

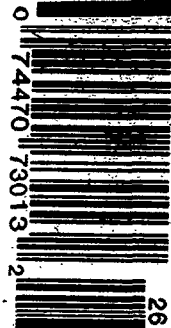
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Catholic Courier

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Leaders chart new waters

Deacon Ray Mielcarek got more than he'd bargained for after becoming a part-time pastoral associate at Rochester's St. Stanislaus Church in the summer of 1997.

"I thought I was going to work 12 to 15 hours per week," Deacon Mielcarek recalled with a chuckle.

But the priest administrator, Father Mitchell Zygadlo, left the parish four months later. His priest replacement from Poland, Father Adam Ogorzaly, did not wish to take on administrative duties.

So in February of this year, Deacon Mielcarek became St. Stanislaus' pastoral administrator. Although that role had been "the furthest thing from my mind," Deacon Mielcarek said, he welcomes the chance to perform ministry and also utilize his background in management.

"I just feel that the Holy Spirit has been leading me toward this," said Deacon Mielcarek, 63, a former engineering manager for Harris Corporation.

An increasing number of parishes in the Rochester Diocese are opting for the pastoral administrator model in which deacons, or brothers, women religious or other lay people carry out all parish functions normally handled by a pastor — with the exception of most sacramental duties.

As of July 1, nine pastoral administrators were serving in this diocese, including four new appointments this year. In addition to Deacon Mielcarek, first-year pastoral administrators include Charlotte Bruney at St. Vincent DePaul Parish in Churchville; Sister Jacqueline Reichart, RSM, at Our Lady Queen of Peace in Brighton; and Sister Mary Wintish, RSM, at All Saints in Lansing. The appointments of Sister Reichart and Sister Wintish were effective June 30, and Bruney began her duties in early June.

Further appointments loom in upcoming years, said William Pickett, director of the diocesan Office of Pastoral Planning. Pickett acknowledged that he has raised this model "explicitly" with groups of parishes involved in Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium.

Pickett said that the model has proven to be a good option for parishes that have lost a resident pastor but still wish to be served by an on-site administrator, rather than become clustered with other parishes.

"Our pastoral administrators have been extraordinarily effective," Pickett said. "What we're demonstrating is that this is a legitimate and viable way to have leadership in the parish."

Model takes root

The pastoral administrators in this diocese include four women religious, three deacons, and a lay man and woman. Sacramental duties are

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Counterclockwise, from top right: As pastoral administrator of St. Stanislaus Parish, Rochester, Deacon Ray Mielcarek has to keep track of more than 50 keys to fit all the doors in the church, rectory, school, and convent building (now a part of the school); he studies flooding on the rectory roof after a heavy rainstorm with Father Adam Ogorzaly; discusses church repairs over the phone with a contractor; and attends to parish paperwork. A retired engineering manager who was ordained a deacon in 1996, Deacon Mielcarek said he does as many repairs as possible himself to save the parish money.



STORY BY MIKE LATONA • PHOTOS BY GREG FRANCIS