

Welfare Hikes Passed By NYS Legislature

By Michael Groden

New York public assistance was increased for the first time in seven years last week as Gov. Hugh Carey signed a bill authorizing a 15 percent hike in welfare payments.

The increase will bring the average welfare rate from \$258 per month for a family of four, to \$296 per month.

The welfare hike also ends a two-year campaign by dioceses in the state, including a concerted effort in Rochester, that urged an increase for people living on public assistance.

Individuals in the diocese and diocesan agencies urged the increase, citing the need for more money for welfare recipients due in part to the spiraling inflation rate in the past several years.

In the Diocese of Rochester, a long-term effort was carried out by Catholic Charities and the Office of Justice and Peace to educate people in the diocese for the need of increased public assistance. It also urged individuals and diocesan agencies to debate the issue and send their findings to legislators in their areas.

During the two-year period some 8,600 individual diocesans signed petitions urging legislators to vote for the increase first proposed by Gov. Carey.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark took an active part in the welfare issue. Bishop Clark, together with Bishop Robert Spears, bishop of the Episcopal diocese, headed an ecumenical panel which heard testimony from individuals currently receiving public assistance and representatives from social

agencies who work with welfare recipients.

The bishop also visited Albany in March and urged legislators to support the 15 percent increase to help remove "the dreadful hardship and loss of dignity which our poorest people experience."

"I ask you to consider (an increase) favorably. I know it's not popular, I know it's complex, but I ask you not to forget the concern we must have for the needs of the poor," the bishop told the legislators.

William Privett, associate director of Catholic Charities, applauded the welfare increase, and praised the New York State Legislature for approving the measure.

He said that while the federal government is about to cut some \$40 billion in social service funds, "it was really an act of courage for

the New York lawmakers to approve the measure."

Privett also said that the passage of the hikes "is a great statement" for the work done by the Church in the state, especially in the Diocese of Rochester.

The welfare increase may not benefit recipients as much as originally thought, however. The federal cuts in day care services, medicare, food stamps and others will take away much of the increased revenues.

Privett said that although "I feel good about it (the welfare increase), it may not be enough." Citing the federal cuts, Privett said that the benefit from the increase "may be eroded" before they are received.

The losses felt because of the federal budget cuts have will have to be made up somewhere, he said. The only logical place those services can be obtained is from the public assistance check.

NFP Gets \$29,000 From United Way

For the first time, Natural Family Planning will receive a grant from the United Way.

William McCullough, director of Planning, Evaluation and Allocation for United Way, said that \$29,000 for NFP will be included for 1981-82 under the Catholic Family Center allocation of \$768,000.

Therese Petracca, NFP director, said that the office will add a part-time

secretary, Mary Beth O'Hara, and a part-time community education coordinator, Sandy Pawlak.

Mrs. Petracca said programs will be expanded in fertility awareness education and NFP instruction.

"I am very grateful to United Way and to the community for showing this interest in our organization," Mrs. Petracca said. "I am looking forward to making our services more accessible."

Sarah Child

All in the Family



Unthinkable Happened

A pleasant way to relive a fun experience after vacationing in a famous spot is to find a book or magazine article depicting the delights you have just sampled. Even better is having the good fortune to turn on the TV and find a movie or documentary centering on that locale.

This past week our family relived only too clearly our visit just two weeks before to St. Peter's Square in Rome. But there was little enjoyment as we watched the camera sweep the familiar environs and saw the white jeep carrying a wounded pontiff careening along the cobbled surface of the piazza bricks.

Our last week in Europe had been spent in Rome and we had gone to the Vatican every day. It was an easy, pleasant walk along the Tiber from our hotel and besides the overwhelming attraction of the Basilica itself, there were the added inducements of the Vatican Museums, the Vatican post office (more efficient than the Italian system), plus the architectural wonders of the immense piazza.

We had had plenty of time to study it Easter Sunday morning as we had waited, along with more than a quarter of a million people, for Mass to begin. And it had crossed my mind then as we had sat in the bright sunshine that beautiful morning how no security precautions had been taken.

It occurred then how easy it would be for some person, perhaps a deranged individual, to bring in some weapon, to detonate some kind of explosive.

No, I was being ridiculous. How could anything untoward happen in this place? The tangible joy of the throng — the very sunshine — helped dispel such a notion. The idea was unthinkable.

Last week, the unthinkable happened. And it seems likely that the tradition of a pope mingling freely with his people on home territory may be seriously affected, if not completely done away with.

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