

## Necessity hastens pending changes

One of the many benefits that has arisen from our Pastoral Planning Process is the wonderful spirit of collaboration characterizing the 35 planning groups throughout our 12-county diocese. Opportunities to share ideas and resources have opened the door to learning for many who previously had taken a more parochial approach to involvement in their church.

I'm hoping that this same collaborative spirit between clergy and laity manifests itself once again as we enter the time of year when pastoral positions are filled.

As we continue forward in the season of Lent and anticipate the wonderful changes the spring season will soon bring, I'm reminded that — just like the season — our church experiences change as well. One such example is the process by which individuals, be they priests or lay people, are appointed to parish leadership positions.

It is surely no secret that one of our most important resources, our diocesan priests, are growing scarcer and older, and that the demands placed on them are growing proportionately greater. The effect of this reality on their spiritual, physical and emotional health is of great concern to me.

It is also a fact that an increasing number of our parishes are led by pastoral administrators, rather than ordained priests. These wonderfully gifted leaders include women religious, deacons and laity. You will be happy to know that we have very high standards for admission to the pool of potential administrators and that all candidates are carefully screened.

In the past, when pastoral leadership positions needed to be filled, the initial process involved trying to match the right priest with the right position. Only when a particular planning group requested it — or when no priest was available to serve the parish — did we consider asking one of our qualified candidates to serve as pastoral administrator.

This past year, I asked a representative committee to act on the recommendation of our Priests' Council that we put a new procedure in place for filling such openings. The committee's plan, the Priest Personnel Strategic Plan, recommends that

### along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

when a pastorate becomes vacant, both priests and those in the pastoral administrator pool might apply, with the Priest Personnel Board then recommending the preferred candidate for my appointment.

A priest will always be preferred to a lay person as the prime pastoral leader of a community, but this will be less possible in the future. Given the continued decline in our number of priests, I would like the Personnel Board to have the freedom when no suitable priest is available to recommend the person who, all factors considered, board members judge to be the best for the position.

Several factors will be important in developing such recommendations. Among them are: 1) analysis of the needs and strengths of the parish community; 2) awareness of the experience, gifts and desires of the pastoral ministers in question; and 3) the work of a transition team that will meet with the incumbent pastoral leader, parish staff and parish pastoral council to confirm that the needs identified are accurate.

In the end, I want the Personnel Board to recommend to me the most qualified candidate, given the needs of the local community in question, the overall ministerial needs of the diocese, and the particular needs of individual priests.

I write this now so that you will not be surprised or feel put upon should your parish be among those affected by such changes in the future. But, as I have indicated above, we must be realistic about the fact that our wonderful priests are diminishing in number and growing older. To provide you with the best possible priestly ministry

and to preserve their health and well-being, we need to make such adjustments.

Thank God, we enjoy the ministry of a growing number of well-qualified lay pastoral ministers and permanent deacons. Their generosity, together with that of our priests, ensures that we will be able to continue offering quality pastoral care to all.

As I ask all of these pastoral ministers to work in a cooperative spirit in the best interest of the communities they serve, so I must ask you and all of our people to understand and accept the adjustments you may need to make. That may mean accepting a changed Mass schedule even if it affects your tee time. It may mean understanding that a marriage witnessed by a deacon is no less a sacramental marriage than is one witnessed by a priest — or even a bishop! The same is true for baptism.

The fact is, dear friends, that we are in an age of the church in which we and many other dioceses need to make the kinds of adjustments to which I refer here. My knowledge of you over the years gives birth in me to a deep confidence that we'll do it well — and might even become stronger in the midst of it all.

Two brief closing notes about themes I know to be of great interest to you:

1) We will continue our efforts to attract and support potential candidates for the priesthood. I ask you to pray for this intention and to encourage such vocations in any way you can.

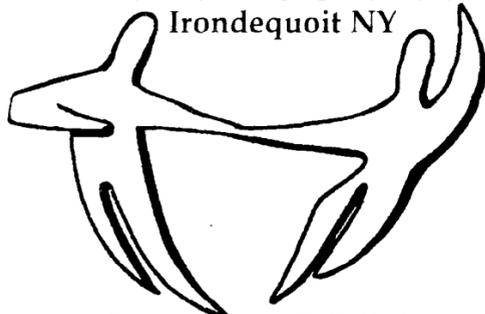
2) Our priests may retire, depending on circumstances, between the ages of 67 and 75. The Priest Personnel Strategic Plan encourages me to appoint interested retired priests as sacramental ministers in parishes led by pastoral administrators. In addition, it recommends that I assign willing retired priests, individually or as teams, to serve the sacramental needs of our parishes. I am happy to make such assignments until the age of 75. Thereafter, I shall prize whatever ministry they choose to offer to our community.

I know that I have raised many issues here. If I can provide further information, or greater clarity, please let me know.

Peace to all.

## Reaching Out In Faith and Friendship

ST. SALOME'S CHURCH  
Irondequoit NY



### Census 2001

Sunday, March 25, 2001 • from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Parishioners from St. Salome's will be collecting information about all baptized Catholics throughout the parish.

The parish borders Lake Ontario on the north, Irondequoit Bay on the east, Titus Avenue on the South, and Willow Creek Lane on the west.

Call 323-1160 For More Information

## PRINCIPAL

Elementary School (Pre K - 6th).

St. Agnes, in the heart of the Adirondacks of New York State. MS in Elementary Education or Administration preferred. Experience in a similar position a major plus. Candidate should be a practicing Catholic.

Inquires and CV to J. Michael Gaffney, Pastor, St. Agnes Parish, 6 Hillcrest Ave, Lake Placid, NY 12946 • Fax: 518-523-2203.

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