

Kwanzaa is a time to celebrate African roots

Jennifer Ficaglia/Catholic Courier

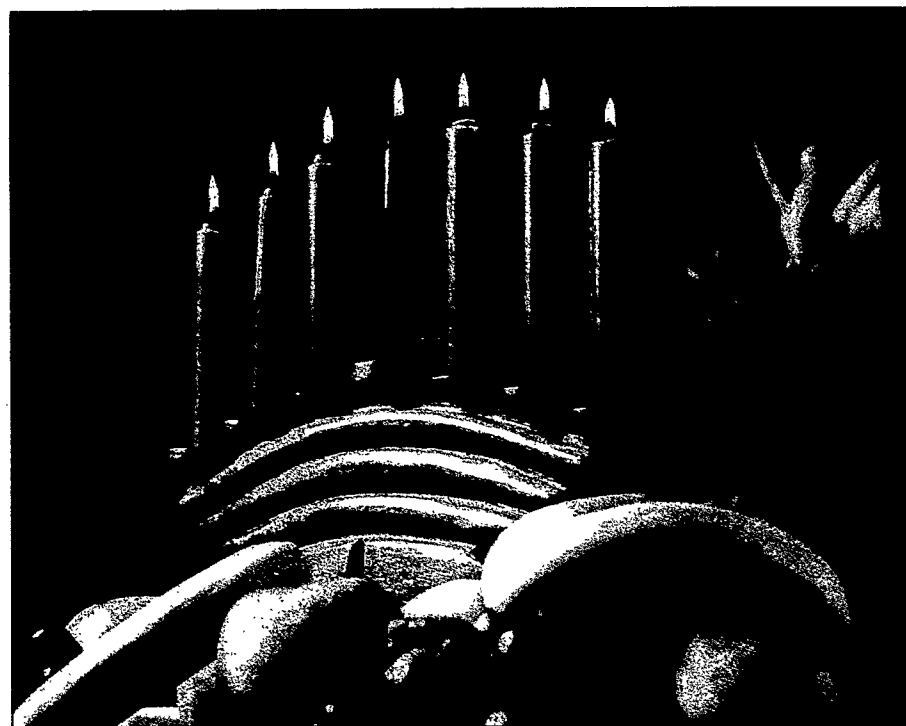
Kwanzaa is a time for African Americans to come together to celebrate and learn about their heritage, as well as to focus on their families and how they are connected to each other and Africa, according to a local priest who celebrates the holiday.

"Kwanzaa speaks to the heart of the African American community," said Father Michael Upson, associate director for multicultural services in diocesan Parish Support Ministries and administrator of Rochester's Immaculate Conception Parish. "It's a time for everyone to learn and be focused, and a

time to bring the community together. For me, it's very stimulating. It's very enriching."

Father Upson explained that Kwanzaa, which means "first fruits" in Swahili, is a cultural holiday created in 1966 by black-studies professor Dr. Maulana Ron Karenga. Karenga developed the celebration as a way to preserve, continually revitalize and promote African American culture.

Kwanzaa is celebrated from Dec. 26 through Jan. 1, and is full of opportunities for creatively celebrating family togetherness as well as for learning about African culture and traditions. Each of the seven days of Kwanzaa is devoted to a



principle that "helps focus on certain aspects of our lives," Father Upson said.

The seven days and principles are:

- Dec. 26, Umoja (Unity): To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.

- Dec. 27, Kujichagulia (Self-determination): To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for and spoken for by others.

- Dec. 28, Ujima (Collective work and responsibility): To build and maintain our community together and make our sisters' and brothers' problems our problems and to solve them together.

- Dec. 29, Ujamaa (Cooperative economics): To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.

- Dec. 30, Nia (Purpose): To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

- Dec. 31, Kuumba (Creativity): To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful than we inherited it.

- Jan. 1, Imani (Faith): To believe with all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

Father Upson said that Kwanzaa celebrations are full of music, singing and storytelling. People of-

tentimes dress in African attire, and the celebrations are very rich in symbolism.

According to information at www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org, there are seven basic symbols of Kwanzaa.

Mazao (the crops) symbolize African harvest celebrations and the rewards of productive and collective labor; Mkeka (the mat) symbolizes African American tradition and history and therefore, the foundation on which to build; Kinara (the candle holder) symbolizes African American's roots, their parent people of continental Africa; Muhindi (the corn) symbolizes children and the future they embody; Mishumaa Saba (the seven candles) symbolize the seven principles, the matrix and minimum set of values African people are urged to live by in order to rescue and reconstruct their lives in their own image and according to their own needs; Kikombe cha Umoja (the unity cup) symbolizes the foundational principle and practice of unity, which make all else possible; and Zawadi (the gifts) symbolize the labor and love of parents and the commitments made and kept by the children.

Kwanzaa offers a time for people to better understand the meaning of African rituals, symbols and attire, Father Upson said, as well as learn who they are as African Americans, learn who they are in the community and what their purpose is.

"It's just an enjoyable time," Father Upson said.

Come and visit our beautiful South 45 garden section, a garden-like setting of two, three and four grave lots, including a raised-lawn crypt area highlighted by a bronze statue of Christ fallen under his cross.

MONTHLY FUNERAL MASSES
 10:30 am - 11:30 am - Third Sunday Each Month
 November - All Souls Chapel
 May through December - All Saints Mausoleum

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP FOLLOWING MASS
 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm - Sunday @ The Mausoleum

2461 Lake Avenue Rochester, NY • 585-458-4110 • www.holysepulchre.org

www.catholiccourier.com