

# Lay administrator offers model for future staffing

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

CALEDONIA — Michael Mahoney's appointment as a temporary pastoral administrator of St. Columba's/St. Patrick's in Caledonia began with a tongue-in-cheek remark.

Last fall, Father Gerard Hafner, the parish's pastor, was talking with the parish staff about his sabbatical, scheduled to begin Jan. 1, 1989. He suggested that Mahoney, who had been the parish's pastoral assistant only since August 15, could administer the parish.

The staff thought it was a good idea, however, and Mahoney became the first lay person other than a woman religious to administer a parish in the Diocese of Rochester.

What parishioners at St. Columba's/St. Patrick's have experienced on a short-term basis may become a long-term reality for diocesan parishes in the coming years as the number of priests available in the di-

ocese continues to decline. And what they have discovered is that a parish can survive with a non-ordained person at the helm.

"I haven't heard comments from anybody in our parish that we have a lay person taking the place of Father," reported Virginia Muscarella, a longtime parishioner. "I think it has worked out great."

Parish council member Judy Ball, who is part of the parish's Commitment to Ministry team looking at alternative staffing patterns for the parish, noted that in the team's talks the idea of having a non-ordained person administering the parish "hasn't been a point of discussion because we're doing it. Sitting on council, and looking at what's coming down in the future for the church, it works."

Mahoney is well aware that what he is doing may serve as one model for future patterns of parish staffing. In fact, he has already been asked to talk about his experience — which will end later this month when Father Hafner returns from sabbati-



Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier

Michael Mahoney prays with Agnes Pangrazio and her son, Richard, during a recent communion call to the Pangrazio home.

cal — at the Bishop's Leadership Day September 23 in Rochester's Riverside Convention Center.

But Mahoney is equally aware of what the past year has done for him. "It's been a year of growth spiritually and intellectually — demanding, challenging and satisfying," he said. "It really has been an opportunity to do what I retired from the Marine Corps to do: to serve God and his people."

Mahoney officially retired from the Marine Corps Sept. 1, 1989, ending his military career as a major. He left, he said, because he felt a call to dedicate his life more directly to serving God.

That sense of calling extends back to even before Mahoney's stint in the military. He studied for the priesthood in college, majoring in theology and philosophy. Then he met his wife, Monette, and opted instead for marriage and the Marine Corps.

Even as a marine, however, Mahoney remained active in the church wherever he served. While stationed in Ithaca for three years, he also earned a master's degree at Cornell University in the philosophy of religion.

During those three years, 1983-86, Mahoney also had his first contact with the Diocese of Rochester. Both he and his wife were impressed by the progressive policies of the diocese. They were also impressed, he said, by the "spirituality of Bishop (Matthew) Clark."

When he decided to retire from the Marine Corps and to engage more directly in church work, Mahoney contacted the diocese's personnel office. Because of his experience as an officer, his church work and his education, he was certified as a pastoral assistant. And when Father Hafner was looking for a pastoral assistant with who could deal with finances and maintenance, Mahoney fit the bill.

Nevertheless, moving from non-parishioner to pastoral assistant to temporary administrator within a few months was an unusually rapid transition, both for Mahoney and parishioners. But Jack Beattie, the president of St. Columba's/St.

Patrick's parish council, said even in the short time Mahoney had been in the parish, he had impressed parishioners and given them confidence he could handle the job.

"There's just a personal chemistry that seemed to work between him and the parishioners right away," Beattie observed.

Father Robert Schrader, at that time director of the diocesan personnel division, noted that Father Hafner's enthusiastic support, the parishioners' obvious approval and Mahoney's qualifications made the decision easy.



The task facing Mahoney was by no means easy, however.

At first, parishioners believed that they would be without a resident priest for the six months of the sabbatical, and began planning accordingly. Fortunately, Father Daniel Hogan became available, and was willing to work with Mahoney.

Then Mahoney discovered problems with combining the tasks he and Father Hafner had previously split. "One of the adjustments we've had to make (was) there (were) more demands on my time as administrator," he observed. "I have my own duties, plus leading, teaching, providing the pastoral care that (Father Hafner) did."

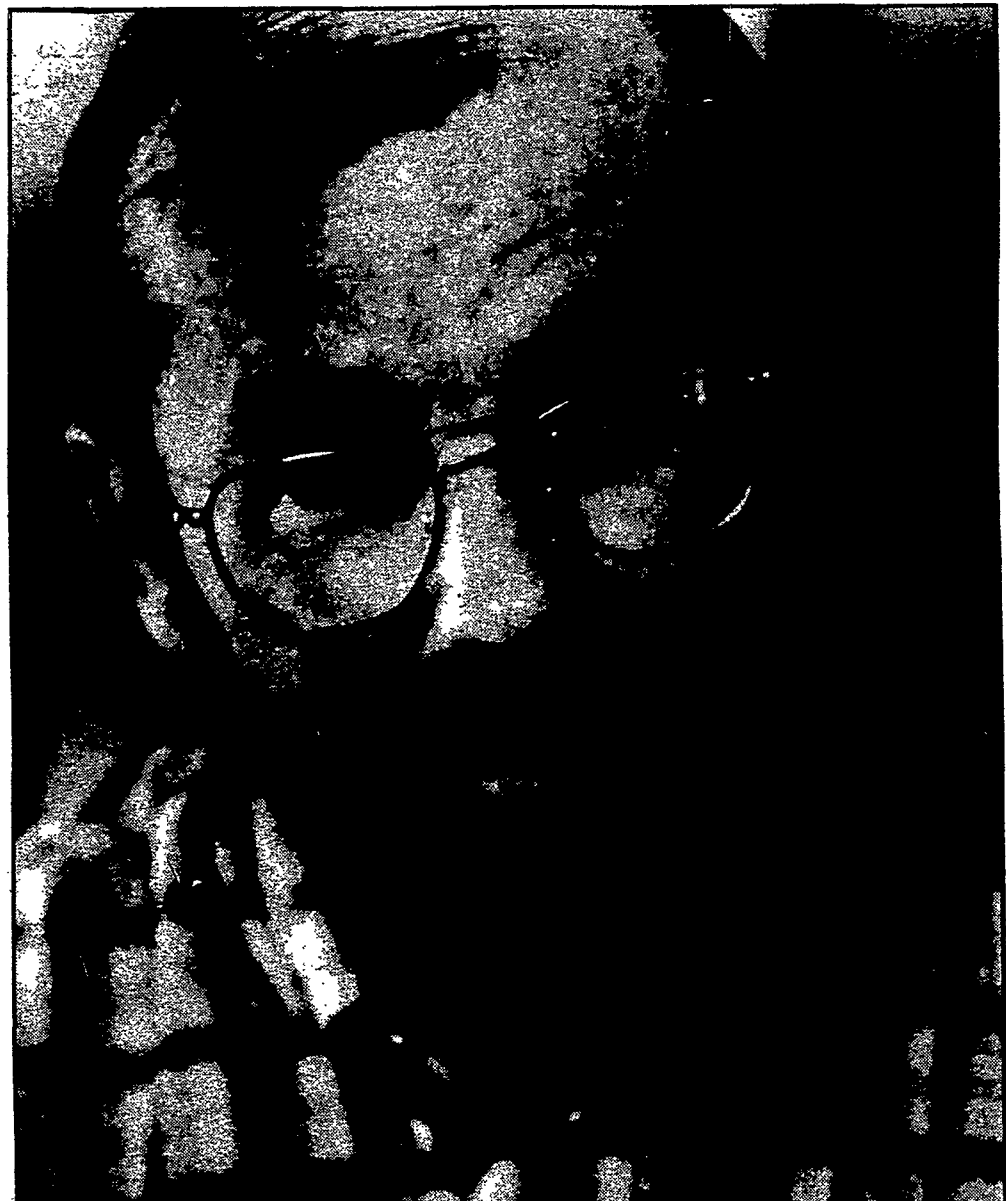
Mahoney also has found that administering a parish involves a myriad of tasks that don't seem obvious from the outside. Simple day-to-day management of the parish and its staff, the constant need for decisions and the meetings that must be attended eat into the administrator's time and energy, he noted. "At bottom," he added, "these tasks often prevent you from being out in the community."

In some cases, Mahoney acknowledged, he simply could not do all the tasks. Before the sabbatical, for example, he and Father Hafner had divided Communion visits to sick or home-bound parishioners. Mahoney alone was unable to visit the 34 people, however, and so he asked the parish's eucharistic ministers to help. The eucharistic ministers also helped to distribute ashes on Ash Wednesday.

"I have found that people recognize the situation and the need for assistance, so we've been successful in asking for assistance and getting it," Mahoney observed.

Mahoney said that one lesson learned from his experiences this spring is that such lay involvement will be vitally necessary in the future when non-ordained peo-

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Michael Mahoney, temporary pastoral administrator at St. Columba's/St. Patrick's in Caledonia, is looking forward to Father Gerard Hafner's return from sabbatical so that he can take a rest from the duties of parish administrator.

## Bolivian lay-run parish thriving after 15 years

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

Even as people in the Diocese of Rochester consider future staffing patterns for parishes in light of declining numbers of priests, one potential resource to aid those deliberations is being prepared for the diocesan archives.

Two diocesan priests, Fathers Peter Deckman and Edward Golden, have received a file describing their experiences in creating a lay-administered parish in La Paz, Bolivia — a parish that has operated successfully with a lay leadership since 1974.

The two were among a number of diocesan priests and lay people who worked in the diocesan mission parish of San José Obrero between 1967 and

1974. Father Deckman had arrived in Bolivia in 1966 to work with Maryknoll priests, and in 1967 he and fellow Rochesterian Father Thomas O'Brien were given the mission outpost of San Pedro on the outskirts of La Paz as the base for the diocesan mission.

One original plan was that we would make ourselves available to Bolivian priests," said Father Golden, who arrived in the parish in 1966. With his arrival, the mission had about its only early years working with missionaries from Bolivia's own ranks.

In the late 1960s, however, the Bolivian bishops closed the territory because the Spanish priests who taught there were introducing the ideas of the Second Vatican Council. By 1972, the

Rochester missionaries began to realize that no Bolivian priests would be available to replace them.

According to Father Deckman, the priests, in consultation with parishioners, began to consider other staffing options. Among those considered were ordaining married men and serving the permanent deaconate. Neither option, he noted, were practical at the time, however.

The missionaries then hit upon the idea of developing lay leadership. At a brainstorming session with the parish staff, Father Golden said, the team "just sat down and figured out who there was active in the parish at the time who would

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