

DIOCESAN NEWS

Communities welcome debt relief

By Mike Latona, Staff writer and
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In many cases, the Rochester Diocese's announcement of more than \$2.1 million in debt relief to 34 parishes and schools made a significant impact on those institutions' financial pictures.

In the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward, Father Robert Werth, pastor, said his cluster has been relieved of \$248,185 in outstanding obligations.

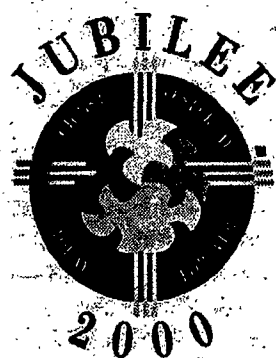
Father Werth said most of these debts had been incurred in providing employee benefits for teachers at St. Monica's School during the 1980s, when the parish was struggling to keep the school going.

"Certainly this puts Monica's in a much more equal position with the other two parishes," Father Werth said. "Monica's can play more of an equal partner in the cluster," which also includes St. Augustine's and Our Lady of Good Counsel.

The Roman Catholic Community of Geneva, which consists of St. Francis de Sales and St. Stephen parishes, received jubilee debt relief of \$115,049, according to Father Roy Kiggins, pastor.

Father Kiggins said these debts were owed to the diocese for such expenses as pensions, health and liability insurances, and to the *Catholic Courier* for subscriptions.

"The people are tremendously impressed by the generosity extended to us from the diocese and the individuals," said Father Kiggins, who noted that his parishes also were contributors to the debt-relief fund. In response to Bishop Matthew H. Clark's request for contributions, both Geneva parish councils had pledged 5 percent of their non-restricted reserves to the fund. The contributions amounted to about \$1,500 for St. Francis DeSales and



roughly \$1,000 for St. Stephen's.

Father Kiggins said the Geneva parishes had incurred debts as a result of declining parish membership at both St. Francis de Sales and St. Stephen.

As they worked toward creating the combined ministerial staff envisioned by the their pastoral-planning process, the community has cut back on staff and other expenses. The combined community of about 2,600 families plans to operate under balanced budgets from now on, he said.

"Debt relief affects the past," Father Kiggins noted. "We still have some future challenges that we have to meet."

Also in Geneva, DeSales High School was forgiven debts of \$139,702, according to Principal Daniel Skinner, who said the obligations were decade-old bills for insurance and pensions.

"When you have a problem from the past and it's taken care of, it creates a whole new optimism," Skinner said.

In Hamlin, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish received debt relief of \$35,778, according to Father Paul J. Ryan, pastor. The parish will apply \$23,500 toward the mortgage that financed the church building in 1987, paying off about half of the balance. The parish expects to pay off the remainder of the mortgage within the year.

"We were struggling to get our mortgage down," said Father Ryan, who noted that the community was surprised to receive debt relief. The parish had pledged 5 percent of its savings to the jubilee fund, and

parishioners are grateful that the fund is enabling them to take care of a significant burden, he said.

"We got the word of the jubilee gift just after the budget was approved for next year, which will result in a break-even next year," Father Ryan said.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's debt relief addressed money owed to the diocese, unpaid school subsidies, and unpaid subscription bills for the *Catholic Courier*, according to Billie Dietrich, office administrator.

The diocese's Jubilee Debt Forgiveness Fund was established in recognition of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, for which Pope John Paul II spent years preparing the church. It also honors the biblical tradition of granting various freedoms and forgiveness every 50th year.

Father Joseph A. Hart, diocesan vicar general and moderator of the Pastoral Center, said the debt relief was allocated by an ad hoc committee of diocesan officials, pastors and pastoral administrators.

Rinefied noted that the Jubilee Debt Forgiveness Fund will be used to pay debts incurred through loans from third parties; pension bills; health and insurance bills; subsidies to the Catholic Schools of Monroe County; and the *Catholic Courier*. The diocese will forgive old loans; all old TGA underages; and bills for the diocesan self-insurance program. The total amount of this relief is slightly more than \$800,000.

In addition, the Catholic Schools of Monroe County office has announced \$211,400 in debt relief, and the *Catholic Courier* has forgiven \$17,200 in outstanding parish bills.

Some dioceses are similarly forgiving debts, according to Catholic News Service. Amounts ranged from \$206,000 to \$7 million. Religious orders also are forgiving debt for the jubilee.

Aid received across diocese

According to James Rinefied, diocesan chief financial officer, a total of 34 parishes and schools have been awarded debt forgiveness, effective with Bishop Matthew H. Clark's letters of June 22. They are:

Church of the Annunciation, Corpus Christi, Holy Cross, Holy Family, Holy Rosary, Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Sacred Heart Cathedral, St. Andrew, St. Bridget, St. Francis Xavier/Holy Redeemer and St. Monica, all in Rochester; Holy Name of Jesus and Our Mother of Sorrows, Greece; Northeastern Junior High School, St. Thomas the Apostle and St. Salome, Irondequoit; St. John the Evangelist, Spencerport; Guardian Angels and RIT Catholic Campus Community, Henrietta; St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Hamlin; St. Leo, Hilton; St. Rita's, Webster; and St. Theodore, Gates, all in suburban Monroe County.

Jubilee debt forgiveness was also extended to Steuben County's All Saints Academy, Corning; St. Joseph, Wayland and St. Ann, Hornell; Ontario County's Roman Catholic Community of Geneva; St. Francis DeSales/St. Stephen's School and DeSales High School, Geneva; Wayne County's St. Michael, Newark; Chemung County's St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads and St. Pius X, Van Etten; and Tioga County's St. Patrick, Owego.

From A Timeless Love Blooms An Ancient Faith

SUPPORT THE CHURCH IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Central and Eastern Europe, now emerging from 70 years of atheistic communism, is rebuilding the faith of their ancestors. With financial help from American Catholics who generously contribute to the U.S. Bishops' Collection to Aid the Church in Central and Eastern Europe, the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception run a summer program for 500 orphaned and needy children as well as one for 50 catechists from Armenia in southern Georgia. In addition to lessons in the Catholic faith, the Sisters help students develop Christian values, ideals and ethical principles to guide their behavior, form their consciences, and enrich not only their lives but also contribute to the revitalization of the faith in their nation

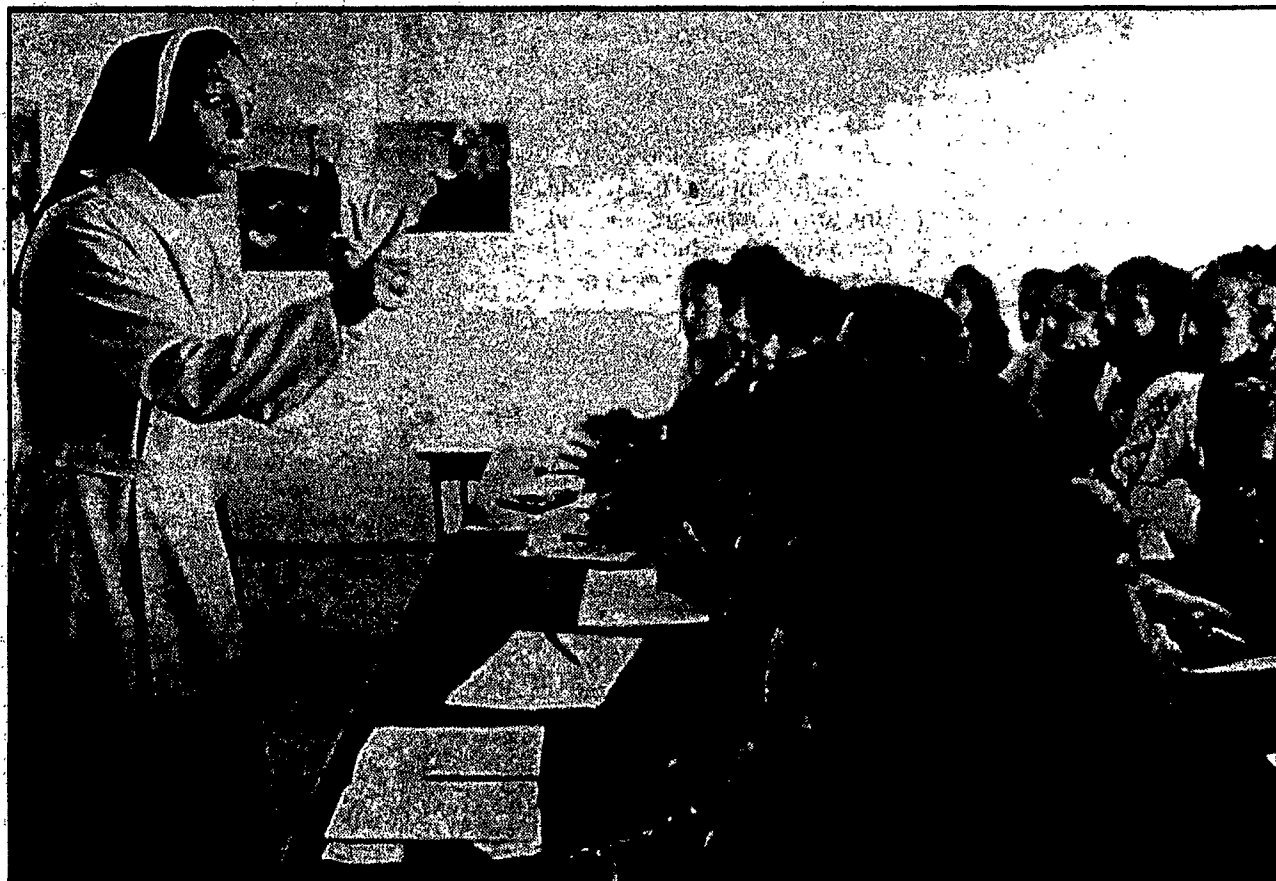


Photo: Armineh Johannes/Catholic Near East.

2000 CHURCHES IN EASTERN EUROPE

DATES: JULY 8TH AND JULY 9TH