

Bishop defends transfer

Some lobby on behalf of priest

By CHRIS PHILLIPS

At least 40 parishioners of the Our Lady of the Annunciation Church in Florence have sent letters to their bishop expressing disappointment that the temporary leader of their church is being returned to his regular post in Springfield.

While he said he appreciated the letters and sentiments of the parishioners, the Catholic bishop of Springfield today said he will stand by his decision.

The parishioners said they have grown fond of the Rev. James A. Sipitkowski — who for the past month has been filling in for their

ailing pastor, the Rev. Richard E. Wellette — and they do not want to see him leave.

However, Bishop Joseph F. Maguire of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield said today that while the reaction of parishioners is "perfectly understandable," he will stand by his decision to return Father Sipitkowski to his chaplain's post at the Bay State Medical Center in Springfield.

Bishop Maguire explained, "We have to spread the good talent around. When a priest is ordained, he belongs to the whole diocese."

The bishop has appointed the Rev.

Henry L. Dorsch, an assistant pastor at the St. Mary of the Assumption Church at 3 Elm St., as the temporary administrator at Annunciation until Father Wellette returns.

Father Dorsch, who also will continue to direct the Northampton Christian Life Center at 95 King St., has indicated he plans to make no major changes at Annunciation during his temporary stewardship of the church's affairs.

Efforts to contact Father Sipitkowski were unsuccessful.

Father Wellette is recuperating at

(Continued on page 4)



REV. JAMES A. SIPITKOWSKI

— Priest

(Continued from page 1)

Providence Hospital in Holyoke from a stroke he suffered while he was celebrating a Mass Oct. 27.

The parishioners have nothing against Father Dorsch, Bishop Maguire emphasized.

None of the half-dozen parishioners who were contacted today to explain their views about the bishop's decision were willing to discuss the issue publicly.

One woman termed it a "private matter" which should not be publicized.

However, Bishop Maguire confirmed that he has been inundated with letters from the parishioners who clearly do not like the idea of losing Father Sipitkowski. Although he had filled in for only a month, Father Sipitkowski had been assistant pastor of Annunciation before being transferred in 1981.

Bishop Maguire said he knows from personal experience the difficulty of leaving a church once an attachment has been made to the parishioners.

Bishop Maguire said he has answered all 40 of the letters he has received so far. In his responses, he thanks the parishioners for their support of Father Sipitkowski and also urges them to pray for the recovery of Father Wellette.

"It's nice to hear positive comments about a priest," he said.

But Bishop Maguire said it was clear from the beginning that Father Sipitkowski's assignment to Annunciation was "very temporary."

Father Sipitkowski has commitments at Bay State Medical Center that he must keep, Bishop Maguire said. "And it wouldn't be right to expect him to carry on the both duties."

Bishop Maguire also said the parishioners have emphasized in their letters that they have nothing against Father Dorsch.

As the temporary "administrator" of the church, Father Dorsch will be responsible for the day-to-day pastoral duties, which range from managing finances to providing spiritual leadership.