

DIOCESAN NEWS

Network welcomes new rules for clubs

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

After fighting for two years to have the City of Rochester more closely regulate sexually oriented businesses, Interfaith Action, a network of local congregations, has won a major victory. City Council voted unanimously Sept. 19 to enact new legislation affecting such establishments.

Although some adult business owners had criticized the proposed legislation in other public sessions, no one spoke up against it at the Sept. 19 meeting.

In part, the new legislation prohibits "body rub" parlors, prohibits physical contact between strippers and customers in cabarets, and requires the licensing of some adult businesses, employees and managers. Sexually oriented businesses have until Jan. 31 to obtain licenses.

Jennifer Cruppi, a member of Interfaith Action's organizing committee at Most Precious Blood Parish, said she and her neighbors welcomed the new legislation. After a nude juice bar opened up the street from her home in 1999, she said she and other neighbors feared that many ills would plague her area.

"I thought that it would bring the neighborhood down," she said of the juice bar. "I think it diminishes the quality of life, and I thought the crime rate would increase."

After losing their year-long fight against the juice bar, she and other Interfaith Ac-

tion members continued to push for tougher rules and regulations on adult businesses. Crime did not increase noticeably in her area after the juice bar opened, but she and her neighbors see the new legislation as a preventative measure.

"The legislation is a big, big deal here because it's going to make sure that these problems don't start up or increase here," she said.

Parishioners at Most Precious Blood were supported in their efforts by members of neighboring churches also affiliated with Interfaith Action: Holy Rosary and Sacred Heart Cathedral, as well as Grace United Methodist Church/Grace Urban Ministries. Interfaith Action collected 4,000 signatures on a petition opposing adult businesses, and worked with the city in crafting the new legislation. A city task force spent several months identifying and studying adult businesses in the city, ranging from topless bars and bookstores to escort services and massage parlors.

"I think citizen input from Interfaith Action and a number of other citizens was very important ...," said Linda S. Kingsley, the city's corporation counsel (chief attorney). She noted that the new regulations allow adult businesses their constitutional right to operate but still satisfy many of the community residents' concerns.

"I think the businesses probably feel, grudgingly, that what we've done is fair," she said.

The new regulations specify, among

many things, the following requirements for sexually oriented businesses seeking to operate in the city:

- All businesses carrying more than 40 percent sexually oriented merchandise, along with all adult cabarets, adult arcades and adult theaters, will be required to be licensed. Businesses with less than 40 percent of such merchandise nonetheless must separate their adult material from the rest of their merchandise, and control access so as to prohibit access to minors.

- Vertical and horizontal separations will be required in all cabarets to prevent physical contact between entertainers and customers, essentially prohibiting "lap dancing."

- All adult businesses must be located at least 1,000 feet from such places as churches, playgrounds, schools, hospitals, cultural facilities, libraries, parks and community centers, an increase of 500 feet more than previously mandated. All sexually oriented businesses must be 500 feet away from any residential zone.

- Body rub parlors are banned, and only massage professionals licensed by the state will be allowed to operate massage businesses.

Cruppi said she felt the law struck a proper balance between the concerns of the neighbors and the rights of the businesses.

"I believe that when these laws do go into effect, I think it's going to eliminate any problems," she said.

Diocese places Auburn pastor on leave

Father Robert L. Beligotti, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Church, Auburn, is on a leave of absence for an undetermined period, according to Father Joseph A. Hart, diocesan vicar general.

He will be dealing with personal concerns "not related to any type of criminal activity or behavior," stated a diocesan release dated Sept. 21.

According to the statement, Father Beligotti will remain pastor of St. Francis, but

Bishop Matthew H. Clark soon will appoint a temporary priest administrator.

"St. Francis of Assisi is a parish with a rich history and a deep spirituality," Bishop Clark said in the statement. "The skilled staff will be of tremendous assistance during this time."

Father Michael F. Conboy, diocesan director of priest personnel, spoke at Sept. 16-17 Masses at St. Francis.

"We have every confidence in the staff at St. Francis and ask you to be of support to them during this difficult time," he said, in part. "The staff has not done anything wrong or anything inappropriate that has led to Father Beligotti's leave."

"We also have heard that some parish-

ioners feel that the parish now is to be closed. Again I must be very clear — the parish is not closing."

Father Conboy reiterated diocesan support for the parish. He also said that cards or notes to Father Beligotti may be sent through the parish secretary, Lee Gaylo, to his attention at the Pastoral Center.

Father Beligotti, 58, has been pastor of St. Francis since 1993. He left the parish Sept. 15.

Bob Delaney, immediate past president of St. Francis' Parish Council, said Father Beligotti was well-liked. He said rumors have been circulating about the cause of the priest's departure, but "if anyone knows anything, they're not talking."

"It seems to me it would be better if the people really did know and could figure out a way to contend with it," Delaney said. "I hope it's something that could be straightened out and he will be able to return."

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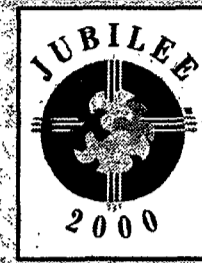


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Petitioners: Relieve debt

By Kathleen Schwarz
Assistant editor



The diocese has forwarded petitions bearing the signatures of 4,000 diocesan parishioners to federal lawmakers. The petitions, urging debt relief for Third World countries, were mailed Sept. 18.

They called for "broad, deep and speedy debt relief" and an appropriation of \$800 million for debt relief for fiscal year 2001 through 2003.

The petitions were gathered following parish presentations around the diocese by Sister Janet Korn, RSM, and other speakers.

"This was a big move as part of the Jubilee," said Sister Korn, diocesan social justice awareness coordinator, noting it also was a public-policy issue this year.

The petitions were a response to Pope John Paul II's Jubilee 2000 call for debt relief to developing countries.

"I am so very grateful to those who have taken the time and effort to step forward for this cause," Bishop Matthew H. Clark stated in a press release. "I continue to pray that our efforts will lead to success and ultimately allow all of our sisters and brothers throughout the world to live with the peace, health and dignity to which they are entitled."

Earlier this year diocesan parishes and individuals pledged more than \$1.1 million to a Jubilee Debt Forgiveness Fund. With additional funding, five schools and 29 parishes and faith communities were forgiven more than \$2.1 million in debt.

The petitions sent out this month noted that the United States has made important progress toward greater debt relief for many of the world's poorest countries. But its debt reduction legislation does not provide funding for the final element necessary for true debt relief — funding for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries trust fund, the special fund to relieve multilateral debt owed to institutions such as the World Bank and African Development Bank, the petitions stated.

In an op-ed article in the Sept. 20 *Washington Post*, Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston called on Congress to allocate \$435 million for debt relief.

That was the amount the United States pledged to the HIPC fund in a 1999 meeting with G-8 nations. Following that pledge, the U.S. Senate approved only \$75 million, Sister Korn noted. And when it came time for the House to vote, "there was a huge call in from some of the parishioners" not only in this diocese but across the country. The House this summer approved \$225 million.

"We're still a long way off," Sister Korn commented.

The \$800 million requested in the petitions represents the cost to the United States of canceling debts of more than 30 heavily indebted poor countries and the U.S. share of multilateral debt reduction for the same countries under the HIPC initiative.

The effort to draw attention to the need for debt relief in other countries was supported by the Diocesan Priest's Council and implemented by a committee established by Catholic Charities.

Includes reporting by Catholic News Service