

# Parishes on campus: challenging tomorrow's leaders today

By Teresa A. Parsons

For the next three weeks, the Courier-Journal will profile campus parishes around the diocese, beginning this week with Keuka College in Penn Yan.

When Sally Luna first met the handful of students who comprises Keuka College's Newman Community last fall, they agreed that their aim would be to build a strong community.

As the end of the academic year approaches, both Luna, the school's part-time Catholic chaplain, and the students believe they did better than that goal.

Together, they helped to revitalize student activities on campus by sponsoring monthly events and programs. They drew more students, faculty and staff to liturgies than in past years. In the process, they established relationships with one another that flourished beyond their weekly celebration of liturgy.

"Mass was just one more time to see each other," explained freshman Julie Engasser. "We feel like a family."

For Senior Julie DeSarro, 1985/86 has been the best year ever. As president of the Newman Community since its inception at Keuka four years ago, she has kept faith with its slow, but steady growth.

"I wish people could know how hard we worked to get where we are," she said. "It was a struggle for three years, and now it's where it should be. I just hope it keeps growing."

But two weeks ago, as her college career drew to a close, DeSarro and the rest of the community were handed a bitter disappointment. They learned that no replacement will be hired for Luna, who earlier this year resigned her part-time position as Catholic chaplain for Keuka and Hobart/William Smith colleges. Because of budget considerations, the Diocese of Rochester has withdrawn its financial support for the campus ministry.

Before she undertook the Finger Lakes-area post, Luna served as pastoral assistant for four years at Mother of Sorrows Parish in Greece. A native of Rochester and graduate of Nazareth Academy, she has worked in campus ministry at St. Louis and Notre Dame univer-

sities. She also worked in administration at St. Bonaventure for 12 years, eventually becoming dean of students.

"I came here at a really good time," she said of her arrival at Keuka last year. "The administration did a lot to save the school and turn it around, and the students were really ready."

She resigned nonetheless because she felt the pull between the two colleges was too strong. With too many miles in between them, she didn't believe she had enough time at either. The news that she would not be replaced was a surprise, she said.

Particularly for the seniors, it was a painful blow.

"I cried when I heard," DeSarro said. "We're finally established this year and were really going places. I know the people here are capable of keeping it alive, but they really need an outside person to come in and help organize."

Luna was only on campus twice a week, so much of the work and planning was done by students. Nevertheless, she agreed that the chaplain's position is important to the long-term health of the community. Students have looked to her as a liaison between themselves and college administration as well as with the Penn Yan parish and the diocese.

Without a chaplain, the community's continuity is also threatened. Because students leave every four years, it is up to the chaplain to identify and develop potential leaders in each class.

"My job is basically a moderator, a helper, somebody who cares enough about them to say 'Do you want a retreat?' or 'Is everything ready for Mass this week?'" Luna said. "Their primary reason for being here is to study, and they work hard."

That's amply illustrated by what the community has already accomplished in a short time against unlikely odds.

With its idyllic location on the western bank of Keuka Lake, the college appears to be a haven of tranquility. But seniors like DeSarro and Jill Swetland know differently. Throughout their four-year careers, Keuka has been fighting for its life against declining enrollment and rising costs.

With the advent of a new administration last



Members of Keuka College's Newman Community have come a long way in four years, and are determined to keep on building their community. From left are senior Jill Swetland, sophomore Elaine Ruigrok, senior Julie DeSarro, freshman Julie Engasser and part-time college chaplain Sally Luna.

year, headed by College President Arthur F. Kirk Jr., the school's fortunes appear to be taking a positive turn.

But the instability took its toll. This year's senior class lost half its membership over the course of four years.

"Before we could worry about a Newman Community, we had to worry about the college," said Elaine Ruigrok, a sophomore.

Nonetheless, DeSarro and several other Catholic students organized themselves into a Newman Community four years ago. The following year, the diocese funded a part-time chaplain and Newman gained an office and formal recognition as a campus organization.

"That's when we first felt there was a group to belong to," DeSarro said. "But we really didn't develop a community of faith until this year."

It's a small and closely-knit community, consisting primarily of students and a few faculty and staff members.

But on a campus as small as Keuka's, they are still highly visible. "There aren't many of

us to put events together, so we work hard together," DeSarro said.

Nearly one-quarter of Keuka's 400 students are estimated to be Catholic. But the majority live within two or three hours of campus and travel home most weekends.


"A lot of people also don't come to church — maybe they were baptized, but they just never go," Engasser said. "Then there are the ones you see at Mass for the first time on Parents' Weekend."

Attendance at weekend Masses has just begun to increase this year. An average of 20 people gathered on Saturday nights to celebrate liturgy with one of the priests from St. Michael's Parish in Penn Yan.

"The Mass is really personal," Ruigrok explained. "It feels like ours and not our parents' church. We share in the worship and we do the work to get things together."

To reach out in a welcoming fashion, members of the Newman Community organized monthly events this year for Catholics and non-

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