

The New Code of Canon Law

New parish staffing patterns to meet the future

By Father Kevin McKenna
Vice Chancellor, Diocese of Rochester

Many U.S. dioceses, including our own, have had to ask serious, soul-searching questions during these last few years: In the next decades, will the shortage of clergy — which is indicated by various statistics — mean the availability of only the essential sacramental presence of the Church in many communities? As a result of this anticipated shortage, will service be reduced to mediocrity? Without an adequate number of clerics to staff them, will parishes be forced to close?

The revised code attempted in a positive way to respond to the concerns expressed by many sectors of Church. It recognized the history of pastoral care that has been entrusted traditionally to its ordained pastors. Reflecting also the theological value echoed by the Second Vatican Council, the revised code reaffirmed the importance of the sacrament of orders — the priesthood — as a primary requisite for pastoral care. The Church expects that a pastor be able to celebrate the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and therefore establishes the necessity that one must be an ordained priest to validly be appointed to the office of pastor (Canon 521,1).

Those entrusted with drafting the code also recognized the dynamics clearly taking place within the Church in the post-Vatican II era: an increasing shortage of clergy and an increasing awareness and appreciation for lay ministry. Consequently, the new code allows for flexibility, creativity, and adaptations in leadership types and structures to meet the changing needs of the contemporary Church. The new law provides for "team ministry," in which the pastoral care of a parish or of several parishes taken together can be assigned to a group of priests (Canon 517,1). One of the priests is appointed "moderator," with an ultimate accountability to the bishop. Rooted historically in the ancient "presbyterium" — the college or local grouping of priests collaborating closely to assist the bishop in governance of the local Church — this model of ministry emerged within our own diocese a number of years ago with the development of "co-pastorates." The code proposed an extension of this concept to include pastoral ministry to several parishes by one "team" of pastors.

A perhaps even-more exciting and creative option suggested by the code is the exercise of pastoral care for parishes in areas experiencing a "dearth of priests" by permanent deacons and persons or communities

of persons who are not ordained (Canon 517,2). In these circumstances, a priest must be appointed to supervise the pastoral care to ensure the necessary bonding of the parish with the sacramental life of the Church, and to execute the juridical affairs of the parish which are entrusted to a pastor by law. It would not be necessary, however, for him to reside in the parish.

This type of ministry has already become a reality in many dioceses of our nation, particularly in those that are heavily rural in population. In these regions, permanent deacons, women religious and religious brothers, and lay people have assumed the day-to-day administration and pastoral care for the parish community, including such duties as baptismal and marriage preparation; visitation of the grieving; bringing viaticum to the sick; conducting funeral services; etc. Unfortunately, the new code does not give any name to the people who are providing this care within a parish. In some dioceses, the titles used are "pastoral associate" or "parish minister."

Such developments, in addition to helping the Church deal with a very severe and serious priest shortage, help to develop and realize an essential concept of the Council, which has been codified into law: "All the Christian faithful have the duty and the right to work so that the divine message of salvation may increasingly reach the whole of mankind in every age and in every land" (Canon 211).

But such options also challenge us as Church to deal with important related questions: How do we emphasize and maintain the ministry of the ordained priest and recruit more applicants? How will the utilization of non-ordained ministers presiding at Eucharistic services respond to the community's need to celebrate the Eucharist, and not just receive it? More mundane but just as essential questions must also be answered, relative to compensation for those involved in such ministry; proper training for these new ministries; and preparing parishioners for these new developments in pastoral staffing.

As we continue to develop our faith lives and commitment to the Church, we are increasingly better able to discover the most appropriate ways and options to ensure that parish life flourishes in the years ahead.

NEXT WEEK: The revised code and new parish structures.

Jubilarians

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Father Edward J. Golden, current chaplain of the Elmira Correctional Facility, was born March 11, 1935, in Elmira. He is the son of Francis and Frances Curry Golden. Father Golden attended St. Mary's School, and Southside High School, Elmira, and is a graduate of St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries. He was ordained to the priesthood on May 27, 1961.

Father Golden's first assignment was as assistant pastor of St. Stephen's Church, Geneva, where he served for three and one-half years. Beginning in February of 1964, he served as assistant pastor of Blessed Sacrament for another three-and-one-half year period, before beginning an assignment to the South American missions in 1968.

Returning to Rochester in 1974, Father Golden was appointed to head the diocese's Spanish Apostolate, a position he held for more than two years. In 1976, he became assistant pastor of St. Francis Xavier, Rochester, assuming the pastorate shortly thereafter.

He has served at the correctional facility since 1982.

Father William B. Holberton, chaplain and staff member at Bishop Kearney High School, was born August 31, 1921 in Hackensack, N.J., to Thomas and Frances J. Altschuler Holberton. He attended public school in Fairmont, N.J., and St. Philip Neri School in Boston. He is a graduate of St. Bernard's Seminary, Rochester, and was ordained to the priesthood on May 27, 1961.

Father Holberton's first assignment was as assistant pastor of St. Ann's Church, Rochester. In 1963, he was appointed chaplain of Strong Memorial Hospital, a position he held for 20 years.

In 1983, Father Holberton became the part-time chaplain at Our Lady of Mercy Motherhouse, where he served until moving to Bishop Kearney in 1984.

Father Neil Miller, pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, Rochester, was born July 13, 1935, in Corning to Fedele and Maria Ambasea Miller. He attended St. Mary's School, Corning, and is a graduate of

Corning Free Academy as well as St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries. Father Miller was ordained to the priesthood on May 27, 1961.

His first assignment was as assistant pastor of St. Michael's, Lyons. Subsequent assistant pastorships were at St. Agnes, Avon, 1963 to 1967; St. Mary, Watkins Glen, 1967 to 1969; and St. Lawrence, Greece, 1969 to 1973.

In 1973, Father Miller became co-pastor of St. Augustine's Parish, Rochester, moving in 1975 to assistant pastor of St. Casimir's, Elmira. In 1976, he took a position in the diocesan Office of Human Development, which he held until being assigned in 1983 to serve on the diocesan mission team to Rochester's sister diocese of Tabasco, Mexico.

After completing two years of mission service, Father Miller assumed the pastorate of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in 1985.

Father George Wiant, pastor of the Northeast Quadrant Cluster, was born October 11, 1935, in Rochester, the son of George and Martha Dombrowski Wiant. He attended public schools in Rochester and is a graduate of St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries. He was ordained to the priesthood on June 3, 1961.

Sacred Heart Church in Auburn was the site of Father Wiant's first assignment as assistant pastor. He remained in Auburn until 1963, when he was appointed assistant pastor of Good Shepherd, Henrietta, and St. Joseph, Rush. In 1965, he became chaplain of Bishop Kearney High School. He was assigned to secular mission work in 1971, and this assignment lasted nearly seven years. In 1978, he was named director of the diocesan Office of Human Development.

In 1979, Father Wiant was appointed assistant pastor of St. Mary's Church, Dansville, and in 1980, he became associate pastor of St. Joseph, Weedsport. He was named pastor of the Northeast Quadrant Cluster at its inception in 1985.

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