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Shortage

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"Everything has gone along as planned. There have been confirmations, first Communions," Grocki said.

Quick adjustments

Whereas priests who announce their retirement usually give several months' notice, removal of the four diocesan pastors for sexual-abuse allegations occurred quickly and without public warning.

Father Conboy said he and other members of the diocesan Department of Human Resources visited all the affected parishes and met with representatives "as soon as possible" following the removals. The top priorities were to hear concerns and then quickly identify temporary administrators. "If you don't appoint somebody it can break into divisions, anarchy, whatever," Father Conboy explained.

The temporary administrators have been: St. Mary Our Mother — Father Robert C. MacNamara, a retired priest who lives at the parish; St. Paul — Father Brian Cool, Catholic chaplain at the University of Rochester, who lives at St. Paul; and St. Pius Tenth — Deacon Leo Aman, former campus minister at Nazareth College, who became the parish's part-time deacon last fall.

Michael Tedesco, diocesan director of communications, said July 1 that no temporary administrator had yet been appointed for St. Patrick's in Seneca Falls.

Several priests have made themselves available to help plug the holes for sacramental coverage at these parishes. The same has held true at St. Joseph's Hospital in the wake of Father Brodnick's departure.

"The generosity of our senior priests has been outstanding — them and the extern priests," Grocki said.

Father MacNamara and Father Cool returned to their previous statuses when, on June 25, Father Christopher Linsler became the new pastor at St. Mary Our Mother and Father Stanley Kacprzak took over the pastorate at St. Paul. As of July 23, Father Daniel Holland — currently the pastor at St. Theodore's in Gates — will become the new pastor at St. Pius Tenth.

Meanwhile, St. Joseph's Hospital announced June 17 that Deacon George Welch, of Elmira's Eastside Catholic Parish, and Mary Ann Klee, pastoral associate at Henrietta's Church of the Good Shepherd, have been hired to replace Father Brodnick and the hospital's other chaplain, Sister of St. Joseph Margot Mann, who recently resigned. Because neither new chaplain is a priest, "our plan now is to talk with the local clergy and work out an arrangement" to get future sacramental coverage, said Denis Sweeney, the hospital's director of marketing and community development.

Father Conboy noted that sacraments were not a major issue with regard to the three non-pastors who were removed by Bishop Clark in early May. Father William Lum had not been allowed to celebrate

Mass, and Fathers Thomas Corbett and Robert O'Neill had only been celebrating liturgies on a limited basis, usually at nuns' residences.

Helping to heal

The temporary administrators at St. Mary Our Mother, St. Paul and St. Pius Tenth were all thrust into action within days after the pastors were removed. Father MacNamara, 76, who has lived in retirement at St. Mary Our Mother since 1992, said he agreed to help out after being approached by diocesan officials.

"Knowing that it was a very temporary thing and we have a veteran and marvelous staff, it wasn't too individual an effort," Father MacNamara said.

Father Cool said he volunteered to provide leadership at St. Paul in part because Father Simon's resignation came during a lull in his schedule as a college chaplain.

"The staff is very gifted and talented, but the suddenness and shock was very jarring. They were appreciative of having someone giving a little rudder to the ship," Father Cool said.

Deacon Aman, meanwhile, was approached by diocesan officials about St. Pius Tenth almost immediately upon his return from a vacation in Italy.

"It's not something I had wanted or would have chosen ordinarily, but the need was there," Deacon Aman remarked.

All three administrators said they encountered parish communities that have tried, with some amount of difficulty, to carry on. At St. Pius Tenth, Deacon Aman said, "Many, many people have offered to help out in various ways, and there's a strong parish council and other committees. But there is no denying kind of a real hurt in the parish, both because of the ones who can't understand (Father Rogers') being away and the others who are just very fearful for their children and any possible dangers that were there."

Father Cool said he has dealt with "a lot of strong emotions. Many people were very close to Father Dave (Simon) and appreciate all the good works he's done here. It's always a question of wanting to know information. But sometimes information is slow in coming, or it's not going to come."

In Horseheads, Father MacNamara said parishioners voiced concern about who their next leader would be. "The dominant thing would be the anxiety of the people — will it be a pastor because of the shortage of priests?" he said.

With replacements having begun their assignments at St. Paul and St. Mary Our Mother, and another due within weeks at St. Pius Tenth, all three temporary administrators can return to their regular lives.

"I am behind (at the University of Rochester.) A lot of people think we close



Father Linsler greets Bob and Barbara Cobb after Mass June 30 at St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads.

down for the summer, but we don't," Father Cool said.

"It's nice to be needed, like everyone else. But I'm ready to hand it over," Father MacNamara commented.

"As the summer eases, so will I ease," Deacon Aman said.

Trickle effect

In order to accommodate the openings in Horseheads, Webster and Chili, other parishes have experienced shifts in their own pastoral leadership.

At St. Mary Our Mother, Father Linsler arrives after eight years as pastor of St. Charles Borromeo/St. Patrick, a cluster in Elmira. Replacing him is Father Eugene Dobosz, an extern priest from Poland, who is serving as priest administrator.

At St. Pius Tenth, Father Holland will take over after 10 years at St. Theodore in Gates. According to Father Conboy, a new pastoral leader for St. Theodore has not yet been named.

At St. Paul, Father Kacprzak arrives after six years as pastor of Our Lady of Mercy in Greece. The new pastor at Mercy is Father Robert L. Beligotti, who had been chaplain at Monroe Community Hospital and sacramental minister at St. Mary of the Assumption in Scottsville.

The changes carry a hint of irony for Our Lady of Mercy: Father Kacprzak had arrived there in 1996 after the former pastor, Father Lum — who would eventually plead guilty to a criminal charge of sexual abuse — had taken a leave of absence. Now, Father Kacprzak moves to St. Paul for reasons also related to sexual abuse by a priest.

Michelle Andrews-Smith, Our Lady of Mercy's parish pastoral council chair, said Father Kacprzak had told the parish he opted for St. Paul because "he could help them heal — much like he did at Mercy."

Although Andrews-Smith said parishioners generally agreed with his decision, she also remarked that "we're not really done healing yet" and that it was disappointing for Father Kacprzak to leave so soon after the completion of a brand-new church, the first in the 45-year-old parish's history. Bishop Clark dedicated the build-

ing June 16.

On the other hand, Andrews-Smith said Our Lady of Mercy has proven it can recover from adversity. "I believe strongly that all these things have made us what we are today. We're going to be OK," she said.

Facing the future

These shifts in pastoral leadership will not have major long-term effects on the diocesan pastoral planning process, according to William Pickett, director of the Office of Planning. He pointed out that the three pastors who were removed in early May are all in their 60s and would have been retiring in the next few years.

Nevertheless, Father Conboy acknowledged that the diocese "very definitely" has to address, in earnest, the accelerating loss of full-time priests, saying it will become increasingly difficult to fill openings with diocesan priests in the years to come.

Recent examples of this are St. Margaret Mary in Apalachin, where the late Father Bonin was replaced by Sister of St. Joseph Sue Hoffman as pastoral administrator; St. Michael's in Lyons, where Father William Barrett, who retired, was succeeded by Deborah Housel as pastoral administrator; and St. Joseph's Hospital, where there is no on-site priest chaplain for the first time in the hospital's history.

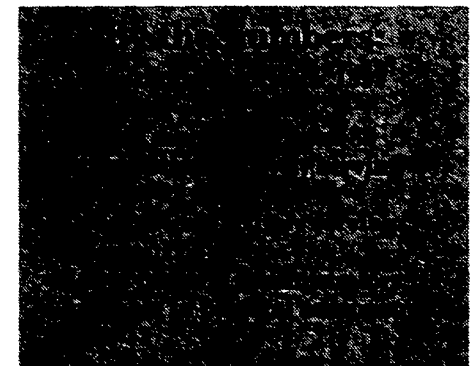
Father Cool acknowledged that although St. Paul got a priest pastor to replace Father Simon, the same may not hold true by the time Father Kacprzak moves on.

"It just seems like it would be too much sudden change having a pastoral administrator, as qualified as that person may be — even here, a progressive-looking parish," Father Cool said. "(But) it could very well be the next time. All parishes should have that discussion in a very serious way."

"If that's the future, we need a little more discussion about it," agreed Father MacNamara, who noted that despite Father Linsler's appointment, Bishop Clark had only promised that he would appoint a "pastoral leader" at St. Mary Our Mother — leaving the door open for that person to be someone other than a priest.

Father Conboy said the Priests' Personnel Board and the Office of Planning will discuss this subject in the near future. For the present, he admitted that he wouldn't mind a break from the flurry of changing pastoral assignments.

Asked if this recent trend may finally be subsiding, Father Conboy sighed and remarked, "Oh, God, I hope so."



Vouchers

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A similar point was made by Dennis Poust, director of communications for the New York State Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the state's bishops.

"In order for a voucher program to have a chance in the New York State Legislature, we must see a strong grassroots effort, particularly from minority communities most affected by failing public schools and lack of educational options," he said. "This is one of the only ways to overcome the intense opposition of the powerful teachers' unions. Another concept supported by the bishops is campaign finance reform that includes limits on the amount of money unions can spend on campaign contributions."

"All this being said, the Supreme Court decision is very important because it gets people talking and it takes away a key argument of school choice opponents," Poust

added "A lot of work needs to be done before New York is ripe for real school choice initiatives. But I'm confident we'll get there eventually. However, we need our political leaders to put the rights of parents and children ahead of the lure of cash from the teachers' unions."

Dominican Sister Glenn Anne McPhee, secretary of education of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the decision "reinforces the basic right of all parents to choose the school they believe best serves the educational needs of their children."

Mark Chopko, general counsel for the USCCB, said one of the most important elements of the court's decision was that it "relied on evidence about the design of the program, rather than statistics about the choices actually made."

"This means that when legislators enact a program for valid reasons that gives parents constitutionally permissible choices, legislators can more confidently act without worrying that some court will second-guess that judgment when people actually

begin to make choices," he added.

Rehnquist was joined in the majority by Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy and Clarence Thomas.

Thomas wrote that the voucher system is an effective way of helping minority students get the education needed "to defend themselves from some of discrimination's effects."

Four members of the court strongly disagreed with the majority, however.

Justice John Paul Stevens called the majority decision "profoundly misguided."

He likened the ruling to taking a step toward religion-based strife such as that which led the first colonists to migrate to the New World from Europe or which has torn apart the Balkans, Northern Ireland and the Middle East.

Also dissenting were Justices David Souter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer. Breyer raised concerns that the voucher program would lead to government interference in how religious schools

are run.

The Ohio Legislature created the voucher program in 1995 after a federal judge declared that the schools were being mismanaged and put them under the authority of the state superintendent of public instruction.

The program provides for vouchers of up to \$2,250 annually for children in low-income families to attend other public or private schools or pay for tutors.

The vast majority of participants use their vouchers to pay tuition at church-affiliated schools, nearly all of them Catholic. In the term just ended, 3,567 voucher students were enrolled in 30 Catholic schools, according to Robert Tayek, spokesman for the Cleveland Diocese. The program has about 4,000 participants in all.

The case reached the Supreme Court after the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in 2000 that the program was unconstitutional because the vouchers are primarily used at religious schools.

Contains reporting by Rob Cullinan.

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