

# Antioch retreat program cancelled for 1989

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Antioch, a highly structured retreat program the Diocese of Rochester had sponsored for young adults, has been cancelled for the rest of the year due to declining interest, according to the program's chairman.

Each of the Antioch retreats, which occurred four times a year, ideally should have drawn about 30-35 people, said Craig Bellis, chairman of the program's board of directors. "It's the type of retreat that needs a lot of input from a lot of people," he commented.

Yet the last Antioch retreat — which took place at the Cayuga Nature Center in Ithaca in March — drew only about 20 participants, according to Father Charles Manning, associate director for youth retreats and diocesan Family Camp. An Antioch scheduled for June was cancelled due to low enrollment, Bellis said.

A typical Antioch retreat consisted of a series of intensive talks given by young adults who had attended previous Antiochs, Father Manning said. With about 20 young adults serving as staff, the program had a "busy" air about it, the priest noted.

Father Manning and Bellis both remarked that the retreat's structured nature had lost its appeal to young adults in the diocese. "Antioch was a fine retreat, but it was always jam-packed, so there wasn't a lot of time for personal reflection," Bellis said.

Bellis also said that the retreat hadn't been drawing a large number of new participants in the last few years. "You'd pretty much find the faces that were in previous Antiochs with a few new ones on each retreat," he said.

Despite the declining popularity of the retreats, Bellis and Father Manning's decision to cancel the Antioch program surprised some of the board's members.

"It came as a complete shock to me," said Mary Kay Williams, a board member. "I wanted it to go on. I was growing in the program."

Williams acknowledged that the retreat format needed revision, but said a decision to cancel it should have been put to a vote by the board of directors.

Bellis said he understood the anger of board members like Williams, but said that he and Father Manning felt a decision had to be made due to the program's declining state. "It was a radical move, and it definitely came as a shock to the people involved," Bellis acknowledged. According to Father Manning, the decision to end Antioch was announced at a meeting of the program's board of directors in late June.

Father Manning said that the Antioch program will be replaced by a less-structured series of retreats that will allow participants more time for personal reflection.

Starting next December, these new retreats will require 10 rather than 20 staff members, which will allow the program to function on a sounder financial basis than Antioch did, he added.

Bellis said that the Antioch retreats were floundering financially because fewer people were attending each retreat. Eventually, staff members began having to pay as much to attend an Antioch as was charged to retreat participants.

The visibility of the Antioch retreat program also suffered from being administered by the Department of Youth Ministry, according to Mike Drexler, co-chairman of the Diocesan Commission on Young Adult Ministry. The new retreat program will be administered with the help of the diocesan Young Adult Commission.

"I think we'll give some credibility with the Young Adult Commission being involved in diocesan retreats for young adults," Drexler said. He echoed Father Manning's and Bellis' comments about the need for a more relaxed, reflective young adult retreat program. "I think there will be a little bit more flexibility in the structure. I think we'll be able to benefit from a wider cross-section of experience in running retreats," he said.

Drexler observed that the some of the new retreats will be staffed by such professionals as speakers versed in psychology. "I think (the format) will be changing, as compared to the Antioch program, where one was as same as the next one," he said.

Williams, who attended a July 18 meeting between former Antioch board members and members of the Young Adult Commission, said the meeting left her feeling better about the decision to end the retreat program. "Now, looking at it farther down, I feel very positive," she said.

## Food cupboard suffers summer financial crunch

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — A local food cupboard is being squeezed for funds long before the usual lean period in fall and winter, according to the Rev. Richard Comegys, pastor of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 350 Chili Ave.

Comegys, director of the South West Ecumenical Ministries Cupboard, said that the food-distribution service has suffered a continuing financial strain due to a 20-50 percent increase in requests for food packages this summer. The crisis is compounded by the fact that the cupboard did not receive its usual amount of donations between Thanksgiving and Christmas of last year.

The SWEM Cupboard is supported by 40 area churches, including 15 Catholic parishes, and by several fraternal organizations and private contributors. The cupboard distributes food packages to families and persons in need in the southwest area of Monroe County.

Food cupboards usually find themselves scrounging for funds in the fall, Comegys said, but an unusually busy summer has forced the SWEM cupboard to live on a virtual week-to-week budget.

In years past, Comegys noted, the SWEM Cupboard distributed about \$100,000 worth of food annually. Most of the food was donated, and about one third of it was purchased with cash gifts. This year, however, the cupboard will probably distribute \$120,000 worth of food by year's end, he said.

The cupboard receives about one-third of its food and cash donations between November 15 and December 25 of each

year, the director said, noting that last year's cash donations were lower than normal. Usually, the cupboard receives \$10,000-11,000 during the Christmas season; last year it received only \$9,000 during the same period, Comegys said.

Cash donations usually drop off dramatically following the Christmas season, he added, noting that the cupboard received \$1,700 during January. On average, the cupboard receives about \$2,000 a month in cash gifts, he said.

The minister also noted that in previous years, several of SWEM's member churches have sponsored a benefit Advent concert, which has raised about \$2,500 annually for the food cupboard. In Advent 1988, the concert did not take place.

Usually, Christmas-season cash gifts enable the cupboard to keep going through leaner months, but last year's donation drop meant the SWEM cupboard was already scrambling for funds at the beginning of July, Comegys commented. The director said the cupboard has been spending about \$1,500 per week on food throughout the summer, a dramatic increase from the usual \$700 spent weekly in past years.

Ironically, he said, food donations have actually increased slightly in the last few months as compared to the same periods in previous years. Yet, because food donations often vary in type, the cupboard must spend cash donations to buy other foods needed to create nutritionally balanced food packages, he commented.

If, for example, the cupboard received a large donation of flour, it would need to add cooking oil to food packages in order to make the flour useful.

Compounding the cash crunch is an overwhelming demand for food packages this summer, Comegys observed. Generally, demand for food packages increases in the summer because children from low-income families are no longer receiving free lunches in school, he said. Normally, the cupboard distributes packages to 150-250 people per summer week, but nearly 300 people per week have been coming to the cupboard this summer, he remarked.


Comegys attributed the increase in demands for food packages partially to the growing number of referrals the SWEM Cupboard receives from other local agen-

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