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## Presiders

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express their gratitude that she had stepped in.

"It was really funny," she reported. "After the service, one of the parishioners came up to me and said, 'Barb, I really needed to hear what you said today.'"

## Facing the future

Ivers has not had the opportunity to preside in a similar situation since. Nor, for that matter, has any other trained presider had to step in for a Sunday or Holy Day service in the Diocese of Rochester due to an emergency situation since her experience.

But that day may come, noted Joan Workmaster, diocesan director of liturgy.

"There's every possibility that (some) coming Sunday there will be a community or two where there will not be a priest to celebrate a liturgy," Workmaster predicted.

Although it's not likely to happen immediately, she added, with the declining number of priests and with increased clustering of parishes, a sudden illness or bad weather may mean a community will face conducting a service in the absence of a priest.

"Down the road we are going to have places that are going to want to maintain their vitality as a parish, but simply will not be able to have a priest presider with them all the time," she said.

Such is already the case in other regions of the United States, acknowledged Father Michael Spillane, executive director of the Washington D.C.-based Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions.

Father Spillane noted that there haven't been statistical studies of services by lay presiders. However, he added that anecdotally he is aware that they are conducted fairly regularly in the Southwest, Northwest, Midwest and Alaska — regions where the priest shortage is more acute than in Rochester, and where parishes are often long distances apart. In some dioceses, he added, they take place as often as once a week, though not in any one parish.

The implications of that looming reality is on the mind of lay leaders in the Diocese of Rochester.

"I see the signposts down the road," observed Leo Chinelly, a delegated lay presider at St. Patrick's Parish, Macedon. "I'm quite aware of the fact that the laity is

going to have to play a role when it comes to liturgical services. I feel privileged to be a part of that."

"I see the need for it. I'm looking at the future and see the need in the diocese for lay presiders," said Sister Gertrude Erb, RSM, pastoral associate and one of the delegated lay presiders at St. Ambrose Church, Rochester. "I feel we need to be prepared for it, not just walk in and do it."

## Be prepared

The diocese has attempted to ensure that people are indeed prepared. Ivers, Chinelly and Sister Erb are among approximately 100 people who have completed training to serve as delegated lay presiders. An additional 50 people have completed part of the training. The first letters from Bishop Matthew H. Clark officially delegating lay presiders in parishes were ready to be mailed this month, Workmaster said.

The groundwork for that training — and the delegating — was set by Bishop Clark's 1996 pastoral letter on the Eucharist, "From East to West a Perfect Offering." In the letter, Bishop Clark noted, "The Eucharist is the central event and action of reconciliation for a community of faith." He also noted, "The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is crucial to our understanding of our Christian identity."

The bishop went on to ask each parish in the diocese to plan for emergency situations in order to maintain "the Sunday celebration of Eucharist in all our parish communities." The following July, the diocese released "The Centrality of the Sunday Eucharist: Guidelines for Parish Planning," furthering the process.

"I think (Bishop Clark's) pastoral was critical, was foundational in grounding us (in the awareness) that the Eucharist is central to our lives as a faith community," noted Sister Chris Treichel, OSF, pastoral associate and a delegated lay presider at St. John the Evangelist Church, Rochester.

As a result of that pastoral, parishes developed contingency plans for emergency situations. Among their first options are using priests from nearby parishes, retired priests and order priests, conducting services led by permanent deacons, and directing people to parishes where Masses are available. But as part of their planning, the parishes were also required to develop options for lay presiders to conduct alternative services in emergency situations when ordained presiders are not available.

Sister Treichel helped Workmaster train the individuals to be delegated. The training provided theological background — including study of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship's 1988 document, "Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest" — and a practicum in which each person is given an emergency situation on short notice and asked to prepare a service.

Ivers recalled being upset at the short notice she received during her training.

"I called Joan and she said you know you're not going to have a lot of time to prepare," Ivers recalled with a laugh, noting that Workmaster's prediction proved true for her.

Such short notice in the training, Workmaster observed, "really reflects what the bishop sees as the use of (lay presiders), that it truly is in an emergency situation, that it is not to be used on a regular basis."

## Differences in services

Workmaster emphasized that Sunday services are not to be confused with Communion services that a number of parishes currently offer on weekdays. The Sunday service is central to the Catholic faith, while weekday services are voluntary. As a reflection of this, she noted, "The Sunday rite is much more extensive."

Basically, she said, the weekday service consists of a gathering rite, readings, then Communion. Sunday services would include more prayers and more readings.

Moreover, weekday services are generally scheduled well in advance, so people know what kind of service they are voluntarily attending. The Sunday services will only be done in emergency situations, generally with little or no notice.

Still, Chinelly found his experience in leading weekly weekday Communion services at the parish helpful.

"A year ago, I would never have done a Sunday service in the absence of a priest. Now I could," Chinelly said. "I'm hoping that the people who are delegated are preparing themselves by doing Communion services."

One concern, Workmaster acknowledged, is that people might confuse the lay-led Sunday services with Masses, or come to believe that they are equal in value. Thus some of the prayers normally heard at Mass are worded differently, or replaced. The presiders are instructed to avoid some gestures priests would nor-

mally use.

Chinelly, for one, is conscious of trying to avoid such confusion while at the same time showing respect for the service. He arrives to preside at noon-time Friday services wearing his green uniform — he is a municipal worker for the Village of Macedon. He dons an altar servers alb — not a priest's — and during the service sits with the congregation as much as possible. He said he will try to keep up some of the same practices if called upon to be a Sunday presider.

Basically, Workmaster said, presiders should "make it clear, 'I have been trained and I have been delegated by the bishop, I am not ordained and I'm not doing anything that intrudes on an ordained's privileges.'"

Now that the training for the first group of lay presiders has been completed, Workmaster acknowledged, more catechesis is needed for parishioners so they are prepared for lay-led services.

Workmaster noted that some of that catechesis already happened through the discussions surrounding the release of Bishop Clark's pastoral. Also, Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium — the process under which parishes in regions plan how they will work together to provide ministry — has helped to make Catholics aware that lay people will need to assume more roles in parishes, including liturgical ones.

Workmaster said members of the diocesan Liturgical Commission were also considering ways to help provide catechesis about lay presiders. She hopes to implement some actions by fall.

Some of that catechesis has come in unexpected ways.

Michele Bertot of St. Margaret Mary Parish, Irondequoit, for example, saw a glimpse of the possible future last year when her then-pastor, Father Peter Bayer, took ill on a Saturday morning and was out for several months. The parish had a series of priests coming in to conduct services.

"Yes, it was difficult," Bertot said. "I think the parish actually grew through that experience because people had to take on different roles."

"You can talk about the shortage of priests, but when it hits, they can speak from experience. We're all in this together."

Bertot and four other people at the parish have completed presider training. "We want to be ready," she said.

Likewise, Ivers' parish experienced a year in which there was not a resident priest.

"We went through a year we thought of as the 'priest of the week' year," she said. "The real world was very present to us."

Sister Erb noted that part of that real world in the Catholic Church is that in emergency situations "lay people can share the lay presiding in legitimate ways."

But even if he is called to preside, Chinelly emphasized, he will keep one thing in mind: "The (Sunday) Communion service will never take the place of the Mass — which is the ultimate prayer."

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