

## Bingo

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For these parishes, net bingo and bell-jar profits represented an 8.9-percent average of their annual individual revenue. Yet bingo proceeds also constituted as much as 47 percent of the revenues at St. Aloysius Church in Auburn.

With such large percentages, it's not surprising that "our bingo sign used to be bigger than our church sign," as Father James B. Callan recently remarked about Corpus Christi Church.

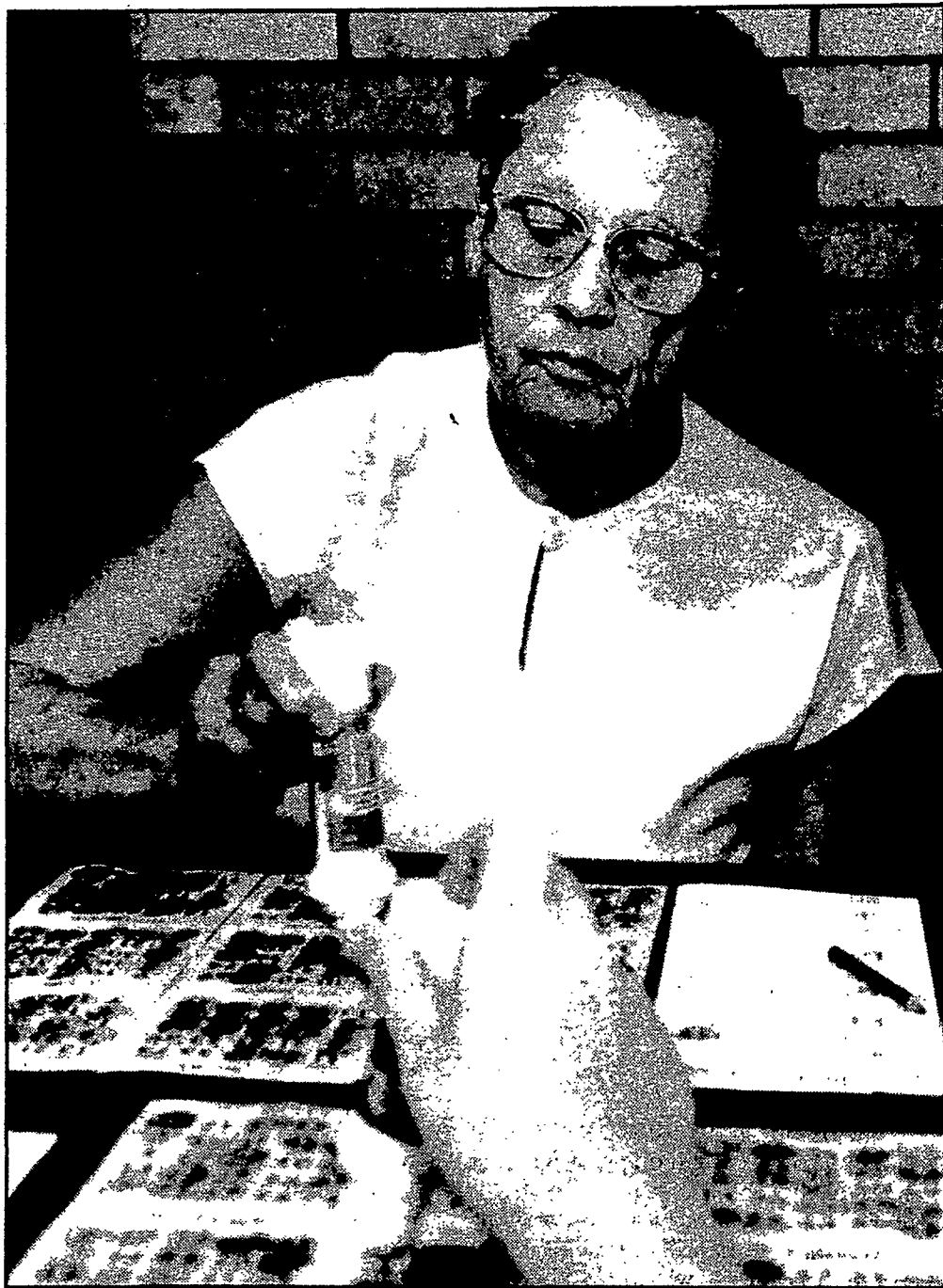
However, that bingo sign is now gone from the Rochester parish, where Father Callan serves as administrator. Bingo was discontinued as a parish function in 1978, but continued to operate in the Corpus Christi School building to help support the school until Father Callan announced in 1988 that he would begin taking steps to eliminate bingo completely. When Corpus Christi School moved its facility to the former Blessed Sacrament School in 1990, bingo ceased at the Corpus Christi location.

Father Callan maintained that bingo has long been a black eye in the face of U.S. Catholic churches.

"We're the laughingstock of other faiths," Father Callan stated. "It's not even embarrassing; it's despicable. It's the very thing that Jesus threw the money changers out of the temple for."

Father Callan added that Corpus Christi Parish has had no trouble generating revenue since bingo ended 16 years ago; its budget has risen from \$41,000 at that time to \$1.3 million today.

Father William V. Spilly, pastor of the Corning-Painted Post Roman Catholic Community, agrees that parishes can use such other means as donations and bequests to sustain operations in the absence of bingo.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer  
Loraine Kiessel, a parishioner of Rochester's Holy Family Church, concentrates on her numbers during an Aug. 31 bingo game in the Holy Family School auditorium.

on these evenings will spend around \$10 on bingo and bell jar combined, with a guaranteed purse of \$1,000 for bingo if at least 100 people participate.

Marian Turney, who along with Kiessel is a Holy Family parishioner and steady bingo participant for the past several years, noted that many of the people who attend the parish's bingo games are "regulars." But she added, "there aren't a lot of parishioners."

In a city parish such as Holy Family, many players tend to be people who live on limited incomes such as those provided by welfare and Social Security. And that fact is one of the arguments often cited by those who oppose the games.

However, "if Holy Family didn't have bingo, (those people) would be spending their money elsewhere," Celeste Short asserted.

Based on the \$10 per night figure — for two hours of play — cited by Tim Short, one might consider bingo a fairly inexpensive form of entertainment. Yet "Bob," a 13-year member of the Rochester chapter of Gamblers Anonymous, stressed that players' income levels and frequency of play must also be taken into serious consideration.

"The amount of dollars (per night) isn't the problem. It's if somebody's on a limited budget and spending \$20 five or six nights a week," said Bob, who asked that his last name be withheld to protect his identity.

Bob said his GA group sessions occasionally have included people who are so addicted to bingo that the game literally takes over their lives.

However, countered Father David W. Mura, "You have your addicts at anything but that's by far the exception to the rule." Father Mura is pastor of the Holy Apostles/St. Anthony of Padua cluster, which, like Holy Family, is located on the city of Rochester's west side.

At Holy Apostles' Tuesday-night bingo, Father Mura observed, "I don't see too many people starving to death."

The pastor argued that bingo can be viewed as a welcome diversion for residents in the Holy Apostles/St. Anthony neighborhood.

"There's a whole socializing thing that gets lost in the 'correctness,'" Father Mura stated. "There are very, very, few social things you can do in this neighborhood. For an awful lot of people who play bingo here, this is their social thing of the week. It's a safe place to go; it's a fun evening. And if they win, it gives them something to feel good about."

Even though Holy Apostles does not have its own school, Father Mura pointed out that 30 percent of all parish revenues goes to support the schools in Rochester's Southwest Quadrant. Without the \$70,000 bingo brings in annually, he said, there would be little money left over for such parish programs as religious education, outreach to shut-ins and assistance for prostitutes, drug addicts and the hungry.

A sampling of Southern Tier church bulletins reflects a similarly strong reliance on bingo. St. Anthony Church in Elmira described bingo as "a great way to support our Catholic schools," while St. Mary Our Mother Church in Horseheads put exclamation points next to its Aug. 11 and Aug. 18 earnings — each in excess of \$1,000.

Yet Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Elmira, with its plea, "Bingo Workers Urgently Needed," targeted a function on which bingo's very existence hinges.

"It's a lot of work getting people (to volunteer)," Sister Burns commented.

"We have to acknowledge and affirm the literally hundreds of dedicated volunteers. It speaks well of their dedication to their parish," said Rinefierd.

But in the longer term, Rinefierd said, two questions need to be asked: "Will there be workers in the future, and is this the best way for them to be involved in parish life?"

Although bingo still operates at All Saints Academy at Denison Parkway, Father Spilly recently commented that he "would hope to eventually eliminate gambling altogether." Currently, his Corning-Painted Post cluster is the only diocesan parish to enforce a no-smoking policy at bingo.

Other Catholic administrators in this country are also strongly opposed to gambling as a means of parish and Catholic-school funding. According to information provided by the Catholic News Service, the priests' council of the Diocese of St. Cloud, Minn., referred to gambling in 1991 as "inappropriate and even scandalous."

And last year, CNS reported that Bishop Frank J. Rodimer of Paterson, N.J., urged parishes and institutions to drop all gambling activities, saying, "it's a sad commentary" on the church that "we have not made a compelling case for supporting our programs and schools on their own merits."

Back in Rochester, Sister Lorraine Burns, SSND, who serves as principal of Holy Family School, has mixed feelings about the role of bingo.

"If it were my say, I would not want to have it," Sister Burns remarked. On the other hand, she admitted, "I don't know where else you'd get the money. The majority of Holy Family are older people who are very, very supportive, but for a lot of them, where is (support money) going to come from?"

Holy Family holds bingo on Wednesday and Sundays, and also rents its facility out for bingo games conducted by Nazareth Academy on Saturdays. Nightly attendance averages about 160 on Wednesdays and 200 on weekends, according to parishioner Tim Short, who helps organize Holy Family bingo along with his wife, Celeste.

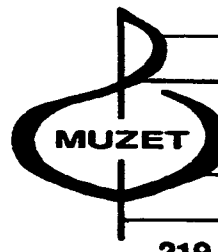
Short added that the average player

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