

Catholic Courier

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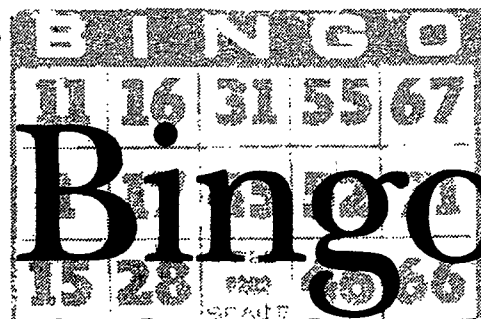
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Bingo: A fun fundraiser or basic exploitation?

Story by
Mike Latona
Staff writer

Some came alone; others arrived in bunches. Most were women, although several men and children were also present. A few complained about cheaters; others sported ear-to-ear grins after their winning numbers were called.

One common denominator existed: each shout of "Bingo" that cut through the air was sure to elicit a collective groan. The good-natured folks shrugged off their defeat with a smile, while others appeared genuinely peeved.

"I don't like this caller," a young girl complained. "He doesn't call my numbers."

"Four ... two ... three ..." murmured Loraine Kiessel, as she noted how many numbers she had needed to complete a full card.

A man protested loudly that the caller was going too fast, but he was rebuked by others who couldn't wait to cover their cards with bright purple, red, blue and green marker dots. In some instances, a single player was exhausting his or her marker's ink on at least 20 cards simultaneously.

A teenage boy wearing a Buffalo Bills cap closed his eyes and folded his hands in prayer as he waited for the next number. In the same corner of the hall, one woman kept her lucky "troll" doll in view while another woman covered her table with small stuffed animals.

As the night progressed, the smoke grew thicker and prompted wheezing coughs from some cigarette-wielding participants. Meanwhile, the tables piled up with ashes, soda containers and stacks of crumpled bingo sheets as well as casino - or "bell jar" - cards.

Depending on who one asks, the people who gathered at Rochester's Holy Family School this recent Wednesday evening were engaged in one or more of the following:

- loyally supporting the parish and school;
- feeding an addiction at a religious institution that encourages low-income people to squander their money;
- simply enjoying a fun evening out.

Regardless of the participants' intent, one fact is indisputable: bingo is big business for several Catholic parishes in the Rochester diocese.

According to statistics provided by James Rinefierd, diocesan chief financial officer, approximately 39 percent of diocesan parishes reported bingo revenues for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1993. Most of these churches were located in such densely populated areas of the diocese as Rochester, Elmira and Auburn.

Although less than two-fifths of all diocesan churches hold bingo, Rinefierd noted their games accounted for 58 percent of the \$58.9 million in total revenues reported by diocesan parishes.

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