

# Diocesan parishes celebrate liturgies filled with tradition

By Teresa A. Parsons

For the first time in 20 years, midnight Mass will be celebrated at St. Michael's Church in Rochester this year.

On Christmas Eve, beginning at 11:30 p.m., the parish tradition will be resurrected in grand and memorable fashion. The church's 13 tower bells will ring to open the service. A brass quintet will then accompany a 40-voice choir from Sperry High School in the church Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid once called "the best church in my diocese."

Midnight Mass at St. Michael's lapsed in the 1960s after riots broke out in the neighborhood and people no longer felt safe in the area of North Clinton Street at night. The parish staff decided to revive the tradition this year in response to requests from parishioners for a celebration of the parish's renewed life in the community.

Almost every parish in the diocese has its own distinctive Christmas customs, whether liturgical or social in nature. Some are long-standing ethnic traditions; others have developed more recently. Old or new — all are based on the same timeless spirit of the season and all in some way reflect the personality of the community.

Christmas Eve at St. Michael's will provide one of the more dramatic contrasts between a parish's past and present. Earlier in the same evening that they plan to rejuvenate one of their oldest parish traditions — midnight Mass — the community will celebrate a custom that reflects its present reality — a family Mass in Spanish complete with traditional Spanish Christmas carols or "musica tipica."

A reunion of past and present parishioners, neighbors and friends will also be the focus of midnight Mass at St. Monica's Church, 841 Genesee St. Over the years, many parishioners have moved away from the neighborhood and all are invited to return for this service, which begins with carols at 11:30 p.m. and concludes with a reception after Mass. The evening promises to rekindle old friendships and spark some new ones.

Perhaps more than any other single factor, music sets the tone for a parish Christmas celebration. A standard feature of midnight Mass at many churches is a Christmas cantata or musical narrative of the story of Christ's birth. For the past 10 years or more, the choir at St. Christopher's Church in North Chili has observed this custom.

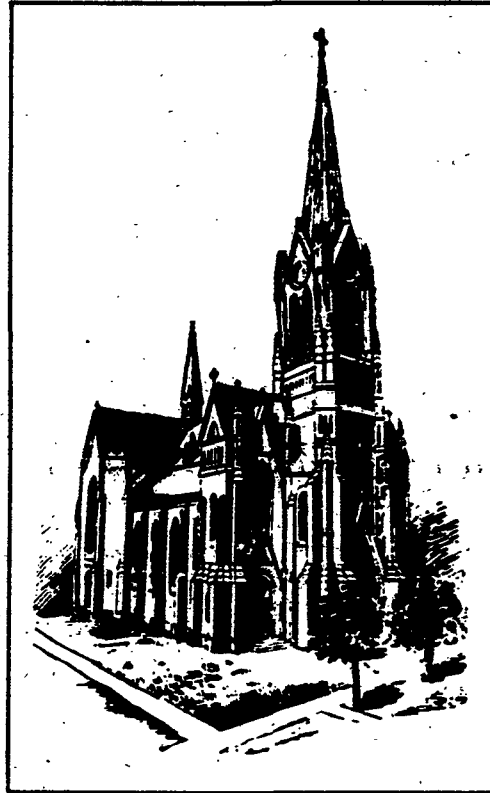
Cantatas generally provide an opportunity for the congregation to sit back and enjoy the music without participating. But this year, in the best spirit of liturgical renewal, St. Christopher's choir will sing a new cantata — "The Celebration" by Douglas Wagner — which requires the congregation to sing a few carols as well.

St. Mary's in Dansville is notable for sheer variety of its Christmas liturgies. Because last year's early Christmas Eve Mass was so crowded, Father Andrew Teuschel, the pastor, will celebrate two early Masses this Christmas Eve. One will be oriented toward young children and the other will be a folk-type Mass, he said.

The midnight Mass at St. Mary's remains a very traditional celebration, while the early Masses on Christmas morning are geared to the people who prefer a more peaceful, introspective style of liturgy. "You have to have variety for people," Father Teuschel pointed out.

Throughout the diocese, many parishes are following the trend toward scheduling family Masses early on Christmas Eve and emphasizing children's liturgies.

At St. Patrick's in Seneca Falls, children have been invited to join the celebrant in the sanctuary during Christmas Eve Mass for the past six or seven years, according to Carol Jaeger, the parish office manager. In past years, some children have curled up and fallen asleep, while others play a liturgical version of "Simon Says," imitating the priest's actions. One year, a bat got into the



church during the Mass and created pandemonium.

"Father tried to tell the kids it was the Holy Spirit, but they didn't buy it," Jaeger joked.

Pageants and plays in which the children act out the Christmas story are other ways they become involved in the liturgy. At Immaculate Heart of Mary in Painted Post, the older children narrate the Christmas story while the younger ones act it out. Children at St. Theresa and St. Mary's parishes in Stanley dress like Mary and Joseph, wise men, shepherds and angels, then march around the church in procession at the beginning of Christmas Eve Mass. At Immaculate Conception in Rochester, older children actually prepare and carry out much of the liturgy for their younger counterparts.

In an effort to make Christ's birth relevant to the children, Father Chester Klocek began to celebrate a birthday party for Jesus nine years ago at St. Leo's in Hilton. After the family Mass on Christmas Eve, children gather around the nativity scene to sing "Happy Birthday." Their favorite part comes last — when they share Jesus' birthday cake.

While Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are the high points of parish celebrations, more and more communities are introducing customs that help them prepare for the season.

Children from St. James Church and school in Waverly plant Christmas wheat each year on December 13, the feast of St. Lucy. The wheat, symbolizing the new bread of life, is later harvested and presented during the offertory at Mass.

These kids also deserve an award for long-range planning. Two months ago, they began work on an altar cloth to present to their pastor, Father Edward Foy. Each child contributed a small drawing to the project — from the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin to Christmas symbols. The drawings were then transferred to a linen cloth, which was presented to Father Foy last Friday with the children's "respect and admiration."

At St. Francis Solanus in Interlaken, all 40 of the children in the parish's religious education program participated in activities throughout Advent. High school students decorated the church while the eighth graders made the Advent wreath. First graders dressed as angels and sang for the congregation during Mass one Sunday. Another Sunday, the sixth and seventh graders told the congregation the story of St. Nicholas.

One of the most unusual parish practices is the tradition of living heritage wreaths at St.



## Along the Way

Bishop Matthew H. Clark



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*"Your eternal Word leaped down from heaven in the silent watches of the night, and now your Church is filled with wonder at the nearness of her God."*

(Opening Prayer of Christmas Mass at Dawn)

My dear people:

The days of Advent have evolved into another Christmas season, rich with the message of God alive in our midst. Truly, the night silence gave the world its Savior, and we are transformed.

As you celebrate this holy day, please take time to appreciate the transformation that has taken place, and that that must still happen. If we are to be truly Christian people, we must accept our role in the continuing story of salvation. God has given us a wonderful opportunity to bring the Living Word to the hearts of all men and women. We are not a world awaiting a Savior, but a graced people proclaiming His Presence.

May this Christmas season be rich in its blessings for you and those whom you hold dear. May the blessings of the Christ Child fill your hearts and minds so that you are renewed in your strength and commitment to His work. May the mystery of the incarnation, proclaimed through you, bring healing, confidence and peace.

We are a people of dawn. We rejoice in the rising sun. We look to the hope-filled challenges of a new day. Let this Christmas be a morning star which guides your way and invites all to "wonder at the nearness of God."

With the promise of prayer, I remain

Your brother in Christ,

*Matthew H. Clark*

+ Matthew H. Clark  
Bishop of Rochester

*This Love Endures Forever*

Mary's of the Lake in Watkins Glen. Beginning three years ago, Father Andrew Kalafsky, the pastor, asked parishioners to create wreaths that symbolized their family heritages and traditions.

Father Kalafsky, who comes from a Slovak background, decorates his wreath with marzipan candies. An Italian family has made a wreath from raviolis and a Scotch family has used plaid bows. The area's grape industry was duly recognized by a wreath made from vine branches and decorated with grapes. The owner of a local diner formed his wreath from knives and forks one year. Another parishioner commemorated his parents, who were bakers, with a wreath made from bread. On Christmas Eve each year, between 15 and 30 wreaths are displayed throughout the church.

The parish celebration many Hispanic children look forward to is after Christmas — the Feast of the Epiphany, January 5.

For more than ten years, Hispanic parish-

ioners at St. Michael's in Newark have marked the feast with a special Mass. Older children dress as wise men, shepherds and Mary and Joseph and march in procession around the church. The wise men later hand out gifts to the little ones. If there is a newborn boy in the community, he is used to symbolize Jesus; otherwise, a statue is used in the manger.

Maria Rodriguez, who has helped organize the celebration most years, remembers that back in Puerto Rico, the "wise men" rode on horseback through the streets of her town, following by the townspeople singing and

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