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Pastoral

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usually carried out by a resident priest who is not a pastor, such as Father Ogorzaly, or a priest from a neighboring parish.

Father Robert Ring, diocesan director of priest personnel, said that for several years the diocese has appointed temporary pastoral administrators when a pastor goes on sabbatical or suddenly leaves a parish. In fact, a current pastoral administrator — Deacon Michael Mahoney at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Scottsville — had been temporary administrator at St. Columba/St. Patrick Parish in Caledonia in 1989.

In 1994, the model became more permanent when Sister Anne Michelle McGill, SSJ, began a four-year term as pastoral administrator of St. Gabriel Church in Hammondsport. Other pastoral administrators currently serving terms include Sister Win-tish; Deacon Mahoney; Dean Condon, at Guardian Angels, Henrietta; and Sister Alice Cooney, SSJ, at St. Joseph's, Rush.

According to Father Ring, these terms can be renewed twice, giving a pastoral administrator up to 12 years at one parish — the same as a priest. Pastoral administrators who serve terms are required to have a master's degree as well as extensive pastoral and/or administrative experience.

A parish might consider this model if it finds out from the diocese that a pastor who is leaving will not be replaced by a full-time priest. Parish size and vitality play into this decision as well. Finances, also, may determine if a parish chooses a pastoral administrator over clustering.

"You have to pay the pastoral administrator the same, or more than, a priest. Plus, you have to pay the sacramental minister," Pickett explained. "It may not be cost-effective."

Much in the same manner as a pastor, the pastoral administrator oversees hiring of staff, and coordination of committees. The administrator also preaches at weekend liturgies and attends to all ministerial needs of the parishioners except for administering of sacraments.

Rochester is not the only area using pastoral administrators. According to Catholic News Service, a study of the 1998 Official Catholic Directory revealed that there are approximately 400 deacons, brothers, women religious or other lay people serving in administrative roles at parishes.

Compared to nearby dioceses, Rochester is advanced in employing its pastoral administrator model. The Diocese of Buffalo has just one pastoral administrator, and the Diocese of Syracuse does not have any.

Striving for acceptance

Overall, though, the model is still in relative infancy in this diocese. Therefore, Pickett said, pastoral administrators are still an unknown entity in some parts.

"Unless you're in or near a community that has it, you're probably not aware of it," he remarked.

Not surprisingly, pioneer pastoral administrators said that acceptance hasn't come overnight.

"I think the parish really grieves the loss of a full-time priest. It's almost like the end of an era," Sister Cooney said. She replaced Father Richard O'Connell in 1995 when he retired from St. Joseph's in Rush.

Deacon Patrick Shanley encountered a similar situation when he became pastoral administrator at Rochester's Holy Family Church in early 1997 after Father Michael Schramel left to become pastor at St. Ambrose Church in Irondequoit.

"Part of it is habit. People would call up and ask for Father," he acknowledged.

But Deacon Shanley said that the parish accepted him quickly because he'd been Holy Family's pastoral associate since 1991.

"They were ready for this. We had talked about it," he said.

On the other hand, Condon had not yet established those bonds when he became pastoral administrator at Guardian Angels in Henrietta in 1995 after working seven

years for the Archdiocese of Boston. And one year prior to Condon's appointment, Father Richard Hart had died suddenly after 19 years as Guardian Angels' pastor.

"It was very challenging for the parish," Condon commented.

Condon said he has hired music and youth directors, formed new committees and implemented liturgical changes over the past three years. However, he refrained from making such changes when he began his position.

"My approach was trying to get to know people, building relationships," Condon explained.

Deacon Mahoney said that pastoral qualities, rather than the fact they are not priests, are ultimately how pastoral administrators should be judged.

"So much attention and energy was being given to a different model, that I think you can lose sight of the fact you have to give equal attention to the style," Deacon Mahoney said. He became pastoral administrator at St. Mary's in Scottsville in 1996 when Father Daniel Tormey retired.

Pastoral administrators have also gained acceptance from priests, Sister McGill noted. In her first year at St. Gabriel's, she recalled, she was not invited to the diocesan priests' convocation — but in 1996 she and Sister Cooney both attended.

"The priests were welcoming and accepting, and went out of their way to let us know we were part of their group," Sister McGill said.

Women, along with married men raising families, mark a sharp departure from the traditional image of a male, celibate pastor. Yet Condon said that the presence of his wife and three children seems to be welcomed — especially by younger parishioners — at Guardian Angels.

"They like seeing a married man with a family on campus," Condon said.

Priestly duties

Even though the lifestyles and appearances of pastoral administrators differ from those of priests, they do hold many responsibilities of a pastor.

"All the wonderful things that go into a community can be done by a pastoral administrator," Sister McGill said.

But should pastoral administrators carry the title of pastor?

"In a sense, we are the pastor," Sister Cooney remarked.

"I feel like I'm a pastor, and that (the parishioners) have accepted me as that," Deacon Shanley added.

However, because they are not priests, pastoral administrators are canonically forbidden to assume the title of pastor or administer most of the sacraments — the only possible exceptions are baptism and matrimony.

"I would love to be called to administer the sacraments," Sister Cooney said. "I have to admit there's a frustration at not being able to."

Sister McGill shares this disappointment. "We pray with the sick. But we cannot give them the comfort of the sacrament of the sick," she said.

Despite this dilemma, Sister McGill said that pastoral administrators may well be the best means for dealing with a growing priest shortage.

"I think it's going to be a way to save individual parishes," Sister McGill stated.

Pickett said that effective pastoral administrators allow priests "to maximize their time in non-administrative ways." Father Ring added that in upcoming years, he expects priests in this diocese to be utilized more for sacramental duties, and less for administration.

For the most part, Father Ring said, larger parishes in the Rochester Diocese will continue to be administered by resident priests. But smaller parishes that are facing the loss of a pastor, he said, might well consider a pastoral administrator.

"The receptiveness of the people in a parish to change, and to be open to new alternatives, will make a difference," Father Ring said.