

Pastoral years provide taste of parish ministry



Mickey McGrath, a seminarian serving Rochester's Holy Ghost Church, is scheduled to be ordained in 1996.

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — Seminarian Mickey McGrath realized he had gained acceptance at Rochester's Holy Ghost Parish the day he was asked to conduct a prayer service at a funeral home.

He had been asked to lead the service because the church's pastor, Father Alexander H. Bradshaw, had another commitment.

"The people were very welcoming," McGrath said. "They made me feel like I belonged there, not like they wanted just a priest."

Of course, barring any changes in plans, McGrath will be a priest. His ordination is scheduled for 1996.

This year, however, he is serving a pastoral year away from the North American College in Rome, where he is pursuing his seminary studies.

McGrath is one of five seminarians currently serving pastoral years in the Rochester diocese.

John Bell, who attends St. Augustine Seminary in Toronto, is serving his year at St. Patrick Church in Seneca Falls. Bell's schoolmate, Douglas Della Pietra, is assigned to the Corning-Painted Post Catholic Community.

Meanwhile, two students at St. Mary Seminary in Baltimore — Kip Corriveau and Frank Fusare — are serving pastoral years at St. Mary Parish in Elmira and St. Anne Parish in Rochester, respectively.

The pastoral year's goal is to "have a really deep experience of parish life and ministry," noted Father John A. DeSocio, assistant to the bishop for vocations.

During his pastoral year, which now takes place between the second and third years of seminary studies, a seminarian immerses himself in parish life. In addition to preaching, he helps run meetings, religious education and youth programs, and performs hospi-

tal, nursing home and communion visits, Father DeSocio explained.

During the year, each seminarian meets regularly with Father DeSocio as well as a priest supervisor appointed to help him set goals and evaluate his efforts, and a subcommittee comprising members of the Diocesan Priestly Formation Board. Each seminarian has a separate subcommittee to assist, advise and oversee him throughout his seminary and formation years.

The seminarians have served pastoral internships before — usually part-time during the school year, or over summers. But the yearlong program allows for more time to learn, Della Pietra said.

"I think I'm going to be able to get more in-depth with the things I'm doing," noted Della Pietra, who is scheduled to be ordained in 1996. "I can get involved with more long-range projects."

His experience as a summer intern last year at Livonia's St. Joseph Parish helped him to prepare for a full year of service, Della Pietra noted.

"The big area that I'm working on is trying to ask for people's feedback," Della Pietra observed. "Last summer, I just sort of did things. I don't know if I learned as much as if I'd asked people for feedback."

Corriveau discovered that he had to learn to pace himself differently than in the seminary or in previous pastoral placements.

"One of the things I've learned is to slow down," said Corriveau, who is slated for ordination in 1995. "Parishes are not as high intensity as a hospital. Parishes have their own rhythm."

Fusare, who was a summer intern in 1992 at Auburn's St. Alphonsus Parish, echoed that perception.

"Having been in parish last year as well, I learned there are no two parishes that are alike," said Fusare, who is to be ordained in 1996. "There's al-



Frank Fusare, who is also scheduled for ordination in 1996, is currently working at St. Anne's Church in Rochester.

ways something more to learn."

Sometimes the demands can almost become a burden, McGrath noted.

"One day I feel like I'm overwhelmed with what I need to do," McGrath said. "Another day, I feel like there's nothing pressing to do."

But, McGrath added, part of the learning process during the pastoral year is how to balance one's schedule to prepare for those days of heavy demands. In his case, he noted, that means "personal discipline in terms of making good use of my time."

One of the things that Bell is learning is that, as a seminarian serving a pastoral year, he is a public figure.

"People have expectations they expect you to fulfill," noted Bell, who is slated for ordination in 1997. "You are a person of high profile in a parish and in the diocese. It calls you to serious accountability."

Bell added that his summer pastoral experience at Penn Yan's St. Michael Parish in 1992 had so affected him that

he took a semester off from St. Augustine Seminary in the spring of this year — in part because the seminary did not offer more pastoral experience opportunities. His pastoral experience also led him to re-examine his own call to the priesthood, Bell observed.

"I compare it to Peter walking on the water," Bell said. "The initial step of faith was easy, then I realized the storm was all around me."

Bell subsequently re-enrolled in the seminary. He is pleased that the seminary has also decided to make more pastoral experiences available for seminarians from the United States.

Indeed, all five of the seminarians praised the pastoral-year program.

McGrath, for one, noted, "It's been challenging and busy at times, but I've been at peace and comfortable."

"What it's doing for me is it's making me more and more anxious to get into ordained ministry," Corriveau observed. "Even the little you do makes you want to do more."

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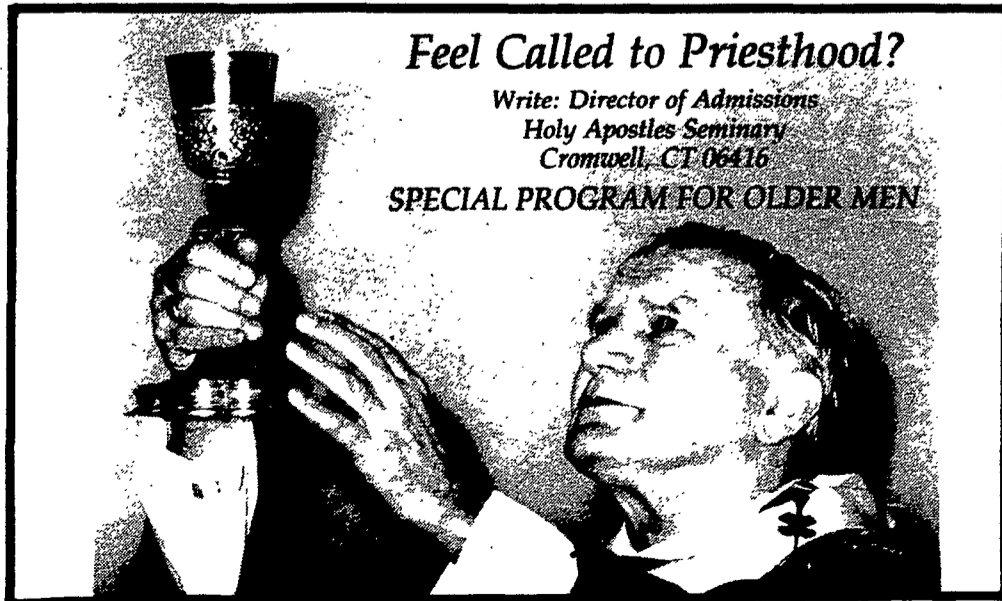
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