

# Pastoral Center's purpose is most often misunderstood

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Father John M. Mulligan is well aware of the image most diocesan Catholics have of the Pastoral Center, 1150 Buffalo Road.

"We're sort of isolated, ivory tower people that spend our days handing out edicts on high," said the vicar general and pastoral office moderator.

Contrary to that popular image, the Pastoral Center primarily exists to serve the staffs of each of the diocese's 162 parishes, Father Mulligan said. That's the image he wishes more diocesan Catholics would have concerning the pastoral offices, the priest emphasized.

Indeed, the Pastoral Center's mission is outlined in a guidebook diocesan employees receive when they undergo orientation.

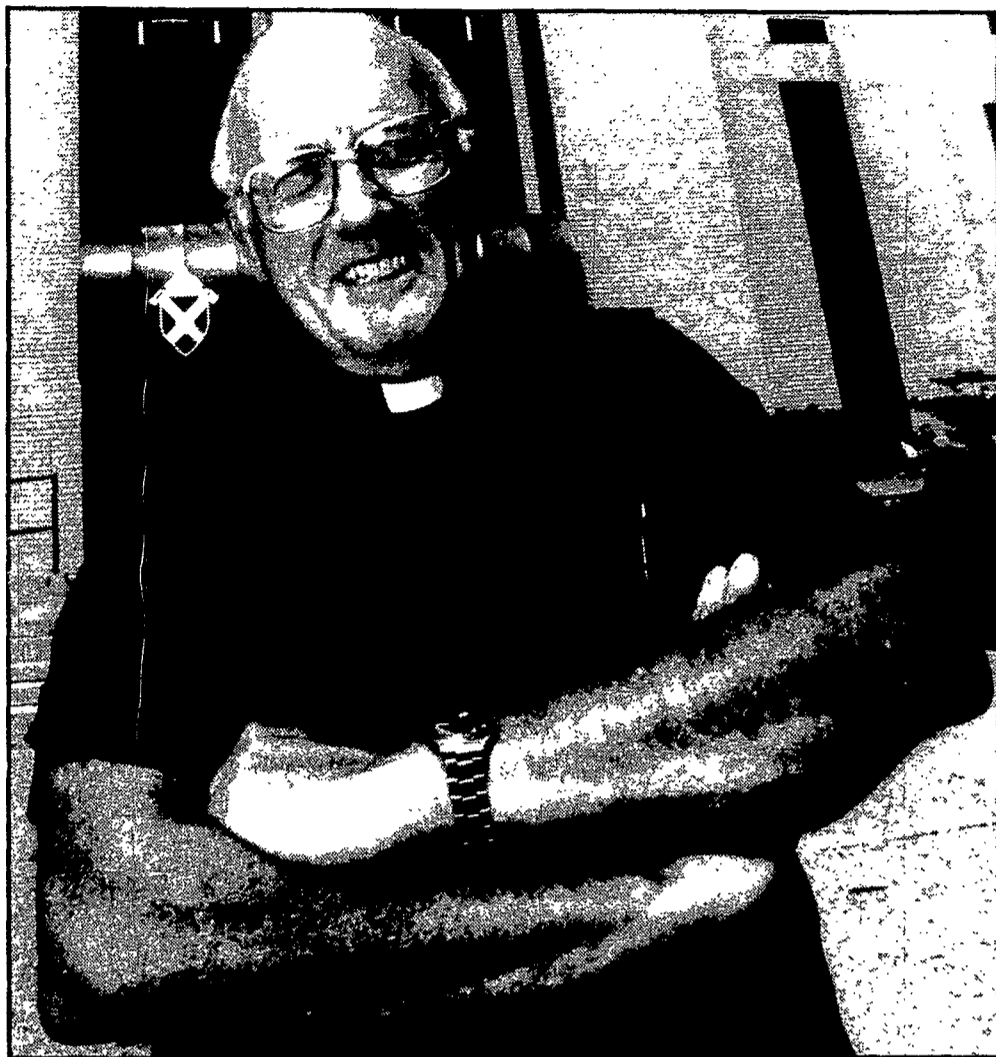
"The staff of the Pastoral Center assists the Bishop in fulfilling the mission and goals of the Church of Rochester," the guidebook's mission statement says. "Committed to excellence, we provide professional support and development and technical services for the diocesan community in compliance with canon and civil law."

The guidebook divides the Pastoral Center into Internal and External Ministries. Internal Ministries include such areas as the diocese's financial services, legal services, development, and information systems.

External Ministries are comprised of the following:

- **Faith Development**, which oversees Catholic schools, evangelization and catechesis, and professional development.
- **Parish Support Ministries**, which comprises urban services, ecumenical and interreligious affairs, pastoral council formation, liturgy and the tribunal office.
- **Human Resources**, which includes the pastoral office, human resource administration, employee benefits, personnel services, priests' personnel and deacon personnel.
- **Social Ministry**, which consists of Catholic Family Center, the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry and the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry.

Of all the listed programs, the social ministry offices are the only services under Pastoral Center administration that regularly serve lay Catholics through various counseling and support programs, Father Mulligan noted. In addition to the above ministries, the Pastoral Center also oversees the



Father John M. Mulligan serves as the vicar general and Pastoral Office moderator for the Diocese of Rochester.

Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Diocesan Synod Office as well as Propagation of the Faith/Diocesan Missions.

All of these offices, with the exception of social ministries, exist to provide information and support for pastors and their lay and religious associates who administer parishes and schools, Father Mulligan emphasized.

He added that many groups throughout the diocese regularly meet at the Pastoral Center as well.

Nonetheless, diocesan Catholics often ask questions of Pastoral Center employees that would be better directed to their parishes, Father Mulligan said.

"One of the problems we have is people often contact us about a particular concern," the priest continued. "There are very few things that come in here that are simple yeses and nos."

Quite often, with such issues as schools' reorganization, the Pastoral

Center is not the first place a concerned Catholic should contact for information, he noted.

"We may have literally 200 people call and have to explain the same thing to you," he said. "You can't spend eight hours listening to 16 people telling you the exact same thing."

As far as questions regarding schools' reorganization, parishioners should call their pastor, or someone associated with a school's governing board, Father Mulligan said.

Sacramental preparation questions often bog down Arlene D. Jones, secretary to Bishop Matthew H. Clark. More often than she would care to admit, Jones receives calls from disgruntled Catholics who complain about the content of a pastor's homily that day, or who grumble about how he celebrates a wedding, she said.

Yet, there is often little she can do to help such callers because pastors have many of the responsibilities that diocesan Catholics often associate with the bishop, she and Father Mulligan said.

Despite the fact that they wish more people would use the proper channels to communicate concerns about the church, Jones and Father Mulligan both observed that parishioners can reach Bishop Matthew H. Clark by simply writing letters.

"I think he's very attentive to his mail," Father Mulligan said of Bishop Clark, adding that the bishop receives between 20-40 letters a day.

Jones concurred with Father Mulligan's observation about the bishop's letter reading.

"His mail does get answered," she said.

Not every letter, however, is answered directly by the bishop, Father Mulligan said, because the bishop either lacks the time to write a personal response or because he delegates the task to someone more directly involved in the area concerning the letter's author.

"But he sees the response before it goes," Father Mulligan concluded.

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Father John M. Mulligan  
Pastoral Office moderator

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