



DIOCESE OF FALL RIVER

The Anchor

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Father Landry proud of *Anchor's* accomplishments as he leaves the helm

By Kenneth J. Souza, *Anchor* Staff



EXECUTIVE DECISION — Father Roger J. Landry, center, is leaving his position as executive editor of *The Anchor*, to become pastor of the newly-formed St. Bernadette Parish in Fall River, and to devote more time to teaching and writing. With him is his *Anchor* staff, from left: Becky Aubut, Dave Jolivet, Wayne Powers, Father Landry, Mary Chase, and Ken Souza. (Photo by Father Richard Wilson)

FALL RIVER, Mass. — As he prepares to take over as pastor of the new St. Bernadette's Parish in Fall River, Father Roger J. Landry will not only be leaving his parishioners at St. Anthony of Padua in New Bedford, but also the duties of *The Anchor*, the diocesan newspaper for which he's served as executive editor for the past seven years.

While he has mixed emotions about leaving what has become an important tool for evangelization and a daily passion since he was appointed by Bishop George W. Coleman to succeed Msgr. John F. Moore in July 2005, Father Landry takes pride in what *The Anchor* has achieved.

"Of all the diocesan papers I've seen, I think *The Anchor* may do the best job of all in covering local news," Father Landry said. "It's truly a diocesan paper. Many of the other papers rely far too much on reprinting Catholic wire service articles. Our front page almost always featured three or four local stories. That we cover much more local news with a much smaller staff than most other Catholic papers is a real tribute to the hard work of the *Anchor* team."

In keeping with that philosophy, one of the first things he did after becoming executive editor was to increase the number of local columnists who contribute to *The Anchor*.

"I'm really proud of how many local columnists we have, which adds to the way this is truly a diocesan paper," he said. "Other newspaper editors express to me how amazed they are at the participation of so many in the mission of our paper, from priests and deacons writing weekly homily reflections, to the weekly, biweekly and monthly columnists, to those who do various thematic series as well as somewhat regular op-eds."

Having taken the helm of the diocesan paper during a critical juncture — with print media beginning the transition to digital and online versions and in the aftermath of a barrage of negative Catholic articles in the secular newspapers — Father Landry said he's pleased to have been able to guide the ship through stormy weather.

“*The Anchor* team ... has been able to shine light on so much of the good happening throughout our diocese and to be a reliable source of the Catholic faith in an age in which so many Catholics are confused about what the Church stands for and believes,” he said. “We’ve been able to foster the talents of so many local writers and living stones, we’ve been able to take *The Anchor* online, we’ve made our diocesan directory one of the most attractive and useful of any diocese’s in the country, we’ve been able, I believe, in the years after the terrible scandals that have rocked the faith of so many Catholics, to be a weekly source of hope.”

Providing that positive spin — that sense of hope — to Catholics throughout the diocese is what Father Landry believes should be the central mission of *The Anchor*.

“My biggest goal was to have made *The Anchor*, to quote the letter to the Hebrews: ‘An anchor thrown into Heaven’ — something to lift people up, to give people hope,” he said. “It’s amazing the number of people who have stopped me when I’ve given talks in parishes around the diocese to just thank me for *The Anchor*. They tell me that they read it from cover to cover. I’m glad that they really do depend on it, that’s what I’m most proud of.”

With many secular newspapers now struggling to maintain their print editions, Father Landry said *The Anchor* and most Catholic newspapers have been blessed with steady readership over the last few years.

“I think the print editions of Catholic newspapers still have a good five to 10 years in them, while the media as a whole is preparing for the transition to almost exclusively online content,” he said. “We already have a boat in the water at *The Anchor*, thanks be to God, that will prepare us for that new phase as we throw our anchor into this new media.”

Father Landry first learned to appreciate the value of journalism while he was a sophomore at Harvard in 1988. It was during that time that he and several friends founded a magazine called *Peninsula*, which focused on promoting the social teachings of the Church.

“I learned how to write about the Church’s teachings in controversial areas without ever mentioning the word ‘Catholic,’” he said. “But in order to be able to do that, you needed to be able to write and that’s when I began to take more seriously writing articles instead of writing term papers or essays. I began to recognize through my work on *Peninsula* how much of an impact journalism can make. I always took that with me into the priesthood ... but it wasn’t until Bishop Coleman asked me to take over *The Anchor* that I started to see a vocational dimension to journalism.”

When he first approached Father Landry about taking over *The Anchor* in October 2004, Bishop Coleman stressed that he wanted it to be a real tool of adult education for the diocese.

“I always took the bishop’s desire seriously in both the ‘information’ and ‘formation’ sides of the paper, to give Catholics in our diocese materials that could help nourish their understanding of the world and of the Church from a Catholic perspective and help them apply the truths of the faith to their Christian life,” he said.

Ironically, it is Father Landry’s own never-ending passion for writing and proclaiming the Good News that led to his decision to leave *The Anchor*.

“Over the last two years I’ve done various workshops and retreats for priests,” he said. “At the end of almost every one, the bishops who invited me and many of the priests in attendance strongly encouraged me to get into book form what I preached to them, because they thought that not only would it help priests but also the whole Church. Having several successors of the Apostles and brother priests urging me in this way was, in a sense, an external confirmation of what I had been discerning for quite some time in my prayer — that God seems to be asking me to dedicate more of my time to this aspect of the New Evangelization.”

To that end, Father Landry asked Bishop Coleman if it might be possible for him to be freed of some of his responsibilities for a couple of years to dedicate himself to this type of apostolate.

“He took several weeks to pray about it and told me that there was no way he could foresee with so many priest retirements that he could relieve me of my work as a pastor but if I really felt called to do this work, he would relieve me of my *Anchor* duties,” he said.

Father Landry accepted the bishop’s recommendation, although he says he’s sad to leave *The Anchor*. His sadness was somewhat alleviated when he learned that Father Richard D. Wilson would become his successor.

“I’ve known Father Wilson from before the time we were seminarians,” Father Landry said. “He was writing for the newspaper at Georgetown when I was founding *Peninsula*. He also worked as a reporter in Quincy, so he brings some real journalistic experience and training to the paper. He’s also a man of deep, Catholic faith, who pays attention to current events, and so I look forward to reading his weekly editorials.

“I don’t know how he’s going to find the time to manage everything — taking over three parishes and a school in Attleboro at the same time — but he’s one of the hardest working priests in the diocese and he will somehow, with God’s help, find a way.”

As for words of advice to his successor, Father Landry simply suggested that Father Wilson look at *The Anchor* as “the largest pulpit he now has to preach the Gospel.”

“The same gift of the Holy Spirit that helps us as priests in our preaching the Word will also help us to teach the Word in season and out of season — not only on page six, but on pages one to 20,” he said.

Although he remains pleased about his work with *The Anchor*, there were a few things he wished he had more time to achieve during his tenure.

“One of my hopes coming in was that we could grow *The Anchor*’s readership,” Father Landry said. “There are many parishes in which maybe only 25 percent or so of the parishioners are reading or receiving *The Anchor*. I would love to get to a stage where in our diocese every faithful Catholic hungered to be informed by what’s going on in the Catholic world and in other Catholic parishes in the diocese.”

Even though the weekly print run has remained steady over the last seven years — which, itself, is an achievement during a time when many secular newspapers are seeing a sharp decline in subscription rates — Father Landry wishes he had done more to promote *The Anchor*.

“I would have loved to have gotten to the point where every adult and young Catholic in the diocese would be looking forward to receiving a copy of *The Anchor* in their mailbox on Friday,” he said.

He also regrets never finding a suitable columnist to write about issues for Catholic seniors or a Catholic medical doctor who could advise on medical issues from the perspective of the Catholic faith.

“Most of all, I would have loved to have learned the art of shortening my editorials by 300 words each week,” he said with a smile.

Although Father Landry will be officially stepping down as executive editor of *The Anchor* with this edition, at Father Wilson’s request he will resume writing a weekly column for the newspaper once he’s settled in at St. Bernadette’s Parish.