

Priest urges pastors to comfort AIDS victims

By **LINDA JUMP**
Staff Writer

DELHI — Delaware County pastors need to take the lead in establishing a welcoming and caring atmosphere for people with AIDS through prayer, advocacy and by becoming involved, a priest told fellow clergy Tuesday.

The Rev. Bernard Turner of Albany, outgoing director

of the Diocesan AIDS ministry, told more than a dozen clergy members they set the tone for how the community reacts to AIDS patients. The Tuesday luncheon was sponsored by the AIDS Task



Turner

Force of Delaware County.

"As leaders of the faith community, we set the tone, especially in the more rural areas. We need to set a sense of welcome, hospitality, openness and awareness," he said.

Several members of the Right to Life organization attended the luncheon, asking Turner his opinion about condom distribution and

questioning his data about the incidence of acquired immune deficiency syndrome. Edward Symkoviak said condom distribution is the "flash point" in the county when it comes to AIDS.

Another man argued that Turner, as a representative of the church, should preach morals and values and not condone reckless behavior

that leads to AIDS.

Turner said his attitude is certainly biblical. "AIDS is the new leprosy," Turner told the clergy. "The church has something to say ... and it's got to do it visibly and forcefully," he said. He said proper education will help prevent the spread of AIDS.

He said clergy should not condemn people with AIDS

or judge them, but should provide a caring atmosphere.

The Rev. Kenneth Baldwin, a retired United Methodist pastor, said in the past, the church has not been welcoming to AIDS patients. "Most of us in our churches and synagogues are doing a lousy job," he said. He praised Turner for his work.