

The Rev. Dennis Gallagher A.A. was recently appointed provincial of North America for the Assumptionist order.
[Photo/Michelle Sheppard]

By Amanda Roberge, Correspondent

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WORCESTER — Having attended Assumption College as an undergraduate student in the 1960s, the Rev. Dennis Gallagher returned as a priest in 1976 and for the better part of the decades since, he has lived in the Community House on the Worcester campus and served the school in a number of capacities, in both the spiritual and academic realms.

But having recently been named the provincial of the Assumptionist order for the North America region, Rev. Gallagher will soon leave the school with his sights on Brighton, where he will be closer to the administrative headquarters for the Augustinians of the Assumption, long known simply as Assumptionists. The order consists of a congregation of Catholic brothers.

“Once you are named provincial, you can no longer hold employment at the college,” he said, adding that his involvement will be limited to his new role on the school’s board of trustees. “It is something that will take some getting used to.”

The Assumptionist community is one that exists worldwide, he said, with North America being a relatively small constituency. The region over which he will preside includes several communities in the Northeast, several in Mexico and one, the Center for Faith and Culture, in Quebec, Canada. The international order has a presence in almost 30 countries.

Rev. Gallagher said the region of the most rapid growth exists in Africa as well as in the more recent foundations in Vietnam and the Philippines, with other vibrant communities across Europe and South America. He said that he will be looking after the spiritual well-being of 30-35 people in the United States, about 25 in Mexico and 10 in Quebec.

“Being provincial sounds more overwhelming than it actually is,” he said, adding that while growth is happening in other areas of the world, the challenges in North America are unique in that there is the issue of an aging membership that seeks to attract some younger folks.

Becoming an Assumptionist priest was not a lifelong goal for Rev. Gallagher, who was born in Lowell and grew up in Chelmsford. In fact, he said, it was not something that had entered his mind until his senior year at Assumption, when he was fortunate enough to have some “very fine Assumptionist professors” whom he “admired greatly.”

“I’d had no inkling at all before then,” he said.

Part of the new position will involve a heavy dose of travel, with part of that task centered around maintaining relationships within the North American Assumptionist communities. Being

the provincial, he added, means making important decisions regarding policy and personnel issues.

But part of that travel includes two substantial trips to meet with the other provincials, and those trips are lengthy and can take place anywhere in the world — with the upcoming meeting in December slated to take place in Rome.

The three-year term has the potential to be succeeded by another term, so Rev. Gallagher is open to how the coming years unfold. But after his term, he will wait to see what life holds.

“I’m not a young man,” he said with a laugh. “So we will see where I wind up when this is all said and done.”

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