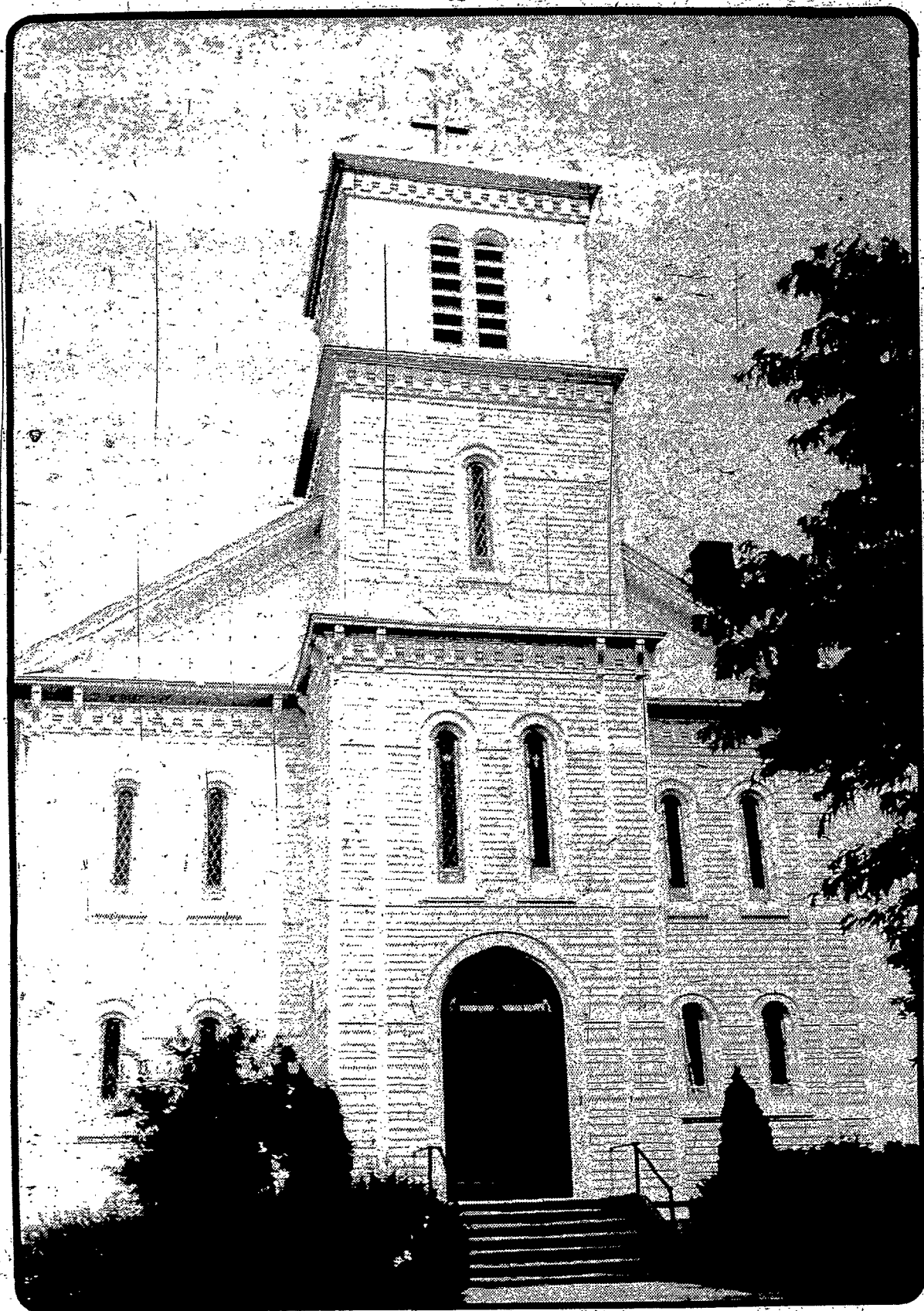




Sacred Heart Church, Perkinsville

Text by Bonita Baldwin
Photos by Susan McKinney



Bruce Tobias plays with Father Weider's pups.

A Church That Feels Like Home

If a stranger were to drive into the churchyard of Sacred Heart in Perkinsville on a weekday morning, he would sense something different. In the backyard some kids would be swinging while others played with Tim's pups, and Tim, Father Timothy Weider, might be down in a hole with two youths unearthing the septic tank. That's where he was one recent morning. "Country plumbing," he chuckled as he climbed out.

The buildings look like church, but everything feels like home.

"Home," Father Weider explained inside Friends' Inn where he lives, "is not a place. It is an atmosphere of love where a human being can evolve into personhood."

"A community is the gathering and mutual supporting of homes. Christianity is essentially communal."

Since his days in the Secular Mission, Father Weider, young, bearded, dressed in overalls with a torn knee, has been incorporating his concept of home into programs that create "families."

Working near Perkinsville in the Secular Mission, "a free lance rural apostolate," Father Weider was able to "look after the parish" when Father Thomas Kane, the late pastor of Sacred Heart, became ill.

Father Weider recounted that at that time there was talk of closing the parish, leaving churches in nearby Wayland and Dansville to serve the community. He asked instead that the parish be kept open as a resource center to the rural apostolate. "The only way we can justify our existence is to reach out and serve beyond our community," he said.

The Perkinsville work began eight years ago when Father Weider organized the parish council, "one of the first in the diocese, if not the first." The spirit of that body was casually captured when one of its members stopped to ask Father Weider if they could meet that night where one of the other members was working because he didn't want to miss the meeting.

Project REACH was also the beginning. A multi-faceted social outreach, it has since outgrown its church facilities. Father Weider himself is no longer part of the project. "We're a seedbed," he explained, "We staff projects, but when they are strong enough they leave."

Project REACH headquarters have moved to Cohocton. Its volunteer medical and dental programs have become part of the Tri-County Medical Program with centers in Nunda, Dansville, and Cohocton. The day care center for migrant children that began in the old school is now a year around child development center housed in Wayland. Clothing and food stores have also relocated in Wayland.



From left to right, Ted Didas, Bob Lawrence, and Pete and Joe Huber weed garden behind church.