

Catholic Courier

■ DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

■ VOL. 114 NO. 31

■ THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2003

■ 75¢

■ 32 PAGES

Inside



Hornell native set to become diocesan priest

Deacon Mark Brewer will be ordained June 14 — Page 3

Permanent Diaconate ranks to grow by five

Also, priesthood gets closer for local man — Page 4

Woman embraces call to be a Sister of Mercy

Congregation welcomes newest member — Page 5



Monk to make final profession of vows

Chinese native joins Abbey of the Genesee — Page 6

Pullout section lauds service of priests, nuns

Anniversaries, retirements also featured — Pages 9-24



Seeking a healthy balance

Father Dennis Sewar, who turns 52 years old May 16, broke his leg in three places this past December. That mishap occurred only five years after he suffered a stroke.

Father Gerald O'Connor, age 63, has had seven heart attacks and seven major surgeries as an adult, including two surgeries in the last few months.

One might suggest that either man should cut his job to part-time status or perhaps consider retirement.

But this is not your average profession or career. It's the priesthood — a religious vocation, something that calls for a special commitment.

The dedication of priests, even when ailing, is often remarkable. Within a month after breaking his leg, for example, Father Sewar was saying Mass from a wheelchair at Rochester's Church of the Annunciation, where he serves as pastor.

Although he still gets around on crutches, Father Sewar is looking forward to his new pastorate. In late June he will move to Spencerport's St. John the Evangelist — which, at approximately 1,500 families, is double the size of Annunciation.

Father O'Connor, meanwhile, is the longtime pastor of not one, but three parishes: St. Catherine of Siena in Addison, St. Stanislaus in Bradford and St. Joseph's in Campbell. Though he remains in fragile health, Father O'Connor dismisses the possibility of long-term disability or early retirement, citing loyalty to his Steuben County faith communities. In fact, he rescheduled one of his surgeries until after Christmas because he felt it would be asking too much for his retired assistant Father Andrew Kalafsky — who turned 84 on Jan. 1 — to cover three churches during the holiday season.

Some would note that priests aren't the only folks whose work is physically, mentally and emotionally taxing. But few professions are more demanding than a regimen that may include getting out of bed with the flu to celebrate Mass for a waiting congregation; running to the hospital for an anointing of the sick at 3 a.m.; going on regular sick calls; providing chaplaincy for community groups; preparing homilies; counseling parishioners; handling paperwork; and participating in and/or presiding at church meetings and



Father Dennis Sewar, pastor at Rochester's Church of the Annunciation, gives Communion to Ida J. Russo on April 27. A month after breaking his leg in three places this past December, Father Sewar was saying Mass from a wheelchair. Now using crutches, he stays seated for most of the Mass.

social functions.

Does a priest's level of commitment arise more from personal choice, or from a feeling of having no choice? There may not be a clear-cut answer, but it's worth noting that Father O'Connor — as well as Father Sewar in his upcoming assignment — are the only full-time priests for their respective parish communities. Healthy or not, a single priest may well be responsible for hundreds, if not thousands, of families.

On the one hand, Bishop Matthew H. Clark recommends that diocesan priests maintain reasonable workloads, such as celebrating no more than three Sunday

Masses per week. Yet according to Sandy Grocki, diocesan coordinator of clergy services, such quotas are often exceeded.

Overwork, as well as such issues as loneliness, morale and intimacy, prompted Father Robert Schrader to submit a lengthy document to the Priests' Council of New York this past year. In urging New York's diocesan and archdiocesan leaders to tighten policies concerning priests' health and well-being, Father Schrader cited the need for such resources as support and reflection groups, and 24-hour health-crisis hotlines.

"These issues have been identified and

Continued on page 25

Story by Mike Latona • Photo by Rebecca Gosselin