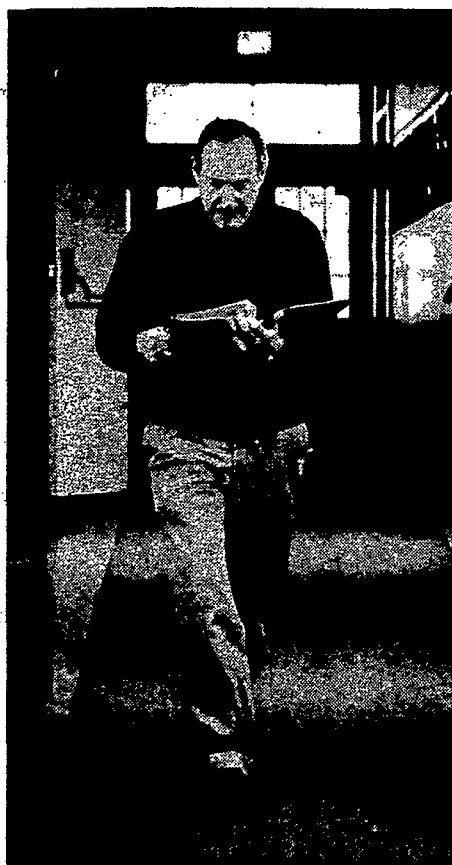


# SPECIAL REPORT



Bishop Clark, checks his materials en route to a workshop at leadership day.

Priest as a regular feature of a parish or faith community. It is essential that we respect these guidelines, lest it appear that something that might look like a Eucharist is taken to be Eucharist. While we face more difficult times ahead, we will be far from the situation that prevails in many parts of the world where it is not possible to have Sunday Eucharist in every parish. We must not let our need

*(O)ur concern must not be with the numbers of priests, Masses or worship sites, but rather with the quality and vitality of parishes and faith communities.*

for convenience or our habits lead us into questionable practice.

Whatever the long term future may hold, over the next five years of the planning process weekly Sunday Eucharist must be part of the life of every parish.

## A comment about the relationship between number of priests and parishes:

There is and must be some relationship between the number of priests and the number of parishes that can reasonably be supported. We've avoided setting arbitrary standards. However, the adverse impact of continuing the same number of parishes with a declining number of priests argues for a clearer norm. Given the canonical limit on the number of Masses to be said by a priest and the centrality of Sunday Eucharist, a full time priest should logically be responsible for no more than three parishes or worship sites. A single priest cannot effectively serve clusters of four or more parishes or worship sites either as pastor or sacramental minister. Such a setting would require more than one priest. These are not rigid rules. Other sacramental ministry support, size of staff and other factors need to be considered. But there is a limit to what we can reasonably and justly expect from even the best of our pastoral leaders.

## Priest Personnel strategic plan for 2025

All of the above notwithstanding, how we answer those questions in 2025 may differ from the way we would today. To make sure that we are moving toward that future rather than simply making minor adjustments while we play for time, I have asked Priest Personnel to provide me, and then you, with its best judgment of the way that our limited number of priests will be assigned in that year, 2025. In addition, I will ask them to provide us their best estimates of the number of priests to be available to each planning group in a way that is consistent with this longer-term view. It is important that you keep the 2025 expectations in view as you develop your five-year plans. As difficult as it may be, your short-term planning must be compatible with the long-term expectations. To do otherwise would be to pretend that we do not know what we know all too well.

To prepare for this important next step, I will be consulting with the Priests' Council and the Stewardship Council about the best way to involve the people of the Diocese. I am especially mindful of the experience that you and your and your colleagues in pastoral planning would bring to such an understanding.

## My view of the future

I do not, my dear friends, want to pass

on to my successor problems and issues that we are capable of dealing with and do not simply because they are difficult or disagreeable. Each generation of the Church must go through its own Passover from death to life in order to prepare the Church for the next generation. We face wonderful opportunities and challenging problems. An honest and full experience of both will allow us to be open to the creative power of the Spirit. God has a difficult time operating in illusion and delusion. God reveals in a sense of reality. The vitality of parishes and faith communities will continue to be our highest priority. But that vitality may very well look different. We are likely to have more non-Eucharistic wedding and funeral liturgies presided over by deacons and possibly by lay ecclesial ministers — professionally trained, caring pastoral ministers. We are likely to have fewer hospital and nursing home visits from priests and more from lay ecclesial ministers, trained, caring pastoral ministers, as well as trained, caring volunteers. We are likely to have more lay people managing the financial and administrative functions of parishes. Our joint task assisted by the Spirit as always, is to find ways for the Church of Rochester to remain vital and, in fact, to become even more vital and vibrant with these challenges.

## Conclusion

I look forward to our dialog here today and throughout the next year as we prepare for the next round of planning. I end where I began: I cannot imagine a group of people with whom I would rather journey than the people of this Diocese, and I thank you very, very much.

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