Retreat centers offer quiet places to encounter God

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Hungering for some alone time with God? If the answer is yes, the Diocese of Rochester has a number of centers designed to meet the needs of individuals and/or groups interested in going on retreat.

Readers should contact each center to learn more, because they all offer many programs that would take several pages to list. Highlighted here are four retreat centers listed in the official diocesan directory, along with examples of some of their programs.

Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua – For 75 years, Notre Dame has operated in locations in Rochester and Geneva, and under slightly different names. Administered by the Redemptorist Fathers, Notre Dame since 1967 has been situated on Foster Road in Canandaigua, overlooking the lake of the same name. The center plans to celebrate its 75th anniversary sometime later this year, after the appointment of its newest superior, Father John Kingsbury, CSsR, becomes effective in August. Father Kingsbury will replace Father Frederick Brinkmann, CSsR, who has been appointed assistant secretary of the Redemptorists' Baltimore province.

Notre Dame serves about 5,000 people each year, primarily adults, and its preaching staff consists of three priests and two Sisters of St. Joseph. Its sprawling, two-story building contains 108 beds, a chapel and meeting rooms. The center recently was renovated to the tune of $1.3 million in heating, air conditioning, kitchen and painting improvements.

The Redemptorists specialize in preaching, and retreat director Father Paul Miller said retreat work allows him to give talks for retreat participants with far more depth than he could in the limited amount of time available during an average Sunday homily.

Karin von Volgtlander/Staff photographer

Mary Mulcahy (from left), Virginia Murray and Joan Doeblin of St. Stephen Parish in Geneva pray during Mass in the chapel at Canandaigua's Notre Dame Retreat Center June 18.

Notre Dame emphasizes a theme in its retreats each year, and this year's is "Christ Calls: 'Come to Me! Be Refreshed!'" In particular, Father Miller and fellow retreat director Father Jack Fiske noted that people need to be refreshed in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"People need to get away desperately from the noise of the world," Father Miller said.

Father Fiske added that retreats provide lay Catholics time to realize the true meaning of their vocations.

"It's an absolute that Jesus Christ lives in everyone, and (a retreat) is a really fine opportunity to come to acknowledge that Jesus lives inside you," Father Fiske said.

Father Jack Fiske speaks to retreat participants.

For information on Notre Dame, call 585/394-5700, or visit the Web site at *notredameretreathouse.org*.

Sisters of St. Joseph Spirituality Center, Rochester – Located at 402 Rogers Parkway, this center is adjacent to St. Margaret Mary's Parish, and has been operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph for 17 years, according to Sister Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ, director.

The SSJ Spirituality Center offers numerous retreat programs as well as counseling in the fields of health and wellness, grief and other areas, she said. Sister Heffernan added that the center currently offers consultation to people in midlife, or 35 and older, "to help them see that their interior life becomes more important as they develop."

She said the center serves 3,000 to 4,000 people a year, both individuals and groups from parishes and other organizations. The center also conducts days of reflection and offsite retreats for parishes.

"People come here to pray, to look for peace," Sister Heffernan said. "We have one woman who says when she comes through the door she wants to holler, 'I'm home.' That's the spirit she feels."

The center will offer a "Life Long Learning Week" for men, women and children from July 22-26. For information, call 585/336-4370.

Mercy Prayer Center, Rochester – Sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, this center, at 65 Highland Ave., is located on a wooded acre near Highland Park. Directed by Mercy Sister Jody Kearney, Mercy Prayer Center offers programs on such subjects as faith-sharing, spirituality and yoga, women's spirituality, and creativity and prayer.

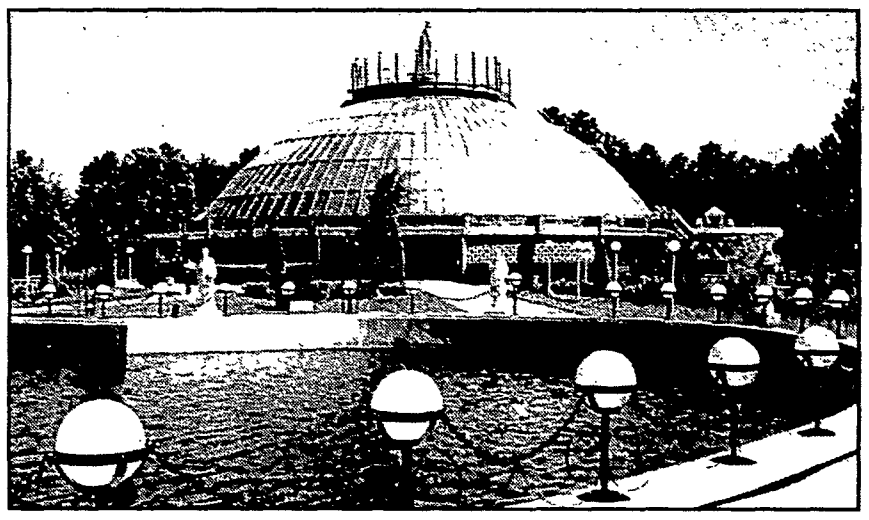
A highlight this year is a four-part session on "The Nonviolent Moment: Spirituality for the 21st Century," which will take place at the order's motherhouse, 1437 Blossom Road in Brighton. The series will take place on the evenings of Sept. 16, Oct. 21, Nov. 18 and Dec. 16, and will focus on the call, spirit, heart and power of nonviolence.

The Mercy Prayer Center can accommodate overnight guests. For information, call 585/473-6983, or visit the Web site *www.ggw.org/mercyprayercenter*.

Borromeo Prayer Center, Greece – This center is operated at 3011 Dewey Ave. by St. Charles Borromeo Parish, and was opened in 1991, according to Patricia W. Scouten, administrator. It is the only parish-run retreat center in the diocese.

In particular, Borromeo works with parish staffs and councils on creating mission and vision statements and on leadership development, Scouten said. The center also hosts ecumenical, support and rosary groups. The center can accommodate 37 people overnight, and serves more than 1,000 people each year.

For information, visit the Web site at *www.frontiernet.net/~stcharls/bpcindex.html* or call 585/663-5856.



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