

Churches Rap Refuse Plan

By JOHN DASH

Father William Flynn, chancellor of the diocese, has warned the Monroe County Legislature that if it enacts a proposal to create a new refuse district and charges city property owners on an assessed valuation basis for collecting refuse, the Church will publish a parish-by-parish account of the cost of such an operation along with the district representative's name and how he voted on the issue.

"This is not a threat," he said, shortly after addressing a public hearing on the question, "but there is a question of accountability here; and we have an obligation to make known what is happening."

The Church, he said, has "a grave concern ... for the ultimate effect this act would have on our city parishes. Practically all of the property owned by these parishes is tax exempt though the assessment roles contain an assessed valuation for each parcel."

"We are very concerned about the city parishes," he told the legislators. "This will only add to their burden."

Father Flynn was joined at last week's hearing by

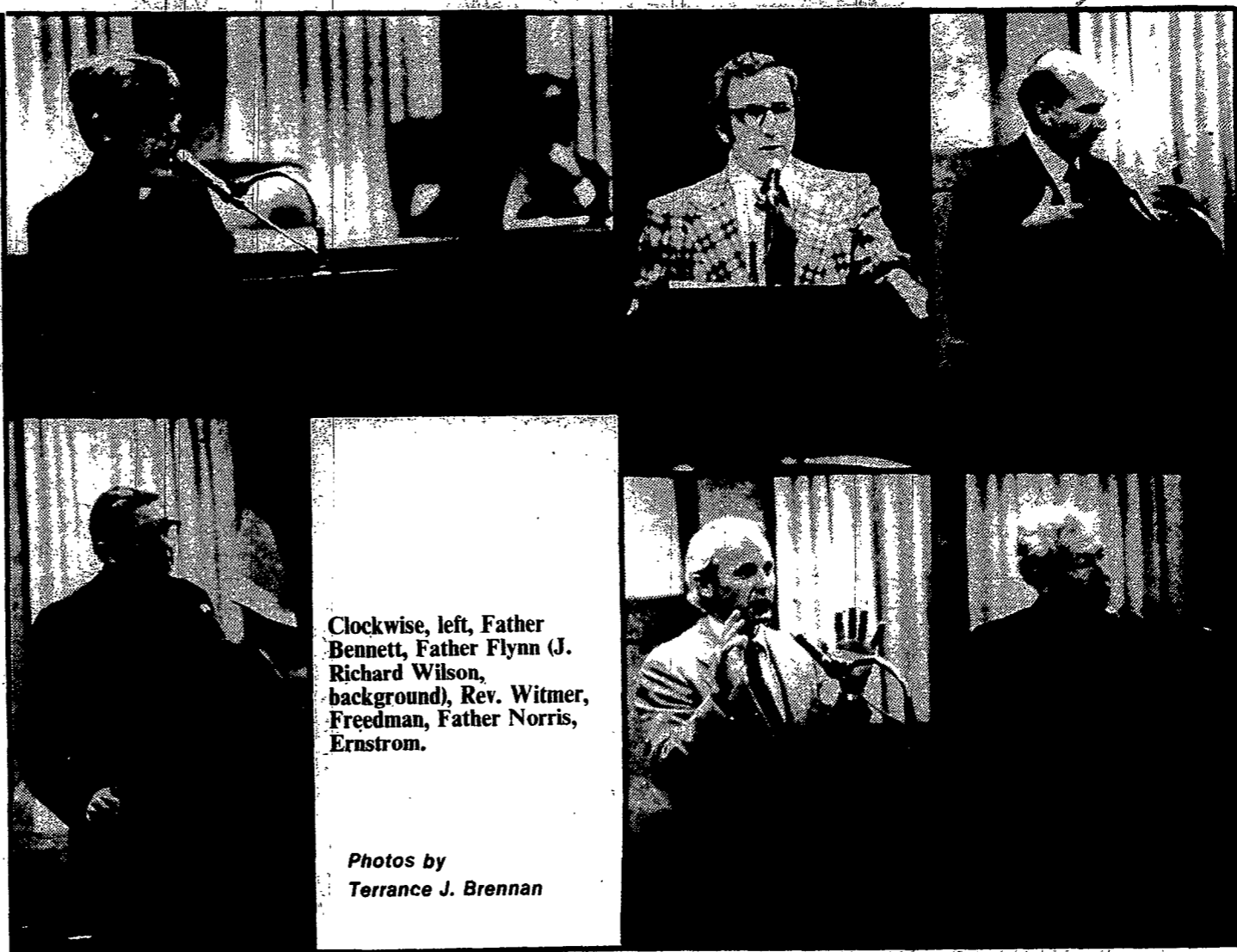
Father Charles Bennett, associate at St. Mary's Church, who told the legislature that "The city of Rochester is taking away exemptions granted by the State of New York." He too warned the assembly that enactment of the proposal would be "challenged through law and the courts."

Rev. Lawrence Witmer, head of Genesee Ecumenical Ministries, joined the diocese in voicing his "grave concern," stating that "religious communities deserve special consideration."

William Ernstrom an attorney for both the diocese and for GEM, challenged the use of Section 266 of the County Code in the proposed legislation. He said that "any charge based on Section 266 does not need to be based on assessed valuation."

"I'm suggesting that there are other bases for the charge," he said.

Father John Norris, pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church, and president of the GEM Pure Waters Task Force, reminded the legislators of the running battle he has had with them over the pure waters charges for churches. He also reminded them of the



Clockwise, left, Father Bennett, Father Flynn (J. Richard Wilson, background), Rev. Witmer, Freedman, Father Norris, Ernstrom.

Photos by Terrance J. Brennan

limited victory he has had in exempting churches from that burden. He said he considers the creation of the refuse district and the charge based on assessed valuation to be a "gimmick."

Father Norris, Rev. Witmer, Ernstrom and Father Flynn all noted that the churches of the area want to pay their fair share for services rendered, but the use of assessed valuation in determining the cost of those services

puts an unfair burden on already struggling religious communities.

Speaking for the proposal was city manager Elijah Freedman, who reminded the legislature

that it has already agreed to the idea of creating such a district. He also indicated that if revenues which would be generated from the creation were not after all forthcoming, other city services might suffer.

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