

Sparta pastor moves to Appleton

Rev. James Leary to take over at St. Mary, St. Joseph

By Cheryl Anderson
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The Rev. James Leary, 65, pastor for 11 years at St. Patrick Church in Sparta in the Diocese of La Crosse, will take over as pastor of St. Mary and St. Joseph parishes in Appleton effective Sept. 1.



Leary

The Rev. Larry Abler, pastor of St. Joseph Parish, took over as temporary administrator of St. Mary's when the Rev. Mike O'Rourke, 66, died Feb. 22. Abler, who has presided over funerals, weddings and occasionally led mass at St. Mary's since March, will semi-retire in August.

Abler, 72, who has been at St. Joseph's for 7 years and a priest for 46 years, will serve as sacramental minister with extended duties from Sept. 1 to Jan. 1 at St. Jude's in Oshkosh.

"I do want to stay really active," Abler said.

Leary originally is from Stevens Point, and he has family in Tomah. He is a member of the Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Joseph in Detroit. Leary served as director of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen in Detroit from 1993 to 1999, when he took over as the pastor of the parish in Sparta.

Leary was appointed by his superiors to take over at St. Joseph's for Abler, a fellow capuchin, as well as St. Mary's. Abler said he's been trying to recruit Leary for the position for more than a year.

"He's got a wonderful, wonderful personality," Abler said. "He's got a great sense of humor ... and he's had great pastoral experience in the past. ... He not only has a great heart for helping and working with the poor, he's a tremendous business person."

LEARY: Worship times will remain the same

From A-3

Leary will serve as vice-president of St. Mary's and St. Joseph's, which will run independently from each other. "So he has the final administrative responsibility for both places," St. Mary's business administrator Brian Dresang said.

"He's very charismatic and seems to be a very compassionate guy," Dresang said. "My first impression of him was good."

Leary will also have a presence at St. Joseph Middle School and Catholic Central.

Worship schedules will remain the same with the help of an as yet unnamed associate who soon will be appointed.

"Hopefully he won't try to fill Father Mike's shoes because nobody can," Dresang said. "We don't want him to be Father Mike.

We want him to be Father Jim."

Leary recognizes the challenge. "I'm sure it will be difficult for me and I'm sure it will be difficult for St. Mary's parishioners," Leary said. "Father Mike O'Rourke was there for over 25 years. So it'll be growing pains for both of us."

Dresang sees it as a year of firsts. "The first time for everything without Father Mike. But it will also be the first time we have Father Jim, which I think can be a very good thing," he said.

Leary hopes to preach all masses the last week in August at St. Mary's and the first weekend in September at St. Joseph's. "It'll be a new adventure," he said. "I wish I could be three years down the road and beyond all the initial adjustments that are required. But that's the way it's got to go."

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