

The Priests Council

Councilmen Approve New Health Plan

By JOHN DASH

Questions of finance, under a variety of headings, occupied the attention of the Priests Council meeting last week at Becket Hall.

Councilmen deliberated a proposed shift in group health coverage for diocesan employees from Blue Cross/Blue Shield to Wausau, fees charged for services ancillary to weddings, stipends, priests' car allowances and a long-term disability plan.

Group health has come under the scrutiny of Thomas Weber, finance director for the diocese since last fall. He presented the council with a detailed comparison between the two companies' plans.

Answering the priests' questions on the proposed plan was Joseph Miltsch, Wausau representative.

Major differences between the plans according to Weber, include a 12 per cent decrease in the premium rate for Wausau this year; the inclusion of major medical coverage up to \$100,000 from Wausau (BC/BS ceiling is \$15,000); and exclusion of abortion coverage in the group's contract.

This last was of special concern

to several councilmen, including Father James Lawlor, who asked if abortion coverage was included in Wausau's other group contracts. Miltsch replied that it was, but that the diocesan contract would not include the item. Father Benedict Ehmann also expressed the bloc's opinion that the root question in the debate over the health insurance shift was a moral one, whether the group's premiums would pay for abortions, as is the case under the present diocesan contract.

Miltsch responded that the funds would not.

Miltsch and Weber also fielded technical questions on the extent of Wausau coverage, on the process used in selecting Wausau's plan, on methods of payment both of premiums and of returns.

Father Kevin Murphy then moved that the council recommend to Bishop Joseph L. Hogan to accept the new proposal contingent on its acceptance by diocesan financial experts. His motion was passed unanimously with one abstention from an order representative.

During discussion and voting on



Photo by Ben Susso

At council meeting priests hear Bishop Hogan's statement on the new process for the selection of bishops. With Bishop Hogan are Fathers Lawlor, Marvin, Heindl (partially hidden), and Gaelens.

marriage preparation (see other story, this page); the council approved a recommendation that fees ordinarily charged for granting dispensations be done away with.

During the same discussion a proposal that the director of finance, in consultation with pastors, establish a set of directives concerning church-usage fees for weddings and other sacraments was roundly scorned by Father James Baker of Livingston-Stauben. He noted that his group felt the process was "going the long way around." He said his group supported the idea of doing away with church-usage fees but it should be up to the local parish authorities to establish fees for such items as maintenance.

Father James Marvin, council president, noted that his bloc would agree with Father Baker's idea.

Father Ehmann, on the other hand, scored the proposal of doing away with the fees as "a bit Manichean." He described himself as "enough of a materialist" to expect such monies.

A proposal to regularize organist fees in the diocese was described by Father Baker as "an utter waste of time." Father Marvin interjected that Father Robert Kennedy, diocesan director of liturgy, had already been so charged.

Debate on the two matters extended to questions of usurping the authority of parish councils, questions of fiscal consistency and creating distrust in the minds of those to be married.

The council eventually passed the two items in what Father Marvin described as a "squeaker vote," 10-9 with two abstentions.

Under the aegis of Msgr. Leslie Whalen, Father Charles Bennett presented an urgent proposal to the council that a "self-insured long-term disability plan be implemented immediately."

A crisis has arisen since Jan. 1, Father Bennett said, in the ability of the diocese to provide for wages for disabled priests.

He outlined the mechanics of a new disability plan and encouraged the council to pass a recommendation which would have it in operation by July 1.

Three members of the council abstained from voting but the council passed the proposal. The plan calls for each diocesan priest to pay \$88.54 per year into the

disability fund. Should a priest become disabled, he would be paid the difference between his regular base wage and what he would receive from other sources (Primary Social Security, Workmen's Compensation and state disability insurance).

Father Bennett noted that while insurance companies have refused to handle the diocesan plan, for a variety of reasons, one corporation has volunteered free actuarial services for the plan.

On the question of stipends, Msgr. Whalen as head of the priests finance committee, having been charged with making a study and presenting a recommendation on separating priests' incomes from

their ministerial duties, returned to the council a proposal to make no changes in present diocesan practice.

The council voted 12-6 with 2 abstentions not to accept the recommendation. Msgr. Whalen was later charged to re-present a study on the question.

The council also passed a recommendation from the committee that the priests' salary scale be reviewed every year by the personnel finance committee.

The priests furthermore passed a recommendation that their car allowances be raised to \$1,200 per year.

Also OK Proposals For Marriage Rites

Revamping the process by which the diocese prepares couples for the sacrament of matrimony moved one step closer to completion last week when the Priests Council voted to recommend to the bishop a dozen courses of action, several involving radical shifts from current practice.

The recommendations put into practice the council's intentions when it approved last May a broad document on marriage preparation. That document had been nearly two years in the writing.

Should Bishop Joseph L. Hogan approve the priests' counsel:

—the diocese will design and adopt two pre-marriage investigation forms, one dealing solely with canonical requirements and the other dealing solely with pastoral and attitudinal considerations;

—both the application for and

the statement granting dispensations in such problems as mixed religion and disparity of cult will be in English, will have a new form and will be free;

—a set of directives will be designed for church-usage fees (although it is the consensus of the council that fees not be allowed at all, except in seriously restricted cases);

—the practice of charging "stole fees" will be studied and changes made if necessary;

—the Chancellor, in consultation with others, will design a set of guidelines for granting dispensations from Canon Law #1109, which limits the places where weddings may take place;

—a clergy conference will be convened before any of the above take effect.

Father Daniel Holland opened the debate on the proposals by noting that "there is nothing on the promises" made by a non-Catholic partner to raise the children as Catholics.

Father James Baker cited his bloc's concern over the expertise of the "present chancellor and marriage tribunal staff" to redesign the canonical investigation forms.

Father Louis Hohman countered that the offices were "not self-contained entities in themselves" and that there would be consultation with canon lawyers in the drafting of the forms.

Msgr. Leslie Whalen called for a graphic designer to help with the layout of the new forms, a proposal which drew laughter from the council. The present forms allow great space for "yes" and "no" answers and very little where detailed explanations are required.

Father Kevin Murphy asked the council to consider "a more radical change" in authorizations to grant dispensations, a proposal which Father John Coonan, one of those who prepared the recommendations, said was voted down in his committee. — DASH.

Etc...

In other matters of interest, the Priests Council heard that:

—Father Benedict Ehmann was named to represent the council on the Permanent Diaconate task force.

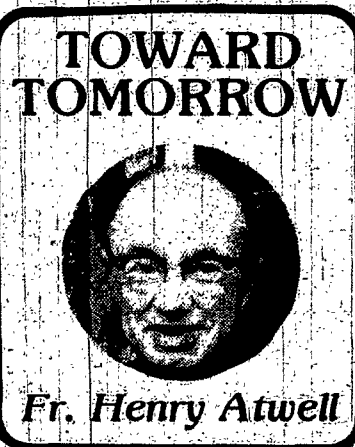
—Father Daniel Torrey will convene the newly-established Mission task force.

—Bishop Joseph L. Hogan has communicated with interested parties in Auburn on the recent appointment of Father Donald Schwab as director of religious education.

—The Ministerial Review Committee has met several times and its "spirit is very good."

—A meeting of Bishop Hogan and Elmira Catholics showed "signs of great cooperation."

—It is hoped the conflict among St. Anthony's, St. Patrick's and the Spanish Apostolate can be resolved without recourse to process.



texts not generally available at all; and for the Daily Office, supposedly intended for every Catholic; four volumes, \$80. To complete the library, add a hymnal, \$5 — for a total cost of about \$200.

Now multiply that cost by the 18,000 parishes, 4,000 missions, 12,000 chapels, 600 monasteries, convents, universities, seminaries, etc., and allowing for some of these not making the total investment, even though many parishes have more than one copy of one or more of the books, especially the Missal which is the most costly of the lot, the total cost for liturgical renewal in the United States is well over \$6 million.

The Vatican Council in 1963 called for simplification and clarification of our liturgy — "noble simplicity... short, clear, and free from useless repetitions... within the people's powers of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation," are the words of the Council.

Here we are now, almost fifteen years and over six million dollars later, and we need a library of fifteen books and the people are in large measure confused and many are contemptuous and the whole enterprise is ridiculous if not tragic.

Is it not time for the People of God to call a halt to the continued proliferation of revisions and additional options and take the task away from experts who apparently are scholars but not pastors, and over the next fifteen years try at last to do what the Vatican Council wanted done?

And in the meantime we might wisely use the texts in the Episcopal Prayer Book. If there were no other benefit, think of all the money we would save!

My neighbor and friend, Rev. Michael Wilson, rector of Zion Episcopal Church in Avon, recently gave me a copy of the just published, almost final edition of their proposed revised Book of Common Prayer.

The book, in clear type and well bound, contains texts for Morning and Evening Prayer, the Great Litany, the Eucharist with four variants, the rites for Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Matrimony, Ministry and Anointing for the Sick, Funerals, Ordinations of Bishops, Priests and Deacons, the entire Psalter, a Catechism and a listing of all Scripture texts to be used for the year. Many of these rites are published in duplicate, one version being the "traditional" thou-thy thee form and the other, the "contemporary" you-your form. Cost of the volume is \$3.50.

The comparable texts for the revised Roman Catholic services are available only in separate volumes — fifteen to be exact! Costs of these volumes are as follows: a Missal, \$45; Lectionary, \$25; separate books for Baptism, Weddings, Funerals, Penance, about \$6 each; Anointing for the Sick, \$4; Confirmation, Ordinations,