

Local News

Indebted parish takes risk to help the homeless

By Lee Strong

Rochester's shelter providers have regularly cited the need for a permanent, 24-hour facility to meet the social service requirements of Monroe County's homeless.

Now one Rochester parish is taking steps to help make that permanent facility a reality.

St. Ambrose Parish has decided to donate half of the net proceeds from its 1988 parish festival to the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry, which will act as program developer for creating a permanent facility. The St. Ambrose donation will be used to help locate, purchase and renovate a site for the shelter.

If this year's festival as successful as last year's — which netted \$38,000 — GVOSM would receive \$19,000. Festival organizers, however, hope to double last year's returns by adding such new events as a wine-tasting social and a basketball game featuring members of the Buffalo Bills, and by implementing an aggressive advertising and marketing campaign.

According to Father James J. Marvin, St. Ambrose's pastor, the parish finance committee and board of trustees unanimously voted to donate half of the festival proceeds to the shelter project, even though the parish ran a \$54,000 deficit in fiscal year 1987/88.

"We're taking a calculated risk to help the helpless," Father Marvin said. "Their needs are bigger than our own."

In January, the festival committee itself proposed that the parish donate half of the June 10-11 event's proceeds to help the homeless. Several committee members work in shelters operated by other parishes and, at committee meetings early this year, discussed the need for a permanent shelter facility in Rochester. The committee presented their proposal to Father Marvin, who readily agreed to the plan.

Festival committee members then met with the parish's finance committee and trustees in early February, while Father Marvin brought the idea to the attention of the parish staff. According to the pastor, the three groups unanimously voted to support the proposal.

Father Marvin finally presented the proposal to the parishioners at large the weekend of March 19-20, receiving what he termed "overwhelming support" for the decision. "Several people came up to me after Mass and said, 'It's not good business sense, but it's good humanitarian sense,'" the pastor reported. In addition, he noted, several non-parishioners who

were attending St. Ambrose's Masses also came to see him and gave him what he described as "substantial donations."

Sal LaBella, a parish trustee, said that any apprehensions finance committee members and trustees may have had about the decision were resolved by the thoroughness and enthusiasm of the festival's presentation. "They put together a plan that — if it works — the risk to the parish would be minimal," LaBella observed.

The fact that a number of festival committee members were already involved with the homeless was a major factor in helping parish leaders to endorse the plan. "They showed a first-hand knowledge of what the needs of the homeless are," LaBella remarked.

Parish leaders were also motivated by a sense of the cause's worthiness, LaBella added. "We as a parish have been very fortunate," he said. "We believe that the parish needs to reach out to those less fortunate."

"Besides helping the homeless directly," LaBella continued, "we believe that this will draw some attention to this issue. It's our way to speak up and make a commitment that's more than just words."

Both LaBella and Father Marvin credit Dean Wojtczak, the festival committee's chairman, with originating and promoting the proposal. In addition to meeting with the parish trustees and the finance committee, he also talked to festival captains; spoken to the social ministry chairmen from other parishes; sent letters requesting support to parishes, labor unions, and businesses; arranged for some of the added events; and contacted William Privett, director of Catholic Charities at GVOSM, who coordinates the office's efforts on behalf of the homeless.

Wojtczak's own awareness of the homeless situation in Rochester comes from working in parish shelters for several years.

"We're not giving the people the services they need," Wojtczak observed. "The shelters are good, but they're a Band-Aid approach. We need a 24-hour shelter where we could channel the people to the services they need."

The proposal developed by the festival committee will provide funds to start the permanent facility project, Wojtczak predicted, and will increase festival receipts enough to ensure that the parish will not lose money.

Two fund-raising events will precede the actual festival. On April 15, the parish will spon-

sor a benefit basketball game at Nazareth College pitting the coaches of city, county and Catholic schools against members of the Buffalo Bills football team. The second event — planned for some time in May — is a wine-tasting social to which local political and religious leaders will be invited. These events will not only raise money, but will also bring public attention to the festival and the homeless, Wojtczak predicted.

The committee has also expanded the scope of the festival's annual car raffle to include the sale of tickets by other parishes. Fifty percent of the net proceeds from this sale will be donated to the permanent facility fund, and 25 percent will be returned to the parishes in which the tickets were sold.

Privett, who sent a letter a letter to Monroe County pastors urging them to support St. Ambrose's efforts, is optimistic about the potential effects of the plan. "(St. Ambrose's) work ... will help us in developing the follow-

up services and the permanent facility the homeless of Rochester need," he said.

The money raised through the festival would not be enough to actually establish such programs or open the facility, but would, instead, provide seed money to help get them started.

"Typically, government support doesn't cover all the cost for rehabilitation (of a building), especially the up-front costs like architectural studies or getting site control," Privett noted. In addition, he said, state and federal sources are more inclined to support a project if they see strong local support for it — the kind of support St. Ambrose will provide.

Wojtczak also hopes the parish's commitment will plant a seed of a different sort. "This year we're trying to get other parishes involved in our festival," he explained, adding that he hopes other parishes — inspired by St. Ambrose's plan — will undertake similar efforts. Ultimately, he hopes "it will mature into a diocesan program for the future."

Bishop Clark appoints Father Thomas P. Mull to serve as pastor of Sacred Heart Cathedral



Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the appointment of Father Thomas P. Mull, director of the Diocesan Office of Liturgy, as the pastor of Sacred Heart Cathedral, effective March 21, 1988. Father Mull had been administrator at the cathedral since February 25, following the death of the former rector, Father Robert J. Miller.

The newly appointed rector will leave the directorship of the Office of Liturgy immediately. He will remain a consultant to the Liturgy Office on a limited basis, however.

Father Mull was ordained to the priesthood March 19, 1976, at St. Andrew's Church, Rochester. From June, 1976, to June, 1982, he served as parochial vicar at St. Ambrose Parish, Rochester. He was appointed director of the Office of Liturgy in June, 1982, at which time he was also appointed part-time parochial vicar at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

A graduate of St. John Fisher College, Father Mull has an master of divinity degree from St. Bernard's Seminary (1975) and a master of arts degree in theology with a concentration in liturgy from Notre Dame University (1986).

In addition to his duties in the Office of Liturgy, Father Mull has been a member of the Liturgical Office of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, executive secretary of the diocesan Liturgical Commission, coordinator of the television Mass for shut-ins and part-time chaplain at the School of the Holy Child. He is also a member of the diocesan Commission for Women and of the diocesan Theological Commission.

Church to host organ concert

Noted concert organist Carlo Curley will perform organ classics at St. Joseph Church, 303 E. Main St., Batavia, on Palm Sunday, March 27, at 4 p.m. The program will include works by J.S. Bach, Buxtehude, Wagner, Beethoven, Purcell, Dupre, Franck and Mozart.

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