

Falls' Grosz named pastor of St. Stanislaus

By JAY TOKASZ

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Bishop Henry J. Mansell wasted little time in appointing a new pastor to oversee St. Stanislaus, the mother church of the Polish-American Catholic community in Western New York.

Thursday, Mansell tapped his second in command to fill the role.

The Most Rev. Edward M. Grosz, auxiliary bishop and vicar general of the diocese, was named to succeed the beloved Monsignor John R. Gabalski. Gabalski, pastor for 25 years, died last week.

Grosz's appointment is effective Monday. He will leave his post as the pastor of two parishes in Niagara Falls, St. Stanislaus Kostka and Holy Trinity, where he had been serving since 1996.

Grosz will no longer serve as vicar of the Vicariate of West Niagara County, an administrative post. Instead, he will become vicar of the southeast Buffalo vicariate, a group of 20 parishes, succeeding Monsignor Matthew Kopacz, pastor of St. Casimir parish.

Mansell described Grosz's ap-

pointment as "very appropriate."

"Bishop Grosz has been a distinguished leader, not just among Polish-American people, but also for people in Western New York generally," Mansell said in a written statement. "He is an energetic and effective collaborator. His astute and dynamic example will be a catalyst for strong development in St. Stanislaus parish and southeast Buffalo in the years ahead."

During a meeting with reporters Thursday afternoon at St. Stanislaus Church, located at 123 Townsend St. near Broadway and Fillmore in the heart of the East Side, Grosz said he was surprised and honored by the new post.

"I'm so pleased to reconnect with Polonia and the area. I'm sure God had his finger in this, and the Blessed Lady, too," he said.

Grosz's appointment as the sixth pastor in the 130-year history of the church was welcomed by parishioners. They viewed it as a sign of Mansell's commitment to the parish and to preserving the culture of the widespread Polish-American Catholic community in Western New York.

Parish trustee David Syjka said

he was excited and grateful about the appointment.

"Bishop Grosz will be able to walk side by side in the footprints of Monsignor Gabalski," he said. "Bishop Grosz is cut from the same cloth. He is a tireless worker. He is dedicated to the Polish culture."

While financially healthy, St. Stanislaus sits in a deteriorating neighborhood that is no longer heavily populated by Catholics.

Following Gabalski's death, some parishioners had expressed concerns about the future of the church and its school, which has about 65 children.

Those concerns were eased with Grosz's appointment.

Grosz said that he could not replace the popular Gabalski.

"Nobody can replace Monsignor Gabalski. I just follow him," he said. "I can't be Monsignor Gabalski. I have to be Bishop Grosz."

Grosz also emphasized that he would be seeking consensus from parishioners on any decisions for the future of St. Stanislaus and the southeast Buffalo vicariate.

The vicariate includes a number of parishes with huge losses in membership, and Grosz's appoint-

ment could signal diocesan plans to reconfigure parishes on the East Side. Grosz was involved in efforts to consolidate parish schools in Niagara Falls.

Already, the diocese is studying the possibility of merging three small parishes in the Clinton and Fillmore area into a single parish run by Franciscan friars. Over the past 30 years, the number of registered parishioners has fallen from 5,700 to about 1,450 in the three parishes, where an average of 475 people attend weekend Masses.

Grosz said he sees a "bright future" for St. Stanislaus, a church that he called "a symbol of an entire culture, an entire group of people." Polish Masses will continue at the parish.

Grosz was ordained a priest in 1971 and has served at a variety of parishes in the diocese. He was named auxiliary bishop of Buffalo by Pope John Paul II in 1989. He served as pastor of St. Philip the Apostle parish in Cheektowaga for six years prior to his appointment in Niagara Falls.

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