Parishes must balance limited resources with legitimate needs

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commission was appointed in 1985 by Bishop Matthew H. Clark. Its mandate is to review and revise all personnel functions and policies throughout the diocese, with an eye toward making them just and consistent.

Methods of describing diocesan salary increases now vary from a flat percentage for pastoral center employees to a suggested range for parish religious educators, pastoral assistants, parish visitors and youth ministers. A negotiated stipend for women religious also falls within current guidelines.

For clergy and lay Catholic school teachers, a step system is used. All priests, for instance, are classified in one of four categories — pastor, co-pastor and special worker or campus minister, associate, and deacon intern.

Beginning with the year of his ordination, a priest advances to a slightly higher salary level with each year of service. Meanwhile, the salary levels also increase. In 1987/88, $100 will be added to each of the salary steps for priests, ranging from $4,243 for an associate in his first year to $8,801 for a pastor in his 45th year.

Payments for each priest's pension, insurance, room and board, car and professional allowance — each of which is figured separately — will total $8,003.

Because the salaries of Catholic school teachers are also determined by a step system, their recommended increases varied. Steps for each year of service ranged from $11,200 for a first-year teacher with a bachelor's degree to $19,780 for a teacher with 20 years' experience, a master's degree, and 15 or more hours of graduate credit.

Some principals complained that they were led to expect larger increases, and that they were not adequately consulted when the scale was developed.

"Rumor had it that it was going to be a big increase," said Sister Mary Smith, SSND, principal of St. Philip Neri School. "But at least there's some attempt to reach equity with Catholic high school teachers . . . and they're trying to do something for the teachers who've been in the system a long time.

After 17 years in the Catholic school system, Rosemary Coleman, a junior high teacher at Corpus Christi School, appreciates the attempt. But as a single parent who holds down two jobs year-round, she still has to scramble to pay her bills.

"I can see that they're making an effort, but a lot more needs to be done," she said. "I have this very strong commitment to Catholic education, but sometimes I have to ask myself who's supposed to get my strongest commitment, my family or my school?"

Women religious employed by parishes, schools and other diocesan organizations will receive a stipend that has increased by nearly one third this year, in response to recommendations from the Women Religious Compensation Committee. The committee requested the increase from $7,200 to $9,300 in order to begin helping congregations meet retirement costs for a growing proportion of their members.

The increase is also a step toward a compensation system based on the value of services rendered by religious — and a step away from the customary cash stipend, which has traditionally been supplemented by varying arrangements with parishes for housing and transportation.

Commission members increased the starting salary ranges for parish visitors, religious educators, youth ministers and pastoral assistants by an average of $2,000. The commission also suggested a six percent increase for those currently within the recommended range.

In an effort to more equitably support continuing education among those ministerial workers, the commission also recommended that parishes begin to offer such workers a professional development allowance of $250.

Even though the allowance is small, commission members recognize that it may strain parish budgets. The commission has thus suggested that parishes increase the allowance gradually over the next three years, to reach $450 by 1990.

While parish ministers reacted gratefully to the show of support, they also noted that even $450 doesn't go far, when a single graduate-level course at St. Bernard's Institute costs $570.

Meanwhile, quite a few employees, including parish and diocesan clerical and secretarial workers, still receive no formal assistance for continuing education.

Nor will their pay increase next year be of much help. The commission recommended only a three percent increase for "non-exempt" workers at the pastoral center and parishes, as compared to five percent for those in managerial positions at the pastoral center.

At least one parish staff worker described the disparity as "a slight injustice."

But Mary Kessler, a subcommittee member and director of personnel services, explained that diocesan wages for non-exempt staff are "pretty close to market value," when compared to those of other non-profit organizations. Managerial salaries, on the other hand, are far from competitive, judging by last year's 40 percent rate of turnover.

"It's difficult to keep people and even to replace managers at the current salary levels," she said. "When you have a lot of turnover, you spend a great deal of time orienting, recruiting and training someone, and then you have to turn around and do it all over again."

Kessler and other members of the personnel commission's salary and benefits subcommittee are continuing to work on salary guidelines for other diocesan employees not named in this year's compensation outline.

Meanwhile, the subcommittee has also won praise for some notable improvements in procedure. Not only was the compensation report released earlier than in past years, but it was sent in its entirety to all employees. In past years, individual employees often received only the guidelines for their own positions.

In the letter announcing his approval for the wage and salary recommendations, Bishop Clark observed that the increases are a matter of justice rather than charity.

"I realize the serious impact that these adjusted scales will have on parish budgets, as well as on diocesan budgets," the bishop wrote. "We are all faced with the call to provide just wages, and at the same time, to acknowledge limited resources."

Parish and school administrators are indeed wondering where they'll find the money. The personnel office, meanwhile, has no formal means of determining how closely Church employers adhere to the salary and benefit guidelines.

"It's a difficult question," Kessler acknowledged. "Do you pay what you can afford, or do you pay a just wage and trust that the money will come from somewhere? It's something we're all going to have to wrestle with every year.

"We may never be competitive, but we have to be just," she added.

Study proposes altered payment system for sisters

A hefty increase in the stipend paid to women religious who work for the Diocese of Rochester is only the first step of a process aimed at altering the whole system of compensating sisters in the diocese.

Increased stipends are among several recommendations that stem from a study of the revenues and expenditures of two local religious congregations, using data compiled two years ago. By commissioning that study, members of the Women Religious Compensation Committee have gained their first solid indication of what those congregations will face locally, in meeting the future needs of their retired members.

Released late last month, the Women Religious Compensation Study reveals that the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of St. Joseph — who together comprise 90 percent of all women religious in the diocese — spent $1.108 million more on care of retired and infirm sisters than their congregations earned in 1984/85.

The study also forecasted a dramatic increase in retirement costs in 1990, as the ratio of active to retired sisters swings even further out of balance.

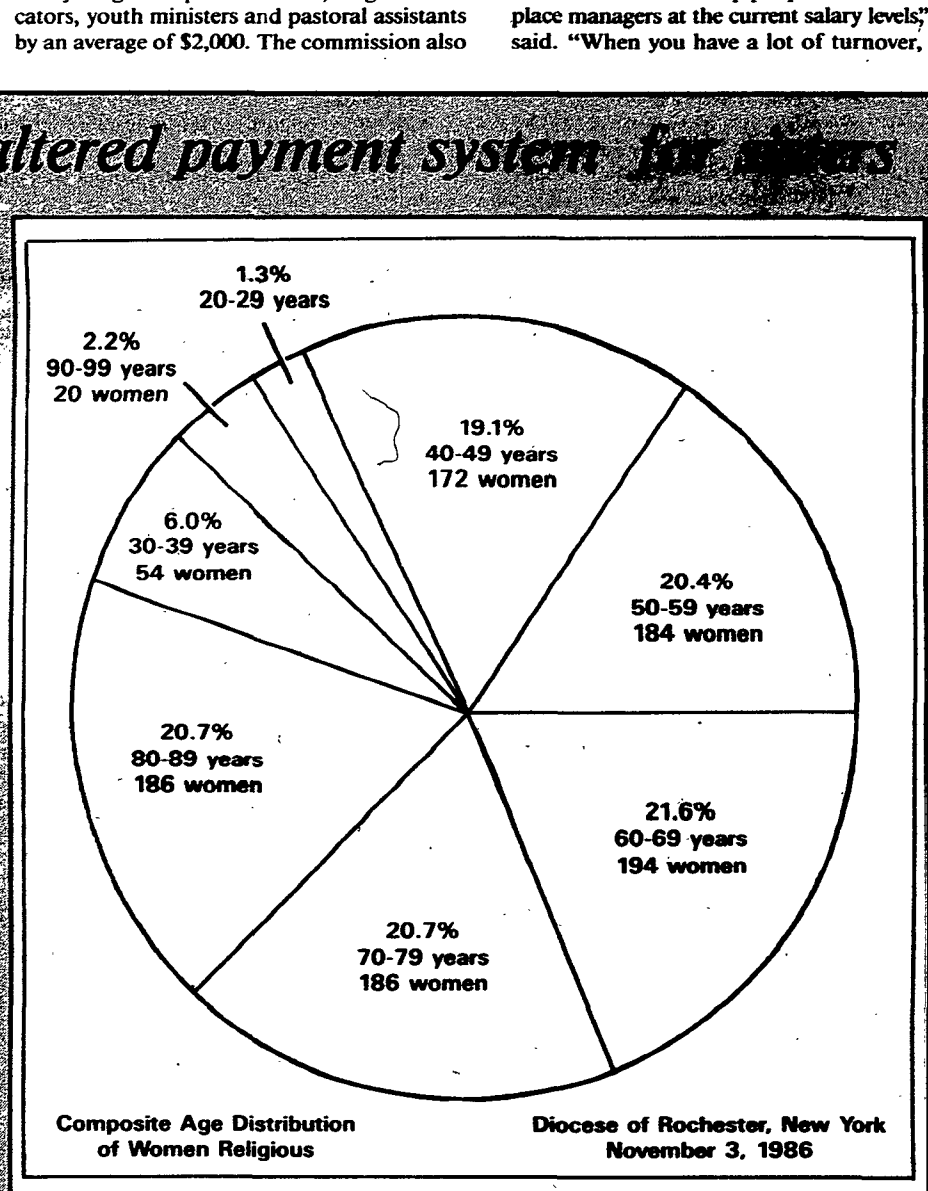
Unlike their counterparts in most other New York state dioceses — who responded immediately to reports of a crisis in funding the care of retired sisters by launching large-scale campaigns and collections — officials in the Diocese of Rochester decided to take a look not only at retirement needs, but also at the whole system of compensation for women religious.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark appointed the Women Religious Compensation Committee in 1984, to "study and determine an appropriate remuneration for women religious who serve in ministries under the auspices of the Diocese of Rochester."

After two-and-a-half years of meetings and research, members at last submitted their final report to Bishop Clark in October.

The bishop approved the report and appointed two committees, comprised of lay advisors and representatives from the diocesan administration and both local congregations, to carry out its recommendations.

The implementation committee is charged with devising processes and negotiating timelines for the transition to a new method of payment. Currently, sisters employed by parishes, schools and diocesan offices and agencies receive a stipend, in addition to such non-cash benefits as housing and transportation.



The above graph depicts the current age distribution of all women religious in the diocese, including members of 17 congregations. The graph shows that 31.6% of the sisters were 70 or older in 1986. Twenty years ago, these women were teaching in our Catholic schools and staffing hospitals. During this period, little or no provision was made for their retirement needs.

The study recommends an alternative to the current system, proposing that women religious assume the costs of their own housing and transportation and negotiate salaries based on the real value of the services they render.

"By taking away the non-cash benefits, you would allow communities to make choices regarding their living arrangements," explained Sister Muriel Curran, vicar for religious and a member of the compensation committee. "It's not simply that sisters would be withdrawing from a [illegible] building and leaving the parish [illegible] ill. . . . They would be [illegible] people as it relates [illegible]

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personnel — lay, religious and clergy — who worked together to ensure that people throughout the diocese knew how their contributions would be used.

"I think what was very helpful was that Bishop Clark communicated to pastors ... and the lay leadership how important everyone's gift was, no matter how big or how small," Father Bayer remarked. "It's the whole idea of participation in the parish and in the diocesan Church."

"We want to keep the appeal going along the same track," Father Moynihan observed. "We want to continue to increase the donor base as we go along, to get more people participating, and ... to encourage donations at all (financial) levels."

Looking to the future, Father Moynihan said, "We just need to make people feel that they are giving to the bishop, to the diocese and to the ministry of the local Church. We all benefit from what we give; it comes back to us in many ways, through a wide variety of services."

One of his objectives is to keep the increase in parish quotas and diocesan goals moderate. "That means the central operation (diocesan offices) will have to continue to be carefully streamlined," Father Moynihan said. "We'll have to weigh services and decide which are most crucial in light of the funds available. We'll have to put priority on the most pressing needs in the future."

Though the $168,000 surplus might seem to loosen the ties of budgetary restraint, Father Bayer noted that it cannot be counted on. In each of the previous six campaigns, 3 to 7 percent of the total amount pledged was not collected. Thus, he explained, the surplus indicated by pledge figures might quickly vaporize. The actual amount contributed cannot be determined until late May or early June, the end of the pledge-collection period.

"The people in our diocese have been very, very responsive to living up to the moral obligation of what they do pledge," Father Bayer observed. "But because of unemployment, a death in the family or whatever, people are sometimes unable to fulfill their obligations."

Nevertheless, merely reaching the diocesan goal has lightened the pressure on diocesan personnel. Still recovering from two separate waves of 7 percent budget cuts imposed to compensate for last year's TGA shortfall, staffers did not know until now whether their programs would have to be trimmed once again.

"This year, they're certainly not facing that," Father Bayer said. "The anxiety level is certainly not here."