

## Priest shortage

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istries, there are more than 300 pastoral administrators already serving U.S. Catholic churches, compared to just 200 in 1990. Approximately 40 percent of U.S. dioceses are served by at least one pastoral administrator.

Father Clifford anticipates that the number of pastoral administrators will rise here, as well, in upcoming years.

"My suspicion is that this model will be ever more attractive. I have every confidence that this is going to be a healthy, profitable experience," said Father Clifford.

"I believe the pastoral-administrator model is very effective," agreed Father Robert P. Ring, diocesan director of priest personnel. "One of the reasons we hope we can use it more is because we've established a number of clusters, and we need to test other methods."

"We're very happy with this alternative," said O'Connor, who served on the search team for St. Gabriel's pastoral administrator. "There are 700 families at St. Mary's and only 125 here at St. Gabriel's, so I think we'll see Father Hammond about as much as we would have anyway."

However, even if parishes opt for pastoral administrators, budgeting is a key factor since these are ordinarily full-time paid positions filled by lay personnel.

Father Ring maintains that the cost will probably be considered worthwhile to parish communities. "Given the high value people place on good pastoral leadership, parishes should have the capacity to afford a pastoral administrator," he said.

Yet until the pastoral-administrator option becomes more commonplace and easily budgeted within the diocese, clusters continue to be the first option to compensate for lack of priests.

Six new diocesan clusters will begin operation at the end of this month: Holy Apostles/St. Anthony of Padua, Rochester; St. Francis of Assisi/Ss. Peter and Paul, Rochester; St. Casimir, Elmira/St. Charles Borromeo, Elmira Heights; St. Januarius, Naples/St. Patrick, Prattsburg; St. Patrick, Mount Morris/Holy Angels, Nunda; and St. Anthony/St. Patrick, Elmira.

With the addition of these clusters, Father Clifford said 21 of the diocese's 160 churches are no longer being served by "free-standing pastors." Overall, there are 188 active diocesan priests available for parish duty, compared to 196 at this time last year.

Father Clifford added that discussion has begun in two additional areas within the diocese where future clustering or pastoral administrators are possibilities: Holy Rosary/Most Precious Blood, Rochester; and St. Francis Solanus, Interlaken/Holy Cross, Ovid.

Father Paul J. Ryan can speak from first-hand experience when he says that pastoral administrators are preferred options for parishioners who desire regular contact with their pastoral leader. Currently, Father Ryan covers considerable ground as pastor of the four-church Cayuga Team Ministry Cluster.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer  
Sister Anne Michelle McGill, SSJ, was recently named the diocese's first-ever pastoral administrator.

"If I were a parishioner and I had any complaint, it would be that you don't get quality time from a pastor when he's spread over a wide area — where with a qualified administrator or pastoral leader, the person is on the scene," Father Ryan remarked.

Father Ryan is leading a group of pastors from Cayuga and Seneca County which convened last month to address the future of their parishes. He said that more clustering and or pastoral-administrator appointments are expected to take place in these counties by June of 1996.

The reason for this joint effort, he said, is that "by doing so in unity and cooperatively, that when these decisions are made it's not one parish out there alone."

Another manner of addressing the priest shortage — and the one which administrators strive hardest to avoid — is to completely cease operations in a church building. Yet that was the case this year with Holy Name Church in Groveland Station, which had been a mission of Holy Angels in Nunda. Holy Name's closing was announced in March.

"While (this alternative) is not eliminated altogether, it is, at the same time, not to be seen as a first option," said Father Clifford. He said that "inner vitality and strength, and ability to maintain themselves" are the criteria used for keeping churches open. He added that in many instances a church's closing is a decision made

by parishioners rather than diocesan administrators.

Father Clifford pointed out that the Rochester diocese does not adhere to the philosophy of some other U.S. dioceses where "whole groups" of churches have been shut down.

Regardless of the route taken, any parish's transition from its previous status is bound to be met with apprehension.

"I have a very vivid recollection of one woman saying, 'I just wish we could have a priest.' I said, 'Well, I think we all do — but this is the reality of things,'" remarked O'Connor.

Adjustments such as these have been especially rocky for the parishioners of St. Anthony Church and St. Patrick Church in Elmira. Clustering of these two parishes — both located near the Elmira College campus — was to take place upon the departure of either pastor, Father Thomas W. Burr of St. Anthony or Father Eugene P. Sweeney of St. Anthony.

That plan is kicking in much sooner than expected following Father Joseph M. Jankowiak's sudden resignation from St. Mary Our Mother Church in Horseheads in early April. He is being replaced as pastor by Father Burr, so the St. Anthony/St. Patrick cluster must now go into effect immediately.

As the *Catholic Courier* went to press earlier this week, the St. Anthony/St. Patrick vacancy had not yet been filled. Not surprisingly, this has left parishioners in a state of confusion.

"It's horrible," stated Rose Bennett, who serves as religious-education coordinator at both churches and is a member of the cluster planning team.

"The rumors are unreal," she added. "Absolutely nothing has been done ... we should be talking about Mass scheduling, but we can't tell the people anything because we don't know what the new pastor is going to want. It's been tough, very tough."

"The case in Elmira has been a little unusual for us," Father Clifford acknowledged.

Yet Bennett also remains confident that the St. Anthony/St. Patrick lay community will unify quickly once the cluster gets underway.

"Our cluster team has worked wonderfully together. We're just hoping the people work as well together as we do," Bennett commented.

Similar voyages through uncharted waters are taking place at St. Gabriel's in Hammondsport, where a woman religious is about to become the on-site administrator.

"Some parishioners are very excited that a woman will be leading, and others will probably need some time to adjust to the idea," O'Connor commented.

Priests, as well, may find it difficult to adapt to the changing times.

"Given the extent to which priests can be overextended, I think many would welcome having the major responsibilities of a parish entrusted to a pastoral administrator," said Father Ring. "But that's not to say there wouldn't be a lot of adjustments and growing pains."

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