

Rockville Centre's money woes point to church-wide problem

Tom Gallagher | Feb. 9, 2010 NCR Today

"Almost 100 of 133 Roman Catholic parishes in the Diocese of Rockville Centre are expected to lose money this year, based on a diocesan analysis that shows more financial problems than initially reported a few weeks ago.

The Long Island diocese also [increased the number of employees being offered buyout packages](#) [1] from 1,500 to 1,800. That amounts to nearly one-third of its workforce of 6,000 - a figure one nationally recognized church finances expert called "eye-popping" and "unheard-of."

Two weeks ago, the diocese said about 66 parishes operated in the red. But that figure was based on self-reporting by the parishes, said diocesan spokesman Sean Dolan. The diocese's own analysis came up with the figure of close to 100 expected to lose money this year. Last year, 96 parishes operated in the red.

Dolan said offering voluntary separation packages "is always difficult, but we're doing it in a very compassionate manner."

Diocesan officials offered a variety of reasons for the financial troubles: investment losses amid the recession; declining Mass attendance and donations; increasing expenses for payroll, health care and pensions; and building maintenance on aging infrastructure. Dolan said the buyouts are expected to cost the diocese "several million dollars," depending on how many employees accept them."

As a side note, there has been an interesting, public argument about the nature of the diocese's financial condition going on for some time led by Richard Grafer, who has presented systematic, detailed analysis of the Diocese's finances as far back as 2005. See [here](#) [2] and [here](#) [3].

When a diocese is in such financially battered condition, shouldn't there be a major turnover of financial advisors and perhaps an intervention by competent, independent financial and management experts?

I have long argued in writing the the current parish governance model is broken, dysfunctional and archaic. When money flows in, flaws remain suppressed.

What are we left with? Catholic elementary and secondary schools are going the route of typewriters. Parishes are closing all over the place. Mass attendance is at an all time low and showing no signs of improvement. Catholics as a total number of the U.S. population is stagnant-to-declining and if we did not have non-documented folks coming into the U.S., we'd be moving towards a population of 15 million and not holding at 23 million+/- . Further, the fastest growing population for those who believe in God are those unaffiliated to a formal denomination and former Catholics represent a large portion of that number.

If we don't identify new ways to organize ourselves, we'll continue on the path to diminishment and we'll have no one to blame but ourselves.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.newsday.com/long-island/nassau/diocese-sees-more-financial-woes-to-offer-1-800-buyouts-1.1749682>

[2] <http://www.antonnews.com/manhassetpress/2005/10/14/news/grafer.html>

[3] http://www.votfbpt.org/Dio_of_Rockville_Centre_cash_reserves_rapped.pdf