

Priests Council Changes, Endorses Constitution

By MOLLIE JUDGE

The Diocesan Priests Council endorsed the Pastoral Council constitution Dec. 10 after amending it to eliminate some unduly powerful positions and thus assure more democratic operation.

The priests also considered various financial matters at their monthly meeting in Becket Hall. A proposed retirement plan was reviewed at length, provisions for sabbatical leave were outlined and a partial report on innercity parish finances was accompanied by a warning that the schools concerned needed more money.

An action plan centering on the world food crisis was offered for consideration by the blocks. Other topics included the pastoral assistant program and continuing education of priests.

The amendment to the Pastoral Council constitution, proposed by Father John Mulligan, changes the method of setting up standing committees. Originally, the constitution required the executive committee to choose a council member as coordinator for each standing committee. The coordinator would choose the committee members and act as liaison between the committee and the council.

Father Mulligan pointed out that the coordinator would hold an extremely powerful position, but if the whole standing committee membership were nominated by the executive committee and then ratified by the entire council, the powerful position of this one person would be eliminated. His amendment to accomplish the change was accepted, and the document was approved unanimously as a tool that would enable the diocese to organize the Pastoral Council.

The council also approved unanimously a revised Pastoral Assistants Proposal that calls for the formation of a Pastoral

Assistants Committee to work with the Department of Pastoral Planning.

The proposal, presented by Father Sebastian Falcone, gives the new committee the authority to send a candidate for a pastoral assistant post to a particular parish for an interview. Father Falcone said the committee would screen candidates and suggest which parishes would best suit their qualifications.

An updated report on the priest's retirement plan was presented by Father Charles Bennett and George E. Perrin, manager of Benefits Planning and Development for Eastman Kodak.

The plan proposes that the normal benefit for a priest retired at age 70 will be \$7.50 for each year of credited diocesan service. This amount will be payable at the beginning of the first month following retirement and will allow a maximum of \$300 in pension benefits.

The maximum benefit will be built up over 40 years of service instead of 45, to allow a priest ordained later in life to receive this amount. The plan provides a vesting benefit to permit the priest to collect even though he is assigned to another diocese. A man who has left the priesthood after 20 years will also be entitled to a pension.

There are 50 retired priests in the diocese and that number is expected to double within the next 10 to 20 years.

Father Bennett stressed that the sole purpose of the fund will be to provide retirement and disability benefits for the plan's participants. It will not affect the priest's social security benefits, but if he receives a pension from any other organization, such as military, government or educational institution, the combined pensions cannot exceed \$300 per month. A document explaining this plan

will be sent to the diocesan priests for reviewing. The matter will be brought back to the Council at the beginning of the year.

Father William Schifferli, pastor representative and chairman of the Personal Finance Committee, delivered that committee's report on a cost of living index effect on priest's salaries and a continued increment for retired priests.

The council endorsed the recommendation of the committee that in addition to the annual increase of \$60 for active priests a three per cent yearly increase on the priest's base salary be included in view of the cost of living. The committee felt that this figure was a modest one since the index points to an 11.5 per cent rise in the cost of living. The added percentage will go into effect at the beginning of the fiscal year on July 1, 1975.

A recommendation for the continuation of the yearly increment until the priest retires from active ministry at age 70 was tabled. At the present time, the increment is discontinued when the man reaches 35 years of service in the priesthood.

The Continuing Education Committee's report, along with program costs, will be sent to all block representatives for discussion.

The committee investigated the number of priests continuing their education, their attitudes and a list of locally available programs.

Father Daniel Holland, education chairman, urged that a full-time person be appointed to offer a guidance service to those seeking additional education.

"This full-time person will get more men to participate in this program and most important, he will be able to offer some sort of a guidance service to the priests. He will probably be the coordinator of a couple of committees concerning this," he said.

Father John Mulligan presented a resolution of the Social Action Committee urging formation of a Human Development Committee in each parish to increase parishioners' awareness of the world food situation. It urged that the Office of Human Development mobilize itself as a World Food Crisis resource center. The blocks will review the resolution before it is submitted for council action.

The financial situation of the Council of Inner City Parishes (CICP) was described in part by John Ritzenthaler, diocesan treasurer, and Father Anthony J. Valente, a co-pastor of St. Michael's.

According to Father Valente, the inner city parochial schools will not be able to operate next year on the same amount of money they had this year.

"It is a serious responsibility of the Priest's Council to support CICP," he said.

Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, who attended the meeting, presented a draft of the average cost of a priest's sabbatical. The report recommended that the priest applicant be given leave and paid salary and regular benefits when he is on sabbatical. It stressed the the diocese would not be responsible for the entire cost and that the priest would be expected to make a personal contribution toward his sabbatical.

Bishop Hickey told the Council about the National Council of Catholic Bishops meeting, which he attended last month.

The 250 bishops focused on debates concerning current issues

such as Governor Nelson Rockefeller's confirmation as vice president. They took a stand against capital punishment. The

National Council also stressed the need for the permanent diaconate, especially in rural areas.

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Priests Oppose Health Council Plan

The Diocesan Priest's Council voted to send two representatives to the proposed task force group of St. Mary's Hospital which intends to protest the recommendation of the Genesee Region Health Planning Council to close the obstetrical facilities of hospitals handling fewer than 1500 live births per year.

The recommendation of the planning council could affect St. Mary's Hospital, the only Catholic hospital in Monroe County. Approximately 1200 babies were delivered there in 1974. According to Sister DeChantal LaRow, hospital administrator, the Council will specify which facilities must be closed by April 1975.

"The closing of the obstetrical unit could very well affect the other units of the hospital since obstetrical patients are referred to other facilities if need be," Sister said. "It is an innercity hospital which serves the poor, and it also offers an alternative to those patients who would prefer a hospital that does not perform abortions."

A 1971 study by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists suggested that the 1500 figure would be the minimum number of births for efficient operation of any obstetrical unit in an area of Rochester's size. According to Paul Lewis, the public relations director of St. Mary's, the study avoided economic considerations and failed to give hard cost information.

Sister DeChantal, who spoke at the Priests' meeting Dec. 10, acknowledged that the decline in

births was a direct effect of the abortion law passed by New York State in July 1971.

"Since St. Mary's is a Catholic hospital it will not permit a woman to have sterilization surgery performed immediately after childbirth. So these potential patients would be referred to another hospital that offers this type of procedure," she said.

"It really bothers me that Catholic hospitals with even a large number of births, such as 1200, will be soon closed as a result of their ethical principles. The fact that abortions, sterilizations, and euthanasia are not performed in them seems to have an effect on the number of patients they serve," she added.

The hospital intends to organize a task force tomorrow to carry its message to the public.

The council asked Father James Marvin, president, to select priests to serve on the task force, and he named two pastors, Father Elmer McDonald of St. Christopher's and Father John Norris of Blessed Sacrament. Neither is a council member.

The PC affirmed that the National Catholic Hospitals Association and the National Catholic Chaplains Association should be informed of the situation threatening St. Mary's.

"A Catholic hospital is a living witness to the dignity of human life. We must adhere to certain ethical and moral principles and serve the patient's bodily and spiritual needs," Sister DeChantal declared.

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