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Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

Mary Carol Wall, youth minister at St. Mary Parish in Bath, cleans up Aug. 23 as a crew of volunteers paint the rectory. Local church leaders agree that a strong volunteer base is an important gift enjoyed by urban, suburban and rural parishes alike.

Exploring issues of diversity

Reaching beyond a church's four walls and into the community is one of the biggest challenges for Father Tony Mugavero, pastor of St. Bridget's Parish in Rochester. Last month, his parish conducted a tent revival in an effort to appeal to those curious about the Catholic faith but uncomfortable entering an unfamiliar church.

Father Mugavero is one of a growing number of people in the diocese who feels the local church needs to truly welcome and embrace all people, regardless of age, race, ethnicity or geographic location.

"To me it is so telling that we have such a small black Catholic population in

Rochester, and I travel street after street and there's only a black population, and many of those streets are unchurched," Father Mugavero said. "We have to be humble and admit we still have feelings about color. We have to create an environment where people are together to break that down."

The need to break down barriers and build bridges between cultures was among topics parish leaders delved into during last month's diocesan Leadership Days.

Panel discussions and workshops focused on the different kinds of diversity in the church of Rochester, from the geo-

graphic diversity among urban, suburban and rural parishes to cultural and ethnic differences. The event also presented an opportunity to discuss the gifts, challenges and needs of cultures and parishes within the diocese.

"Our local church of Rochester is incredibly diverse and rich with many gifts, and this diversity in the local church is really a gift to all of us," said Bernard Grizard, director of diocesan Parish Support Ministries, which coordinated the event. "It's what makes our richness, and it's really what the body of Christ is about; being different but one. The more we

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Story by Jennifer Burke

