

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Hospital chaplain receives social work award

By Jennifer Burke
Editorial intern

Father George Norton, the director of pastoral care at Rochester General Hospital, was recently awarded the 2002 Ella Hollister Social Work Award.

The award, given every year to an employee or volunteer at Rochester General, was established in 1984 to acknowledge the role that social workers play at the hospital. Those being considered for the award have to continually demonstrate dedication to and compassion for the patients.

"I had never in the world thought of this happening," Father Norton said of receiving the award. "It was a great honor to be cited by the people I have a lot of respect for."

Kay Johnson, a social worker with the hospital's women's center, nominated Father Norton, who served as chaplain of Genesee Hospital for 12 years before coming to Rochester General. Sharon Cerasoli, another social worker at the hospital, understands why Johnson nominated Father Norton. According to Cerasoli, Father Norton was nominated in part because of the way he responded to the closing of Genesee Hospital last year.

"Father was very instrumental in helping everybody with healing and working together. She (Johnson) really wanted to make special note of his importance in helping with that process," Cerasoli said.

Father Norton came to the Rochester area in 1976 to attend St. Bernard's Institute. He had planned to become a priest of the Diocese of Providence, R.I., but after his 1983 ordination, he decided to stay in Rochester.

"I was just very comfortable here with the church of Rochester and the style of



Karin von Volgtlander/Staff photographer
Father George Norton displays Rochester General Hospital's Ella Hollister Social Work Award in his office at RGH June 7. He recently received the award for his work as the hospital's director of pastoral care.

the Diocese of Rochester," he said.

Father Norton became interested in hospital ministry at a young age. When he was in his 20s, he was hospitalized for a ruptured appendix and he always remembered how important the hospital chaplain was to him. That memory was just one of the many reasons Father Norton decided to go into this ministry.

"I had always felt that it was the kind of ministry I could apply myself to," he said. "I also felt that I would be able to reach out to people. It's a very rewarding ministry. You see people at their most vulnerable time, and you can be of some service to these people."

Father Norton visits patients and families, giving comfort and hope to those in times of need. He also supports other

hospital employees in times of crisis.

"I often say that I have two parishes," Father Norton said. "I have one that's made up of patients and families, and I

call that a transitory parish, but I have a permanent parish too. That's the staff. All of the staff, including us here in pastoral care, need support as a result of some situations we find ourselves in."

If, for example, a particular floor of the hospital is experiencing many deaths in a short period of time, staff members often call on Father Norton, who relies on them for support as well. The experiences they share bond them together.

"I have friends that I can share with and so on, but I find a great deal of support in being with the staff. Oftentimes the staff members have gone through the same thing with me," Father Norton said.

The patients and staff of the hospital respond well to Father Norton, according to Cerasoli.

"He can't get down the hallway without 20 people greeting him," she noted. "Father certainly has his own special presence. It's been wonderful to see people responding with such warmth and friendliness to (him)."

"I love hospital chaplaincy work and I love being a priest," Father Norton said. "I'm thankful for many people for fostering my priesthood and my vocation."

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