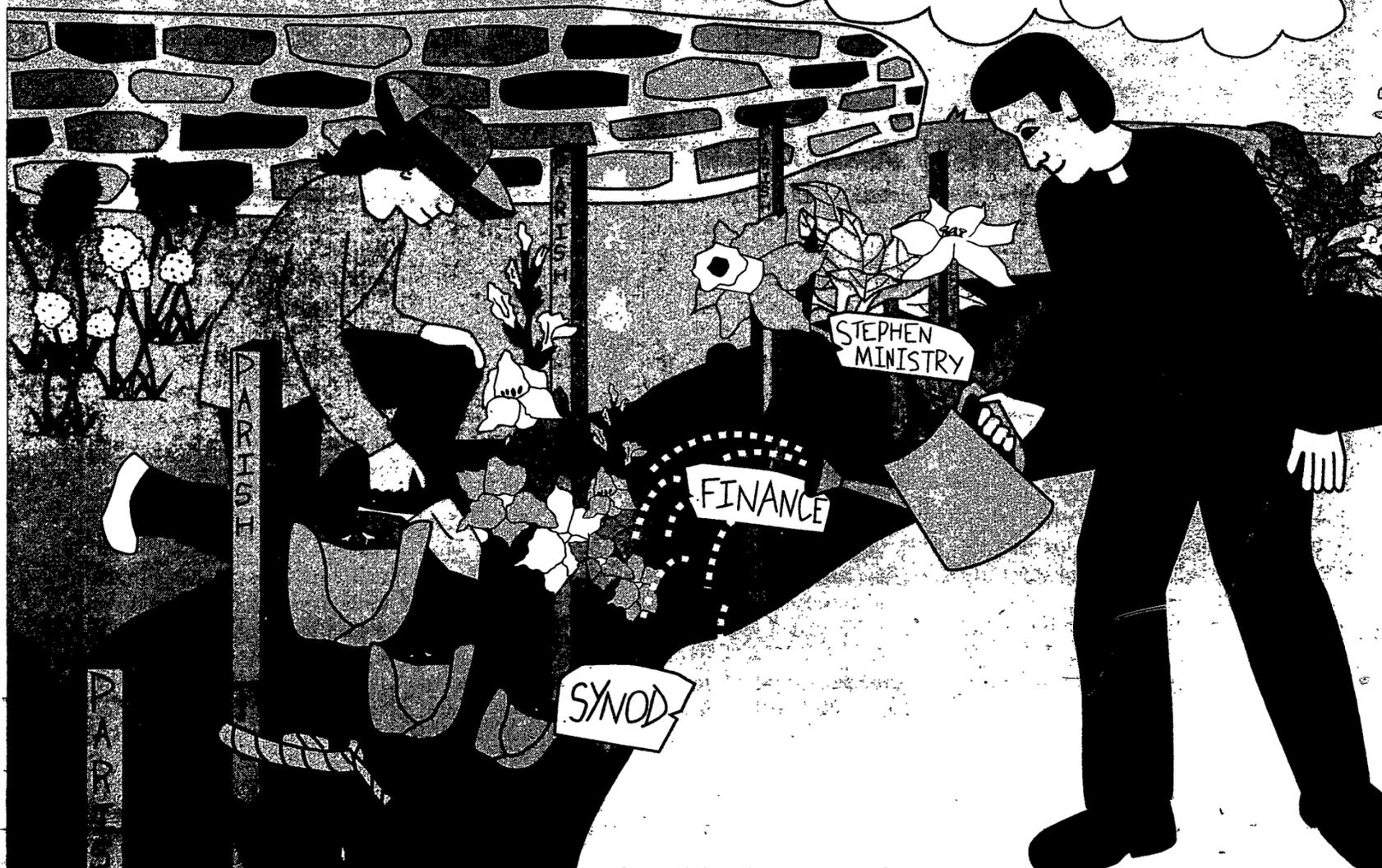




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Collaboration spawns growth in ministry of lay councils

When Father Ronald P. Harley became pastor of Geneva's St. Francis de Sales Church in 1988, he made it clear that lay people would have expanded roles in parish ministry.

"I addressed it from Day One, that it was going to be a partnership," Father Harley said.

The parishioners' reaction, he recalled, wasn't nearly as fervent. "I would describe it as kind of stunned silence," Father Harley remarked.

Dolores Ninestine, a lifelong St. Francis de Sales parishioner at 57, recalled that "lay people were not that involved" in the parish previously, unless they took part in such traditional organizations as the Rosary Society.

Now, Ninestine observed, members of the Finger Lakes parish are involved in a wide range of parish activities. St. Francis de Sales operates ministries and committees involving finance, liturgy, social ministry, Stephen Ministry and sacrificial giving — all under the umbrella of a parish council, or as it is also called, a parish pastoral council.

"I think they're absolutely vital to the running of our parish," said Ninestine, who serves

as the St. Francis de Sales parish pastoral council chairperson.

According to Deacon Claude Lester, such a level of involvement in parish operations reflects a model of constant evolution on which parish pastoral councils are based.

"People keep pushing the limits. They say, 'Don't try to nail us down,'" remarked Deacon Lester, who serves as diocesan director of the Office of Pastoral Council Formation.

This factor has led parish pastoral councils to acquire their own unique identities, Deacon Lester added.

"They've gone from saying, 'How can we be like this other group' to saying, 'How are we different,'" Deacon Lester acknowledged.

With the exception of a couple of parishes, Deacon Lester said that parish pastoral councils have been adopted by almost every parish in the Diocese of Rochester within the past 30 years.

These councils were created in response to the Second Vatican Council's emphasis on empowering the laity. This goal was articulated in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 31, where the laity was instructed to "share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and the world."

The 1983 Code of Canon Law applies this sentiment specifically to parish councils:

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