## Are 'imported' priests solution to shortage?

Is there a shortage of priests? If so, what can be done about it? People answer the second question in a variety of ways, almost always reflecting, for good or for ill, a theology of the church and its priesthood.

For Catholics who believe that all problems can be solved by prayer (and sometimes with a little fasting thrown in), the shortage is only short-term. As soon as we persuade enough people to pray harder and to make sacrifices to win God's attention and favor, an upswing of vocations is sure to follow.

Other Catholics are convinced that the vocations crisis is a blessing in disguise. Because of the shortage of priests, more and more lay people are performing ministerial roles once reserved exclusively to the clergy. In some cases, religious women and lay persons are even serving as parish administrators.

In the middle are those Catholics who neither deny nor dismiss the problem. They, too, fall into two camps.

The first argues that the church will have enough priests again, once it drops the requirement of obligatory celibacy and opens the priesthood to women.

The second group, without denying the need for prayer, proposes an intermediate solution: importing priests from other countries.

For several years now, this has been the short-term solution of choice in var-



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

ious U.S. dioceses. Given the fact that we have a Polish pope, it is a matter of some interest that many of the imports have been from Poland. Is it to curry favor with the Holy Father, or does Poland have such an oversupply of priests that there is no longer any place for them all at home?

To be sure, the imports are also from Asia (including the Philippines and Sri Lanka) and from black Africa.

Until recently, the importation of priests from other countries received little or no attention beyond the dioceses for which the priests were recruited. An announcement by the new archbishop of Chicago has changed all that.

Archbishop Francis George (called "the sheriff" by some of his priests because of his tendency to micro-manage such things as the distribution of holy Communion in the parishes) has disclosed a plan for borrowing priests from

Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa. It consists of inviting ten foreign priests and ten foreign seminarians to Chicago every year for five-year tours of service.

But the new archbishop, having just arrived in Chicago in May, was not prepared for the negative reaction. Indeed, he has admitted that his plan has "raised a lot of hackles."

Many priests, religious, and laity in the archdiocese have been asking how priests from other cultures will be able to serve the pastoral needs of American Catholics. Will they understand the changing roles of women and of lay people in the church? How will they relate to American youth?

Moreover, apart from heavily Catholic countries like Poland and Ireland, the countries U.S. dioceses, including Chicago, are drawing from are in far greater need of priests than we are.

Another question, raised only privately within clerical circles, concerns the motivation of some of the imported priests. A free ticket to the United States, guaranteed room-and-board, and an income and standard of living that far exceed those of their own countries constitute a temptation difficult for many to resist.

And what do American pastors and parishioners receive in return? In too many instances, priests who operate ac-

cording to a different concept and pace of pastoral activity and who, in some few cases at least, kick over the clerical traces after a period of time in a U.S. parish.

Although Archbishop George admitted to the *New York Times* that he has heard accounts of visiting priests who have not been able to adjust to American culture and, consequently, have been poorly accepted by parishioners, he insists that it is "spiritually healthy to learn how to receive" (9/28/97).

One reason why it is so difficult to achieve the desired results from such an experiment is disclosed in a remark at the end of the *New York Times*' article. A Mexican carpenter told the reporter that he doesn't need simply a Spanish-speaking priest; he needs a Mexican priest. "If a Guatemalan comes," he said, "even I don't go to Mass."

The most fundamental question of all, however, concerns the nature of the priesthood itself. Is the priest nothing more than a dispenser of sacraments? If so, it really doesn't make any difference whether he is culturally and pastorally attuned to America or not.

But if the priest is more than a dispenser of sacraments, this short-term solution is likely to make matters worse, not better.

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# CEMETERIES of the Rochester Catholic Diocese

The cemeteries below paid a nominal fee to be included in this listing.

A number of other Catholic cemeteries chose not to be listed, primarily because they no longer have burial plots for sale.

#### Monroe-Livingston Region

- 1. Holy Sepulchre Cemetery & Mausoleum 2461 Lake Avenue Rochester 716-458-4110
- 2. Mount Olivet
  East Canal Road
  Office 152 Main Street
  Brockport
  716-637-4500
- 3. St. Patrick's 46 Stanley Street Mt. Morris 716-658-2110
- 4. St. Rose 1985 Lake Avenue Lima 716-624-1005

#### **Finger Lakes Region**

5. Calvary St. Mary's 95 North Main Street Canandaigua 716-394-1617

#### **Finger Lakes Region**

- 6. St. Agnes c/o 12 Hibbard Clifton Springs 315-462-2961
- 7. St. Bernard's 2841 Center Road Scipio Center 315-364-8172
- 8. St. Bridget's 15 Church Street East Bloomfield 716-657-7626
- 9. St. Columbkille c/o 97 West Bayard Street Seneca Falls 315-568-5203
- 10. St. Joseph's 2667 Hamilton Street Weedsport 315-834-6266
- 11. St. Joseph's

  Regional Cemetery

  6020 Lake Ave. Ext. Auburn
  315-252-5197

#### **Finger Lakes Region**

12. St. Patrick's
51 Grove Street
Moravia
315-497-0626

### **Southern Tier Region**

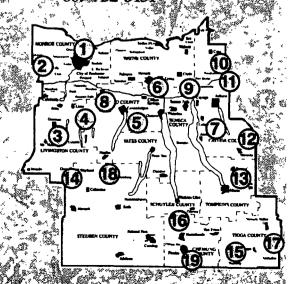
- 13. Calvary Cemetery
  at the Church of the
  Immaculate Conception
  113 North Geneva Street
  Ithaca
  607-273-6121
- 14: Sacred Heart of Jesus Chapel Street Perkinsville 716-384-5500
- 15. St. James 503 Clark Street Waverly 607-565-2014
- 16. St. Mary Our Mother 816 West Broad Street Horseheads 607-739-3817

#### Southern Tier Region

17. St. Patrick's Route 17C Owego 607-687-1068

18 St. Pius V 35 Maple Street Cohocton 716-384-5500

19. Ss. Peter & Paul Cemetery 623 Franklin Street Elmira 607-732-6431



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