

Local News

Priests debate compensation for lost 'stole fees'

By Lee Strong
Stole fees — the offerings given priests for officiating at weddings or funerals — will soon disappear in name and traditional form in the Diocese of Rochester.

As of July 1, 1988, offerings received for weddings and funerals will be placed in each parish's general treasury. As stipulated by the 1988/89 compensation package released January 14 by the Diocesan Personnel Commission, priests will receive a one-time \$1,500 salary adjustment to compensate for the loss of these offerings.

In light of this policy — and to more accurately reflect the canonical basis for the change — the term "stole fees" will be replaced by "church offerings."

The change comes as a result of recommendations made early last year by the Diocesan Priests' Council. These recommendations, in turn, were prompted by the 1983 revisions in the Code of Canon Law, according to Father Kevin Murphy, priests' council's chairman.

The council's recommendations called for a standard \$50 fee. Previously, the amount of the stole fee had been left largely to the discretion of individual pastors and celebrants.

He suggested that the lack of discussion had resulted from a weakness in the committee structure of the personnel commission itself. The current structures make it difficult for good communication to take place among the members of the three committees of the commission and their constituents.

Based on this average and the standard fee of \$50, Father Kiggins proposed the \$1,500 adjustment figure in his report to the Salary and

Benefits Committee. The results of the survey were also included as an appendix to the minutes of the Priest's Council's November meeting.

Priests' Council members discussed the results of the survey at their December 2 meeting. The priests raised a number of objections to the report and its conclusions, and even considered a motion to delay implementation of its recommendation.

According to Father Eugene Weis, pastor of Elmira's St. Casimir Parish, one of the major concerns about the adjustment was that smaller parishes would be unable to fund the increase in salary.

A second objection was that priests who performed more than 30 weddings and funerals a year would lose income. "This might lessen the incentive to take a large parish," he suggested.

The major objection to the proposal, however, was to the way it was authorized, Father Weis said. "Our big disappointment was that when we were told about it, it was already in operation," he remarked.

Father Murphy, who made the motion to delay implementation of the proposal, also expressed reservations about the process. "I didn't feel we'd had enough time to study or discuss it,"

Commission members are aware of this problem and will be trying to correct it, he said. Father Robert J. Schrader, director of the Division of Personnel, Staffing and Development, acknowledged the communication problem among council members and said he hopes it will soon be resolved.

One thing I'm encouraging is that all three committees of the Personnel Commission (the Salary and Benefits Committee, the Development of Ministers/Employees Committee and the Policies Committee) establish a good communication mechanism with their constituents this year, so that as salary and remuneration schedules and new policies are being developed, they can receive feedback and give input," Father Schrader said.

He also acknowledged that the \$1,500 adjustment might be a burden on some parishes and might result in a loss of income for some priests. "Father Kiggins tried to identify a (dollar amount) that would not put an undue strain on small parishes and an undue decrease in income in larger parishes where priests were receiving more," Father Schrader said.

The Diocese of Rochester has announced that Bishop Matthew H. Clark will officiate at a February 19 healing service for AIDS patients and their families.

Bishop Clark, Episcopal Bishop Burrill to lead interfaith services for AIDS patients, families

The next evening, Bishop William Burrill, head of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester, will lead a memorial service in honor of deceased AIDS patients. The service will begin at 7 p.m. at Temple B'rith Kodesh, 2131 Elmwood Ave.

Organizers note that the two services will mark the first time the Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches in a diocese have cooperated in such services. According to Catholic diocesan officials, however, Catholic dioceses elsewhere in the country have conducted similar services, petitioning for the cure of AIDS, acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

According to John Kubiniec, director for liturgical music in the diocesan Office of Liturgy and one of the planners of the services, the theme for the two is "Love, Hope and Healing."

ded that many priests were receiving stole fees far less than \$50 before the offerings were standardized, so priests who are "taking cuts will be taking smaller cuts when compared to two years ago."

Father Schrader recommended that critics of the salary adjustment give it a year's trial. "If there are needs for adjustment, the Salary and Benefits Committee could look at it," he noted, adding, "if we'd withdrawn (the adjustment recommendation), we would be no further along than we were two years ago."

Father Kiggins, observed that implementing the new stole fee guidelines is part of move toward a more wholistic view of ministry — and away from the cultic (sacramental) notion of priesthood that ties income to sacramental responsibilities. "As critical as sacramental ministry is, it's not the be-all and end-all of the priest's role," he said.

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Yet he noted that the healing service is not intended to provide "miracle cures for anyone involved. What we're looking for is a healing of souls and spirits."

The services were organized by AIDS Rochester, Inc., a community-based group that offers support to AIDS patients and their families. The group is currently providing services to 215 people.

AIDS Rochester's director, Jackie Nudd, said the group asked the two bishops to conduct the services because they "felt two men of their magnitude could make for a tremendous statement to the community."

Nudd added that in contacting the two bishops, "We hoped for the best, and we got the best."

In addition to the services, AIDS Rochester will offer two workshops at New Life Presbyterian on Saturday, Feb. 20. The first session, which will take place from 10 a.m. to noon, will deal with intimacy issues. The second, entitled "When a friend has AIDS," will run from 2-4 p.m.

For information about the services or the workshops, contact the Rev. Kathy Elliott at (716)271-8478.

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