

# Mergers, clusters and closings

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Fortunately, the two parishes are only a few blocks apart. As a rule, Father Grzela preaches Sunday mornings at 8:30 a.m. at St. Stanislaus, then races to St. Theresa by 9 a.m. for Mass. At 10 a.m., he's back at St. Stanislaus, returning to St. Theresa's by noon.

"The people are very understanding," he said. "I think some of them wonder 'How long can he keep it up?' but it's not too bad so far."

With time, Father Grzela believes the people of St. Theresa's have grown less suspicious of diocesan motives, but no less determined to keep their parish alive.

"People see their community as a sign to the neighborhood," he said. "They don't want their parish to die, so they're energized."

In the past six months, parishioners at St. Theresa have virtually redone the building

which comprises the church, school and parish hall, according to parish council president Richard Hannon. Volunteers have installed a new kitchen in the hall, repainted most of the school rooms and refurbished all of the plumbing in the building. The work, which Hannon estimates could have cost more than \$70,000, was completed for less than \$10,000.

The parish has reinstated traditions like the annual Easter dinner and children's Christmas play. Many more people are serving as liturgical ministers — and for the first time women are being included.

Parishioners have also reached out to former members who are home-bound or in nursing homes. With the help of a diocesan grant, the parish has offered assistance to four needy families in the surrounding neighborhood.

This summer, St. Theresa's is planning a two-week Vacation Bible School for children in their own and nearby parishes.

"I think tradition is the biggest hurdle we've had to cross," Hannon said. "The priests here have always dictated the way things were done. People were afraid of not having a priest. But by not having one, we have found a new parish."

"The strength of this parish is in the church — there's nothing else here for people," he added. "If St. Theresa's survives, it will be because of the people. They have wanted to do these things, but they've just never been asked."

"I am so proud of them," Father Grzela said. "Now I think they see that they can not only survive, but be successful without having their own priest. They feel appreciated."

But they are not entirely satisfied. Despite their accomplishments, Hannon said, something is lacking. "We can do the painting and the fixing and the socializing, but we're missing spiritual guidance — just someone here at the rectory for people to talk to," he said.

At present, a seminary student is living in St. Theresa's rectory, and Hannon wonders whether eventually a retired diocesan priest could live there as well.

A similar renewal has taken place at Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier. Prior to last year, each parish drew 150 to 200 worshippers on a good Sunday. Since the merger, more than 400 worshippers have attended Sunday services, according to Father Leone.

But numbers don't reflect the new vigor he senses among the people. "People saw it as a strengthening move and have wanted to be a part of it," he said. Parishioners have begun to organize a Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) program. More than 200 children now attend religious education classes. Liturgical ministry, prayer groups and comforting ministry have also grown.

"The intercultural dynamic is still there," Father Leone said. "One of the things you're faced with is the question of whether you should do everything twice or try to bring everyone together. I think we've ended up doing a little bit of both."

"People who are in place in society always fear losing their position to new immigrants," he added. "In general, you find prejudice in place, but when individuals get to meet one another, it's just people-to-people."

Parishioner Doris Rafoth agrees. "It's history repeating itself really," she explained. "Italian people years ago used to have Masses in Italian. Now we have the Spanish Masses."

"When you come over, you try to cling to your own customs. I'm not ashamed to say I wish I understood the (Spanish) language — they're such warm and loving people," she said. "And I love their music — it's a more lively, toe-tapping kind than what you're used to with the organ."

"I like how it's working out," added Conchita Ramos. "We are a community."  
NEXT WEEK, take a look at the Cayuga Team Ministry, an example of parish clustering in a rural community.

## PIMC offers a chance for shared decisions

Most of what diocesan officials have learned about the Process for Institutional Ministry and Consultation (PIMC) came through experience.

Developed more than three years ago, the PIMC brings parish and diocesan representatives together to decide on parish-level changes in response to changing patterns of ministry.

The process was first used in 1984 for discussions with four urban parishes — Holy Redeemer, St. Francis Xavier, St. Theresa and St. George.

Because the four parishes were located in the city, Bishop Matthew H. Clark designated Father John Mulligan and Rebecca Gifford of the diocesan Urban Ministry Division as the coordinators of that initial effort. Since then, the bishop has named other teams to implement the PIMC in Palmyra and Marion and in the northeast quadrant of the diocese, where eight parishes were combined in two clusters.

According to its mission statement, the PIMC is supposed to help parishes review the past, elaborate the present and envision the future in areas such as outreach, leadership development, socio-cultural diversity, networking with neighboring parishes and agencies, patterns of personnel placement, physical facilities and financial status.

But first, diocesan coordinators found they had to overcome a lot of fear and resistance to change among parishioners.

"People may feel that the rug is being pulled out from under them," explained Gifford, associate director of Urban Ministries. "When there is a change in

any community, there is a loss and there is grieving. We need to say that grieving is important and legitimate and try our best to support and be present to that, to send the message to folks that it's OK."

"One thing we've become really aware of is that it's not possible to spring this on a parish on short notice," Gifford added. "There should be a two-year process of consciousness-raising to give people in the parishes more of a sense of ownership."

Although the PIMC is initiated by the bishop, experience has reinforced the value of shared decisions.

"It's not diocesan leadership, but parish leadership that is crucial," Gifford said. "The process is designed to surface feelings and reflections, to empower people in local communities to come up with their own creative plans."

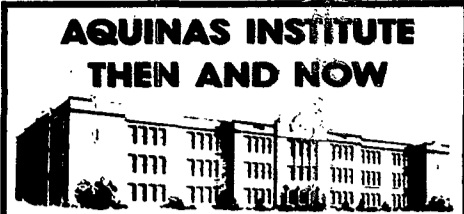
In each instance in which the PIMC has been used, diocesan coordinators have had to adapt the process to the needs of the parishes involved.

"Even though we have an outline for how this happens, it has to be a play-by-play process," Gifford said. "We always knew that, but after hours spent in reflection, it was reinforced."

Once parish-level changes have been identified, approved and implemented, diocesan follow-up depends on the wishes of the parish.

"We don't want to continue to have a heavy hand. It's largely at the request of the pastor," Gifford said.

"There are no blueprints for this because it's brand new," she added. "We all need to work together."



## AQUINAS INSTITUTE THEN AND NOW

— A series of articles to appear semi-monthly commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the school.

The ordinations of three Aquinas alumni this spring to the Catholic priesthood and diaconate carry on a long tradition at the school. Over the years Aquinas has always been a solid and reliable source of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. 50 alumni have been ordained to serve the Rochester diocese, 56 as Basilians, and 54 for other dioceses and religious orders. Many have entered communities of brothers, too.

Two alumni will be ordained as priests for religious orders, Peter Loewenguth C.M. '76 for the Vincentian order and Thomas Rosica C.S.B. '77 for the Basilian Fathers. John H. Hayes '74 will be ordained a deacon for the diocese of Rochester.

The first of these ordinations will be that of Rev. Thomas Rosica on April 19 at St. Ambrose, his home parish. While a student at Aquinas, Rosica was editor of the *Arete* and a coordinator for the *Courier-Journal* section *RapAround*. He attended St. John Fisher College while living with the Basilians at 402 Augustine St. He presently serves at St. John the Baptist Church in Amherstberg, Ontario and expects to be reappointed there.

Rev. Peter Loewenguth's ordination will occur on May 24 at the Church of the Miraculous Medal in Germantown, P.A. While a senior at Aquinas he was elected secretary of the student council. He also worked evenings at the telephone at Sacred Heart rectory. His fondest recollection of this are the times that Bishop McCafferty would tell him to put the phone on answering service and invite him inside for TV and pizza. His Mass of Thanksgiving will be June 1 at the Cathedral.

Another Aquinas alumnus, John H. Hayes, will be ordained a deacon on June 7 for the diocese of Rochester. At Aquinas he was active in track under the tutelage of the late Fr. Michael Wesley. After graduation he attended the University of Cincinnati; he will finish his fourth year of theology at Seton Hall in South Orange, N.J. His uncle, Fr. John Hayes, is chaplain of the Dominican Sisters convent in Elmira. Deacon Hayes will be serving his diaconate year in a local parish.

At least two more Aquinas alumni are studying for the priesthood. William Roedel '80 is in his second year of theology at Catholic University. John Huber C.S.B. '81 is teaching at Annony, France.

NEXT ARTICLE: Aquinas' dramatics.

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