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## Demands

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Father Hewes said that although diocesan officials advise priests not to burn out, he wonders how it can be avoided.

"If the community's expectations are already high, you can go morning to night and not feel like you got enough done at the end of the day," Father Hewes said. "On the one hand, Matthew (Bishop Clark) says to take care of yourself. But the reality is, that's not being lived out."

Meanwhile, Father Edward Palumbos, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Church in Greece, said he won't get a priest replacement for one of his parochial vicars, Father Francis Blighton, who died in January. He added that St. Charles' other parochial vicar, Father Douglas DellaPietra, will eventually leave for another assignment.

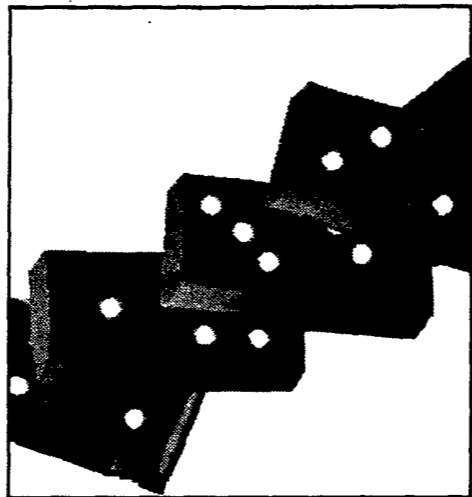
So it's possible that Father Palumbos, 54, will someday be the only full-time priest for a parish of 2,500 families — meaning added responsibilities for him.

"At a time when most men would think about retiring, we are looking to be full-time until we are 70," remarked Father Palumbos, citing the general retirement age for priests in the Rochester Diocese.

Added Father Ronald Gaesser, pastor of Ithaca's St. Catherine of Siena Church: "The demands on my time, at 64, are considerably more than when I was ordained at 25."

Sandy Grocki, diocesan coordinator of clergy services, said that many priests push themselves to the brink of burnout — and over the edge, at times — in trying to fulfill their perceived responsibilities.

"I think they feel there's a job to do, and they do it," Grocki said. "Sometimes they postpone their own health needs. I don't think they place the importance on it that they should. To keep yourself healthy, you have to know when to say 'stop.'"



"It hits you when you realize how easy it is not to take care of yourself," Father Palumbos said. "The temptation to overwork is always there."

Father Thomas P. Sweetser, SJ, addressed priest workloads in his article "The Good Enough Pastor," in the Sept. 25, 1999, issue of *America* magazine:

"'Good enough' is never the accepted practice in a parish. 'Perfect' is the more usual rhetoric until the strain becomes too much," wrote Father Sweetser, who is director of the Parish Evaluation Project, a consulting agency in Des Plaines, Ill.

As Father Ronald Harley found out, it sometimes takes a serious illness to force a priest to accept being "good enough" rather than "perfect."

Last May, shortly before Father Harley was to begin his new pastorate at St. Agnes Church in Avon, he was hospitalized for congestive heart failure. In August, he experienced massive internal hemorrhaging related to his medication.

Father Harley finally arrived in Avon in November to begin his ministry. Nowadays, he said, he takes it easier — and has come to realize that it's not the end of the world when he does so.

"Being ill changes your perspective," Fa-

ther Harley said. "You don't feel it's that important to be every place, but there was a time in my life I felt it was. Now, if I don't feel well, I don't show up to a meeting. I want to be in good shape for the weekend."

Ah yes, the weekend. A common joke heard by priests — and one that surely tempts them to say un-priestly things under their breath — is how they have such an easy job because they only work on Sundays. Father Sweetser painted a much different picture in *America*:

"Only those closest to this ministry of leadership have any idea how demanding the job can be, occupying the pastor from morning to night — especially night — for at least six days a week."

Father Sweetser noted how quickly time can pile up with "homily preparation, meeting time with couples and parents and filling out documents." He added that a burned-out priest runs the risk of going through the motions during liturgy, rather than praying the liturgy.

Quiet time is not only crucial for priests, but the call for it can be found right in the Gospels, Father Gaesser pointed out.

"Jesus took time away from the crowds and demanded that his disciples do the same," Father Gaesser remarked.

But Father Palumbos said that a priest's workload leaves precious little time for personal reflection and prayer.

"When was the last time you called the church and were told, 'Father can't come to the phone because he's praying?'" Father Palumbos said.

Father Sweetser suggested several guidelines to define a reasonable workload for a pastor:

- No more than 50 hours per week doing ministry. Any more would be the pastor's prerogative.

- Twenty-four to 36 hours per week away from the parish for leisure or personal time.

- Four weeks of vacation per year, and

five days per year for an annual retreat.

- Parish offices located separately from where the pastor lives.

- No more than three regularly scheduled Masses per weekend. No more than two other liturgical celebrations, such as weddings and funerals, per weekend.

- No more than one reconciliation session per week.

- No more than one Mass per day during the week. If a funeral arises, the daily Mass is either dropped or replaced by a prayer service with another minister.

- Ten days per year for professional development and a four-month sabbatical every seven years.

Grocki said that many of these suggestions are already enacted in the Rochester Diocese, such as designated personal time and four weeks' vacation. And Father Harley emphasized that when he was ill, he never felt he was being pressured back into duty.

"The diocese was wonderful to me," Father Harley said.

Father Palumbos said that he sticks to his scheduled time off, and trusts his staff while he's away. With very few exceptions, he said, he takes Thursdays and Fridays off.

"I spend 40 percent of my time with staff," Father Palumbos said. "I spend a great amount of time and energy empowering these people. I have complete confidence in them."

Even so, Grocki said that 50 hours per week would probably be a pleasantly low number for most priests.

"They could get a call in the middle of the night and not even count that," she said.

She added that diocesan priests are encouraged to never say more than three Masses per day — but the number often gets exceeded during wedding and holiday seasons, and where priests minister simultaneously at more than one church.

"That's really hard. It depends on the needs of the parish," Grocki said.

Grocki acknowledged that more and more priests are opting to live away from their parish offices. One example is Father Gaesser, who moved out the rectory/office at his Ithaca parish in 1993. Though he lives walking distance from the church, he said the move has made a huge difference.

"You have to separate your personal life from your professional life," Father Gaesser said. "Do you know any other profession where you're forced to live at the place you work?"

Father Conboy, of diocesan priest personnel, said that a lessening of administrative responsibilities would also help lighten the priests' burden. Based on their workload, Father Conboy feels that most priests would not mind ceding at least partial control of their parish.

"I don't think there's too many who have a great desire to do (administration)," he said. "Several have said, 'Let me do what I was ordained to do — be of service to the people.'"

Joan Workmaster, diocesan director of liturgy, added that priests would be wise to drop Masses from their schedules that aren't really necessary.

"Some priests refuse to even think of a reduction of Mass times, because they see their role as doing the amount of Masses that people ask," Workmaster said.

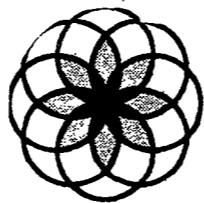
However, Father Hewes said, the bigger attitude adjustment will likely be on the part of the laity.

In his experience, he said, parishioners don't like hearing about fewer priests, or priests doing ministry differently. Yet the situation is against that of other countries, where parishioners walk several miles to church, he noted.

"This is America, where we can get what we want — when we want it," Father Hewes charged. "We are spoiled Americans."

Father Palumbos added that parishioners will hopefully become more and more accepting of lay people going on sick calls, performing Communion services and conducting other ministry previously assigned to priests only.

"That's something people can change — their openness," Father Palumbos said.



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