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Searchers won't quit

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The arrest of a kidnapping suspect yesterday fueled momentum among volunteer searchers who remain hopeful of finding 12-year-old Jennifer Schweiger.

If Andre Rand is responsible for the kidnapping, "we're hoping we can find her during this time," said the Rev. Henry Gentile, associate pastor of Holy Family R.C. Church, the parish of the Schweiger family.

Father Gentile spoke last night to about 50 fellow parishioners of the Schweigers who gathered in the Westerleigh church to sign up for search crews, phone duty, poster distribution, or prayer-group participation.

In light of the immediate increase in leads phoned in since

people have seen the suspect's picture, last night's meeting was fortuitously announced in the church's Sunday bulletin.

"There is a job for everyone," said Donna Cutugno, civilian coordinator of the volunteers.

"We're following up every tip; we don't think anyone is foolish who calls in," she said.

The Schweiger family hopes the arrest will help them find Jennifer, Father Gentile said. Jennifer made her First Communion at Holy Family Church, and the priest has been working closely with the family and the volunteer effort since the girl disappeared July 9 from her Westerleigh home.

"Karen and Kenny (Schweiger) believe she's alive, and we believe she's alive," Father Gentile said.

After the family received a call from police at 9:10 a.m. about Rand's arraignment, "they were pretty down, but we got together and prayed," he said before the meeting.

When Richard Burdge heard of Rand's arrest, "I thought right away, 'Good.' I feel relieved in one way, but I'm not going to let up — not until I get Jennifer back." The Meiers Corners resident has been searching regularly over the past 2½ weeks.

"It's not a full relief," agreed Tom Fougner of Willowbrook.

Parishioner Helen Knepple said the arrest is great news "if it's the right man. I hope it is; they'll get something out of him" on Jenni-

fer's whereabouts.

"I was thrilled he was arrested — that they had him. I thought at that point that they had found her," said Janet Crabbe, who joined volunteers at the church for the noon search. Groups leave from Holy Family Church at noon and 7 p.m. daily.

"If he's the man, let's find out where she is, and get her home," she said.

"We're still hoping that (Jennifer) is still alive and that maybe someone else is involved and taking good care of her," said Ralph LaSardo, who attended last night's meeting.

Father Gentile said it was important for the parish not to give up hope. He looks forward to "a big parade down Victory Boulevard when she comes back to us."