

# Clusters become necessary response to priest shortage

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announced their retirements. Rochester's three-parish Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward, as well as the two clusters recently slated for the Elmira area, were formulated after parish officials contacted the Parish Support Ministry office.

"Sometimes pastors come to us and say, 'It's time,' and sometimes we go to them and say it," said Father Clifford.

At St. Charles Borromeo and St. Casimir in Elmira, clustering plans were initiated by the parish members and staff.

"Instead of waiting for the diocese to tell us what we had to do, we decided to tell them what we were thinking about doing," explained Father Eugene R. Weis, pastor at St. Casimir.

Father Clifford said clustering sometimes also results from a pastorate that becomes available and goes unfilled. Such is the case in northeast Rochester, where St. Michael's has operated without a resident pastor since Father Vincent P. Panepinto departed in 1991 to become chaplain at the Elmira Correctional Facility.

On the city's west side, Holy Apostles Church has remained without a pastor since Father Lawrence A. Gross left in 1992 to assume pastoral duties at Good Shepherd Church in Henrietta. Holy Apostles has been the subject of recent discussions regarding clustering, along with neighboring parishes St. Anthony, St. Francis of Assisi, Holy Family and Ss. Peter and Paul.

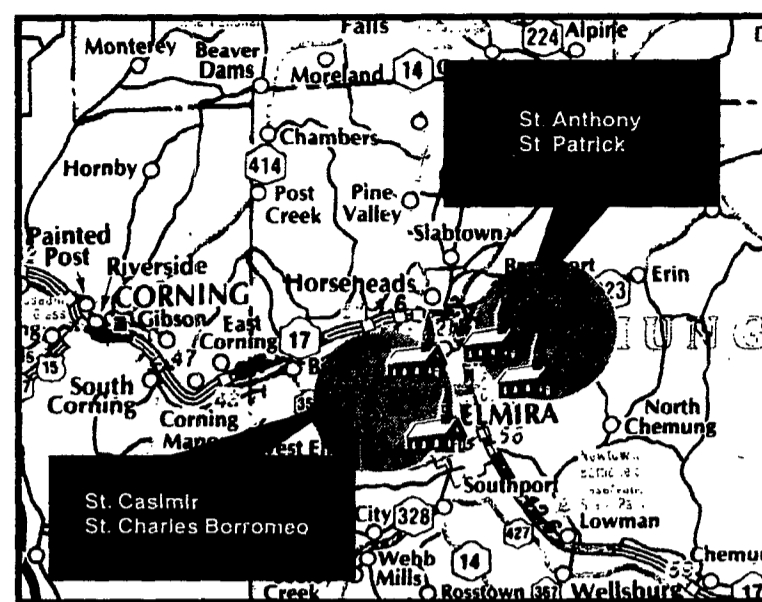
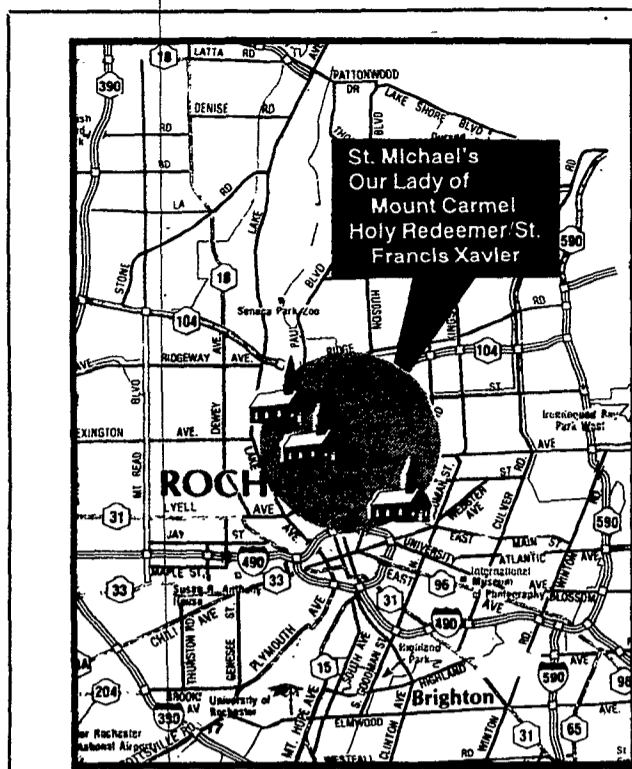
Because he is the primary coordinator of diocesan clustering efforts, Father Clifford acknowledged that his presence is not always a welcome one at parishes where the process is being considered.

"Very frequently when I show up, people think we're trying to close the parish. Well, clustering and closing don't line up next to each other," Father Clifford commented. "None of the (clustered) parishes have ever been closed."

Even so, one cluster's pastoral associate remarked that any type of major transition is always met with apprehension by a certain segment of parishioners.

"Pretty basically, people in the mainstream who are aware of what's going on are fine. Then you're always going to have a few people who don't like any changes," said Sister St. Luke Hardy, SSJ, who serves as pastoral associate for the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward.

Father Clifford said he can empathize with those parishioners who are slow to change. "It's quite natural that people want to continue to be identified with their parish. They've built up a tremendous identification," he acknowledged.



The diocese's newest cluster, on Rochester's northeast side, takes effect this month. In Elmira, St. Casimir/St. Charles Borromeo are scheduled to merge in June 1994 while St. Anthony/St. Patrick will also cluster within the next few years.

Father Richard J. Beligotti, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo in Elmira Heights, agreed that the concept of change is a frightening one for his parishioners as they face the reality of sharing a single priest with St. Casimir beginning next year.

"Will the priest be available?" was the big question," Father Beligotti reported. "People are very used to 'Call the rectory and Father will come.'"

Nowadays when a parishioner contacts the rectory, somebody other than "Father" is more likely to respond. Since priests are being spread so thinly, several of the non-sacramental responsibilities they used to carry out are now falling on the shoulders of lay, volunteer and other religious personnel.

Father William V. Spilly, pastor of the Corning-Painted Post cluster since its inception in 1990, said that "selling" the clustering concept to congregations can best be done by emphasizing the value of every parishioner's input.

"I've tried at the very beginning to help people understand what we're trying to do; that there's a reason for this. I invite the people to become part of the parish ownership," said Father Spilly, who also headed the Cayuga Team Ministry cluster before moving to the Southern Tier.

Cluster staff members can fill several key positions, serving in such roles as pastoral associates, directors of evangelization, deacons, parish-council members, youth ministers, religious-education coordinators and business managers. In most cases, these individuals have multi-parish duties within their cluster.

Although the clustering process can be gradual and sometimes painful, those interviewed agreed that the ap-

proach seems to be working.

"Many parishes and priests feel good about clustering. This is not the fear-some reality that it is sometimes believed to be," Father Clifford commented.

"I see it as a positive," remarked Father Beligotti.

Sister Hardy pointed out that clusters can benefit the staff as well as the parish community, saying that her duties have been eased through the formulation of a cluster administrative staff which comprises 10 full- and part-time people.

Prior to the clustering of St. Augustine, St. Monica and Our Lady of Good Counsel parishes in 1992, Sister Hardy had twice been pressed into a temporary-administrator role at St. Augustine's, she acknowledged.

Sister Hardy laughingly recalls her reaction to cluster pastor Father Robert Werth's proposal for an emergency beeper system connected to all three parishes, with each cluster-team member taking one continuous 24-hour shift per week.

"I said, 'That would be wonderful. I've been on call seven days and nights a week,'" the pastoral associate remarked.

Clustering also seems to be accomplishing its intent of de-emphasizing parish boundaries, according to Father Spilly.

"What we see here is that we have four churches making up one parish," said Father Spilly. "On weekends we have three Masses at each church, and now people go to all four churches. So many people will say that they see people they didn't even know were Catholic."

Sister Hardy reports a similar experience in Rochester's 19th Ward.

"This year we had our RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) program done as one group, and they were initiated on the Easter Vigil at St. Monica's. We had three paschal candles (one for each cluster parish) coming down the aisle," Sister Hardy said.

"That was a powerful, powerful symbol. It was just marvelous, and the church was packed."

## Registration open at all Nazareth Schools

ROCHESTER — The Nazareth Schools are currently accepting registrations for the 1993-94 school year.

Nazareth Hall Elementary School, 180 Raines Park, is a co-education school for grades pre-kindergarten through 5. Nazareth Hall Junior High, located in the Nazareth Academy building at 1001 Lake Ave., is a co-ed institution for grades 6-8. Nazareth Academy is an all-girls' high school for grades 9-12.

For registration details, call 716/647-8704.

## Churches in Tier need Bible school teachers

ADDISON — The Addison Council of Churches is seeking teachers for its Vacation Bible School program.

Teachers are needed in all age groups. The school will run from June 28-July 2, from 9 a.m.-noon each day.

Those interested may contact Father Gerald T. O'Connor, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Church, 49 Maple St., at 607/359-2115; or Deacon Michael Mangione at 359-3617.

## Corpus Christi Church will host 'Universal Worship'

ROCHESTER — Corpus Christi Church, 864 Main St. E., will host a "Universal Worship" service on Friday, June 18, at 8 p.m.

The service is open to people of all Eastern and Western faiths — Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Muslim, Native American, Sikh and Taoist. The service is sponsored by the Sufi Movement.

The program will comprise an invocation, a candle lighting ceremony, readings, prayers and a sacred dance. According to a press release from Sufi on the event, "the purpose of this service is to unite the followers of different religions and faiths (not to promote a particular creed or any church or religion)," and "to strengthen one's own faith through the experience of combined worship."

Call 716/325-2424 for information.

## Correction

The name of Siena Catholic Academy's new principal was misspelled in an article on page 4 of last week's issue ("Junior high gets name, principal"). The new principal is Steve Schockow. We regret the error.

## @bituary

### Mary McGee, 80; former teacher in diocese

Mary McGee, a longtime teacher at several diocesan schools, died on Saturday, May 1, 1993. She was 80.

Mrs. McGee was a lifelong resident of East Rochester. Following her graduation from Nazareth College of Rochester in 1934, she taught at the former Sacred Heart Academy and St. Jerome's School, as well as St. Pius X School, 3000 Chili Ave., Chili.

Mrs. McGee was a member of the Rochester Retired Teachers' Association, East Rochester College Club, Delphian Study Club of East Rochester

and East Rochester Senior Citizens.

She was predeceased by her husband, James. Mrs. McGee is survived by her son, Edward J.; daughter, Margaret; daughter and son-in-law, Ann Marie and William Esch; step-grandchildren, Bethany and Ryan Esch; niece, Rita Almy; nephew, Daniel McCarroll; and several cousins.

A Mass of Christian Burial was held for Mrs. McGee on May 5, 1993, at St. Jerome's Church, 207 S. Garfield St., East Rochester. Interment was at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.