

DIOCESAN NEWS

Diocese considers changes to pension plans

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GATES—The Diocese of Rochester is considering changes to its pension plans for both lay employees and priests. The changes would make the plans more understandable, according to Bill Olsen, diocesan director of human resources.

Among the changes being considered is the creation of a "fund balance" system whereby employees could track the growth of their benefit over the years via individual "accounts," Olsen said. The diocese would remain the sole contributor to the accounts, unlike other employers who have switched to similar systems, which are sometimes called "cash balance" plans. Other employers have had employees contribute to their own pensions along with the employer. Diocesan employees would not have to contribute anything under the new plan, Olsen said.

To encourage employees to save for retirement, Olsen added, the diocese is also considering matching a portion of the contribution an employee makes to a 403(b) tax sheltered annuity account by up to 2 percent of the individual's salary. For example, if an employee contributes 4 percent of a \$20,000 salary to a TSA account, or \$800, the diocese would match \$400 of that. Currently, the diocese makes no such contribution.

The diocese is considering the new pension plan, in part, to increase benefits for short-term employees, Olsen said. The average length of service for a diocesan employee is between 12 and 14 years. As for longer-term employees, Olsen said a fund balance plan could possibly earn them a smaller pension than they would earn under the current system. Hence, he

said, the diocese is considering allowing older employees to opt out of any new plan and stay under the current system. He stressed that the diocese did not want to put together a plan that would adversely affect any employees.

"Our goal is to have a plan that is going to help people have income at retirement, and not hurt people," he said.

Currently, a lay employee of the diocese is eligible for the pension plan who is 21 or older and has worked 1,000 hours for a 12-month period. An employee is vested in the plan after accumulating five consecutive years of service, and may receive a pension at age 65. Olsen said these requirements would likely remain the same under any new pension plan.

Olsen said the diocese has been examining the plans for more than a year, and added that the plans hadn't been updated for well over a decade. In an interview in his office at the Pastoral Center, Olsen repeatedly emphasized, however, that the diocese has made no formal plans yet.

"I've got to underscore this to the nth degree, these are solely thoughts now," he said.

He added that if any changes are made, they would ideally be in place by Jan. 1, 2002. The changes would affect about 3,000 full and part-time employees throughout the diocese, including employees of diocesan offices, parishes, schools and the *Catholic Courier*.

To gather input on changing the pension plans, a committee of diocesan officials chaired by Olsen met with a 15-member focus group of priests, as well as a 20-member group of lay employees, throughout last year. In the next few weeks, a new committee of diocesan officials and outside legal and financial con-

sultants will be formed to prepare recommendations for Bishop Matthew H. Clark, who must give final approval to any changes in the plans, he said.

Olsen added that if changes are eventually made, each employee would receive a letter with an individualized explanation of how the changes affect his or her pension benefits. The letters would be preceded by a general announcement of the plan changes, he said.

For lay employees, currently, each participating diocesan agency annually contributes an amount equal to 7.25 percent of each employee's gross salary to the diocesan pension fund. Meanwhile, the diocese calculates the amount of money an employee would receive from the fund by multiplying the number of years an employee has worked by 1.75 percent of the gross salary paid during the person's employment.

Under the new fund balance system be-

ing considered, the diocese would annually contribute to the pension fund a set percentage of the employee's salary. Each employee would be regularly informed of how much money is in his or her individual account, which would have a guaranteed rate of return, Olsen said.

Olsen also outlined the following possibilities for priests' plans. Currently vested in their plans after 20 years of service, priests would be vested in a new plan after five years of service, as are lay employees now, he said. He added that, currently, a priest who receives a pension from an employer other than the diocese has to forego a diocesan pension if what he is receiving is equal to or larger than what he would receive from the diocese.

However, the diocese is considering ending that practice and letting priests receive pensions from both the diocese and another employer regardless of the size of either pension, he said.



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Having a ball

(Above) Hugh Opray plays "Can Knock Down" at a carnival for residents of St. Ann's Community in Irondequoit on April 25. (Left) Adeline Hale concentrates before tossing a ball. Volunteers from local companies staged the carnival, which consisted of games, prizes and food, as part of the United Way's Day of Caring. Between 80 and 100 volunteers worked the carnival, planted flowers and trees around the campus and sponsored a car wash.

Father Corriveau takes leave of absence

Father Kip Francis Corriveau, chaplain at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester since January 2000, has been granted a leave of absence from his priestly duties effective April 17.

Father Michael F. Conboy, director of the Diocesan Department of Priest Personnel, declined to comment on the reasons for Father Corriveau's leave.

The Priest Personnel Board will discuss appointing a successor to Father Corriveau, according to a statement from the diocese.

Father Corriveau was ordained in June 1995. His first assignment was at Holy Cross Parish, Charlotte, where he stayed until taking a leave in April 1996.

He served as priest-intern and parochial vicar at St. Louis Parish, Pittsford, starting in February 1997 and concurrently served as sacramental minister at St. Joseph's Parish, Rush, as of June 1998. He also served as temporary administrator of Church of the Resurrection, Fairport, from June-September 1998.

In June 1999, Father Corriveau was named parochial vicar of Roman Catholic Faith Community of the Canisteo Valley, comprising the parishes of St. Joachim's, Canisteo; St. Mary's, Rexville; and St. Ann's and St. Ignatius Loyola in Hornell. He served in that position until his appointment to Strong.

— Rob Cullivan

Catholic Courier Summer fun issue coming May 10

The *Catholic Courier* Summer fun issue will be published May 10 instead of May 3. It will include a listing of parish summer festivals, golf tournaments, camps and other features.

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