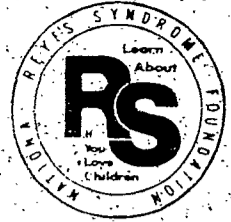


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Does Future Hold Priest-Less Parishes?

Last in a Series
By Martin Toombs

It's Sunday morning at St. Mary's Church, and the permanent deacon is outside the church, visiting with parishioners and checking with those who will assist at the liturgy.

It is nearly Mass time when the priest arrives, traveling from a nearby church. He works as a member of a group of priests who serve several parishes.

During Mass, the deacon gives the homily and makes the announcements, because, as the parishioners know, he is the pastor.

Following Mass, the deacon goes to the school to visit the religious education program, the priest journeys to the next Mass or to a Baptism, and the parish business manager and volunteers take care of the collection.

Meanwhile, the other parish staff member, a sister working as a pastoral assistant, was conducting a para-liturgical service and distributing Communion in the local nursing home.

The Priest Shortage And Its Challenge

Whether such a parish is a nightmare or a realistic view of the Catholic parish of the future depends on each person's perspective.

But the shortage of priests, the emergence of permanent deacons and of non-ordained pastoral ministers and administrative parish staff, makes such a parish a possibility.

The parish would receive its priestly services from a group of priests, who, freed from parish administration, would be able to serve several communities. Working as a team, the priests would live in community, and be able to fill in for one another in times of illness or vacation.

Acceptance of such a parish would require significant changes in the understanding of the roles of parish leaders by all involved.

Another model for ministry would involve large parishes,

with the availability of priests rather than the number of families being the criteria for the continuation of parishes. That, as well, might be a bitter pill for the diocese's 187 parishes and missions, many of which are justly proud of long years of service to the local faith community.

Declining numbers can make closing or merger the preferred option. Such changes have come slowly, being most obvious in consolidation of schools, and convents.

Suggestions now are being made for the consolidation of rectories, an idea which everyone favors, Bishop Dennis W. Hickey notes, as long as it means the priest in the next parish moving into "our" rectory. Head of priests personnel, Bishop Hickey notes that when discussing a new pastor with one parish council, the members seemed to be primarily concerned with having a priest at the rectory when they went there.

Father James Schwartz, head of the Ministry to Priests program, notes that "it makes a lot of sense" to consolidate rectories, but adds that parishioners' worries have to be addressed.

Progress already has been made in reducing the dependence on ordained personnel. Several diocesan departments formerly headed by priests are now run by lay persons. Trained pastoral ministers also are assuming responsibilities as hospital and prison chaplains.

And a count of parish staffs, including priests, pastoral assistants, religious education coordinators and school principals, reveals that there actually are more parish

ministers now than there were several years ago.

Parish business managers also are being used to reduce pastors' administrative duties. Immaculate Conception, Ithaca, has had a business manager for several years, and St. Augustine's and St. Monica's in Rochester recently hired a single business manager. Bishop Hickey noted that business managers, even in small parishes on a part time or shared basis, could make it possible for the pastor to spend more time on ministerial duties.

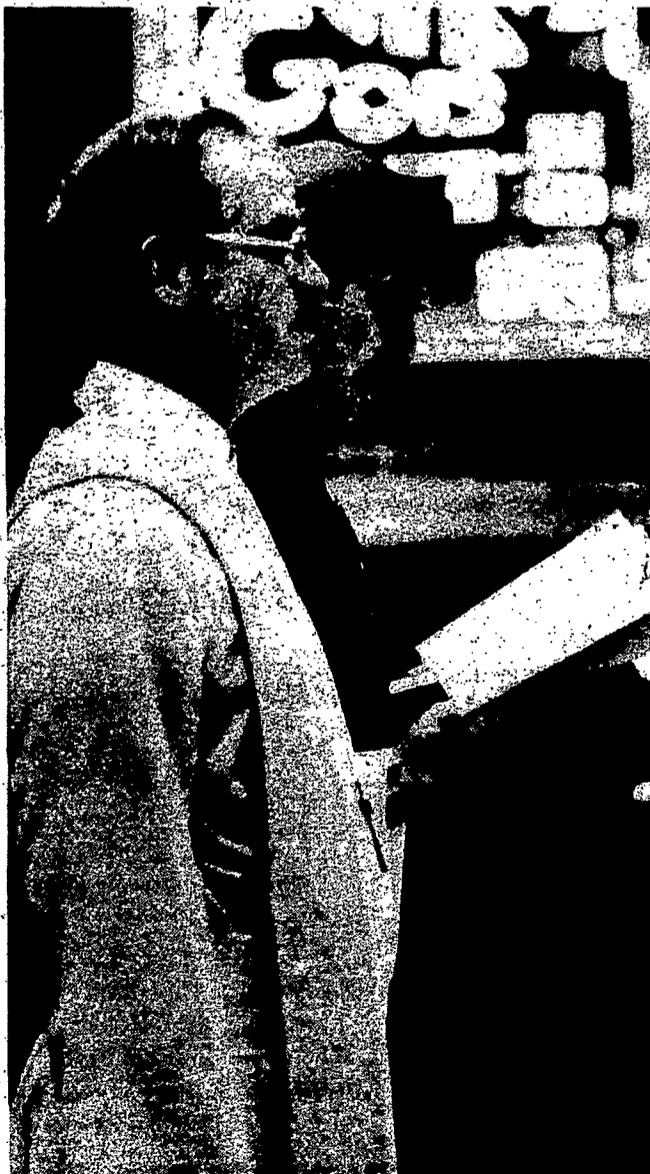
The diocese currently has 43 pastoral assistants, all nuns, who augment ministry in many parishes. Not only do they lessen problems caused

by the shortage of priests, but they also bring their own perspectives to the work, and make available another option for parishioners seeking counseling or assistance.

Exactly what role the permanent deacons will fill when they begin their work is being studied. There are currently 59 men training for ordination as permanent deacons, with ordination for the first class of 28 expected for the spring of 1982.

Bishop Hickey envisions that some permanent deacons will work in non-parochial ministries, especially as hospital chaplains, and they also will provide assistance in rural areas.

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Augsberg Confession

Reverend Dr. John Beeg, foreground, Dean of the Genesee Valley District, Lutheran Church in America, stands with Bishop Matthew H. Clark at the foot of the altar at The Lutheran Church of the Incarnate Word last Sunday during the opening of an evening vespers service in commemoration of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg confession. Some 500 diocesan Catholics and Lutherans joined in prayer with the more than 40 religious that participated.



MSGR. SCHMITT



FATHER WESLEY



FATHER WOOD

Three Priests Die

The diocese was shocked and saddened by the death of three priests over the past weekend.

On Friday, Oct. 31, Msgr. George J. Schmitt, who had noted his 92nd birthday just 10 days earlier, died.

Father John Wesley, a former teacher at Aquinas Institute and a Rochester native, died Saturday in Toronto.

And on Sunday, Father George S. Wood, 66, pastor of Our Mother of Sorrows in Greece, died of a heart attack. Father Wood's death came just two days after his 66th birthday.

Msgr. Schmitt Father Wesley Father Wood

Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated yesterday for Msgr. Schmitt, with Bishop Clark the principal celebrant, at Holy Family Church, Bishop Dennis W.

A concelebrated Mass of Christian Burial is to be held today, Nov. 5, at Sacred Heart Cathedral, for Father Michael Wesley, CSB, who died Saturday, Nov. 1, 1980, in St.

Father Wood will lie in state today (Wednesday, Nov. 5) from 5 to 8 p.m. in Our Mother of Sorrows Church following calling hours from 2 to 4 p.m. in the rectory.

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