

Fr. Amico's family, order greet his release with joy

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

To the sound of ringing bells and cheering parishioners, Father Francis A. Amico, a native Rochesterian and former teacher at Aquinas Institute, re-entered life as pastor of a Colombian parish on Monday night, Feb. 19.

Father Amico had been kidnapped by the leftist National Liberation Army in Cali, Colombia, on Thursday morning, Feb. 15. The pastor of Cali's Our Lady of the Assumption Parish for more than two years, Father Amico was abducted as he walked from his parish church to celebrate Mass at a convent which houses several

sisters from Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, according to Father Norm Tank, first assistant to the superior general of the Toronto-based Basilian order.

The priest was released by his captors early Monday evening in Cali, according to Father Bob Sequin, assistant pastor, who spoke with the *Catholic Courier* by telephone from Colombia.

"(The kidnappers) dropped him off somewhere he could get a cab," Father Sequin said, adding that as Father Amico was being released, a 7 p.m. prayer service for him was concluding. "Immediately after (the service), we rang the church bells, and people came from all over," he

continued.

An exhausted Father Amico entered the church and thanked the parishioners for their prayers and concern, Father Sequin said.

Father Amico was unavailable for comment at the time the *Courier* went to press on Tuesday.

Following his release, the priest was interrogated by Colombian authorities for about 90 minutes, Father Sequin reported. He said that the kidnappers gave Father Amico literature protesting U.S. intervention in Latin America to distribute to American and Colombian authorities when he was released.

Except for continual interrogation, Father Amico's captors treated him well, the assistant pastor said. "He was treated with great respect for his person," Father Sequin commented.

Currently, Father Amico is planning to rest and recover, said his aunt in Rochester, Rose Bianchi, who spoke with him by telephone on Monday night.

"He was so tired and exhausted," she said, noting that his captors even asked him questions about Patty Hearst, kidnapped in the early 1970s by the Symbionese Liberation Army in the United States.

Father Lawrence Finke, secretary gen-

Continued on page 3

Sectionals start

As sectionals begin, DeSales hopes to defend its Section 5 Class D title, and Notre Dame enters the fray as the top seed in Section 4 Class C. Page 12.



CATHOLIC COURIER

Diocese of Rochester

Thursday, February 22, 1990

50¢

20 pages

Fees spawn confusion

By Teresa A. Parsons
Associate Editor

Families at St. Andrew's have been limited to just four per year. St. Jude's keeps its backlog in check with a policy that excludes non-parishioners.

At St. John the Evangelist, Greece, the cost is \$10, but you can still get a \$5 bargain if you don't mind sending the money to Kenya or Bolivia.

And even though the price in the Diocese of Rochester has just doubled to \$10, it's still "a lot cheaper than flowers," one woman noted.

What's "for sale" are Mass intentions, and if you're disturbed by hearing them treated as a commodity, you're not alone.

"People say, 'May I buy a Mass?' and I explain that they can offer a stipend, but it's not really buying a Mass," said Father Lawrence Murphy of Resurrection Parish in Fairport. "It's a hard thing to talk about. I can say all those words, but the money still goes for the Mass intention."

The money also goes directly to the celebrant, which is another reason some priests are acutely uncomfortable with the stipendiary system.

"I don't like my salary to be contingent on how often I perform a sacrament," said Father Roy Kiggins of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Brockport. "This is a profession, and we do get paid for it, but how you do that is complicated because there are faith principles and intangibles involved."

Priests' salaries have remained low — ranging from \$9,400-\$14,380 according to the diocesan salary schedule for 1989-90 — on the presumption that stipends will supplement that amount.

"Originally, (stipends) were a very large support for priests, for their livelihood," explained Father Louis Hohman, who heads the diocesan Priests' Council. "They are much less a part of our support at this point in time, and we are asking, 'Is there a better way of having a Mass offered for someone?'"

"There's a real movement in that direction in terms of salaries that will relieve us from at least the appearance of being 'kept men,'" Father Hohman added.

Yet, from the church's earliest days, priests — along with the poor — were "kept" by the surplus offerings of bread and wine that members of the congregation brought for the eucharistic celebrations.

Offerings gradually became standardized, and as early as the fourth century, people began to request that, in return, Masses be celebrated for

their particular intentions.

Inevitably, abuses crept into practice. During the Middle Ages, wealthy families would set aside a "foundation" or financial endowment to support a priest who would celebrate Masses exclusively for them and their intentions.

Such "privatization" of the Mass was among the practices against which Martin Luther rebelled in the early 16th century. In response, the Council of Trent confirmed that the Mass could legitimately be offered for the intentions of the faithful, living or dead, but that bishops were obligated to eliminate abuses.

Yet such abuses have continued — providing part of the impetus for Bishop Matthew H. Clark's promulgation of a decree on the subject in December, 1989. By establishing a new standard fee, the bishop's decree sought to eliminate discrepancies in the amount of the stipend from one parish to another. Nor, the decree stated, should a discrepancy exist between the stipends for weekend Masses as opposed to weekday Masses, as was once common.

Bishop Clark's decree also directed that offerings could not be combined by a celebrant or transferred to the minister of a communion service — practices some parishes had used in an attempt to reduce a backlog of Mass intentions. Canon law stipulates that a parish not accept offerings for more Masses than may be celebrated in one year, but as the number of priests diminishes, the steady stream of Mass requests can mount quickly.

The diocese requires parishes to keep careful account of intentions requested and honored, and to report each year the amount of money in their Mass offering accounts. When a backlog accumulates, diocesan officials encourage pastors to transfer the intentions they cannot celebrate within a reasonable time to local monasteries, religious orders or mission priests.

Particularly for the latter group, Mass offerings have become a significant source of financial support.

In fact, some religious orders and charitable organizations actually solicit donations by promising to celebrate Mass for a donor's intentions — a practice that clearly contradicts the diocesan decree's ruling that "remembrance at the Sacred Eucharist" must not be treated as "a secondary benefit of some other project or enterprise."

"If you want to make a donation to the missions or to a memorial fund, then you should do that," observed Father Thomas Mull, the former diocesan director of liturgy who helped prepare the decree on Mass offerings. "It's not the purpose of the Mass to raise funds for something," he said.

Bishop Clark's decree should

Continued on page 14