

ABANDONING A SINKING SHIP

This photo by Janine Breschi, a French survivor, shows the burning Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro listing in the Indian Ocean last Wednesday as nearly 1,000 passengers and crew fled in life rafts. The liner sank Friday off the coast of Somalia. Breschi arrived in Djibouti yesterday aboard a rescue ship.

Minister's mistress has church divided

U.K. clergyman will be fired if he gets married for the third time

GOODERSTONE, England (AP) — If Rev. Kit Chalcraft marries for a third time he will be dismissed by the Church of England. So his fiancée remains his mistress, with the approval of much of his flock.

The affair amid the carrot fields and pine groves of the west Norfolk countryside, 160 kilometres north of London, has put a focus on an issue long troubling the church: the remarriage of divorced people.

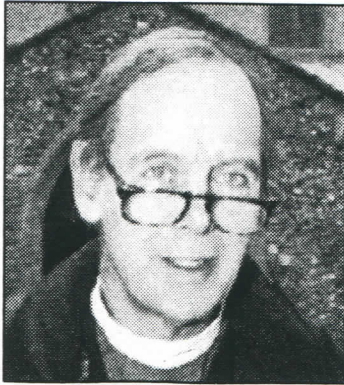
The General Synod, the church's ruling body, debated the question Friday but is still considering the matter.

Church of England law insists on the indissolubility of marriage, although it permits divorce for grave causes, especially adultery. Three attempts in the 1980s to allow remarriage of divorced people in the church ended with a compromise under which it's up to the local vicar.

The need for a unified policy has become more pressing, however, as more than a third of marriages in England and Wales now involve at least one divorced person. And divorced people have been able to be priests since 1992.

From his pulpit, Chalcraft, 56, has said opposition to marrying divorced people in the church is outdated. "As a church we must face the realities of contemporary life or else we cause people to suffer a lot of guilt, and we look ridiculous in the process."

But the Bishop of Norwich, Rev. Peter Nott, said he has been generous with Chalcraft in



KIT CHALCRAFT: Church of England bishop threatens to dismiss him.

the past and will not change his mind now.

"A clergyman who marries for the third time following two divorces can in no way bear witness effectively to Christian standards of marriage," Nott has declared.

Because Chalcraft plans to marry again in September, Nott gave notice that in February he must leave his post. But he agreed to listen to the objections of church wardens on Dec. 13.

For 7½ years Chalcraft has been priest for 10 scattered parishes — Bodney, Cockley Cley, Didlington, Fouldey, Gooderstone, Great and Little Cressingham, Hilborough, Oxborough and Thrextton.

He has kept his sense of humor despite awkward publicity and headlines such as "Three Weddings and It's Your Funeral."

"I'm sorry, really, that I got the bishop into such a mess," he said at his rectory at Gooderstone.

Chalcraft has said his first marriage of 23 years failed because "I didn't give it enough attention," while the second, which lasted two years, was "a rebound relationship that never should have happened."

Chalcraft and Susanne Hall became close when her husband died 10 years ago, and have been romantically involved for more than four years.

"More than a year ago, we were told that if we married, Kit would lose his livelihood," Hall said. "That's just barmy after decades of being a totally dedicated priest."

Angry union members

New drug plan cause for joy at gay parish

BY LESLIE SCRIVENER
STAFF REPORTER

Richard Haslam was overjoyed as he sat in church yesterday and learned the province was extending its drug benefit plan to help people with AIDS.

Someday it just might benefit him.

"It seemed like my prayers were answered," said Haslam, an accountant weakened by HIV, who has been on long-term disability since the summer.

It was the first Haslam, 40, had heard of the extended plan announced last week by Premier Bob Rae — a move that is causing rejoicing in the gay community.

Haslam's drug plan ended when he went on disability, although he continues to receive 85 per cent of his salary. For now, he can afford the \$200 a month he spends on prescription drugs.

But if his condition diagnosed six years ago worsens, his drug costs will soar.

The plan will cost between \$60 million and \$80 million, The Star reported last week, but details will not be worked out until

the new year; one possibility is that benefits would be based on a sliding income scale.

Because he earns in the middle incomes, Haslam doesn't know if he will qualify.

"Even if I don't qualify, just the fact that it's there for someone else is wonderful news."

Such wonderful news that Rev. Brent Hawkes, pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto, where Haslam worships, wept when he read details of the announcement to the congregation.

And when local MPP Marilyn Churley (Riverdale), Ontario's minister of consumer and commercial relations, spoke at the church yesterday, she was greeted by a standing ovation.

The ecumenical church's members are largely gay and lesbian and 25 per cent of the male members have HIV.

The church held its first funeral 13 years ago; now there are about two funerals a week.

In his sermon, Hawkes expressed joy about the plan, but at the same time urged members to be angry and outrageous "as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death."

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