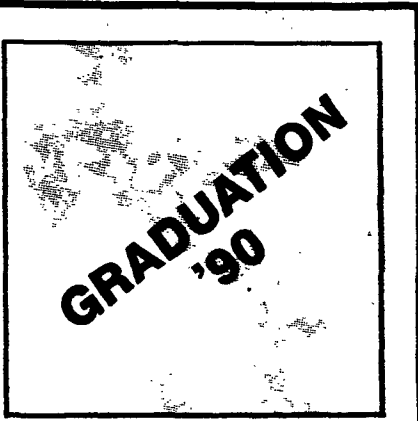


Saluting seniors
Pull out the *Graduation '90* section honoring graduates of public and Catholic high schools. The section, which also highlights diocesan youth-award recipients, begins after page 8.



CATHOLIC COURIER

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Making ends meet in ministry

By Teresa A. Parsons
Associate editor

The Catholic Church may lose some of its best and brightest lay employees because they can't afford ministry's demanding hours and low salaries and support a family, too.

In theory, the church upholds the value of family life, proclaiming in Vatican II documents that "Everyone ... who exercises an influence in the community and in social groups should devote himself effectively to the welfare of marriage and the family."

In practice, however, the church's own employment policies have sometimes fallen short of that mark.

Salary will be a factor in whether Peter Reilly returns to religious education. After five years in the field, Reilly is leaving his post as catechetical leader of St. Mary's Church, Corning, to complete a master's degree in theology at Notre Dame University.

As he looks ahead to starting a family, Reilly is not sure he wants to duplicate the experience of colleagues who've struggled to make ends meet. "The salaries aren't really conducive to raising a family," he said. "That's one of the reasons men don't stay in religious education."

Hours were among the reasons Elizabeth Webster chose to leave religious education ministry at Blessed Sacrament Parish after she became a parent. "As a mother I was very much aware that 40-hour positions in the church often become many more hours than that. To do justice to ministry, marriage and family, I knew it was going to be too much," she said.

The church's current model for ministry is based on the service of celibate clergy and religious, who collected little or no salary and for whom life and work were often indistinguishable. Consequently, church work is notorious for demanding 60-hour weeks, 12-hour days and frequent night meetings — all of which exact a toll from a new class of lay employees who also face demands from family life.

The best protection against overwork and burnout, argues Father Joseph McCaffrey, a priest-representative to the Diocesan Personnel Commission, is a well-written job description hashed out between employee and employer.

Yet limiting the long hours parish employees sometimes work is at odds with the fact that the church, like any non-profit organization, must wring as much value as possible from each dollar.

And there's a pastoral aspect to working for the church that's difficult to quantify. "You're writing a description for a job,



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Marianne Coleman, a secretary in the department of social services at St. Mary's Hospital, shares a lunchtime moment with daughter, Caitlin.

but this is a ministry," explained Coleman De King, who is leaving her post as director of religious education at Christ the King Parish for family reasons. "If a person is hurting, you need to be there."

Benefits on balance

One means with which the church has tried to attract and retain qualified employees is benefits, such as paid health insurance and generous leave policies.

Employees of the diocese, for instance, will not likely be affected by pending federal legislation mandating a period of unpaid parental leave.

Rochester's policy, as outlined in the diocesan policy manual issued last January, provides for up to 30 days of "informal," unpaid leave or up to six months of "formal" unpaid leave for such situations as childbirth, adoption or elder care.

Legislation recently passed by the House of Representatives, meanwhile, calls on businesses employing 50 or more people to allow up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a newborn, newly adopted or sick child, or an ailing elderly parent, or to recuperate from a serious medical problem.

The diocesan policy manual, however, is mandated only for diocesan employees, including those who work for the Pastoral Center and elementary schools. Agencies of social ministry follow a separate policy manual, although it is similar in many respects.

But under New York state law, each parish throughout the diocese exists as a separate and independent corporate entity. Thus the diocese's authority to enforce its policy is moral rather than legal.

Nevertheless, most parish and diocesan employees contacted described their

employers as fair in granting family leave.

Even before the diocesan policy manual was revised last January, Mary Ann Bender, an eighth-grade social studies teacher at St. Stephen/St. Francis de Sales School in Geneva, was granted leave ranging from three to nine months after the birth of each of her three children. Neither she, nor any of her co-workers, has had a problem with requesting leave, Bender said.

Surviving staff shortages

Family leave is not so simple to arrange for every class of parish and diocesan employee. Particularly in small and rural parishes, specialized employees such as religious-education directors, youth ministers and parish secretaries are difficult to replace on a temporary basis.



Lindsay White (foreground) takes time to look at a book, while Funmi Sunmonu dresses her doll.

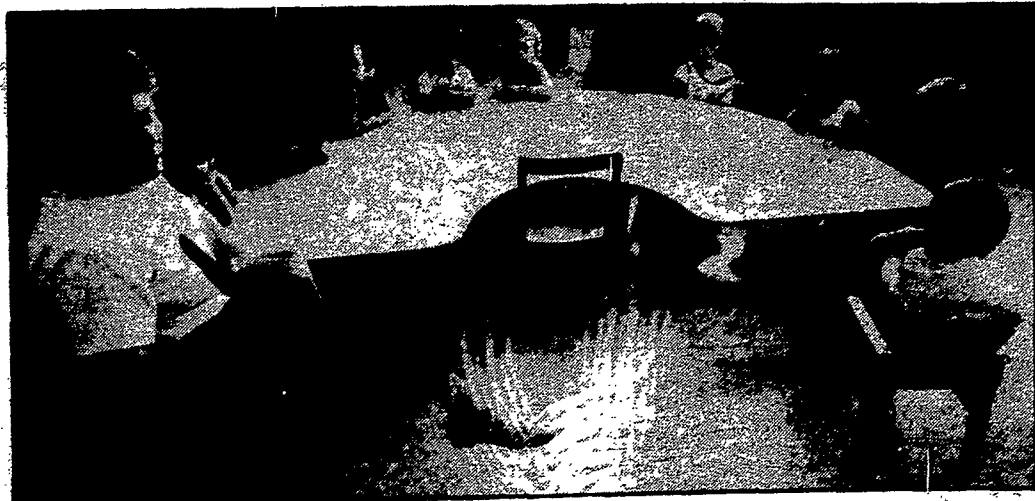
"If we were without a religious educator for three months, I would have to get someone in to do the job," said Father McCaffrey, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Newark Valley and St. Francis of Assisi, Catatonk. "That person would probably not be as well-qualified ... so the pastor might have to be re-involved with religious education."

The intimate atmosphere among employees of small and even large parishes allows such flexibility, Father McCaffrey observed. "When the maintenance man was off," he offered by way of example, "I cut the grass."

On the contrary, Mary Jo Smith doesn't see leave as a benefit that will be widely used by parish secretaries. The administrative assistant at Good Shepherd Parish, Henrietta, Smith explained that some portions of a parish secretary's job — like answering the phones or preparing the bulletin — can be done by volunteers or temporary employees. More complicated responsibilities, such as payroll and maintaining parish records, tend to await a secretary's return. "In the offices, if you're not there, work doesn't get done," she said.

Another parish secretary, Mary Rose Cantatore of Holy Spirit Parish, Webster.

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Teacher Carol Schmalzbauer reads to the "Pokey Puppies," also known as the toddler group at St. Mary's Sister Ann William Bradley Child Care Center. The center is among the first in Monroe County to offer on-site day care for employees' children.