

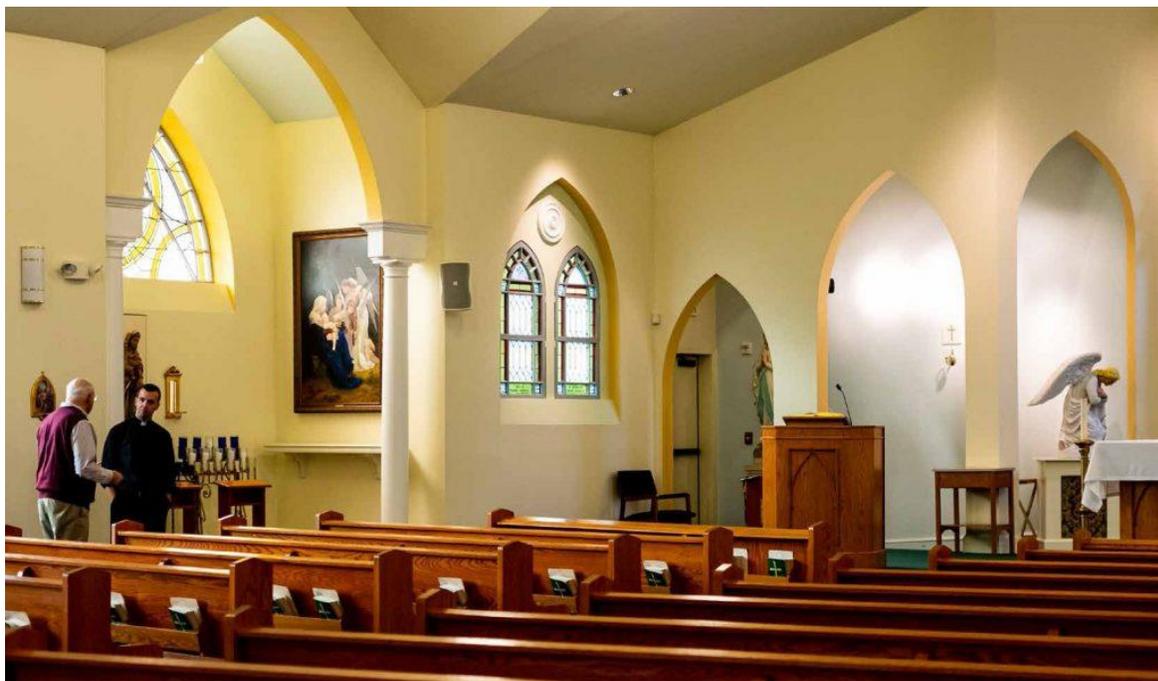
The Herald

Serving the Communities of Vermont's White River Valley Since 1874

Randolph, Rochester, Bethel To Share Priest

Fr. Milanese To Retire After 24 Years in Town

| September 12, 2019 | By Zoë Newmarco



The retiring Father John Milanese shows the incoming priest, Father Scott Gratton, around the sanctuary of the Our Lady of the Angels Catholic Church in Randolph on Monday morning. (Herald / Dylan Kelley)

Last Sunday marked the final Mass offered by Father John Milanese at Our Lady of the Angels, Randolph's Catholic Church, as he heads into retirement. Father Andrew Bednarowicz, who was priest at the Our Lady of the Valley parish in Bethel and Rochester, has received a new assignment in Bradford. Bednarowicz could not be reached for comment before press time.

Coming in as priest at all three churches is Father Scott Gratton, who was ordained four years ago, after attending seminary school in Providence, R.I. This will be the first time Randolph's

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Catholic church has shared a priest with Bethel and Rochester. With the change comes the elimination of Sunday Mass at the Randolph church; instead, Mass in Randolph will be held on Saturdays at 4 p.m.

Gratton explained that in the Catholic tradition, holding Mass on Saturday evenings is not uncommon—the practice can be traced back to Catholicism’s Jewish roots. In Jewish traditions, sundown is considered the start of the next day, so Saturday evening Mass still occurs on the holy day, he said.

On Sunday mornings, Gratton, who lives in Bethel, will offer Mass at 9 a.m. at St. Elizabeth church in Rochester, and at 11 a.m. at St. Anthony’s in Bethel.

Additionally, on Sunday evenings, Gratton will continue to say Mass at Norwich University, where he has served as chaplain for the last several weeks. Per an assignment he received earlier this year, Gratton will also continue to celebrate Mass with the Vermont Army National Guard, for which he serves as chaplain.

“I’m all over the place,” said Gratton with a chuckle, noting that he’s excited to take on so many roles.

Working Together

Gratton, who grew up in Newport Center, said that although he’s not very familiar with the White River Valley, he’s excited to be returning to rural Vermont communities.

“I think many times we tend to put our younger priests in more of Burlington, Chittenden County area, but my heart’s really always been with the people in smaller towns,” said Gratton, who himself held assignments in Chittenden County for the last few years, including at the Winooski parish and as vice principal at Rice Memorial High School in South Burlington. Although he loved his time there, he’s thrilled to be back in the smaller Vermont towns, he said.

“I definitely enjoy coming to the rural parts of the state now, and serving people who I think are not always first thought of from the big-city side of things,” said Gratton.

For now at least, the two parishes— the Rochester-Bethel area parish and the Randolph-area parish— will remain separate “at least on paper,” even though he will be the sole priest assigned to all three churches, said Gratton.

“We’ll be working and praying together in a way, but logistics for now will be separate,” he said.

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He emphasized that he's excited to "spread joy and to bring my love for God into this area," said Gratton. "I just want to be able to serve the people in this community and I want to lose myself in it."

Passing the Baton

Milanese, who has been a priest for 45 years and served in Randolph for 24 of those, told The Herald on Monday that while he will miss the people at the church, he's very pleased to be leaving the congregation in Gratton's hands.

Over the years, Milanese said the congregation—like those in many churches throughout the state—has shrunk considerably during his time in Randolph. Currently the congregation has about 75 families, he said.

"From when I came here 24 years ago...it's decreased considerably. People have moved away, people have died," he said. "The congregation is aging, just like every congregation in Randolph. We don't have young people going to church."

Additionally, he noted that the numbers of priests is down, which likely contributed to Gratton holding so many assignments at one time.

Despite having so many charges, Milanese underlined his faith in Gratton's ability to serve all of the congregations well.

"Father Scott Gratton is a wonderful priest. He's talented, he's enthusiastic, he has a wonderful personality. He will be able to do things that I could never accomplish. The people here are very blessed to have him," asserted Milanese. "It makes me feel very good to be passing [the church] on to someone so capable and so qualified as Father Gratton."

Milanese plans to live in Barre but said he has no solidified plans for his retirement, although he'll likely continue to lend a hand at neighboring churches.

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