

Bishop Clark unveils effort to recruit priests

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Diocese of Rochester ordained two priests this year.

Next year, one, possibly two, ordinations will take place.

According to Bishop Matthew H. Clark, the pattern of sparse ordination is expected to continue for at least the next five years. During the same period, the diocese will lose approximately 10 priests each year due to retirement or death.

"I'd say we're in a crisis," Bishop Clark said. "If this trend goes on uninterrupted, we will not be able to enjoy the sacramental life" the diocese has enjoyed up to this time.

In response to this crisis, Bishop Clark has appointed Father Thomas Valenti to the new position of assistant to the bishop for vocations. In creating the position, Bishop Clark said he wanted "to identify the bishop with the primary responsibility for vocations in the diocese," and "to signal a new thrust under my personal leader-

ship to recruit candidates for the ordained priesthood."

The move will also streamline diocesan vocations operations, consolidating under the new title the offices of director of vocations, director of seminarians — titles which Father Valenti has held to this point — and the director of Becket Hall.

In conjunction with Father Valenti's appointment, Bishop Clark named five priests as consultants in the recruitment and development of priestly vocations. The consultants — Father Peter Deckman, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Rochester; Father John DeSocio, chaplain at Ithaca College; Father Patrick Connor, parochial vicar at St. Vincent DePaul Parish, Corning; Father Timothy Brown, priest intern at St. Margaret Mary Parish, Rochester; and Father Michael Brown, priest intern at St. Catherine's Parish, Mendon — will provide support and input to Father Valenti.

In a letter sent to parishes on Sunday, April 16, to coincide with the World Day

of Prayer for Vocations, Bishop Clark announced that on Trinity Sunday, May 21, the diocese will begin a prayer campaign for vocations. He called for parishes and individuals to include vocations in their regular prayers.

During this prayer campaign, parishioners will be asked to submit names of men they believe to be potential candidates for priesthood. Those men will be invited to join Bishop Clark later this summer for a day of prayer, reflection and information on the vocation of priesthood. They also will be encouraged to participate in the diocesan vocations programs, including the Seek and Affiliate programs for men exploring the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood, and Becket Hall, a residence program for men fulfilling requirements to enter a seminary.

In addition, Bishop Clark and Father Valenti will be traveling to regional meetings of diocesan priests in August and September "to give specific attention to the question of vocations to the priesthood,"

Bishop Clark said. The two will encourage priests to recommend potential priest candidates from their parishes and ministries.

Father Valenti said that in launching the program, Bishop Clark is indicating that he sees the importance of his role as a bishop in fostering vocations — an awareness, Father Valenti indicated, that has grown out of the bishop's involvement with the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Vocations.

At the diocesan Pastoral Council meeting April 15 at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Bishop Clark said that on his return from his sabbatical in Mexico, he made the overall well-being of the priests of the diocese one of his paramount concerns. A part of that concern, he said, was recruiting new priest candidates.

Bishop Clark also expressed support for the current vocations programs in the diocese. "What I think we are lacking," he said, "is a public awareness of those programs."

Father Valenti said the new campaign will help to let young men considering the priesthood "know there are programs to assist them." Those programs — Seek, Affiliate and Becket Hall — will now all be housed at Becket Hall.

In addition, the five priest consultants will be invaluable in helping to reach out to more young men in the diocese, Father Valenti said. The five will speak to parish and school groups about vocations, and will meet individually with men considering priesthood. The inclusion of Fathers DeSocio and Connor on the board is especially important, Father Valenti said, because they will be available to provide support for Southern Tier men who are considering the priesthood but are unable to participate in the Rochester-based components of the vocations program.

Father Valenti said the new approach was undertaken following a study of vocation efforts in other dioceses. As a result of that study, he recommended the prayer-based approach of the new diocesan effort.

"I strongly recommended to the bishop that a period of prayer lead anything that we do," Father Valenti said. "I'm convinced that God hears the prayers of the church when we're facing such a chronic need."

He added that men currently involved in vocations had discovered their own call only through prayer. "It is only when a person really invests time in prayer that he begins to hear the call," he concluded.

Diocese to conduct survey, DPC learns

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Diocese of Rochester will undertake a marketing survey to determine the attitudes, values and beliefs of diocesan Catholics. The results of this survey will be used to help guide future diocesan spending and fundraising efforts.

Plans for the survey were revealed Saturday, April 15, to members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council during a presentation by Mark Seeberg, diocesan director of development, and Elizabeth Brown, diocesan director of communications.

During the meeting, held at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Seeberg and Brown also answered questions about diocesan development and communications efforts. In addition, Bishop Matthew H. Clark responded to questions about his sabbatical in Mexico, the diocesan mission team in the Diocese of Tabasco, Mexico, and the ongoing Commitment to Ministry Process designed to help parishes determine their future staffing needs and options.

During his presentation, Seeberg pointed out that charitable fundraising is now a competitive market. Since communication is a vital part of fundraising, Brown was hired in January to direct the diocesan communications effort, Seeberg reported. In its June, 1988, report, the Oversight Task Force of the Five Year Financial Planning Process Task Force, which called for improved development and communications efforts in the diocese, also suggested the need for a marketing survey to determine "what people know and don't know... what the myths are," he said.

This survey will be conducted by early fall, Brown explained. During the next few weeks, the diocese will sign a contract with one of the marketing research companies with whom it is currently negotiating. That company will evaluate research already done in the diocese and studies done in other dioceses, also employing focus groups and consultations with key individuals in the diocese as part of its study.

The company will use this research to produce a questionnaire to be distributed to a random sample of Catholics in the diocese in late summer or early September. The results of the questionnaire will be used as early as this fall to help plan such efforts as the annual Thanks Giving Appeal and marketing Catholic schools.

During the presentation, pastoral council members raised a number of questions and concerns about the survey and diocesan development efforts. Angela Palmieri, who represents ministry to handicapped, pointed out that other surveys had been done in the diocese and that other groups are engaged in similar efforts. She urged that the diocese look at those efforts before hiring an outside firm to conduct a survey.

Seeberg responded that when "you have 101 groups pumping in ideas, you need someone to take charge." He added that the diocese had been listening for so long the time had come for some decisions to be made.

Tim Mancini, northeast region representative, questioned how the mission of the church would be incorporated into a marketing survey. Seeberg pointed out that the diocese would not be using the survey to determine what sacraments to offer or what to teach, just what issues and services are important to people. "I think we've got to grow up as a church," he remarked. "We're about 20 years behind other Catholic institutions."

Concerns were also raised over the language Seeberg used in discussing development efforts. John Notebaert, a representative for renewal groups, cautioned Seeberg to be careful about referring to people in the diocese as "customers," the "constituency" or "the people in the trenches." In the church, Notebaert remarked, "People in the trenches" are brothers and sisters.

Dave Dolan, of the Chemung Schuyler region, pointedly commented to Seeberg that part of development director's task will be selling himself. "You're going to have to sell yourself, or there will be backlash," he predicted.

On the whole, however, pastoral council members voiced support for the survey and the general direction diocesan development efforts are taking. Florence Tripi, for example, commented that she is very much a traditionalist, but that the church needs to move on. Such diocesan fundraising efforts as the Thanks Giving Appeal do well, but the diocese is competing for money with organizations that engage in marketing efforts, she said, remarking that the diocese has to keep pace if it is to do better.

In addition, Tripi said the diocese needs to pull together the studies and research done by various groups in the diocese. "It's the only way we can do some long-range planning," said the northeast region's representative.

The pastoral council meeting also included Bishop Clark's open forum, during which he responded to questions about his reasons for taking a sabbatical to study Spanish. He pointed particularly to predictions that by the year 2000, approximately one-half of the Catholics in the United States will be Spanish-speaking.

The bishop also noted that the experience of the diocesan mission team in Tabasco, Mexico, places in perspective U.S. concern about priest shortages. Rochester, he said, has approximately 300 priests serving 400,000 Catholics, while Tabasco has only 75 priests serving 1.5 million Catholics.

Liturgy nourishes people for Christian mission

By Father Robert J. Kennedy
Guest columnist

Last week we considered the ways in which the liturgy is the summit of Christian life. It gathers all of our individual faith stories and all of the saving and sanctifying activity of the church into one great act of worship of the God of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy, God's people give thanks, repent, lament, praise and intercede in response to the God they experience as present, or occasionally absent, in their lives.

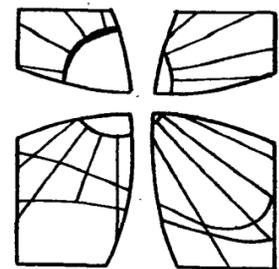
The liturgy is equally the source of nourishment for Christian life and mission. All that we are and do as church and as individual believers draws its vitality and strength from the liturgy. As we gather around the table of God's Word and the table of the Body of Christ, our vision of God's order of things is clarified and our baptismal commitment to live fully the life of the risen Christ is renewed and strengthened.

Before we consider how this occurs in word and sacrament, however, we must take note of the fact that it is in the gathering of the folks themselves that the encouraging presence of Christ is first to be found. As we look around at the motley crew of our fellow parishioners, we see neighbors and relatives, friends and strangers who, like ourselves, have been tou-

ched by God's grace in their lives and who, like ourselves, seek to know this loving God more fully. With the eyes of faith, we acknowledge in this gathering that "here is God's dwelling among humankind!" (Revelations 21:3). The encouragement is found in the fact that God makes a home in the homes and lives and hearts of ordinary people like ourselves!

We then engage in conversation with this God of Jesus Christ, a conversation which rejoices the heart, but also challenges it to greater love. It occurs in every liturgy of the word. The God of wisdom and truth opens her heart to her people, that they might dine on the riches of the banquet of her teaching. God the storyteller narrates the tales of a pilgrim people, who usually stumble, but sometimes march triumphantly along the road to salvation. The God of the prophets challenges us to faithfulness and to hope in the promise contained in the challenge.

Most importantly, the God of Jesus Christ announces good news — to all the poor, to those locked in prisons of metal bars and their hearts, to those dwelling in darkness and in the shadow of death. This is the good news of comfort and peace, of forgiveness and healing, of liberation and hope. God's conversation with us in Christ is so good that sometimes it may even hurt



GROSS OF GLORY
LIFE in CHRIST

to hear it; it may seem positively incredible. But it is always life-giving, for God, who is life and love, is present in the word as it is spoken in the midst of the assembly.

Sometimes in silence, sometimes in song, sometimes in unbridled praise, sometimes in needy pain, God's people join the conversation with this God of life and of the living. The conversation between a believing people and their God leads them to enact the sacraments of their relationship. Whether these are the sacraments of initiation and commitment or of forgiveness and healing, we Christian people are nourished at the sacramental table of God's grace.

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