

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Pastor's departure leaves major hole in Cayuga

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

A six-church parish in Cayuga County is struggling to keep its current structure intact following the sudden departure of its pastor.

Father Brian Jeffers, 37, who had led the six churches in Good Shepherd Catholic Community since 1998, was granted a leave of absence by Bishop Matthew H. Clark on April 18. According to Father Michael Conboy, diocesan director of priest personnel, the leave took effect immediately.

Father Jeffers had first informed the parish community of his impending departure in the April 15 weekly bulletin.

Although Bob Hazelton, parish pastoral council chair, said he "had a gut feeling" that Father Jeffers was struggling with his vocation, he said he "was very, very surprised" by the pastor's abrupt exit.

Father Conboy said that temporary sacramental ministers would cover the gap from now until late June, when a new pastoral leader would be appointed.

However, Father Conboy noted that no applications for the Good Shepherd pastorate had been received. This prompted Father Conboy to meet with the Good Shepherd parish council at a specially scheduled meeting on April 16. He was joined by two diocesan officials: Bill Pickett, diocesan director of planning; and Casey Lopata, a planning liaison.

The meeting took place at St. Bernard's Church in Scipio Center. The other five churches in the Good Shepherd community are St. Joseph, Cayuga; St. Patrick, Aurora; St. Michael, Union Springs; Our Lady of the Lake, King Ferry; and St. Patrick, Moravia.

Father Conboy said it remains possible that Bishop Clark will ask someone who

has not applied to take on the vacant position as either a pastor or pastoral administrator. Father Conboy stated that he "absolutely" wants leadership of the cluster resolved by the time new pastoral appointments take effect June 26.

But in order to make the position more attractive to potential applicants, changes may have to take place.

Asked whether there is a link between Father Jeffers' departure and the challenges posed by the Good Shepherd pastorate, Father Conboy said this "is almost implicit" in the fact that nobody has offered to succeed him. Good Shepherd comprises 450 families spread over a large portion of southern Cayuga County.

"If they were all in one place it would be a nice little community, but it's rural," Father Conboy said, asking rhetorically, "Should this be reconfigured so it looks more user-friendly?"

Such a reconfiguration might include closing at least one of the church buildings permanently, Father Conboy said. "I did hear a couple people (on April 16) verbalize that maybe it's time to say we want to do something about this."

If a new pastoral leader does not emerge under Good Shepherd's present configuration, Hazelton said, the possibility of closing worship sites must at least be explored.

"It's my personal opinion that we're going to have to visit that soon," Hazelton said.

But nothing is set in stone at this time, Father Conboy stated. "They're really fine people who are very involved in pastoral planning. But they're not ready to arrive at final decisions yet," he said.

Hazelton said that during pastoral planning in 1997, the six churches worked hard to create a situation that would enable each of them to remain open.

"These churches had been very independent, and wanted to maintain that independence. We'd said, 'Let's not roll over right in the beginning,'" Hazelton said.

Good Shepherd Catholic Community was formed in 1999. At that time, all six churches were canonically suppressed for the purpose of forming one parish with six worship sites. This was in accordance with the Southern Cayuga Planning Group's goal of keeping all six churches open at least part-time. Four weekend Masses have been rotated among the six churches most of the year, and six Masses have been offered on weekends in the summer. One full-time pastor was to oversee this configuration, celebrating three weekend Masses, with sacramental ministers celebrating the others.

Judging from Father Jeffers' April 15 bulletin article, the workload was too much.

"Having the responsibility of six churches and all that it entails becomes overwhelming after a time and I see the need to step aside," Father Jeffers wrote.

Debbie Patrick, former chair of the Southern Cayuga Planning Group, said she can sympathize with Father Jeffers.

"It would be an understatement to say that Father Brian's assignment has simply been a 'challenge,'" Patrick remarked. "It has been a great struggle over the past three years for our six faith communities to come together as one parish ... I'm not

sure we fully realized how difficult a pastor would find this job, or the level of stress and psychic demands that could result."

In his April 15 bulletin article, Father Jeffers indicated that these stresses played partially into his desire to take a leave of absence. The other main reason, he wrote, is the Roman Catholic Church's current stand on priestly celibacy.

"I have personally come to realize the need in my life for the support of a companion," Father Jeffers wrote. "Unfortunately, with the present discipline of the church that is not something that can or will be realized in the near future."

Yet Hazelton said that Father Jeffers' experience wasn't a fair indicator of whether the Good Shepherd pastorate is a realistic workload. He pointed out that the Southern Cayuga Planning Group worked hard to enact its pastoral plan and received diocesan approval for it.

"I felt Father Jeffers was not prepared to be a pastor by the diocese. A person who had experience as a manager of multiple sites would have faced less of a problem," Hazelton said, pointing out that Good Shepherd marked Father Jeffers' first pastorate.

Father Jeffers was ordained a diocesan priest in 1992. He served as priest intern at St. Mary's Parish in Canandaigua, from 1992-95; and as parish vicar at St. Stephen's, Geneva, from 1995-98.

## St. Ann's seeks second campus

By Kathleen Schwar  
Assistant editor

In its 125-year existence, St. Ann's Community has grown to include Heritage apartments, Chapel Oaks retirement units, a nursing home, adult-day care and Transitional Care Center. Now it plans to build a second community in Webster, seven miles east of its Irondequoit campus.

"We have really seen a market need in that area," said Debra Metzger, vice president of planning and project development for St. Ann's. Many of the adult children of St. Ann residents live in the Penfield-Webster area, she said. "We hope that based on what we are proposing, people recognize it is what they will need or their mother or father will need."

The Webster Town Board has referred the project to the town planning board.

The three-phase plan would be developed over probably four years, beginning this winter or spring 2002, according to Metzger. The 41-acre site is off Ridge Road (Route 404) east of Five Mile Line Road, across from small businesses, Webster High School and townhouses.

"There is no question in my mind ... that the proposal St. Ann's is making certainly would fill a need in the Webster community and this part of the Rochester region," remarked Cathryn Thomas, Webster town supervisor.

However, she noted that St. Ann's appearance before the town board April 19 was "just a very preliminary step" and that the town's planning board will need to address issues including density of the development, number of parking spaces and the traffic impact. The property is zoned commercial, and St. Ann's will seek to have it rezoned for multiple residential use. Land adjacent to the site is zoned high-density commercial, with a Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse proposed.

The first phase of the St. Ann's propos-

al calls for 76 assisted-living units, in which residents could receive help with bathing, dressing and eating. It also includes 68 moderate-income independent apartment, and 35 1,200-square-foot patio homes.

Residents of the patio homes and apartments would be offered "a la carte" services including meals and housekeeping. The assisted-living apartments would include about 26 beds for people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

The second phase would create 100-120 skilled nursing care beds. The third phase would create 26 more assisted-living units, 68 moderate-income independent living apartments and 33 patio homes, based on market demand by that time.

A multi-purpose building would be open to all residents for shared meals and most likely a chapel and religious services.

The first phase is estimated to cost \$23 million, while the total project costs could go as high as \$55 million, roughly estimated, Metzger said. She said St. Ann's had considered property in the Penfield area about a year ago, but never came to a resolution on purchase of the property.

The Webster property was once rezoned to medium-high residential when a company planned to develop senior apartments there, but the zoning reverted to commercial because those plans were never developed, according to Thomas.

Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580)  
Vol. 112 No. 29, April 26, 2001  
Published weekly except the last Thursday in December.  
Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.  
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

## Rhinos rage at Kearney

Rochester Rhino Nasho Kirov (left) and Joe Baiata of St. Bonaventure University battle at an exhibition game the Rhinos won, 1-0, April 17. The game was at Bishop Kearney High School, Rochester, the official 2001 season training site for the Rochester Raging Rhinos. The Rhinos have used a third-floor dorm unit as a dressing room.

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