

Catholic Courier

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Is Sunday Mass a thing of the past?

Every Sunday, Catholics throughout the Diocese of Rochester gather in response to Christ's request that they commemorate his Last Supper.

In doing so, Catholics highlight the contention made by the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on Sacred Liturgy that "the eucharistic sacrifice is the source and the summit of the whole of the Church's worship and of the Christian life."

But with the decreasing number of available priests, making such lofty rhetoric meaningful in the real world will become more and more challenging to this diocese — and, in fact, almost all U.S. dioceses — as the new century beckons.

There are currently 185 active diocesan priests available for the diocese's 160 churches, according to the diocesan Department of Priests' Personnel. In addition to diocesan priests, another 27 from various religious orders also serve the parishes' faithful.

Meanwhile, 105 other priests are retired, sick or absent, the office said, and only two new priests were ordained

to serve the diocese this year.

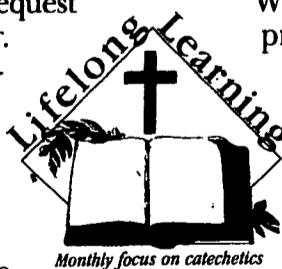
What will happen to Sunday Mass in the light of priests' declining numbers has been the subject of discussion in the diocese since Bishop Matthew H. Clark asked the diocesan Priests' Council and the diocesan Office of Liturgy to begin examining the issue last fall, according to diocesan officials.

The subject was discussed at the diocesan priests' convocation in April as well as at diocesan Ministry Day, an event attended by hundreds of lay and religious ministers and parish clergy, in Geneva last May.

To a certain extent, the diocese has been dealing with the issue, observers said. Already, they pointed out, a small number of priests in the diocese regularly serve more than one community in situations in which neighboring parishes have clustered.

Meanwhile, pastors and pastoral leaders in the Auburn and Ithaca areas have cooperated on the publication of common Mass schedules to help area Catholics attend

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Monthly focus on catechetics

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