

Thanks Giving Appeal falls short; bishop seeks budget cuts

Continued from Page 1

decline in contributions and in the number of donors.

Some people, he explained, may not have responded to the mail solicitation but would have gone to their parish halls to fill out pledge cards. "A number of people have told me that they missed the opportunity to contribute in a way that would allow them to socialize with their fellow parishioners," he said. He noted, however, that in some areas, people expressed a preference for the mail campaign, which eliminated "the bother of going over to the hall."

Others who did not make contributions — in particular those in the small-gift category — may not possess checkbooks needed to respond by mail, he said, noting that this may be a prime reason for the donor decline in that group.

In a statement to the press, Bishop Clark expressed his concern about those who have not yet made their pledges. "We appear to have left an impression by the way we conducted this year's appeal that smaller gifts were not important," he said. "What concerns me most is not so much the dollar loss involved, but the fact that we apparently have given some people who have been incredibly generous with the church a message that we did not need their help, that we did not treasure their participation."

Some have commented that the categorization of donors into three tiers was insulting, especially to those placed in the bottom categories. Based on income information and previous donations, prospective donors were placed into these groups: Phase I, those asked to contribute \$540 or more; Phase II, those asked to give \$100 or more; and Phase III, those expected to give less than \$100.

Although some parishes chose different means of soliciting each group, the original plan was as follows: those in Phase I were invited to receptions at which Bishop Clark personally requested their assistance; Phase II donors were contacted in person by parish representatives; and those in Phase III received donation requests through brochures mailed to their homes.

Some critics of the appeal have referred to the receptions with the bishop as "cocktail parties," a label Father Moynihan said is incorrect. "They were just receptions in a hall at which refreshments happened to be served," he said, adding that some people were also mistaken in their belief that large sums of money had been spent on the receptions. "The receptions cost \$2 per person... It's so inconsequential."

Nonetheless, Father Moynihan said he doubts the receptions will be used next year. "The turnout was considerably lower than we had expected," he said. Of the 5,000 people invited to 15 receptions around the diocese, one-third should have attended, according to figures provided by the Martin J. Moran Co. of New York, consultants for this year's appeal.

Yet, only about 15 percent of those invited did attend, Father Moynihan said. "Martin J. Moran based the one-third on places where the bishop was newly arrived in the diocese... Any bishop who's been in a place for five years isn't exactly a new item," he said.

Another reason donations did not reach expectations, Father Moynihan said, may be that the diocese gambled too heavily that parishes would well-exceed their goals as they have in the past. Although combined parish goals totaled just over \$3 million, the overall diocesan goal was set at \$3.562 million. If the final tally reaches \$3.3 million as Father Moynihan hopes, the sum will be \$200,000 more than the combined parish goals but still about \$200,000 less than the diocesan goal.

"The whole did not equal the sum of the parts," he said, adding that there may have been "a little lack of logic" in the way goals were established. Father Moynihan noted, however, that if parishes had exceeded their goals to the same degree as they were exceeded last year, the overall goal would

have been met.

"There are pluses and minuses in the way we operated this year's appeal," Father Moynihan said, "and these will have to be weighed against each other as plans are made for the future."

That sentiment was echoed in Bishop Clark's statement. "At this point, we need to carefully evaluate the way in which we conducted this year's appeal," the bishop said. "We need to draw on the good counsel of our pastors and other advisers as we review the entire process."

"One point I feel strongly about is that we need to give the pastors and the members of their parishes — who have given generously of their time to help make past appeals successful — more ownership of the appeal at the parish level," Bishop Clark continued.

"This year, we tried to take some of the work burden away from the parishes, but in doing so, we took away more of the local involvement than we should have."

Despite the unfavorable balance sheet, Father Moynihan remains optimistic about the outcome of the appeal. He noted that of the 180 parishes and missions in the diocese, more than 100 parishes have already exceeded their goals and that 34 others are close to reaching theirs.

A phone campaign directed at individuals who have not yet made pledges is underway in parishes throughout the diocese, and some pledges are still being received. Some parishes, however, have refused to conduct additional phone solicitations.

"Some of those who are over goal feel they have already done enough," Father

Moynihan said, explaining that some pastors feel more requests for money would antagonize parish appeal staff and the parishioners at large. "Every pastor has to make that decision himself," he said. On the other hand, in his parish, St. Joseph's in Penfield, the staff agreed that they couldn't allow former donors to feel that their contributions weren't needed. "Everyone has to support the bishop," he said. Father Moynihan further urged those who have not yet made pledges to do so as soon as possible.

In his press statement, Bishop Clark expressed a "genuine sense of gratitude" for the commitment and generosity that people manifest toward the church, especially during the appeal. "All they give," he said, "I know means considerable personal and family sacrifice on their part."

Parish representatives comment:

Appeal format too 'Madison Avenue' this year

By Teresa A. Parsons

Parish staff members may have asked for a simpler Thanks Giving Appeal this year, but it seems that few people at the parish level were happy with the result. The new format's focus on large donors at the expense of personal contact with smaller donors, the costs involved, and a lack of consultation and communication with parish representatives of the appeal were most often cited as the reasons the appeal fell short of its goal.

"The biggest single problem was the elimination of in-hall solicitation," said James Hart, a parish council member at Our Mother of Sorrows at Paddy Hill Parish.

The majority of parish council members contacted last week agreed with Hart, saying that the personal touch of involving parish volunteers with donors was an essential ingredient in past successes.

"People just like the personal aspect of stopping in the church hall," said Richard McElwain of Our Lady of Mercy Parish.

This year, mailings to about 80 percent of past donors were intended to replace in-hall solicitation, thereby eliminating from the parish much of the burden of recruiting and staffing. The top 20 percent of donors were contacted personally — 15 percent were visited at home by parishioners and five percent were invited to a series of receptions at which Bishop Matthew H. Clark discussed diocesan needs.

No one denied that the relief at the parish was welcome, but most added that anxiety about reaching parish quotas more than outweighed that benefit. "At least once the old system was set up, it worked," one woman remarked.

The new approach smacked of "Madison Avenue," to Michael Boccio of St. Mary's in Waterloo, who described it as a "turnoff" to the average person.

"It just wasn't the right feeling for a Church appeal," Boccio said. "It was impersonal — like getting something from the Jerry Lewis telethon in the mail."

Others said that the levels of "recommended giving" listed on pledge cards included in the mailing were too high and therefore discouraged people. Since more costs appeared to be involved with the mailings this year, many people also questioned how much more of their gift would be spent on fundraising costs.

Especially outside Monroe County, the lack of parish involvement left many parishioners with the feeling that "it's Rochester asking for money again." The fact that someone with a familiar face handed out pledge cards in past years seemed to make a big difference.

"It's really hard to help people see how we get it back — they are very concerned about where the money goes," said a parishioner at St. Joachim's in Canisteo. "Now when they see it going to pay a big consulting firm, they really get angry."

"You don't seem to have any control over where the money goes or see any direct benefits here," echoed another parishioner from Moravia. "We made our quota, but with more personal contact, we might do even better."

Few people said they enjoyed organizing or participating in the home visitation phase of the appeal, but opinions on whether it works or not were divided.

"We heard a lot of feedback from people who didn't like the visitation at home," said Hart of fellow parishioners at Mother of Sorrows. "They found it an annoyance and an insult — they said they would have gladly come down to the church or sent it in."

Sandy Harkness of St. Mary's in Elmira admitted she hates "the door-to-door thing" but believes it is effective for a certain segment of her parish. "People who might otherwise say no will say yes face to face," Harkness said.

In past appeals, the bulk of the money raised has come from middle-income donors in average amounts of less than \$50. This year, the top five percent of donors were invited to receptions with the bishop, in an effort to encourage large advance gifts and remove some of the burden from those middle-income donors.

But organizers at the parish level noted that in many cases, the wrong lists were used to send out invitations to the receptions. Instead of inviting those who had made previous large gifts to the Thanks Giving Appeal, invitations were sent to those who had been consistently generous in parish collections.

Because the two groups do not include exactly the same people, some of those who had formerly given generously to the appeal were left out.

Reactions from those who were invited to the receptions ranged from "pleasant, but ineffective" to downright offensive.

"I give what I give because I want to, not because I expect anything in return," said Sandy Harkness. "I appreciated the effort, but they really didn't do a thing for me."

But the idea of special treatment for large donors seemed to others to directly contradict the message of the gospels. "Whoever thought this up hadn't read the parable of the widow's mite lately," one person remarked.

"It separated people," explained Michael Boccio. "Some people give \$50 and that's all they can afford, but they

deserve the same amount of recognition as someone who can afford to give more.

"If the bishop's coming to the parish, have him come for everyone," Boccio added.

Joseph Manning of Geneva agreed. "It was kind of a put down to people who couldn't give as much," he said.

Overall, parish representatives said, the new format seemed to focus on large donors, trusting that the smaller donors would come through with or without much attention.

"I just don't think an appeal can be successful without the small donors," Harkness said.

Some people believed that problems with the Thanks Giving Appeal's new format could have been avoided if more information had been communicated sooner and if past chairmen had been consulted. "In fact comments from past chairmen that the approach wouldn't work were ignored," said James Hart.

"We were completely shocked at the new approach," said Ron LaMagna, a finance committee member at St. Anne's.

Confusion was the result in many cases. At some parishes, mailings were sent to the wrong people. Because they had to depend on reports from the Pastoral Center this year, parish chairmen for the appeal often didn't know where their parishes stood in relation to their quotas.

In past years, a portion of whatever amount a parish pledged over its quota was returned to the parish. Eliminating that policy was a negative development as far as Lois Ferriter, chairperson of St. Paul's parish council in Honeoye Falls, is concerned. "It (the portion returned in past years) took care of re-paving our parking lot and helped with painting," she said, noting it was one tangible benefit of the appeal.

Ron LaMagna believes that other issues within the diocese had an impact on the appeal. "I personally know of people who refused to give because it's not going to schools," he said. "People withheld their money to see what would happen with the schools."

Suggestions for next year's appeal range from returning to the former system to modifying the new system to include both mailings and in-hall solicitation.

"I think we should concentrate on a combination of in-hall solicitation, mailings and advance gifts," suggested Richard McElwain.

"I say go back to the old program entirely," said Ron LaMagna. "I'd rather see the humble approach than the pizzazz approach."

"The bishop gave it a good shot, but it had a few bugs in it," concluded Jim Webber.

Four suburban schools plan consolidated junior high next fall

By Teresa A. Parsons

Pending approval by Bishop Matthew H. Clark and the diocesan Division of Education, seventh and eighth graders from St. Thomas More, St. Jerome, Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady Queen of Peace schools will attend the brand new Seton Junior High School next fall.

Diocesan officials foresee no obstacles to approval of the proposal, which was developed by principals of all four schools in response to declining enrollment and new mandates of the New York State Regent's Action Plan.

With the exception of Our Lady Queen of

Peace parish council, pastors and decision-making bodies from all four parishes have approved the proposed consolidation during the past two weeks. Our Lady Queen of Peace parish council is expected to vote in favor of the consolidation Tuesday evening, Jan. 21.

Our Lady Queen of Peace and Our Lady of Lourdes first joined forces more than a decade ago. In 1971-72, Queen of Peace was designated as the primary school (pre-kindergarten through grade 2) and Lourdes as secondary (grades 3-8). Then, last fall, eighth graders from St. Thomas More School were sent to Our Lady of Lourdes because of

very low enrollment at St. Thomas.

Next year, junior high students will occupy one floor of the Lourdes building. Those students currently enrolled in grades three through six at Lourdes will continue to occupy other floors. As the junior high program expands, the lower grades will gradually be moved to St. Thomas More School.

"All the parishes agreed something had to be done with enrollment in some schools at such a low ebb," said Sister Pat Pullman, principal of Our Lady of Lourdes. "We had similar needs, we're near one another geographically, and we just all started to

talk. It came from the grass roots, and that's what drew us all together."

"This is not in any way connected with the Urban School Plan," said Father George Norton, a diocesan spokesman. "Parish councils and principals worked together on the proposal with input from parents, teachers and even students."

Details about tuition and transportation arrangements as well as other specifics are described in the proposal, which will be released by the Pastoral Center later this week. It is not yet clear whether staff cuts will be required by the new plan.