

HEALTH

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raised over and over in studies down through the past several decades. Rather than just keep raising them, it is now time to respond to them ... (and) hopefully head off difficulties before they become problems which we read about in the paper," stated Father Schrader, pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Auburn and former diocesan director of priest personnel.

A CLOSE CALL

Father Sewar got his own wake-up call in the fall of 1997. In the aftermath of his stroke, doctors determined that stress was a chief culprit in the attack. Father Sewar now says he had become overwrought by internal parish struggles while serving as pastor of St. Mary's in Waterloo.

"I've always said, believe it or not, that the stroke was an absolute blessing. It was not a major stroke. The one thing I learned, I have to take things more in stride and rely on God," Father Sewar said.

He took four months to recover from the stroke, then moved to his current assignment at Church of the Annunciation in 1998. Father Sewar has described his experience there as a joyful one, not only because of a supportive parish community but also based on the personal wisdom he has gained.

"Waterloo taught me a lot. I'd like to be all things to all people all the

time, but it's not going to happen," he said. "I used to feel some guilt about not being there for a particular event or Mass. But if you don't take care of yourself, you're not going to take care of your people."

Thus, after he broke his leg last December, he didn't go back to ministry until he was medically cleared. Meanwhile, Masses were covered by the parish's parochial vicar, Nigerian priest Father Emmanuel Nyong, as well as retired diocesan priests.

"I couldn't wait to get back, but I also had to be patient. I never felt any guilt," Father Sewar said.

Neither does Father Sewar carry guilt about pursuing personal interests, such as studying for his doctorate in ministry or popping a movie into the VCR before bed just to relax.

"I don't do any work after 9 p.m. That's my time," he said.

'THERE FOR THE PEOPLE'

Meanwhile, Father O'Connor is grinding along despite being diagnosed in June 2002 with a tumor on his kidney, as well as a large aneurysm. He had a kidney operation in October and was supposed to have aneurysm surgery in December, but postponed that surgery for a month to accommodate his holiday Mass schedule. When he returned to ministry in early March, he sailed into the scheduled slate of weekday Lenten Masses.

"We did not cut back on anything," said Father O'Connor, noting that he

got help from Father Kalafsky as well as other retired priests in Steuben County.

Father O'Connor lauded the efforts of Grocki in diocesan clergy services to line up these pinch-hitters. Grocki, in turn, said that retired priests are quite generous about filling in. "Senior priests, you don't even have to ask twice," she remarked.

Although Father O'Connor said parishioners encouraged him to cut his workload down for his own sake, that doesn't jibe with the work ethic he has practiced over the years. "When we were in the seminary we were trained to be rugged individuals, to be our own men," he said. "We never thought of taking it easy. You were there for the people, ordained for the people. Contemporaries of mine never took a day off."

Even so, Father O'Connor admits that "the afternoons and evenings are hard; I get tired very quickly." He spends quite a bit of time at his cottage on Seneca Lake, but still has calls to the parish forwarded there. Father O'Connor also says his job is made easier by a small yet efficient staff.

But one area he can't easily delegate is saying Mass for three parishes, and that factor keeps Father O'Connor rooted to his pastorate. Noting that small parishes are in the greatest danger during a priest shortage, he fears that at least one of his parishes might close if he were to retire or take long-term dis-

ability.

"There is no one to replace me. I would have a great deal of guilt if I went out now," he said.

NEW AWARENESS NEEDED

Father Michael Conboy, diocesan director of priest personnel, said he discourages priests from regular ministry if they're in questionable physical, mental or emotional health.

"Every once in a while they feel they're going to keep plugging along. But we invite people to be very concerned about their well-being," Father Conboy said. "You can't give what you don't have."

In the past year the Diocese of Rochester has created the Priestly Quality of Life Board, a team of health experts and diocesan priests. The diocese also has existing guidelines designed to protect priests' health, such as celebrating no more than three weekend liturgies, taking designated days off, and allotting time for vacation, prayer and continuing education.

However, Grocki said it can be tough for priests to take it easy when demand exceeds supply. For example, she said, many people who aren't regular churchgoers insist on a priest for their weddings, even though deacons can preside over nuptials as well.

"I think it's education. People have to understand," Grocki said. "People have to get used to visits by a pastoral minister, a deacon."

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