

Danny Thomas hailed for devotion to family

LOS ANGELES (CNS) — Comedian Danny Thomas was "a meteor of light and goodness," Archbishop Roger Mahony of Los Angeles said Feb. 9 in a eulogy for the late comic and philanthropist.

Archbishop Mahony made his remarks at the Church of the Good Shepherd in the Beverly Hills section of Los Angeles, during the funeral for the 79-year-old Lebanese Catholic who died of a heart attack Feb. 6.

Hundreds of well-known personalities attended the service including former presidents Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford and entertainers Bob Hope, Milton Berle, Red Buttons and Mary Tyler Moore.

At the church, Reagan recalled Thomas' efforts for the St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tenn., where the performer was to be buried. The work earned Thomas a place in heaven, said the former president, who quipped, "I have it on good authority that God said, 'Move over. Make room for Danny.'"

Reagan's comment made a play on the title of Thomas' recently released autobiography, "Make Room for Danny," which was itself a play on the title "Make Room for Daddy," the five-time Emmy Award-winning television show that catapulted Thomas into fame across America in the '50s.

Lillian Streppa, a parishioner at St. Mary's Church in Rochester and a cousin of Thomas, noted that he showed a knack for performing when he lived for a time with his uncle in a Nassau Street flat at her family home back in the late-1920s. Thomas lived in the Rochester area for about a year.

"He was interested in sports, all kinds, and he was always interested in show business," Streppa said, adding that Thomas used to perform in neighborhood talent shows. She commented that he was "very well-liked, and never had any enemies," nor "a cross word about anybody."

The internationally known performer, who went from poor comic to multimillionaire star, devoted himself to family oriented entertainment and humanitarian causes.

He was best known for "Make Room for Daddy," which ran from 1953 to 1964 on ABC and CBS, and for founding St. Jude's Hospital.

He named the non-sectarian hospital, started primarily to find a cure for leukemia, for the saint known as the "patron of hopeless causes."

Thomas raised millions of dollars for the hospital and at its dedication, in 1962, declared, "If I were to die this minute, I'd know why I was born."

His devotion to St. Jude began in 1940

when a friend gave him a leaflet of prayers to the saint and advised the \$2-dollar-a-night comic, whose wife wanted him to go into the grocery business, to pray for guidance.

Soon afterward, as Thomas told the story, he visited a church, recited the prayers and 10 days later landed the job that changed his life.

In response, he vowed to build a shrine and kept his promise through work for St. Jude's.

Thomas was born Amos Jacobs in Deerfield, Mich., and grew up in Toledo, Ohio. He was a Maronite Catholic, and in Hollywood he drew lighthearted barbs for his devotion to Catholicism.

Thomas also received papal honors and was made a Knight of Malta by Pope Pius XII and Knight Commander of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem by Pope Paul VI.

He is survived by his wife, Rose Marie, and three children, actress Marlo Thomas, Theresa Thomas and Tony Thomas.



DESTROYED JEEP — Three Palestinian guerrillas in Sarba village, near Sidon, inspect the the remains of a Jeep destroyed by Israeli warplanes Feb. 5. The bombers attacked PLO chairman Yasser Arafat's guerrilla forces in seven villages southeast of Sidon. Police said at least eight people were killed and 28 wounded.

Deficit causes archdiocese to cut back

CHICAGO (CNS) — Facing an operating deficit estimated at \$21.8 million, the Archdiocese of Chicago announced Feb. 7 that it was laying off 48 employees.

In conjunction with the layoffs, which included the elimination of 10 positions on the archdiocese's English- and Spanish-language newspapers, the archdiocese will reorganize three of its six departments.

The positions being eliminated equal about 8 percent of the administrative and agency work force, according to an archdiocesan press release. Some layoffs took effect immediately, while other positions will be phased out before the end of the fiscal year June 30.

Staff reductions will result in a savings of \$1.45 million. Following a 1989 audit that predicted a deficit of more than \$140 million by 1993, the archdiocese has taken various steps — including the closing of dozens of churches and schools — to help reduce the deficit. Additional schools and churches were closed during the last year and another five parishes are scheduled for closing by the end of June.

This is the first time the Chicago archdiocese has had such widespread layoffs, Marie Knoll of the archdiocesan public information office told Catholic News Service.

"When it came to reductions in programs or personnel, we decided not to use an across-the-board formula for cuts," said Mercy Sister Mary Brian Costello,

chief of staff to Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, in a statement. "This undoubtedly made the task more difficult, but it also meant that we kept our focus on the mission of the church and tried to make decisions for the good of the whole."

Cardinal Bernardin called the layoffs "painful reductions." He said the organizational changes "are responding to the changing needs of our people and to the

call of our parishes for more efficient and effective service."

The equivalent of 10 positions were cut at the weekly *New World* and the Spanish-language monthly *Chicago Catolico*. Michael Behr, managing editor of *The New World*, said the layoffs and the elimination of vacant positions mean his staff has been cut in half since August, when there were eight reporters and editors.

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