

Clusters

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handled solely by priests were now divided among the team — at first one priest, a woman religious and a deacon who worked in the cluster only part time.

Even with the team, lay people were called upon to assume more responsibility. "We can probably say that more people are involved now than when we came," Father Spilly said.

Father Spilly said that the attachment to a particular parish is still strong, but added, "I have a sense that there are many people whose faith is more important to them than the particular parish they belong to."

Except for the St. Anne's/St. Gregory's cluster formed in 1986, the diocese has not established new clusters since the initial three.

In January, 1990, however, the departure of the Carmelite priests from Ss. Peter and Paul Parish in Elmira led to the formation of the East Side Catholic Churches in that city. The Carmelites' former parish was joined with St. Cecilia and St. John the Baptist parishes, which were already served by the same ministry team.

Father David Gramkee, pastor of the new cluster, said that the experience of linking St. Cecilia's and St. John's seven years earlier helped provide a model for incorporating the new parish into the cluster.

During the months prior to the formation of the cluster, the parish councils met to work out the details, Father Gramkee said, adding, "It helped in terms of having a group of people to work together."

In Corning and Painted Post, the four parishes that this June will become the

Corning-Painted Post Faith Community likewise have a group of people working together to plan for the cluster: the parish reflection teams.

The teams were formed as part of the Commitment to Ministry process of studying future staffing needs and options.

In October, 1989, pastors of four parishes — St. Vincent DePaul's, St. Patrick's and St. Mary's in Corning, and Immaculate Heart of Mary in Painted Post — were notified by Bishop Clark that they would be served by three priests rather than four when Father Francis Davis, pastor of St. Patrick's, retired in June, 1990.

The reflection teams, in conjunction with the parish councils, began the work of developing a plan for the region. "In our situation, it meant putting into concrete reality what is, for other parts of the diocese, still theory," noted Father Walter Wainwright, pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The four parishes — which already had a history of working together, and had even jointly hired a youth minister in the past — decided to take a team approach.

"People felt that we really had to unify the area rather than go on as separate parishes," said Gary Pease, head of St. Vincent's reflection team. "It was better to do it now rather than down the road, because we knew it was inevitable with the shortage of priests."

The group put together a number of options, which were presented to Bishop Clark Jan. 2. He approved the one preferred by the four parishes: a team of three priests living in community in one rectory. As of March 26, the parishes were waiting to learn who will be appointed pastor of the cluster, and which priests will be assigned

there.

Pease said that once the cluster is officially formed, the parishes can then get on with the task of maintaining their individual identities while learning to work together cooperatively. He noted that thus far, the process has not been "as smooth as I would hope, but it certainly wasn't as treacherous as it could have been."

The people of Corning and Painted Post at least have one comfort the people of the first three clusters in the diocese did not have: the fact that other clusters do exist in

the diocese and have succeeded.

Father Wiant, for one, noted that because the three parishes have worked together as a cluster, they have been able to "put together a staff that no one individual parish could have done."

St. Thomas' Dates said that clustering is just another change people must accept.

"I think it's a sign of the times that it's going to happen in a lot of places," Dates observed. "It really is a painful process, but I think people are much more aware of the fact that it's a necessity."

RCIA

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blind them," and from "the grasp of death."

The power of the Gospels of these third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent is awesome. They have been used since the fourth century; then, as now, the Season of Lent before the baptism of catechumens was marked by intense preparation and fervent prayer.

The gospels tell of conversion and scrutiny, of a coming to faith, of grappling with death and emerging to new life. They tell not only what happened to a thirsty Samaritan woman, a blind man dealing with a world of doubt and denial, and a man who has died leaving behind two deeply grieving sisters. They reveal what can happen to each one of us; the gospels invite us to journey as a community of believers supporting in prayer and action those preparing for baptism. They call us to look at our own thirsts, our own blindness and denial, our own "dead spots" and the ways we are bound.

With the Samaritan woman we can expe-

rience the new level of faith possible when we acknowledge our thirsts and encounter the person of Jesus. With the blind man we can grow in faith as we deal with prejudice and the limited vision of complacency. With the sisters of Lazarus we can discover that even death can hold the seeds of new life as we put our faith in Jesus, the resurrection and the life, the promised one.

Each week we are invited to pray for our elect chosen by the church and by God for his service. We pray in the words of the rite: "that they will be ready and find Christ in his sacraments ... that they remain centered in him and they may be united to Christ in his death and resurrection and, by the grace of his sacraments, conquer the bitterness of death."

Let us also pray for ourselves, lest having shared the light of faith with them, we ourselves should be lost.

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