

Tougher issues await in new round of planning

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Due to a declining number of priests, the second five-year round of diocesan pastoral planning — which begins this month — “will bring more severe issues into play” than did the first round, according to William Pickett, diocesan director of planning.

Pickett stopped short of predicting that parishes will close. But he did emphasize that priest availability, along with such key indicators as economic viability and Mass attendance, will be major factors in gauging the future of faith communities.

“We’re giving as many options as possible, but still we’ve got to deal with that reality,” Pickett said. While saying the priest

shortage is “something we don’t want to fixate on,” Pickett nevertheless pointed out that the number of full-time diocesan priests will fall a projected 60 percent — to 62 priests — by the year 2025. He added that priest availability has continued to drop since the first round of Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium began in 1997. “Things did not turn around,” he said.

Because of this, Pickett said the first task for PPNM II is for planning groups to assess how many of their faith communities should continue under their current structure. The term “faith communities” refers to parishes as well as ministries in such areas as colleges, prisons and health-care facilities. Planning groups are also being asked to make 10-year as well as five-year



Karin von Voigtlander/Staff photographer
William Pickett, diocesan director of planning, pauses for a photo Aug. 28 at his office at the Pastoral Center.

projections, whereas PPNM I only required five-year assessments.

PPNM II involves 36 groups of faith communities determined by geographic

location. These planning groups are divided into three sets that will meet in 2002, 2003 and 2004. The first set of groups was due to begin meeting in early September. Over the next several months each group will bring its recommendations to parish councils and pastoral leaders. Once a mutual agreement regarding the number of faith communities has been reached, a proposal will be presented to Bishop Matthew H. Clark for approval. From that point, each group’s individual faith communities will begin implementing the proposed changes, if any.

By beginning discussions at the planning-group level, PPNM II bypasses the process of PPNM I, in which recommendations originated at the parish level and

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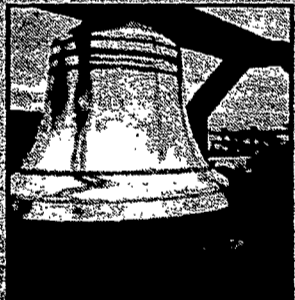


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Memories of Sept. 11 still strong

Although Joseph Leavey enjoyed visiting his sister’s home in the town of Greece, Nora Coco said her brother was firmly entrenched in the Big Apple.

“He loved it up here, but of course he would never leave New York City,” Coco remarked. “It was his town.”

When that town was in trouble last Sept. 11, Mr. Leavey was quick to respond. His dedication cost him his life — he was among more than 300 firefighters and nearly 3,000 people overall killed in that morning’s terrorist attacks. Mr. Leavey was a lieutenant for Ladder 15 in Manhattan, just two blocks from the two World Trade Center buildings that collapsed after being struck.

Since Sept. 11, Coco has been constructing a memorial to her brother in her family’s living room. The mementos include numerous photographs, cards and American flags, as well as a scrapbook full of newspaper articles, prayers and poems. “I’m still adding to it,” said Coco, a parishioner at Our Mother of Sorrows Church.

On one wall is a plaque of the anonymously written Fireman’s Prayer, the four closing lines of which say: “And if according to your will/I have to lose my life/Please bless with your protecting hand/My children and my wife.” Mr. Leavey, 46, left behind a wife and three children.

The loss of loved ones is also a painfully familiar subject for Ithaca resident Olga Potorti. She lost her son, James, a systems analyst for Marsh and McLennan. The global professional services firm had offices on the 92nd floor of World Trade Center One.

“It’s very hard to describe. It’s the mother who carried that child, and it’s something that only a mother will understand. It’s a part of you that’s gone,” Potorti said. “My heart goes out to any family (of Sept. 11 victims) and especially mothers who have lost children in their lifetime. That’s not the way it’s supposed to happen.”

One year after the attacks, Potorti added, her family’s grief “is always with us and always will be, along with all the other (victims’ families.)”

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Nora Coco stands beside the shrine she erected in her Greece home in honor of her brother, Joseph Leavey, a New York City firefighter who died during the World Trade Center attacks Sept. 11, 2001.

STORY BY MIKE LATONA

PHOTOS BY KARIN VON VOIGTLANDER