

Speakers explore racism, response

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

The U.S. bishops have long condemned racism, but more needs to be done by Catholics to eradicate its effects both in society and the church, according to Donna Mostiller, director of human resources for the YWCA in Buffalo.

Mostiller — along with Tara Heavern, the Buffalo YWCA's housing compliance manager — presented a daylong workshop titled "Working Towards A More Catholic Christian Community: Developing Strategies to Confront and Eliminate Racism." More than 30 people attended the Nov. 15 workshop in the Bishop Dennis Hickey Conference Center of the diocesan Pastoral Center. The workshop was hosted by the Diocese of Rochester's Office of Black Ministry.

In addition to her work with the YWCA, Mostiller served as a delegate to the National Black Catholic Congress IX in Chicago in September 2002. Heavern has run workshops on such topics as racism, literacy and conflict resolution.

The workshop took place one day after the 24th anniversary of the release of "Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day." Among its many items, Mostiller noted that the document calls on Catholics to support more training of minorities for leadership positions in the church and to financially support institutions and associations that are organized by black Catholics, Hispanics and Native Americans. During an in-

terview after the morning session, Mostiller said she was struck by participants' willingness to listen to each others' different perspectives on the workshop's topics.

"People don't have any ulterior motives here except to live more fully the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to respond to the baptismal calling to work for justice," she said.

Workshop participant Gerry Murty described himself as a "recovering racist," and added that he is an active parishioner of the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward, which comprises St. Monica's, St. Augustine's and Our Lady of Good Counsel parishes in Rochester.

"I'll be the first one to deny it, but there's racism within me," said Murty, who is white. He added that African-Americans have made many significant achievements in both the nation and the church, and that he believes people need to learn more about those achievements.

Veola Hawkes, an active parishioner in the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward, serves on the community's black Catholic cultural enrichment committee, which lists the organization of an annual All Saints' Day African-American Mass among its activities. As an African-American, she said, color is "primary."

"When people look at you, they don't automatically look at you as a human being, they look at you as a black person," she said. Over the years, however, she said she has learned not to take seemingly racist comments from people as such until she better understands them. For example, she said, she used to react defensively if people complimented on her being "articulate," because she thought the comment indicated that they were surprised to hear a black woman speaking well. Now, however, she's more willing to accept that people may not be implying that.



Reuters/CNS

Blasts investigated

Police inspect the site of car-bomb explosions at two synagogues Nov. 15 in Istanbul, Turkey. The blasts killed at least 20 people and injured more than 300. Pope John Paul II deplored the bombings and urged the world to mobilize for peace and against terrorism.

Hawkes added that she would like to see more people of color in church leadership positions.

"Am I impatient? I don't think so," she said. "Am I hopeful? Yes."

As an African-American Catholic, Ramona Moore, a parishioner at Immaculate Conception Parish in Rochester, said she was concerned over what she sees as growing racial tension in society. She noted that she has tried to understand whites who resent affirmative action, but added that she still doesn't see many blacks in powerful corporate positions.

"There's so many people being laid off and losing their homes, and they're looking for someone to blame," she said. Moore said the participants at the workshop represented people who want to eradicate racism, but she believed more dialogue needs to take place with people who may resent others of a different color.

"We have to get together, as raw

as it may be, and fight through it," she said.

Father Michael Upson, coordinator of the diocesan Office of Black Ministry, which organized the event, praised the participants for their efforts.

"I think it's difficult for people to come to the certain realizations when it comes to racism," Father Upson said. "I think people were open and honest when it came to their pursuit of a very difficult topic."

The event culminated Father Upson's final week as associate director of diocesan Parish Support Ministries and as director of Multicultural Ministries. Father Upson said he is stepping down from both positions effective Nov. 25 so he can devote more time to Immaculate Conception Parish, where he is administrator, and to fulfilling family responsibilities. He will continue to serve as contact person for the Office of Black Ministry.

Jail-ministry coordinator named

Deacon John Brasley, former Steuben County assistant public defender, has been named as diocesan jail-ministry coordinator. He began his part-time position Nov. 3.

Deacon Brasley will coordinate ministry to those incarcerated in jails and prisons throughout the diocese and assist parishes in forming ministries that focus on the incarcerated in their communities.

"I want to be a resource for these ministries, to help ensure that the sacramental and pastoral needs in our jails and prisons are being met,"

Brasley said in a press release from the Diocese of Rochester.

Deacon Brasley was ordained by Bishop Matthew H. Clark in May 2003 and is serving at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Rochester. He is a graduate of St. John Fisher College and Syracuse University College of Law and is currently working on his master of divinity degree at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.

Bernard Grizard, diocesan director of Parish Support Ministries, oversees the newly created office.

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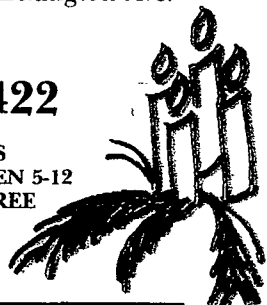
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