

Nightclub deaths reach 97

Michael Brown/CNS

WEST WARWICK, R.I. — Father Robert L. Marciano, pastor of SS. Rose and Clement Parish in Warwick, received an emergency message on his pager from the Warwick police at about 11:30 p.m. Feb. 20.

Minutes later, the Warwick fire dispatcher called and told the priest, who is chaplain for the city's police and fire departments, that he was needed immediately at The Station, a popular West Warwick nightclub.

A raging fire had erupted at the nightclub during a rock band's pyrotechnics display. The death toll was 97 as of Feb. 23, and more than 160 others were injured as the crowd frantically rushed out of the club.

As Father Marciano arrived, more than 60 ambulances and countless fire trucks and police cars converged at the nightclub, which was totally engulfed in flames, and patrons, including some who were on fire, were running out the door.

"Some were burned beyond recognition, some just had smoke inhalation, and some had broken bones from being crushed" by the crowd, Father Marciano told *The Providence Visitor*, diocesan newspaper, in a Feb. 21 interview.

The priest reported to a nearby restaurant where Warwick emergency crews had set up a triage center that the chaplain described as "organized chaos."

The morning after the fire, the priest said veteran firefighters told him that "nothing in their lifetime ever compared to this — nothing even close."

"All of us were really over-



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Father Robert L. Marciano, right, talks with Sgt. Edward Pelletier Feb. 21 at the scene of The Station nightclub fire in West Warwick, R.I. Police, firefighters and ATF agents were combing the scene for remains of victims the day after the disaster that took the lives of at least 97 people.

whelmed by this," he added.

During the course of the night, the priest called a half-dozen priests from nearby parishes to urge them to go to area hospitals where burn victims had been taken or to a victims' center established inside a hotel in neighboring Warwick. Meanwhile, he stayed on the scene, first helping to comfort victims and their families and later to listen to and debrief rescue personnel.

While The Station has been reduced to a pile of burnt rubble, "the worst is yet to come," the priest said, noting that victims still needed to be identified and loved ones would have to be buried. He added that families and rescue workers will

need long-term counseling to help them deal with the tragedy.

Bishop Robert Mulvee of Providence issued a statement offering prayers and condolences for the victims and their families, saying, "All of us in Rhode Island are stunned and grieved by the horrific fire in West Warwick. ... As we mourn the sudden and tragic deaths of the victims, we ask God to comfort all those who weep at such a loss. May the great power of God's love strengthen and help to console them."

The bishop asked that all the victims of the tragedy be remembered in the prayers of the faithful at all Masses celebrated in the diocese during the weekend of Feb. 22-23.

Sr. M. Immaculata, 90; missionary

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Born Ann Kavanagh, Sister Immaculata attended St. Augustine School and Nazareth Academy, both in Rochester. She received nurse training at Mercy Hospital, Auburn, and in 1934 joined the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception as Sister Emery. She earned her bachelor's degree from Bonaventure University and her master's from the University of Houston.

She served in a variety of nursing



and administrative assignments in Austin and Houston, Texas, including director of the Holy Cross School of Practical Nursing in Austin from 1952 to 1955. Pursuing her desire to do missionary work, she went to Coroico in 1964 to work in a clinic and learn Spanish. Returning briefly to the U.S., she was accepted into the Poor Clares and returned to Coroico in 1967. When the mission decided to make and market wine to support their work, she voluntarily directed their wine-making operation for 25 years until her retirement.

Sister Immaculata was prede-

ceased by her sister, Mary McMahon of Rochester, and her brothers, Father Michael Kavanagh, SJ, and Father Ambrose Kavanagh. She is survived by nieces and nephews Kathleen (Richard) Walsh of Greece; Geri (John Godwin) McMahon of Bremen, Germany; Thomas McMahon of Reading Pa.; James (Barbara) McMahon of Boulder, Mont.; Timothy (Mary) McMahon of Geneseo; and many great-nieces and great-nephews.

A memorial service was held at the family's convenience. Memorial donations in her name and in the name of the Poor Clares in Coroico may be made to the Theotokos Foundation, c/o Rhonda Stanley, 7919 Edgemoor, Houston TX 77036.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Diocese of Rochester is pleased to announce the appointment of Rev. Fr. Robert L. Marciano, pastor of SS. Rose and Clement Parish in Warwick, to the position of chaplain for the Warwick Police and Fire Departments. Fr. Marciano will be available to provide spiritual care and support to law enforcement officers and their families. He will also be available to provide spiritual care and support to the community at large. Fr. Marciano is a member of the Diocese of Rochester and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

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