

# Diocesan study will address priest shortage

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

Faced with a dwindling and aging body of priests, diocesan leaders have planned a study of administrative and sacramental resources for parishes. As a result, no permanent administrative appointments will be made until the summer of 2001.

Sandy Grocki, diocesan coordinator of clergy services, said that three parishes — Irondequoit's St. Margaret Mary, Auburn's St. Francis of Assisi and Avon's St. Agnes — are currently assigned interim administrators. Unexpected openings that arise before next summer also will be filled with interim appointments.

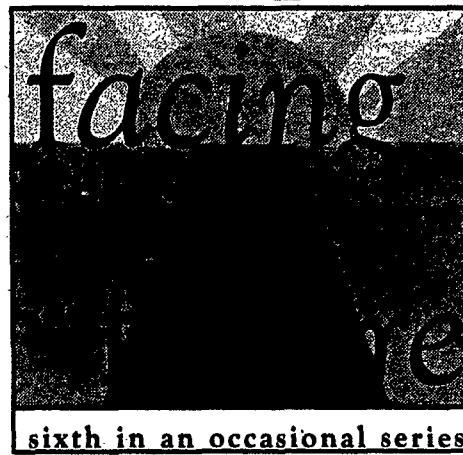
According to Father Michael Conboy, diocesan director of priest personnel, the study is due to begin in late November. It

will be completed in February so results can be factored into the round of pastoral assignments that will begin next summer.

The study will be a collaborative effort between the Priest Personnel Board and an advisory group of diocesan officials. Among the issues to be discussed, according to Father Conboy are: the aging of priests and their needs; projected statistics on ordinations and retirements; the utilization of permanent deacons; and the availability of qualified lay pastoral administrators.

"We're taking a look at the overall picture, how we can best use these people," Father Conboy said.

He said the need for such a study hit home when 61-year-old Father Ronald Harley, pastor of Avon's St. Agnes Parish, suddenly died Sept. 26.



"The red alert was there," Father Conboy remarked. "You say, 'Oh my gosh, what's happening?'"

In an Oct. 11 letter to the priests of the

diocese, Bishop Matthew H. Clark cited telling statistics. He noted that Father Harley was the 17th diocesan priest to die since early 1999. Like Father Harley, many of those priests had not reached retirement age. Bishop Clark also pointed out that seven priests retired last June, while only two were ordained.

"These simple statistics have given us great concern for effective future ministry and placed us now in a position of strategizing and studying our human resources more closely," the bishop stated. "For this reason and others, I have directed our Priest Personnel Board and my close advisors to take time to study the current diocesan situation more critically before any new appointments of pastors are made."

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# Catholic Courier

■ DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 112 NO.7 ■ THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2000 ■ 75¢ ■ 12 PAGES

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## Slings and Holy Land misfortune

In many ways, Leon Katzen, an 82-year-old lawyer in Rochester, and Mitch Kaidy, a 75-year-old retired newspaper, radio and TV journalist, politician and state legislative aide, are alike.

Both men served in the U.S. Army in Europe during the Second World War. Both men saw with their own eyes liberated concentration camps built by the Nazis where Jews and others were killed.

And both men believe Israelis and Palestinians today dehumanize each other through word and deed. However, the two men do not agree where most of the blame for this tension lies.

Katzen will point out that there are pro-Palestinian sites on the Internet filled with anti-Semitic screeds that rival anything Adolf Hitler and his minions authored. He'll argue that the Palestinians have used the time since both sides signed an accord in 1993 as an opportunity to prepare for a final assault against the hated Israelis.

"I am a pessimist," said Katzen, a Conservative Jew who attends Temple Beth El in Brighton. "I believe that the Palestinians do not, nor never have wanted, to have a peace accord."

Kaidy, a first-generation Lebanese-American whose parents were Eastern Orthodox Christians, primarily reserves his skepticism for the Israelis. If Israel wants peace, why has it allowed thousands of its citizens to settle in Palestinian territories, he'll ask.

"I like to see everybody receive justice, and I don't think the Palestinians have received justice," said Kaidy, who lives in Brighton. "When you dispossess people, when you brutalize them, you have outbursts."

And with the breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in recent weeks, both men joined other observers within and outside the Diocese of Rochester to share their views of the violence that has wracked the region since September.

### Whose news?

Katzen's son emigrated to Israel 11 years ago and has become a citizen, and his grandson recently reported for duty in the Israeli navy. Katzen himself recently returned from visiting Israel.

In his journalistic travels, Kaidy has visited Israel, the Palestinian territories, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Both men said that the U.S. news media distort the truth of the current conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.

For Katzen, that bias most hurts the region's Jews who, he said, are being portrayed as murderers of innocent Palestinian children and civilian demonstrators dying in the current street battles raging between Israeli security forces and Palestinians. Katzen said the news media focuses on children throwing rocks and ignores the snipers in the rioting crowds who have shot at Israelis.

"How does a country like Israel fight this kind of an insurrection?" Katzen asked rhetorically. Stating that the Israelis are losing the public relations battle to the Palestinians, he added, "I think the Arabs have finally found a way to defeat Israel."

For Kaidy, news media bias most hurts the region's Arabs, whether they be Palestinians portrayed as terrorists or Muslims generally being portrayed as religious fanatics. The press does not focus on why a Palestinian child might want to toss a rock at an Israeli soldier, only on the fact that someone so young is doing so.

"Nobody thinks that Arab people care when children are shot through the head."



Reuters/CNS

A Palestinian boy uses a slingshot to throw stones at an Israeli Army post in the south Gaza Strip town of Rafah Oct. 30. At least 30 Palestinians were injured when Israeli soldiers opened fire on Palestinian stone throwers there.

Both men have actively worked to change the bias they see. Katzen founded a local chapter of the national group CAMERA — Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America — which regularly details reports it sees betraying an anti-Israeli slant in the news.

Kaidy currently heads The Rochester Committee for Middle East Peace, and has written newspaper opinion pieces that have expressed sympathy for the Palestinians.

### Two testaments

Father Labib Kobi, 50, is a Roman Catholic priest whose Palestinian family was expelled from their home in 1948 during the turmoil that attended Israel's birth. Raised in Lebanon, Father Kobi

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STORY BY ROB CULLIVAN