

Indepth

Diocese hires layman to direct personnel division

By Lee Strong

The Diocese of Rochester has announced the hiring of Robert W. Mason as the first lay director of the diocesan Division of Personnel, Staffing and Development. Mason replaces Father Robert Schrader, who will remain in the personnel division as director of the Office of (Priest) Personnel.



Mason becomes only the second lay person to direct a diocesan division. Rebecca Gifford became the head of the Division of Urban Services in June, 1987.

Diocesan officials acknowledge that Mason's hiring is indicative of an overall trend in the U.S. Catholic Church, as lay people begin to assume leadership positions formerly held by priests. Officials also say that appointing a professional personnel director signals a recognition on the part of the diocese that in the coming years, diocesan personnel issues will become increasingly complex as lay employees constitute an ever-growing portion of diocesan employees. This trend is due in part to declining numbers of priests, but also to a growing awareness of the competence of lay leaders.

"I think that our last two division-director hirings, with lay people replacing priests, shows that's been a trend in the Church, in parishes, in our diocese," said Father John Mulligan, moderator of the Pastoral Office and a member of the search committee that chose Mason from more than 50 candidates. "It's a recognition of the capacity (lay people) have and the skills that they bring."

"Since the Second Vatican Council, I think there has been a greater call to laity to use their gifts in service to the Church," Father Schrader observed. "I think that's now coming to fruition."

Mason is fully aware of the import of his hiring. "I think it will be a challenge — not from the standpoint of the diocese, but from the concept of the diocesan personnel director being a lay person," he said. "I've liked to establish some precedents, and I think this job will establish a precedent. It'll be an experience both for the diocese and for myself."

Mason comes to the diocese with more than 20 years experience in personnel administration. Since March 1988, he has been the personnel administrator of Lifetime Assistance, Inc., an agency that operates training and day-treatment programs for the developmentally disabled. From 1969 to 1986, he was director of personnel for the Fairport School District, and administrative assistant for personnel with the East Irondequoit School District from 1966 to 1969.

"We felt (Mason's) background, aptitude and professional experience coalesced with what we're trying to do," Father Mulligan observed. The moderator cited the new director's experience with educational and not-for-profit organizations, his experience in initiation comprehensive personnel policies, and his emphasis on training for personnel as key factors in his hiring.

In addition to Father Mulligan, the selection committee consisted of Tim Leahy senior vice president and manager of Chase Lincoln First Bank; Dennis Bham, of the personnel office at Bausch and Lomb, Inc.; and Carol O'Neill, director of personnel at Nazareth College.

Mason now takes over a diocesan division in

the midst of internal reorganization. His hiring is, in fact, an important component of that reorganization, his predecessor noted.

Since Father Schrader became the division director in January, 1986, the division's scope of responsibilities has grown. During his three years, he has had to contend with developing alternative-staffing patterns for parishes, creating a review process for pastors and a six-year term for pastorates, providing increased salary and benefits for lay employees, accommodating the growing number of retiring priests and the declining numbers of active priests, and coordinating the growth of the Personnel Commission. All these factors, Father Schrader said, have contributed to making a combination division director-priest personnel director an all-but-impossible job for one person to fill — particularly when that person has no formal personnel experience or training.

Father Schrader's contention was supported by an audit of the division conducted in Decem-

ber, 1987, by the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators. The auditors concluded that the jobs of priest personnel director and division director should be separated, and that someone with personnel training should be hired to head the division.

Father Schrader, who has struggled to fill both positions, agrees with the auditors' conclusions. "The time has come for a better division of labor," he noted.

The priest said the audit recommends additional changes in division structure and operations. Among changes being discussed are reassessing the salary ranges of Pastoral Center positions, restructuring the Personnel Commission, and consolidating or better coordinating personnel operations conducted by other divisions. Although the staff of the personnel division have been examining these suggestions, they chose not to act on them pending the hiring of the new director.

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Reflection process prepares parishes for pastoral options

By Lee Strong

In June, 1985, St. Patrick's Parish, Corning, entered the future.

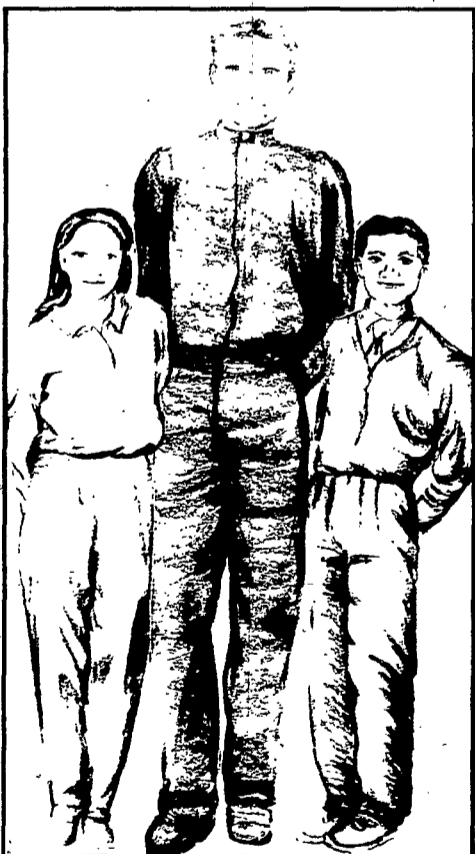
The parish took the plunge when Father Philip Billote, the associate pastor (parochial vicar), was reassigned to Holy Trinity Parish in Webster. Fred Collins, a member of the Corning congregation, recalled that fellow parishioners were surprised when Father Billote was not replaced and the parish had to get by with one priest.

"A lot of people expected someone to take the associate pastor's place," Collins said. When no replacement materialized, however, "a lot of people realized there's a shortage of priests."

St. Patrick's is not the only parish affected by the priest shortage. The diocese now has four clusters in which one priest serves several parishes. Three other parishes, meanwhile, have been temporarily administered by people other than priests. In the first instance, Sister Rita Heberle, RSM, served as temporary pastoral administrator of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Painted Post in the fall of 1986. Sister Julia Norton, RSM, later administered Mt. Carmel Parish, Rochester, from November, 1986,

to May, 1987. Most recently, Michael Mahoney was named administrator of St. Columba Church, Caledonia, and St. Patrick Church, Mumford.

In these three cases, religious and lay people temporarily replaced pastors on sabbatical, but in the future, such positions may be permanent appointments. While the diocesan Division of Personnel, Staffing and Development is currently compiling a job description for permanent



lay administrators, lay people already oversee parishes in other dioceses across the country.

Lay administrators, clusters and the sharing of parish staffs are becoming more necessary due to the declining numbers of priests. By the year 2000 — when officials estimate the Diocese of Rochester will have only 125 active parish priests — a much larger number of parishes will find themselves reduced to one priest on staff or to sharing a priest with other congregations. Parishes will have to rely more and more on lay people to provide services that priests have offered.

Rather than viewing the situation with concern, Father Paul Tomasso, secretary to Bishop Matthew H. Clark, said the diocese is looking at



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increased lay involvement as desirable.

"Most of us underestimate our baptismal vocation to be ministers of the Gospel in a variety of ways, big and small," Father Tomasso said. "Things that in the past priests did, the sisters did — like taking communion to the sick, visiting the sick, meeting with those who lost a family member, making decisions on finance — these are things we could all do for one another. It's a matter of everyone sharing parish life, making parish life happen together, instead of seeing parish life generated solely by the occupant of the rectory."

To prepare parishes for the changes that in some instances have already begun, the Diocese of Rochester has created the Commitment to Ministry process. Father Tomasso described the goal of the process as helping lay people realize the full extent of their baptismal calls.

"We're trying to change the consciousness of ministry," he said. "The process is not aimed at making changes, it's aimed at preparing for change over the coming years. It's to educate and equip parishes not only for changing of staffing, but to face ministry challenges that are upon us."

Father Tomasso acknowledged that some

people may assume the diocese is undertaking the Commitment to Ministry process solely because of the declining numbers of priests. Others, he said, have suggested that promoting lay leadership will undermine priesthood and vocations. Yet the priest rejected both contentions. "The first concern (declining numbers of priests) has pushed us along, but it should never be spoken about without equal concern for the community's baptismal vocations being promoted," Father Tomasso said. "The baptismal vocation is valid and sorely underestimated."

"As to the second concern," he continued, "I really believe with time our presentation will help clarify the identity of the priesthood, and broaden awareness of what priestly ministry is and result in new vocations."

To begin the process, the Commitment to Ministry program is training a reflection team of approximately five individuals for each parish in the diocese. Through six rounds of training staggered over a two-year period, these teams will examine alternative staffing patterns being used in the diocese and throughout the country, discover ways to recognize and draw forth gifts and potential leaders from the parish

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