

# Church Agencies Face Bleak Future

By Melinda Gipson  
Religious News Service

Federal budget cuts, actual and threatened, promise to make this fiscal year the bleakest church agencies have faced in many years — some say since the great depression of the 30s.

In the face of cheery administration predictions that church and private charities easily will "fill the gap" created by cutbacks in entitlement programs to the poor, religious leaders are gloomily dubious.



Few church leaders believe their agencies can even begin to make up for the envisioned massive pullout of government funds from social service programs. Many say they are angry and offended by what they see as an attempt to "balance the budget on the backs of the poor."

Other church leaders contend that the present budget crunch was of the agencies' own making.

The churches have a "critical choice to make," argues Robert E. Duce, executive director of Lutheran Family Service of Oregon and Southwest Washington.

"For the past few decades the government has produced a level of expectation that is now severely threatened by a political philosophy, but more fundamentally by dollars and cents. The choice we have to make is whether services can be upheld through an aggressive and creative partnership between us, government and business."

"Advocacy for such a partnership is going to be up to the church."

Congress, prodded by the president, has approved \$35 billion in cuts, with \$26 billion taken from entitlement programs, which mostly benefit working women, children, the elderly and the handicapped.

In September — with a deepening recession casting a shadow on earlier budget projections — the president proposed another \$16 billion in cuts, with all but \$3 billion to come from new reductions in entitlements.

Congress has yet to pass any appropriation bills or take final action on the president's second budget request. In the meantime, most programs are being funded under a continuing resolution that allows agencies to be funded at the level requested by the president.

Thus many agencies will receive 25 to 40 percent less than last year. Some like the CETA job program received no funds after Sept. 30.

Changes in welfare eligibility rules removed some 15 to 20 percent of those on welfare. These people will turn to church agencies for help, predicts David Harrington of Washington's Associated Catholic Charities.

Betty Letzig, executive secretary of Coalition for Human Development, the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, says the agencies "lack the funds both to make up their own losses of federal funds and additionally aid those dropped from welfare rolls."

She cited the case of one church whose fuel bills shot from \$1,000 to \$14,000 in the course of one year. "We try to provide low income energy assistance to the poor, but nobody is going to pay our own fuel bills if we don't," she said.

In 1981, U.S. corporations donated some three billion dollars. Even if business doubles its contributions between now and 1984, the total would not come close to making up the projected loss of \$76 billion in federal cuts, explained Lester Salamon of the Urban Institute.

On the plus side, churches are expected to "absorb 75 percent of the increase in individual giving projected under the new law," Salamon said.

Another favorable report shows that while church agencies are losing thousands of personnel due to budget and CETA cutbacks, volunteerism is still strong.

A recent Gallup Poll found that 31 percent of all American adults volunteer on a regular active basis — two or more hours a week. Religious activities draw the largest number of volunteers, followed by health and education, the study showed.

Also of great concern to religious welfare agencies is the administration's decision to use block grants as a means of returning to states the responsibility of caring for their own poor.

Proponents of block grants say that decision-making closer to home will prevent agencies from duplicating services, encourage frugality and tailor programs to local needs.

But most administrators see the trend toward block grants as one more way for the federal government to pull out of social services. They fear that by eliminating regulations that accompanied grants, Washington is abdicating its responsibility for seeing that all citizens are provided with adequate health care and educational facilities.

Harrington says that since block shares represent a smaller share of federal money intended for a more diverse range of services, block grants will pit agency against agency; only the larger, better established agencies will survive, he believes. The process also involves choices among essential services. "States will have to choose among mental health, child welfare, alcohol rehabilitation centers and family services," he said.

Father Ronald D. Pasquarello, a senior fellow in urban policy at Wesley Seminary's Center for Theology and Public Policy, believes church agencies in industrial northern states whose cities are suffering the brunt of the nation's unemployment will suffer the worst. Because the fiscal woes of the cities are so great, innercity churches will have the roughest time meeting the needs of the poor, the Marist father said.

For whatever reason, the shift in decision-making from federal to state level will force church agencies "to unite or die," Harrington declared. This means forming coalitions both to lobby state legislatures and to pool resources, he said.

The charities represented by the National Conference of Catholic Charities count on the government for 49 percent of their funding, according to Mathew Ahmann, assistant director for conference governmental relations.

As it has done in previous recessions, the conference expects to run into deficit spending to meet increased demands this year — a practice that concerns some Catholics as being too much like federal deficit spending.

But the alternative — letting people go without services or food — certainly could be worse, Ahmann said.

## Southern Tier Auburn-Geneva

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## Service to Mark Nuns' Murder

Elmira — An ecumenical service marking the murder of three Maryknoll Sisters and a laywoman in El Salvador on Dec. 2, 1980, will be conducted Wednesday, Dec. 2, at 7:30 p.m. at St. Peter and Paul Church.

The ecumenical service is being sponsored by the Elmira Interfaith Peace and Disarmament Group, the Elmira Society of Friends, Sisters of St. Joseph Social Justice Committee, and the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry.

Prayers, readings and songs will call to memory the deaths of the four women, and all those who have died and will die under oppressive

governments struggling for justice and peace, according to the Interfaith Peace and Disarmament Group.

Local singer-songwriter Mary Lu Walker and Gary Kline will provide reflective music.

Members of the Peace and Disarmament Group will distribute leaflets at various sites Dec. 2 intended to remind people that their tax money is used to send arms to El Salvador and other nations in turmoil, the group announced.

## Officers Installed

Geneva — Court 416 Catholic Daughters of the Americas recently installed new officers at St. Francis DeSales Church.

District Deputy Mary Scott of Penn Yan installed the following: Anna Marie Hastings, regent; Geraldine Pollino, first vice regent; Madeline DeMaria, second vice regent; Eleanor Hefernan, financial secretary; Margaret Crowley, treasurer; Jane McElroy, recording secretary; Sadi Cintenio, monitor; Alice Fennell, Anna DeMaria and Violet Passalacqua, trustees.

At the meeting following, plans were made for the Christmas party which will be Dec. 9 at Club 86. Kathleen Capozzi is chairperson.

## Bazaar Scheduled

Ithaca — The Immaculate Conception Parish Bazaar will be Saturday, Dec. 12, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Immaculate Conception School gymnasium.

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