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Orders

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as the Redemptorists at St. Joseph, Rochester; Conventual Franciscans at St. Hyacinth, Auburn; Missionaries of the Precious Blood at Most Precious Blood, Rochester; and Capuchin Franciscans at St. Francis Solanus in Interlaken, Holy Cross in Ovid and St. James in Trumansburg.

In 1976, the Basilians moved into full-time parish ministry when they took over Christ the King, Irondequoit, after its former pastor resigned and diocesan officials gave parishioners the option of being staffed by a religious order.

"I think religious bring a different sense of things. We put a different emphasis on community itself," said Father Norman Tanck, pastor, explaining that Basilians typically live in groups. Four priests currently reside at Christ the King.

Father Tanck added that his Toronto-based order has just begun a new agreement for staffing Christ the King that will last the next five or six years. Once such an agreement is established between his order and the Rochester Diocese, he said, "We are under the same obligations as the other parish priests."

Even the order priests who are not working full-time in parishes provide valuable sacramental assistance. For example, in June 2001, the *Courier* profiled Jesuit Father John Carriero, a long-time guidance counselor at McQuaid Jesuit High School, who has celebrated Sunday Masses at the Monroe County Jail for more than a decade. Several other Jesuits conduct weekend Mass in parishes, noted Jesuit Father James J. Fischer, president of McQuaid.

"A pastor will send a note over. It's rather informal," he said of the way arrangements are handled.

Father Michael Conboy, diocesan director of priest personnel, said the current shortage of diocesan priests would have seemed more pronounced without the availability of order priests.

"We're indebted to the service of these men," Father Conboy said.

Though they can't celebrate sacraments, women religious have played major roles in parish leadership as well, serving in a array of pastoral roles in recent decades.

"It's a need in the church. They've very generously moved into those areas," Pickett said.

"The parishes were kind of the next generation of ministry for us," Sister Stevenson remarked.

Meanwhile, both the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of St. Joseph have expanded their social-ministry initiatives, often working with the inner-city and rural poor.

"We feel we need to be out there wherever there is a need. And there are still ministries out there that we haven't even touched," commented Sister Janice Morgan, president of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester.

Sister Morgan, who also chairs the state Leadership Conference of Women Religious, said opportunities for ministry are greater for women religious in Rochester than in many other dioceses.

"We have a bishop (Matthew H. Clark) who listens and allows us to be pastoral administrators, pastoral associates and parish visitors. These positions are where many of our women want to be," Sister Morgan said.



James Stein/Photo intern

During Holy Thursday Mass at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, Sister Jacquelyn Reichart (second from right), sings along with the parish's sacramental minister, Father Joseph A. Hart (left), as well as Father John Walsh and youth minister Rebecca Mable.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame likewise have branched out from their teaching ministry. Sister Janice Nadeau, who served for many years as a teacher and administrator in diocesan schools, was a pastoral associate at Holy Ghost Parish in Gates. After 13 years there, she became the pastoral minister at Rochester's Holy Family Parish slightly more than a year ago.

"The (SSND) congregation is very open to us seeking our own jobs, saying to be happy in whatever you do," Sister Nadeau said. "They pretty much respect who we are and what we can do."

Despite this evolution, Sister Reichart emphasized that women religious should not completely sever their ties to education. "I think it's an extremely critical and valuable ministry for us," she commented.

Stretching resources

Due to declining resources, however, it's unlikely that religious orders will be able to maintain their current levels of service in the Rochester Diocese. Unlike diocesan ministry, these orders must concern themselves with a much wider geographic area. For instance, the Basilians are also active in Toronto and Detroit, as are the Jesuits in New York City and the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Baltimore and Boston. And, the Sisters of St. Joseph and Sisters of Mercy operate missions in other countries.

A sign of these scarce resources can be found in high-school ministry. In recent years, the Basilians have left Aquinas Institute, and the Christian Brothers have left Bishop Kearney. And, there is only one remaining School Sister of Notre Dame still teaching at Kearney.

Father Fischer said McQuaid Jesuit is faring comparatively well, with nine Jesuits and three Carmelite priests still on staff. Yet he also noted that the Jesuit residence at the school was once home for up to 32 priests. "It's sad," he said.

Parishes have felt these losses as well. Redemptorist and Precious Blood priests are no longer involved in full-time parish ministry in the diocese, and there are fewer Basilians and Jesuits in support roles.

With only five order priests serving full-time in diocesan ministry — compared to 149 diocesan priests and 21 externs — Pickett said it's unrealistic to factor a sudden influx of religious orders into the pastoral-

planning process. He added that religious communities based at monasteries, retreat houses and other private residences within diocesan boundaries are under no obligation to help staff the diocese.

"They do what they can, when they can. It's kind of a loose system to begin with," Pickett remarked. "It's not like we can turn to religious orders, saying, 'We have a pool of priests and we can substitute them for diocesan priests.'"

"They're going through the same experiences as the diocese — older clergy and inherent health problems," Father Conboy said.

At McQuaid, Father Fischer said the Jesuit priests' top concern is their school community. "We have a lot of activities that go on right here in the school. We have Masses connected with football games and banquets," he said. "Alumni are constantly calling for baptisms and weddings." Regarding requests from the diocese, he said, "You just try to take as much as you can."

Father Tanck observed that some dioceses — not including Rochester — are seeking support from the Basilians with increasing frequency. The danger in this, he said, is that "religious priests are drifting away from their charisms. Our community life itself is a gift to the church — if we aren't living together, the gift is gone."

As for women religious, statistics provided by their congregations show a significant drop-off in the years ahead. Sister Morgan said there are currently 376 Sisters of St. Joseph, and slightly less than half of them are active full-time. That compares to 449 sisters five years ago, with a projected total of 125 by the year 2025. Only 10 to 15 of them won't already have reached retirement age in 2025.

Ten years ago, the Sisters of Mercy had 164 active and 71 retired sisters. Today the order has 87 active and 110 retired sisters, and projects only 28 active and 115 retired sisters a decade from now. Meanwhile, Sister Nadeau said more than 150 School Sis-

ters of Notre Dame worked in the diocese at one time. Now there are fewer than 20.

These statistics bespeak a cultural shift that does not favor religious vocations, said Patricia Finnerty, director of the diocesan Office of Vocations Awareness.

"The climate of the world is to make more money and have better jobs. We're all fighting that in vocations; we have to be countercultural," Finnerty said.

"You're never going to see again the numbers we saw," Sister Stevenson added.

Ongoing push for vocations

Yet Finnerty is optimistic for the future. "Maybe it's not the numbers everyone would want, but people are still being called," she said. "I'm pretty encouraged by the upcoming generation. They're not just talking about service — they're doing it. And this could translate into vocations."

The Office of Vocations Awareness was created in 1999. Its primary, but not only, focus has been to attract young men to the diocesan priesthood. Although Finnerty said she doesn't discourage men from joining religious orders, doing so would most likely mean those people would leave the diocese for service elsewhere.

Finnerty said her office also works closely with vocation-awareness coordinators at the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of St. Joseph. Women's religious orders are additionally promoted by the vocations-awareness office through special informational days and visits to schools, college campuses and diocesan youth-ministry events. Finnerty said this exposure is crucial, noting that young people have "asked all kinds of questions" at these sessions.

Finnerty added that "A real grassroots education is needed so people know what a sister is." Sister Morgan agreed, saying it's important to dispel stereotypes of women religious such as those portrayed in "Sister Act" and "Nunsense."

Sisters Morgan and Stevenson also said they're pleased by the growing success of their orders' lay associate programs, in which women can observe disciplines of an order without taking perpetual vows.

Although Sister Morgan acknowledged that religious orders are "going to look different in the coming years," she believes that "fewer doesn't mean we can't do as much. I think religious life is going to be viable in the future."

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