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# Catholic Courier

DIocese of Rochester, New York ■ VOL. 108 NO. 4 ■ THURSDAY, October 24, 1996 ■ 75¢ ■ 20 PAGES

# Eucharist

## Parishes asked to plan ahead

**F**ather John Phillips, pastor of St. Bridget's and St. Joseph's Church in East Bloomfield, will retire in 1999. But his parish is already planning ahead for the situation that may result. He addressed the ramifications of his retirement — and its potential impact on parish Masses — in the parish's Sept. 22 bulletin.

"As the number of priests dwindles, Catholic leadership is discovering new and exciting ways to continue the work of Christ's Church, as more ministries are developed among the laity," Father Phillips wrote. "But one thing is certain: fewer (and aging) priests will mean fewer Masses."

In a phone interview, the pastor said his parish will begin to occasionally celebrate one Sunday Mass as opposed to the two regularly scheduled so as to accustom parishioners to having fewer Masses. St. Bridget's and St. Joseph's will inaugurate the practice on Sunday, Nov. 24, the feast of Christ the King, he said. He added that the celebration will be followed by a parish-wide brunch.

"We're trying to keep it positive," he said of the single Sunday Mass and the brunch.

In doing so, Father Phillips and his parishioners are already on their way to implementing Bishop Matthew H. Clark's new pastoral letter titled, "From East to West a Perfect Offering." The letter is being released to parishes this week as an insert in the *Catholic Courier*.

The letter calls diocesan Catholics to discuss maintaining the Sunday Eucharist even as a diminishing number of priests are available to celebrate it, and in light of changing patterns of church ministry.

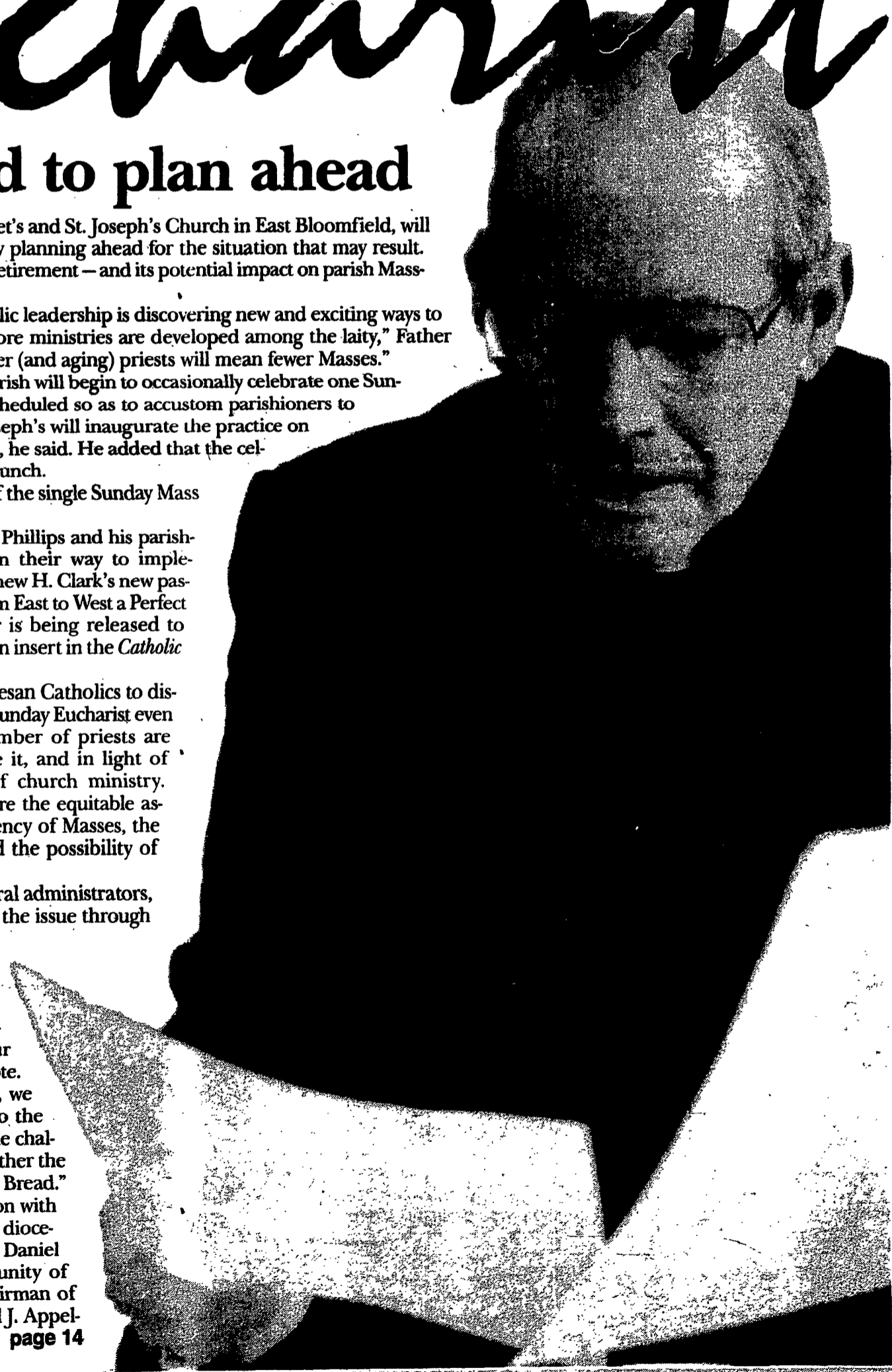
Among the issues addressed by the letter are the equitable assignment of priests, the number and frequency of Masses, the appropriate use of alternative services, and the possibility of parishes holding joint celebrations.

The document also calls for pastors, pastoral administrators, parish staffs and parish councils to examine the issue through homilies, bulletins and group discussions within parishes, regions and other groupings.

"I ask that we enter into an open, prayerful and honest conversation in the same manner and with the same spirit that marked our recent Synodal discussions," the bishop wrote. "Then, as the Holy Spirit works among us, we may arrive at answers that will carry us into the new millennium eager and ready to meet the challenge of living out the Gospel mandate to gather the People — to tell the Stories — and to break the Bread."

The bishop wrote the letter in collaboration with a team that consisted of Joan Workmaster, diocesan director of the Office of Liturgy; Father Daniel J. Condon, pastor of the Catholic Community of Mount Morris and Nunda, and former chairman of the diocesan Priests' Council; Father Gerald J. Appel-

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STORY BY ROB CULLIVAN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHEW SCOTT