

Thanks Giving Appeal '89

Funds support state, national church groups

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In 1988, New York state approved \$25 million dollars to help public and private schools develop asbestos management plans.

On July 19, 1989, Governor Mario Cuomo signed legislation to expand Medicaid benefits for pregnant women and infants in families with incomes between 100 and 185 percent of the poverty level.

And the state's 1989-90 budget includes a 15 percent basic grant increase in public assistance benefit levels.

These are among the bills passed in New York for which the New York State Catholic Conference lobbied. These bills represent tangible results of the money received by the conference from the annual assessment paid to the conference by the Diocese of Rochester.

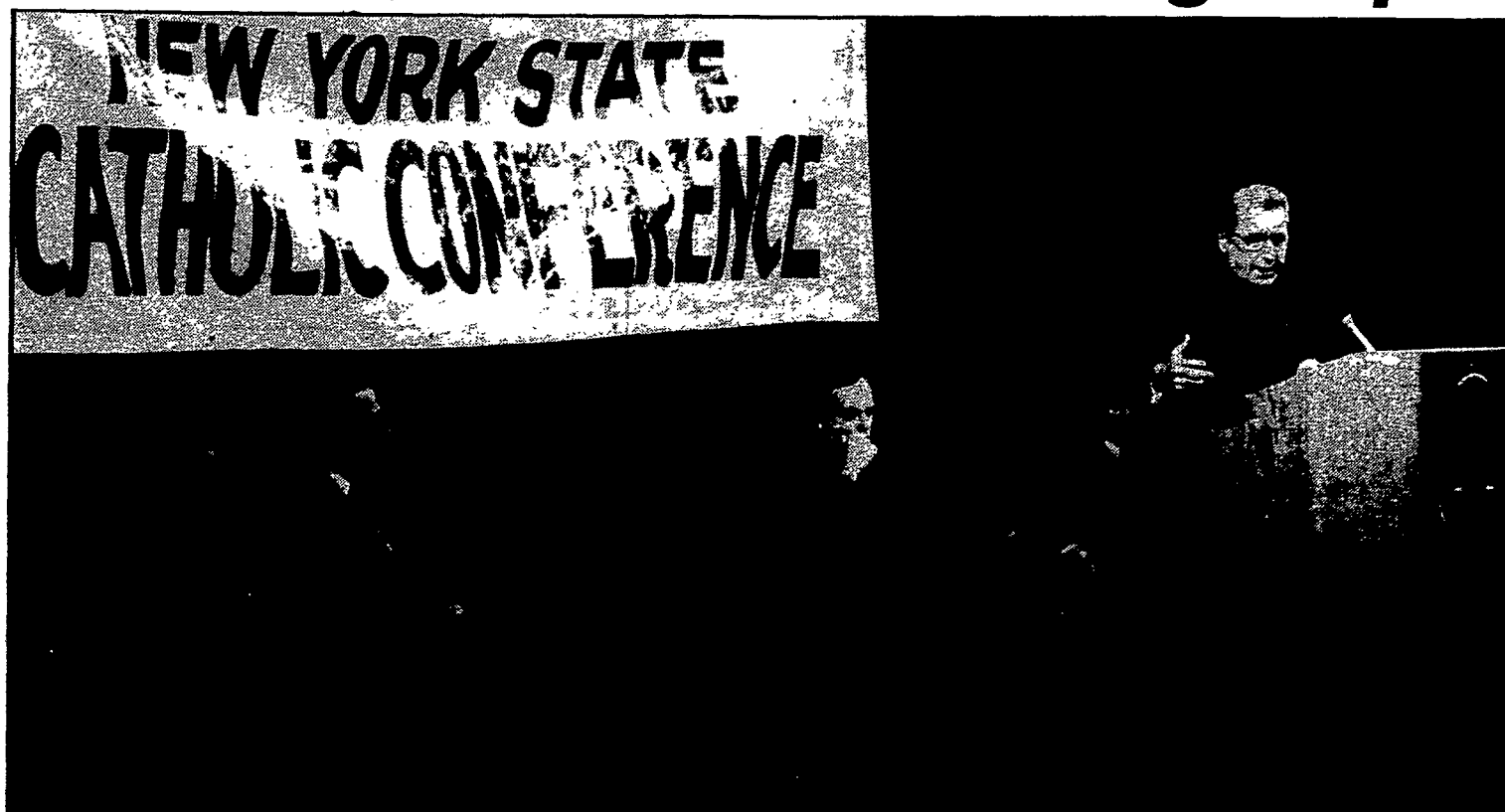
On a national level, the diocese also pays an assessment to support the workings of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops — which deals with the ecclesial concerns of the U.S. bishops — and the United States Catholic Conference — which deals with the civic and social concerns of the bishops.

All of the money for those assessments came from the Thanks Giving Appeal. In fiscal year 1989/90, the diocese will contribute \$121,500 to the state and national conferences. The state conference will receive an assessment of \$37,000, plus an additional assessment of \$7,000 for the Cardinal Cooke Pro-Life Commission. The national assessment is \$67,000, with an additional special assessment of \$10,000 to cover legal fees for cases in which the bishops are involved.

The amount each diocese pays to each conference is determined by the diocese's Catholic population. The national assessment is 13.3 cents per capita — and is scheduled to increase to 15.7 on Jan. 1, 1990. The state assessment is based on a combination of population and the percentage of the state's overall Catholic population living in the diocese.

In return for those monies, the state and national conferences provide lobbying, advice on issues, and coordination of activities among dioceses.

"(The state conference) is a resource, a contact, a conduit, so that every diocese doesn't have to do the same things," explained J. Alan Davitt, executive director of the state conference. "It works on a co-operative basis so that the bishops don't



Courier File Photo

This 1987 Public Policy Forum is just one of many events that receives support from the Thanks Giving Appeal. TGA money covers assessments sent to the New York State Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference.

have to have eight offices."

The two conferences provide a unified voice for the bishops on public policy issues, explained Father Peter Bayer, chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester. In addition, the conferences provide research on issues to help the bishops develop policies.

Lourdes Perez-Albuerno, associate director for justice and peace for the diocesan Division of Social Ministry, noted that the conferences also monitor legislative actions and alert dioceses when petition and letter-writing campaigns are needed. During the spring and summer of this year, for example, the state conference issued regular reports about legislative action on the death penalty.

In addition, the conferences arrange meetings between bishops and their representatives, and state and federal governmental officials. Each year, for example, the state conference arranges for a lobbying day in Albany at which diocesan officials meet with legislators and members of the governor's staff to discuss key issues such as the death penalty, abortion and public assistance. In September, the conference also arranged for the bishops of New York — including Bishop Clark — to

meet with congressional representatives in Washington.

Although the two offices focus on different governmental levels, their work frequently overlaps, Father Bayer noted.

Abortion, for example, was an issue of national concern this spring and summer because of the U.S. Supreme Court's consideration of the *Webster vs. Missouri* case. The court's decision, issued this summer, gave state governments greater power in deciding about abortion restrictions. Because of that decision, New York state's Catholic conference will now more actively take up the issue with state government.

Bill Ryan, a staff member of the USCC's Media Relations Department, pointed out that the national bishops' conference does more than just lobby and research issues. The conference also directs Catholic Relief Service, which is currently providing assistance to areas devastated by Hurricane Hugo in September. The USCC also operates the bishops' Migration and Refugee Services.

Essentially, Davitt concluded, the state and national conferences are the ways in which the church "effects its responsibilities and its social mission." Both bodies, he added, "represent not just the needs of the church, but of people."



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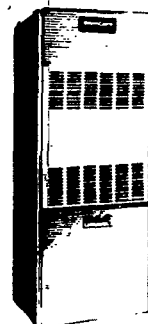
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