

# COLUMNISTS

## 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-

ording 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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Newspaper of the Diocese of Rochester

Catholic Courier

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

