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## Retiring Priest Wistful of 42 Years of Service

By Maria C. Hunt  
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As a young altar boy in growing up in Canastota, Monsignor Francis J. Furfaro was drawn to a life of religious devotion.

That early love of spiritual things, watered by a desire to serve others, grew into a 42-year commitment as a parish priest.

Furfaro, 75, who presides over St. Joseph's Church in Oswego, will retire at the end of the month from the ministerial duties that have filled more than half his life.

As one of five children in a close-knit family, Furfaro attended Mass daily. His Italian immigrant parents had a strong sense of religion and of their obligation to God. However, Furfaro said his decision to study theology at the University of Toronto may have been something of a surprise.

"I think when I decided to enter the seminary, my mother was hesitant about my going, but she was willing to help me in whatever I wanted to do.

"I was greatly influenced by my pastor and as a little boy I served Mass daily," he said. "As a young boy you take Mass day after day and you're in the presence of religious people so that had an effect on me."

Reflecting on his long tenure as a parish priest and regional vicar for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse, Furfaro said that it takes more than a desire to serve to be a good priest.

"It takes an unswerving loyalty, coupled with sacrifice and a life of prayer," Furfaro said. "I think the prayer is most important because that's where you get that spiritual strength.

"I think I had to draw on that strength especially at the time of my retirement to accept the fact that despite my good health and vigor I must relinquish my administrative duties," he said.

The Diocese of Syracuse requires that all priests retire at age 75.

One of the hardest parts of his retirement will be leaving his flock of more than 1,000 families.

"I'm the only priest that many of them have known," he said. "I think initially it will be a little difficult for them, but Monsignor Paul Brigandi is such a warm and good priest, they will take to him in a very short time."

Furfaro said he has seen many changes in the church.

"I think the biggest change I've seen is the evolution of the role of the laity," he said. "Lay men and women are not only helpers but true partners in ministry."

Although he leaves full-time ministry this month, Furfaro plans an active retirement, helping minister at the Sacred Heart Church in Cicero on weekends. He is a member of the Oswego City School Board and chairman of the State University College at Oswego council.

While he is wistful at the prospect of his career as a parish priest having gone by so quickly, Furfaro said he is satisfied.

"I feel that I really have affected the lives of many people and God has worked powerfully through my heart and hands."

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