

# Reservist chaplain helps during war

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

When the United States entered into war with Iraq in March, Father John DeSocio figured he'd soon see duty as a United States Navy reservist chaplain. His only fear, he said, was being relegated to behind-the-scenes work such as serving on committees, whereas his greatest desire was to minister.



The Rochester diocesan priest's concern was quickly dismissed. Father DeSocio was dispatched to the Island of Crete, in southern Greece, where he served at the Souda Bay Naval Support Activity base. He was the only priest, and one of only two chaplains, on a base with 2,400 military personnel — four times its normal population due to the war.

Father DeSocio estimates that nearly half the people there were Catholic — so needless to say, he was highly sought out. He counseled young men who had been among the first U.S. troops in Iraq when the war started and were suffering from disorientation, lack of sleep and narrowly escaping death. Other military were reservists dealing with homesickness.

"Some of the reservists had just gotten married, started a job, had children," Father DeSocio said.

All of Father DeSocio's previous reservist hitches had been in the United States. However, because he currently resides in Belgium, he was assigned to a European location when the war began. Father DeSocio, 56, is vice rector of the American College of the Immaculate Conception at the Catholic University of Louvain, where he works with major seminarians and is beginning the second year of a five-year commitment.

Father DeSocio was mobilized in late March; for the next four months he ministered to men and women in the Navy, Coast Guard, Marines, Merchant Marines, Air Force and Army. His original commitment was for one and possibly two years, but that was cut short after President Bush declared major combat in Iraq finished on May 1. Still, it remained to be seen whether Father DeSocio would be demobilized in time to return stateside and attend the 25th-anniversary celebration of his ordination.

"My brother and sister said they were going to have the party with me or without me, and they were going to have a priest as a stand-in," Father



Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

Father John DeSocio and his mother, Caroline, pass a Knights of Columbus 4th Degree honor guard Aug. 24 following a Mass at Elmira's St. Anthony Church to celebrate the 25th anniversary of his ordination.

DeSocio said with a laugh.

Father DeSocio did get released in mid-August and arrived in the Rochester Diocese in time to celebrate his jubilee Mass Aug. 24 at his childhood parish, St. Anthony in Elmira. He was due to return this week to Belgium.

Father DeSocio has been a Navy reservist since 1991, when he was serving as chaplain at Ithaca College. From there he has maintained a minimum commitment of two days per month and two weeks per year in the reserves, often providing relief for full-time chaplains. He began as a lieutenant and was promoted to lieutenant commander four years ago.

"It's a very stressful job — long hours, many demands," Father DeSocio said, noting that in addition to providing sacraments, a military chaplain often lends spiritual support on such issues as domestic violence and thoughts of suicide. Following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Father DeSocio helped military personnel who had been traumatized by the experience of searching for bodies, and also counseled families of military who were killed in the attack on the Pentagon.

Father DeSocio commented that his most recent military odyssey has been very fulfilling. "I think I was at the right place at the right time," he said of his months in Crete. "I hope I made a difference in some people's lives. They tell me I did."

## JOIN US THIS SEPTEMBER 2003...

### Sept. 5-7 Women's Weekend *Prayer Day by Day*

This retreat will focus on the gift of prayer in our lives, enabling us to SEE God more clearly LOVE God more dearly and FOLLOW God more nearly. The weekend consists of conferences, Mass, Reconciliations and quiet time for personal prayer. Father Jim Louducci will facilitate. (Friday evening 6:00 pm dinner) to Sunday morning Offering \$100

### Sept. 18 *A Day of My Own*

This special opportunity is offered on the third Thursday of each month and will provide a sacred space for you to "take time out" just to be with God - a time to reflect, pray and be refreshed in any way that will nourish your spirit. Come when you want to just "be"! Lunch will be provided. Offering \$12

### Sept. 19-21 Women's Weekend Retreat *Women's Retreat for the Body & Soul*

This retreat focuses on how God has worked in the lives of women through the ages and how women of faith have responded. It leads us into an exploration of how we respond by integrating faith into our daily lives. Presented by Sister Nancy Hawkins, IHM, PhD, Assistant professor of Theology Studies at St. Bernard's School of Theology. Nancy holds an MA from Duquesne University and PhD from Fordham. Also facilitating the weekend will be Mananne Antezak, MA in theology and MDiv from St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry and Sister Rose Raymond Wagner, OSF. Friday evening 6:00 (dinner) to Sunday morning Offering \$100

### Sept. 21-23 *Bereavement Conference of Hope*

Sponsored by the Office of Hope For The Bereaved, this conference provides an opportunity to meet your personal professional educational needs. Time to learn, relax, revitalize and network with other bereaved or bereavement caregivers. Presented by Darcie Sims, PhD and Christopher Novak. Special features includes a Dinner Cruise on beautiful Skaneateles Lake. For further information and to register call Donna Kalb at 315-474-3745

### Sept. 24 *Genuine Happiness*

What is genuine happiness? Where does it come from? How do I experience it? These will be some of the questions explored within the context of our faith traditions and the culture at large. Tools for assessing and cultivating happiness will be investigated, suggested and practiced. Genuine happiness is much less a state to be possessed as it is a by-product of right living. Come and join us as we look into this and other related concerns. Part 2 of the workshop will be offered in May. Attendance at the Fall workshops is not a prerequisite for the Spring session. You will probably be happier if you make both sessions. The second session will build on and expand the core concepts for living life to the full. Presented by Dr. Terry O'Brien, psychotherapist and Credentialed Alcoholism Counselor. Dr. O'Brien holds a PhD in Child and Family Studies and an M.S. in Marriage and Family Therapy from Syracuse University. 6:00 (dinner) - 9:00 Offering \$20 per person per session, \$35 per couple

### Sept. 29 *Embracing the Cup of My Life*

This first in a five-part series will provide and opportunity to get in touch with the intimate wellspring of our spiritual life. Using Joyce Rupp's book, *The Cup of Our Life*, we will explore the many ways the cup can symbolize our daily joys, struggles, griefs, brokenness and celebrations. Copies of the book will be available for \$10.00. Other sessions: Oct. 6, 20, 27 and November 3. Facilitated by Mary Stanley, Pastoral Associate at St. Mary of the Lake in Skaneateles. Kathleen Owens, Pastoral Associate at St. Francis Xavier Parish in Marcellus, and Sister Rose Raymond Wagner, OSF. 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. Offering \$5 per session



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