In almost every diocese in this country, the number of Hispanics has grown a lot. Most of them are newcomers and don't speak English," Reyes said in a telephone interview. He said the circulation of *El Pregonero*, a free publication established in 1977, has risen from less than 8,000 when he began in 1985 to nearly 30,000 today.

### Web possibilities

The Internet, as well, continues to take on increasing significance in the Catholic press: Approximately two-thirds of all U.S. diocesan newspapers listed Web sites in the 2002 Catholic Press Directory. The newspapers either have their own Web sites or are part of a diocesan site.

The *Catholic Courier's* Web site, [www.catholiccourier.com](http://www.catholiccourier.com), debuted in 1997. Under the newspaper's strategic plan, this site would get a graphic overhaul and be updated daily rather than weekly beginning in 2003. It will include all material contained in the weekly and monthly print editions, plus original Web-only material; a searchable archive of past articles; and other features.

The Internet is a key area because "younger people are growing up on the



Web. People want things fast; they want instant gratification," said Kim Parks, who maintains the current Web site in her position as the *Courier's* graphics manager.

But maintaining a quality Web site is a daunting challenge for many Catholic newspapers, Parks pointed out: "You need to devote resources just like you do a paper, and a lot of these Catholic papers run on very small staffs to begin with."

On the positive end, Franz said the Internet enables the *Courier* to expand its distribution to a much wider geographic audience. She also noted that senior citizens, who represent a significant portion of *Courier* readership, are among the fastest-growing online demographic.

Even so, she and McGovern agreed that Web sites will never render useless the printed version of the Catholic press.

"The Web is a 'pull' technology, not a 'push' technology. It does not come to you," Franz said, noting that people not only have to take the initiative to visit Catholic Web sites, but also must fend for themselves in a sea of purportedly Catholic sites

with questionable content.

McGovern cited the convenience of print publications, saying fears about the Internet replacing newspapers are similar to the concerns when radio and television first came out. "People like to still sit in the armchair reading their newspaper," he remarked.

### Weekly vs. monthly

McGovern strongly prefers that those people in the armchair have fresh Catholic news every week, rather than every month. "When a diocesan newspaper cuts back on frequency, it also cuts back on communication, education, information and evangelization," he said.

According to the Catholic Press Directory, 47 percent of the national and diocesan newspapers in the U.S. publish weekly. Twenty-seven percent are monthlies, and 23 percent are biweeklies.

Yet Franz noted that the decision to transform the *Catholic Courier* into a monthly — supplemented by the weekly bulletin inserts and an enhanced Web site — was not made out of economic necessity. Instead, the intent was to use the same resources to reach more people — without compromising quality or the newspaper's ability to cover news in a timely fashion.

Franz pointed out that *Catholic Courier Monthly* would contain as many or more pages as the total in a month's worth of the current weekly issues. Add in regionalized coverage in the weekly bulletin inserts, and Franz foresees no loss in news coverage.

She acknowledged, however, that when dioceses do cut their newspapers back significantly, "what's typically driven the moves has been economics," and that this generally has led to a decline in news coverage. She cited a sharp rise in the cost of newsprint during in the late 1990s as one key factor, combined with an ongoing series of postal-rate increases.

"If we're looking for a 9 to 15-percent (postal) hike in the next year, it's going to get ugly for a lot of people. And there's no

end in sight," said Franz, whose two-year term as CPA president will expire this May.

Economics were at the root of *Catholic New York's* transition from weekly to monthly in September 2001. Catholic News Service, quoting an Aug. 2 article in *Catholic New York*, reported that Cardinal Edward Egan approved this move for New York City's archdiocesan newspaper as a part of cost-cutting moves to slice the archdiocese's deficit that approached \$20 million in the fiscal year ending Aug. 31, 2000. CNS noted that *Catholic New York's* staff got slashed from 31 to 13 employees.

"The situation is painful for us in the Catholic press because *Catholic New York* has been something of a flagship paper" for the Catholic Press Association, said Franz, who noted that the paper had annually won numerous CPA awards for journalistic excellence.

The move to publish monthly happened to take effect just before the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, preventing *Catholic New York* from covering the disaster as it unfolded in its own back yard. McGovern noted that this served as a dramatic illustration of how "it gets more difficult to put out a quality product" when publishing less frequently.

McGovern added that "the success and quality of the paper depends on the bishop. If a bishop wants a strong paper, he'll have a strong paper."

The CPA executive director said he hopes that when the Archdiocese of New York gets back on its feet financially, Cardinal Egan will "come back and see the value of weekly newspaper" in regard to *Catholic New York*.

In fact, McGovern added, all diocesan bishops should work to solve any financial difficulties involving their newspaper before scaling back production.

"They'll say, 'We can't afford it.' But ... if postal rates go up, we have to find ways to generate more income," he said. "To me, it's not a question of affording it. It's an obligation."

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