



File photo

Rochester's Father Elmer Heindl, left, blesses Father Charles Erb, SVD, at a reunion in Rochester last July. Father Heindl will turn 90 on June 14.

Study addresses fewer priests

WASHINGTON (CNS) — When the U.S. Catholic bishops meet June 15-17, they will discuss how to serve more Catholics with fewer priests but with more deacons and lay ministers.

"This will be a vital conversation," said Bishop Richard C. Hanifen of Colorado Springs, Colo., chairman of the bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry.

He said the discussion will address a wide range of pastoral challenges and their implications for church life.

A two-year "Study of the Impact of Fewer Priests on Pastoral Ministry," conducted for the committee by the Washington-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, is to be released at the meeting, which will be held in Milwaukee's Midwest Express Center.

A news release from the bishops' communications office in Washington gave an advance view of some of the findings of the study.

It noted that:

- The number of U.S. Catholics is growing, especially

in the West and South — by 261 percent and 196 percent respectively over the past 40 years.

• The number of deacons and lay ministers has grown dramatically. The permanent diaconate was restored as a church ministry in the late 1960s and there are now more than 13,000 deacons in U.S. dioceses. Parishes employ some 30,000 lay ministers in full- or part-time positions and another 30,000 are currently in lay ministry formation programs.

• The number of priests has gone down, with areas of the Midwest and West reporting the most difficulty in meeting pastoral needs as a result. Besides being fewer, priests are older: The average age of diocesan priests is 57 and the average of religious order priests is 63.

• Less than three-fourths of U.S. parishes now have their own resident pastor. Of 19,000 parishes, nearly 2,400 share a pastor and 2,300 are without a resident pastor. More than 400 parishes are in the care of someone who is not a priest.



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MOVING PRIESTS



Coming to terms with term policy

STORY BY
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Father Thomas Mull moves belongings from the rectory at Sacred Heart Cathedral. He is moving to St. Mary's in Canandaigua.

Even though she knew Father Thomas Mull was due to leave Sacred Heart Cathedral this summer, Mary Anne Taylor said she was stunned when the longtime pastor announced his new assignment.

"We all felt as if someone had punched us in the gut," remarked Taylor, who serves as the parish's religious education coordinator.

Taylor said she was hoping that Sacred Heart Parish could celebrate Father Mull's 25th anniversary in the

priesthood next year. Instead, she is a co-organizer of his farewell reception on June 25.

Father Mull will assume the pastorate of St. Mary's Church in Canandaigua as of July 1. He has served for 18 years at Sacred Heart, the last 12 as pastor.

"Some of the people I've baptized, I've also done weddings for," Father Mull said. "It's very hard to leave. It's almost like leaving home again."

Yet Father Mull said he has been up-front with parishioners and staff that he would be taking a new assignment some

time this year. He said he told his parish council a year ago that "most likely" they would be involved in the process of bringing a new pastor to Sacred Heart this summer.

"I think some people held out that maybe an exception would be made, but the bishop said it wasn't to be," Father Mull remarked. He will be replaced by Father John Mulligan.

Father Mull is among the first wave of priests to be affected by a policy begun in the Rochester Diocese in 1986. With

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