

CONTINUED FROM...

Moving

Continued from page 1

few exceptions, priests who began pastorates that year, or any subsequent year, are assigned six-year terms that can be renewed no more than once. The year 1998 marked the first year that priests moved because they had reached their maximum of two six-year terms.

Rochester is among many U.S. dioceses to enact term policies after the Second Vatican Council, as perception of a parish's identity shifted from its pastor to its entire parish community. Prior to Vatican II, pastorates often lasted for several decades.

Father Robert Schrader, who served as diocesan director of priest personnel from 1986 to 1991, recalled that numerous diocesan priests asked for a term policy in the early 1980s, and Bishop Matthew H. Clark approved this movement. This is in accordance with Canon 522 in The Code of Canon Law, which states:

The pastor ought to possess stability in office and therefore he is to be named for an indefinite period of time; the diocesan bishop can name him for a certain period of time only if a decree of the conference of bishops has permitted this.

In late 1983 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops voted to give diocesan bishops the option of assigning terms of office for pastors. The bishop was also to determine a term's length, as well as the frequency a term could be renewed.

In the Rochester Diocese, a priest who takes a new pastorate is assigned a six-year term. When it ends, the priest and parish conduct an evaluation of his pastorate. The priest then has the option of another six-year term, subject to the bishop's approval.

This policy applies strictly to pastorates. For instance, although Father Mull has served at Sacred Heart Cathedral for 18 years, six of those were spent as parochial vicar. He did not become pastor until 1988, at which time his first six-year term took effect.

Whereas the term policy does not permit a pastorate to extend beyond 12 years, there are numerous instances of a priest leaving his pastorate before that time is up: the pastorate may dissolve due to clustering or some other form of strategic planning; he may be transferred by the bishop to another assignment; or he may simply choose not to renew his six-year term.

A priest may also cut short his term if a desired opening arises elsewhere. Such is the case with Father Alexander Bradshaw, who is leaving Holy Ghost Parish in Gates after 11 years to become pastor at Our Mother of Sorrows Parish in Greece.

"I decided I would look to see what the possible openings were, rather than wait for the last moment," said Father Bradshaw, who will replace the retiring Father Thomas Statt.

Bishop Clark noted that only in special circumstances may a priest extend a pastorate beyond 12 years. "There are exceptions for a good cause — if he is close to retirement, has some particular health issue or has a language gift," the bishop explained.

Meanwhile, some diocesan priests are exempt from this policy altogether. If they began their current pastorate before 1986, when the new policy was enacted, they are

grandfathered and may remain at their current parish for an indefinite period.

However, even though Bishop Clark said he is "not empowered to make laws that are retroactive," he hopes that grandfathered priests will follow the spirit of the policy.

"It's important that all of our priests consider the benefits of a move for them. But having said that, I don't want to move with a heavy hand," he commented.

Bishop Clark is nearing 21 years as diocesan bishop. Asked why terms are imposed on pastors, but not on himself as bishop, he said a priest is "ordained in the service of a diocese," not a particular parish. So when a pastorate is viewed in this broader sense, it becomes more synonymous with the bishop's role as minister of the diocese.

New views of priesthood

With a 12-year limit on pastorates, Bishop Clark said, both the priest and parish can be energized when a pastor takes a new assignment. He added that Vatican II brought about "a fresh understanding of an ordained priest. There was a tremendous emphasis on the ordained minister being the servant of his community."

The current perspective, Father Roy Kiggins said, is: "It's not my (the priest's) parish, it's our parish."

Father Kiggins is in the first-year as pastor of the Roman Catholic Community of Geneva, after having served 12 years as pastor at Church of the Nativity in Brockport. He favors the term policy, saying, "It gives a new challenge and a new perspective."

Father Kiggins added that his parish is a newly formed cluster, comprising St. Stephen's and St. Francis de Sales churches, and that

he's "just begun to scratch the surface" of learning about the parish.

On the other hand, Father Robert O'Neill said he was slow to embrace the term policy at the time it was formulated. "I was on Priests' Council and wasn't in the majority by a long shot," he said.

Back then, Father O'Neill explained, he struggled to understand Vatican II's goal of making priests less isolated from their community "but then when you made friends, you had to leave."

Father O'Neill served as pastor at Rochester's Church of the Annunciation from 1987 to 1998. Had the term policy not existed, he said, he likely would have stayed at Annunciation. He became administrator of St. Christopher Church in Chili in 1998 and was named pastor in 1999.

Only now, Father O'Neill said, does he realize how beneficial the move was for him.

"I probably would not have moved from Annunciation if I didn't have to," he said. "But when I look back, I think I was getting into a rut."

Changing parishes, he said, "was the best

thing in the world for me. I've recommended to my (priest) friends who are grandfathered to do the same."

Father Schrader pointed out that changes in pastorates may become even more frequent in upcoming years, 12-year limits notwithstanding.

"It's almost becoming a moot point. With pastoral planning and clustering, it's rare that anyone will get to the end of their 12th year before they move on," Father Schrader said.

Bishop Clark noted that with a declining number of active priests, pastors can expect to switch parishes more frequently.

"We need to be more mobile and flexible. This policy can help that," the bishop said.

Father Bradshaw said that in the past, when three or four priests might have resided at a single parish, "It was more understandable that a pastor might stay there the rest of his life." And Father Schrader noted that Msgr. Thomas F. Connors, the founding pastor of Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish in 1902, "graduated me from Blessed Sacrament grade school in 1963."

However, Father O'Neill said that a pastor who stays that long might be idolized to



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Father Thomas Mull, center, consults with Father Walter Wainwright, who also is moving, at St. Mary's, Canandaigua. Pastoral Associate Monette Mahoney looks on.

the point that parishioners won't accept any other pastor.

"They might say, 'Nobody can take his place,'" Father O'Neill remarked.

Msgr. Paul M. Dudziak, former teacher of pastoral studies at Washington (D.C.) Theological Union, noted the dangers of long-term pastorates in a 1995 article in *Church* magazine. "How Long a Pastorate?" He listed stagnation; formation of cliques; authoritarianism; and loss of sense of the wider church as potential hazards.

However, Msgr. Dudziak's article generally favored lengthy pastorates. The advantages, he wrote, included familiarity with one's community; fostering of vocations; and management of long-term plans. Although Msgr. Dudziak reported that about two-thirds of all U.S. dioceses invoke term limits, he views such a policy as a deterrent to continuity and stability.

"The systematic dysfunction of a diocese lies ... in the fact that the necessity of transfers is presumed or even made inevitable," wrote Msgr. Dudziak, who currently serves as pastor of Jesus the Good Shepherd Parish in Dunkirk, Md.

Father Frank Lioi, pastor of St. Anne Church in Rochester, said he would like to remain at St. Anne beyond the year 2001, when his second six-year term is due to end. He said that a long-term pastorate may be favorable if a priest such as himself "still feels energized" in his current position. Father Lioi also said he hopes to continue living near his elderly mother, who resides close to St. Anne.

Challenges of transition

Yet Bishop Clark, when asked if a priest can stay beyond 12 years simply because he enjoys his assignment, firmly said no.

"There wouldn't be any of those exceptions," he said. "Otherwise there would be no sense in having the policy."

The bishop pointed out that the reassignment of pastors after 12 years "is not an arbitrary decision on my part," but rather the enforcement of a policy that he supported but did not devise.

"I think the people complain sometimes that the bishop is making the priests move," Father Schrader said. "But it was the priests who wanted this."

Despite his acceptance of the policy, Father Schrader acknowledged that change isn't easy. He is completing his eighth year as pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Auburn, and knows that his stay won't extend beyond the year 2004.

"Auburn is a very nice place, but there's a realistic side. In four years I'll be looking," he said.

Although Father Bradshaw is looking forward to his new pastorate at Our Mother of Sorrows, he said he'll miss the close ties he has formed at Holy Ghost. "There's a grieving process involved. It's very, very painful," he said.

Just ask Jeannine McGorray, who is an organizer of Father Bradshaw's June 11 farewell reception.

"You keep thinking of all the good things that have happened," McGorray said. "I won't kid you, we're all very disappointed. But we knew it was coming."

McGorray said she supports various aspects of the term policy, saying that it keeps a pastor "from getting so enmeshed in the personalities that you don't get an objective view sometimes." But as far as Father Bradshaw goes, "In this case I'm not too thrilled," she said with a laugh.

McGorray said she's trying to keep an open mind, realizing that the transition will be difficult for Father Bradshaw as well as Holy Ghost's newly assigned pastor, Father Albert Delmonte.

Bishop Clark said that it's natural for a congregation to grieve the departure of a beloved pastor, but that they generally accept the new pastor over time.

"Several months down the road they might say to me, 'Oh, Father Jones or Brown or Smith is really nice,'" the bishop remarked.

Sacred Heart's Father Mull said he plans to make the best of his transfer to St. Mary's in Canandaigua, remarking, "I'm moving on to another avenue of ministry." He will replace Father Walter Wainwright, who is leaving after nine years to become pastor at St. Anthony/St. Patrick Cluster in Elmira.

Back at Sacred Heart, Mary Anne Taylor grudgingly accepts Father Mull's move.

"I guess there has to be growth for the priests," Taylor said. "He has to get around and meet different people to shepherd to."

"I just love him to pieces, and I hope he's going to be happy."

Catholic Courier

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We expect the Opinion page to return next week.