

Parish Exchange 'Very Rewarding'

By MARTIN TOOMBS
Southern Tier Editor

Apalachin/Rochester—The young, suburban/rural parish of St. Margaret Mary, Apalachin, and the old, urban parish of St. Michael's, Rochester, provide a myriad of contrasts.

That was the first conclusion reached by Father Elmer Schmidt, St. Margaret Mary pastor, and by Father Anthony Valente, St. Michael's co-pastor, after they spent 10 days in each others' parish.

Father Schmidt pointed out the older population of St. Michael's, commenting that "you can see the lack of kids" in the parish, especially in the shortage of altar boys. There are "just not the younger families" that predominate in parishes such as St. Margaret Mary, he noted.

Father Valente reported that he talked frequently with Apalachin parishioners about their concerns for their children; he commented that he was surprised to find that so many of the parents were younger than he. As a consequence, he noted, much emphasis in the parish is on educational programs for children.

St. Michael's is not unfamiliar to Father Schmidt; he grew up nearby, as a parishioner of neighboring Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Two brothers, Milt and Gordy, still run a meat market in the area.

An early realization, Father Schmidt reported, was that the "unused" St. Michael's school building is far from unused. "I was amazed at all the life in those buildings," he noted, both during the day and in the evenings. And, he added, they are being used "for good Christian purposes."

He also commented that the people's "pride in their parish is certainly beautiful." He said that the "respect for the priests and religious" as exhibited in the streets in the neighborhood, was excellent, "which speaks well for the Church."

One event that Father Schmidt picked out for emphasis was a visit to a Legion of Mary meeting his first night at St. Michael's. He reported that he was impressed with the work and the time being expended by the small group of legionnaires.

Father Schmidt commented that people "should come to the Church or the rectory as if Jesus was there," and noted instances when that happened at St. Michael's. People often turned to the priests for help with their problems, he recounted, and the priests tried to help.

One such request sent Father Paul Freemesser, St. Michael's other co-pastor, out at 10 p.m. to bail out a woman in prison, Father Schmidt said.

Father Schmidt also commented that "a beauty of that parish" was its liturgies which he lauded for their "homeyness."

Crime in the area and the frequent interruption of sirens also provides a different perspective in the urban parish. Father Schmidt's descriptions reported.

The exchange was a good idea, Father Schmidt said, adding that he "would recommend it to any priest." The change could give priests a "better appreciation of what we have," he noted, and a better understanding of the problems and situations facing others.

He also noted that the "people appreciated" the change, and the different perspective available from another priest.

Father Valente also said that the experience was valuable, noting that it was "very, very rewarding for me personally." He said that he learned from St. Margaret Mary parishioners, and that they seemed to enjoy the contact with another priest.



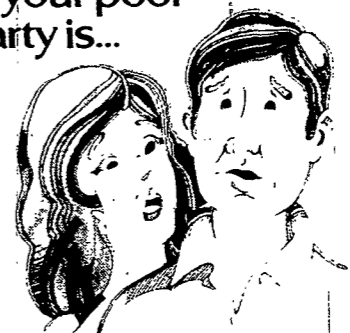
Father Elmer Schmidt, left, is greeted by Father Paul Freemesser in front of St. Michael's Church, where Father Schmidt worked for 10 days, switching assignments with Father Anthony Valente.

Benefit Dinner

The people of St. Joseph's, Rush, will serve chicken barbecue Saturday, Sept. 9—their annual scholarship benefit. The dinner is scheduled for 4-8 p.m. in the church dining room, with

Mass at 9 p.m. Mrs. Lynn Mack and Mrs. William Woolaver have charge. Proceeds go into a fund that helps keep young parishioners in Catholic schools.

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