

Retirement home for elderly priests in the works

By Joyce Coronel
The Catholic Sun

Plans are in the works to build a home for elderly priests who have faithfully served the Diocese of Phoenix for years.

Currently, retired priests own or rent homes. Three others reside at Mount Claret Retreat Center. A few, such as Fr. Clemens Hut, who recently turned 99, live in nursing homes.

In other, older dioceses — the Diocese of Phoenix was established just 40 years ago — existing buildings have been converted into retirement homes or new facilities have been built. The Archdiocese of Newark has two homes for retired priests and the Archdiocese of New York has three.

Of the 126 diocesan priests in the Phoenix Diocese, 54 of them are age 65 or older. With nearly half of the diocesan priests nearing retirement age, the growing need for a place where they may reside with brother priests is apparent.

Fr. Michael Diskin, assistant chancellor for the Diocese of Phoenix and canonical pastor of St. Louis the King Parish in Glendale, is heading up the committee examining a building proposal.

The initiative began last spring at the behest of Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted, he said. Diocesan priests were queried about their interest in such a facility.

Of the 50 priests who responded, 25 said they would “definitely” be interested in a centralized retirement home. A few expressed “some” interest in the project.

With a consensus that both a need and a desire for a retirement home existed, a committee was formed to work out the details. The committee is working with the Foundation for Senior Living. The foundation has agreed to manage the facility once it is established.



“They have built facilities like this before,” Fr. Diskin said, noting that the foundation’s experience — especially concerning green technology — would come into play.

Joe Switalski, director of public relations for the Foundation for Senior Living, has been involved with the proposed priests’ retirement home.

“We’re using the same designer we used [on a project] in Lake Havasu and that is completing a project in Yuma with 60 units,” he said.

The proposal is to have a 10-acre campus that would have several buildings, including a chapel to allow priests to concelebrate Masses.

Five buildings, each with four, one-bedroom units, would face a courtyard. A sixth building would contain four, two-bedroom units. And with 10 acres of land, there would be room for future growth.

Another building would house a community center, library, exercise room and dining hall. Although each of the living spaces would have a kitchenette, the plan is to bring in one meal a day to be served in the dining hall.

The proposed facility, which would house about 25 to 28 retired priests, is geared toward independent living and will not include skilled nursing care.

“There is a provision for a limited number of rooms for priests who might need supervised care — that

would be limited to perhaps four or six bedrooms,” Fr. Diskin said.

A location for the priests’ retirement home has not yet been selected, but Bishop Olmsted has decided to name it *Regina Cleri* — Queen of the Clergy.

“The name expresses our recognition of the Blessed Mother’s power as both mother and intercessor for priests in heaven,” said Fr. David Sanfilippo, vicar general and member of the priests’-retirement-home committee. “It expresses priests’ own devotion and love for Our Lady and recognizes that she keeps her sons under the mantle of her care.”

Fr. Greg Schlarb, Vicar for Stewardship for the Diocese of Phoenix, is charged with fundraising. He said the retired priests’ home, including the land on which it will be built, will cost about \$6 million.

“Right now we’re not looking at involving the parishes so much as it would be a diocesan campaign, seeing what we could do with advance gifts like we have with the CDA,” Fr. Schlarb said. “We’re close to \$2 million in advance gifts before the campaign starts every year.”

Fr. Sanfilippo called the bishop’s announcement of the priest’s retirement home a fitting way to close the Year for Priests.

“With this decision the bishop looks toward a future where our elderly priests, who have devoted their entire lives to the service of God and His people, will themselves be cared for in their time of need.”

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Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted is closing out the Year for Priests with the announcement of a retirement home for elderly priests.



*Please Make a Donation
To Regina Cleri*

Donate Now

Please keep this project in your Prayers, Wills, and Estate Planning. By doing so, you will be instrumental in helping to provide a retirement home for priests in their time of need.

Our Lady, Queen of the Clergy, Pray for us!