

# Team of priests, deacon to serve parishes in Effingham area

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Staff writer

Early summer is the traditional time for parishes to get new priests. Beginning this summer, Catholics in the Effingham area will be welcoming not only a new pastor, but a new team of priests and a deacon who will be serving them in several parishes.



Father Hoefler

Father David Hoefler, who has been serving at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Springfield, will be pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Parish and Sacred Heart Parish in Effingham as well as Annunciation Parish in Shumway.

By Sept. 1, Father Hoefler will be joined by a total of three parochial vicars who will not only work in the Effingham parishes, but will be helping out Father Robert "Bud" DeGrand in nearby Green Creek, Sigel, Neoga and Lillyville.

Up until now St. Anthony and Annunciation have been served by one pastor, while Sacred Heart has been served by another pastor. St. Anthony, the largest of the three parishes, has also had a parochial vicar and a deacon.

Father Hoefler, who will reside in

Shumway, will be working with one parochial vicar who hails from this diocese and two other priests who are here from different countries. Moreover, Deacon Joseph Emmerich will continue to serve at St. Anthony Parish while expanding his duties to Sacred Heart and Annunciation parishes.

In all, Father Hoefler and his team will be mainly responsible for caring for 2,400 families in three parishes, two grade schools, one high school and a cemetery. He will also be dean of the Effingham Deanery.

Newly-ordained Father Brian Alford also will be residing in the Shumway rectory. Father Dominique Rimaz, a priest from the Diocese of Laussane, Geneva and Fribourg, Switzerland, will live in the Sacred Heart rectory beginning Sept. 1. Father Sunder Ery, a priest from the Diocese of Cuddapah, India, has already arrived in the diocese and is residing at the St. Anthony rectory.

"This way each parish has at least one priest living there," said Marlene Mulford, chancellor of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

Father Hoefler is already acquainted with Father Alford and Father Rimaz, as both priests have spent summers serving in or residing at Blessed Sacrament Parish. Father Alford was mentored by Father Hoefler and Father Rimaz stayed at Blessed Sacrament for several months last summer. "Father Dominique was working on improving his English before returning to Rome to work on his degree in communications," Father Hoefler said.

Father Hoefler has been a priest for nine years and has spent that entire time at Blessed Sacrament. However, he is acquainted with the Effingham area because he served as a seminarian intern at St. Anthony Parish 10 years ago.

He was parochial vicar at Blessed Sacrament when then-pastor and priest, Msgr. Kevin Vann, was named Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Worth. After spending about a year as parochial administrator Bishop George Lucas named him pastor of the large Springfield parish.

Father Hoefler was in charge of completing the restoration of Blessed Sacrament Church — a project begun under Bishop Vann's direction — and went on to guide the parish in another construction project, a large addition and remodel of Blessed Sacrament School. That project should be completed on schedule later this summer.

"If the Holy Spirit is asking me to do this, there is no way I can say no," said Father Hoefler in a heartfelt letter in the Blessed Sacrament bulletin. "This year, while we are losing pastors, we have an exceptional grace of extra parochial vicars in the diocese. This has not happened in a while and it is one of the things that made this idea possible. The Priest Personnel Board agreed that I am the one with the specific set of skills to fill this position.

"With the great heartache of leaving here, the prospect of working with these three priests gives me great consolation," he said. "I could have stayed here at Blessed

Sacrament until death and died a happy man. On the other hand I am happy to do something for the diocese that is needed and hasn't been done before.

"I'll also be happy to be of service to the people of Effingham and Shumway," Father Hoefler said. "I know them from my previous experience there and I know I will enjoy being a priest for them in that area."

A lot of time and thought goes into deciding what priests will serve in particular parishes, Father Hoefler said. "In our pastoral planning process that we just completed the effort was to match the resources we have in priests with the needs of the people," he said. "This assignment is a unique occasion to be able to do this. There is no intent to merge the parishes, but only to put our resources to the best service."

Father Spriggs, who has been pastor of Sacred Heart since 2006, will serve as parochial administrator of Ss. James and Patrick Parish in Decatur from July 1 through Sept. 30, at which time he will retire. Father David Peters, who came to Effingham after Msgr. Leo Enlow moved to Quincy, will return to retired status.

"This idea came out of the Priest's Board. We're hoping and praying for a collaborative spirit," said Mulford. "We are relying on the help of the Holy Spirit and I have a lot of confidence in Father Hoefler. He has a good team there and Father Hoefler himself comes with many gifts and talents."

