

# Planning group targets seniors

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Approximately 14,000 of Irondequoit's 52,000 residents — including 5,000 Catholic parishioners — are age 60 or greater.

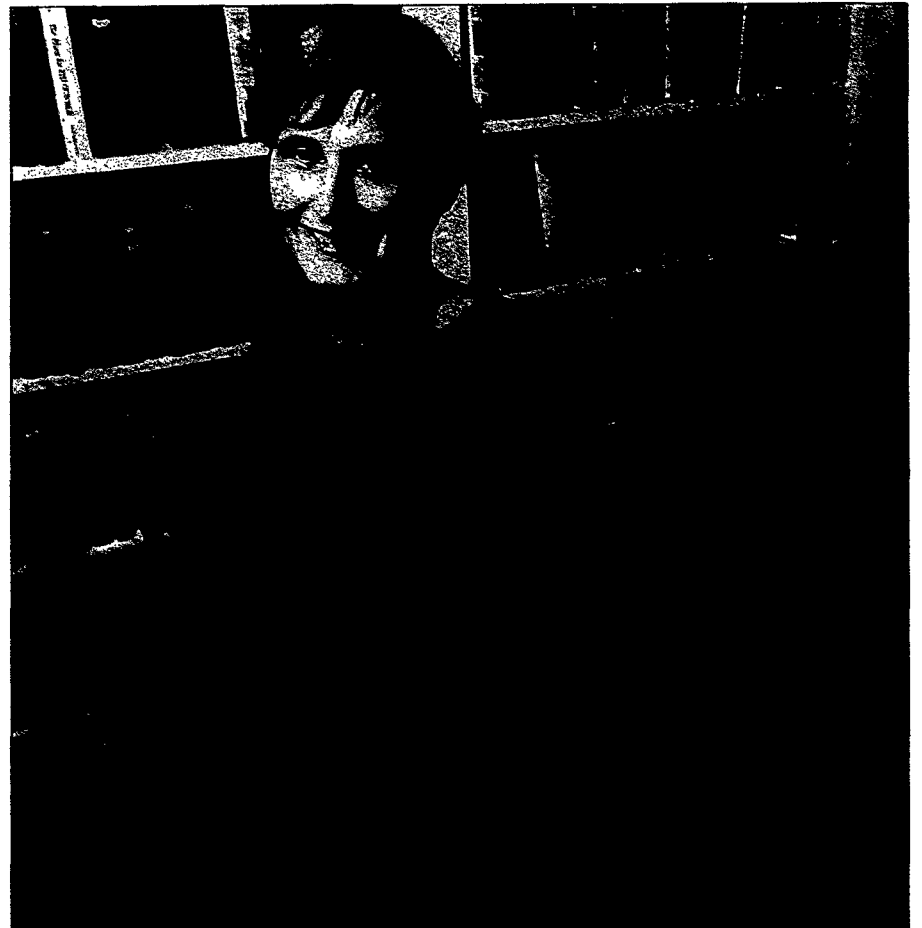
Based on these statistics cited by Father Peter Bayer, director of pastoral care for St. Ann's Community, it's apparent that the needs of senior citizens should take high priority. The Irondequoit Planning Group has addressed this concern by creating a new full-time position: coordinator of senior ministry for the group's six faith communities.

The position is partially funded by the planning group, which comprises the parishes of St. Margaret Mary, Christ the King, St. Salome,



St. Thomas the Apostle and St. Cecilia, as well as St. Ann's Community. Remaining costs are covered by a grant from the diocesan Office of Pastoral Planning. The planning office, established in 1997, receives its funding from the Thanks Giving Appeal.

Donna Walker is the Irondequoit Planning Group's inaugural senior-ministry coordinator. She began her position in July 2002 and works out of an office at St. Ann's Home. Walker has a lengthy background in health-care administration and has



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Donna Walker is coordinator of the Irondequoit Planning Group's new ministry for senior citizens. Her office is located at St. Ann's Home.

also been active in ministry for several years at her parish, St. Margaret Mary.

According to Father Bayer, the Irondequoit Planning Group had identified four prevalent concerns that led to Walker's hiring: transportation; spiritual needs and wellness of seniors; opportunities for socialization; and establishment of a home and health-care referral information system. Based on these factors, the group developed a budget for a paid coordinator.

Thus far, Walker said her top priority has been to gather information from parishioners and pastoral staffs. Out of these meetings she hopes to develop programs that would bring together all the planning group's faith communities, such as Bible-study classes.

"There is a great interest in regionally sharing information," Walker said.

In some instances, she said, programs that are successful at one parish can be expanded to include the entire planning group.

"We're looking to build on the strength that each of these parishes brings," she said.

Father Bayer pointed out that Walker's role is crucial because parishes are not currently equipped to handle the growing senior population. Despite the existence of dedicated volunteers, Father Bayer said that many can only give "a very, very small percentage of their

time to senior ministry."

William Pickett, director of the diocesan Office of Pastoral Planning, said the creation of Walker's position can serve as a model for other parts of the diocese. Pickett commented that the needs of seniors will take on increased focus across the diocese in the upcoming years.

"The baby boomers are about to become seniors," Pickett said. "The boomers are always questioning themselves and institutions. These are going to be different old people. They're going to be challenging us, living longer, being more active."

Casey Lopata, the planning group liaison who works with the Irondequoit group, added, "I think that this project has been a real model of planning-group collaboration as well as perseverance. They systematically worked through the issues, exhibiting flexibility and creativity, and came out with a great outcome. Hopefully it's going to help a lot of people in the Irondequoit area."

Father Bayer said he hopes similar positions will be created in other parishes and planning groups, much in the same way that paid positions in youth ministry and religious education have increased in recent years.

"We want to make sure the senior ministry programs are built right into the whole fabric of the parish," he said.

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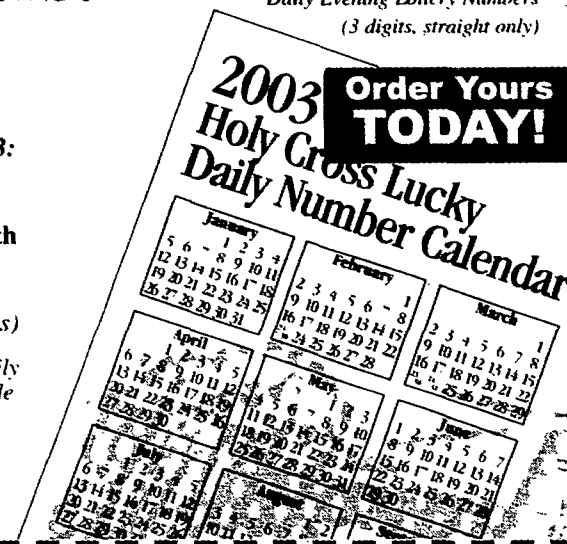
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