Initiative weaves Web of prayers for priests

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — Priests spend much of their time praying for other people. But how frequently do they seek prayers for their own selves?

Not all that often, Mary Reilich and Mary Sanders contend. Yet both women feel that priests are greatly in need of prayers.

"There's not enough praying going on, to protect them with prayers," Sanders said.

Through prayer, Reilich said, "We want to see the priests' problems turn around" in addition to lending support to keep them strong.

Reilich and Sanders are among the originators of "The Monthly Prayer Request for Priests" in the Rochester Diocese, which has existed here for approximately 10 years. The calendar can be handily accessed on the Internet by visiting *www.saintannechurch.org* and clicking on the "Priest's calendar" link.

Each day of the month bears a different priest's name — either an active or retired diocesan priest, or an order priest serving locally. Groups

Senior

are sometimes prayed for, such as "vocations and seminarians" on Sept. 29 and "all missionaries" on Sept. 30. Also appearing on the Web site is a special prayer for priests and vocations. Among the other suggested forms of prayer and sacrifice are Mass, rosary, adoration, a Divine Mercy chaplet and fasting.

Sanders noted that the initiative is a good fit for retired people who might have some extra time to spend, saying, "I'm sure they'll sit with their rosary and pray for the priest." But she also pointed out that many senior citizens are not computer-savvy, so it's crucial for calendars to be distributed in other ways as well. Among the possibilities are printing them in the parish bulletin — which a few diocesan parishes already do — or making photocopies of computer printouts and leaving them at church entrances.

Reilich and Sanders said the calendar is employed regularly by rosary and adoration-chapel groups. They'd like to see the exposure widen, particularly in family residences.

"At supper, you could pray for one priest a day by saying a Hail Mary or Our Father. That would be a powerhouse of prayer. I'll bet you a good number would do it," said Sanders, adding that involving young people in these prayers "would open the door for talk about vocations."

Vocations are crucial in this day and age, as the ever-shortening rotation for the monthly prayer request would indicate. Reilich said that many priests' names appear on the calendar more than once per year, whereas in the beginning it was difficult to fit them into a 365-day rotation.

The prayer-request calendar is an extension of an international apostolate that has existed since 1990. It began locally after Reilich, a parishioner of St. Anne in Rochester, floated the idea past acquaintances from various prayer groups, including Sanders. For the next few years, the calendar was circulated via mail, bulletins and a regular display advertisement in the *Catholic Courier*. Reilich said ads were discontinued because financial support fell off — but Father Frank Lioi, pastor of St. Anne at the time, had an idea.

"Father Lioi said, 'Why don't you put it on the Internet?" Reilich recalled.

The prayer requests have evolved smoothly to cyberspace, thanks to some loyal volunteers handling technical matters.

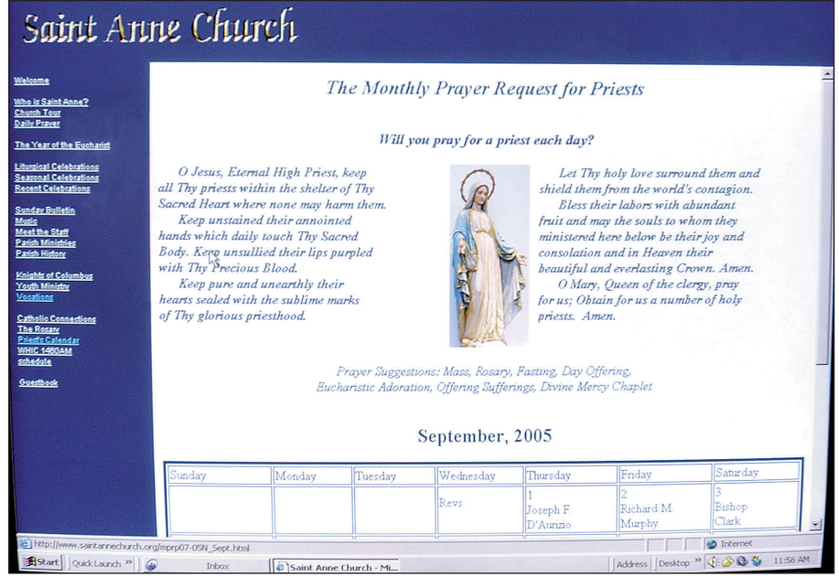
"It's a team project," Reilich said.

Reilich continues to select the priests' names, using the Official Diocesan Directory for reference. Sanders, a parishioner at Irondequoit's St. Thomas the Apostle, recently took over coordinating duties due to health concerns on Reilich's part.

One of Sanders' responsibilities is to write each priest individually and remind him when his "day" is coming up. She and Reilich said many priests are genuinely touched when they hear that specific days of prayer have been devoted to them.

The ministry occasionally receives checks from priests, as well as donations from other supporters. These contributions are crucial in covering mailing expenses: In addition to keeping in touch with priests, the ministry also sends copies of prayer-request calendars to anybody who asks for them.

Anybody who would like a copy of the calendar, or who is interested in making a donation, may contact ~~Reilich at 585/473-4358 or Sanders at 585/467-2355~~.



Above is the September 2005 calendar of "The Monthly Prayer Request for Priests," which can be found on the Web site of Rochester's St. Anne Church at *www.saintannechurch.org*.

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