

## Features



Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal  
Above, Yolanda Petruzzi rolls out sweet bread dough to be formed into one of the many-shaped breads for the St. Joseph's Table at St. Anthony of Padua Church on March 13. At left, Petruzzi was among approximately 25 volunteers who regularly met evenings and afternoons in the back room of Garofanello's Market on Dewey Ave. to produce more than 100 loaves of bread and 500 pounds of cookies.

## Sicilian traditions flavor celebration of St. Joseph's Day

By Lee Strong

The air in the crowded back room of Garofanello's Market on Dewey Avenue was scented with an aromatic mixture of coffee, burning wood and baking bread.

At a large table, three men took turns rolling sweet dough into long strands they later braided together into oblong loaves. On previous afternoons and evenings, they had formed the braids into crosses, shepherd's crooks, fish and even a large heart.

A smaller table was covered with half-cookies. One woman squirted raspberry preserves onto them, another woman pressed the upper halves of the cookies down onto the dollops of raspberry and placed the completed cookies into boxes, a third woman covered the table with more cookie halves.

The six St. Anthony of Padua parishioners worked quickly and efficiently, talking and joking familiarly with each other. For the past month, they have been among about 25 people meeting at various times in the market's back room to mix, bake and decorate cookies and bread. When they finished, Saturday, March 12, they had made more than 2,000 rolls, 100 loaves of bread and 500 pounds of cookies for the March 13 St. Joseph's Table at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Rochester.

St. Joseph's Tables are set up in many local churches around the time of the Feast of St. Joseph — March 19 — but according to Joe Garofanello, who organized the parish's month-long preparations, none are as large or elaborate as St. Anthony's. Following St. Anthony's regular 11:15 Mass, three parish children dressed as Joseph, Mary and Jesus led parishioners in a procession to the church hall where the priests blessed the food and the congregation. In addition to the breads and cookies, the feast included omelets, quiches, fish, fritattas, cannolis, sfingis and pastas.

The St. Joseph's Table is an Italian tradition originating in Sicily. According to legend, the tradition began during the Middle Ages when a severe drought struck a town in the western part of the Mediterranean island. The people prayed to St. Joseph asking for assistance, vowing that they and their descendants would honor him and help the poor and hungry if he interceded. Rain came, and in thanksgiving, the people of Sicily celebrated with a feast that has evolved into the current St. Joseph Table celebration.

"(The table is) meant to represent hospitality to everyone," explained Father Robert Beligotti, parochial vicar at St. Anthony's. "The idea is to share in the thanksgiving for favors received!" The poor in particular, are invited to share in the thanksgiving, he added, because the Holy Family was poor, and "the Lord had a special love for the poor."

St. Joseph himself is special to Italians, Father Beligotti noted, because "he is the patron (saint) of family life and the Italians have a strong sense of family."

Although such an elaborate celebration of St. Joseph's feast may seem out of place within the Lenten season, such festivities actually fit in with Lenten themes, the priest noted. "It reminds us that a reason for Lent is to prepare us for eternal life," he said. "The penitential spirit gets pushed aside so that we can celebrate someone who made it."

St. Anthony's parishioners have celebrated St. Joseph's feast day with small, family-centered St. Joseph's Tables for many years. St. Anthony's tradition of an elaborate parish celebration is only three-years-old, however. Garofanello, who owns Garofanello's Market, and his family had been setting up a table in the store's back room every year. As many as 50 people dropped in annually to join the family's celebration. Several years ago, Father John Mulligan, St. Anthony's pastor, was one of these visitors. He and other parishioners suggested that Garofanello organize something for the entire parish. The store owner contacted friends who agreed to help, and the result is the parish celebration.

According to Ray Fratta, another of the event's organizers, St. Anthony's parishioners have responded enthusiastically to the parish



Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal  
Father Robert Beligotti watches as Ray Fratta checks some of the more than 2,000 rolls baked by volunteers.

St. Joseph's Table. "It's always been a tradition for individual parishioners to invite special friends," he noted. "This way it's open to everyone, and you can get more people because the facilities are bigger."

The types of food prepared for the feast date back to the celebration's religious origins in Sicily. The feast always takes place during Lent; thus fish dishes are frequently offered while meats are never served. The other foods are elaborately prepared, however, so meat is not missed.

The shapes in which the various kinds of breads are baked also derive from religious symbolism. The breads are all braided to represent the baskets used to hold the fish and bread remaining after Jesus fed the 5,000. Some breads are baked in the form of the traditional Christian symbols of fish and crosses. A heart-shaped bread, Garofanello explained, represents kindness to be shown to the poor.

The volunteers preparing for St. Anthony's celebration admitted that they have to work hard to make enough food. "We want to make sure no one runs short," Angelo Marconi explained as he checked loaves in the ovens. St. Anthony's, he said, is a mixed parish with

many low-income and elderly people and organizers wanted everyone who came to take food home with them.

As she squeezed preserves onto cookies, Evelyn Lipa added that in addition to the feast being a parish activity, the work sessions in the back room have become social events. "Last night, the ladies came in singing and went out singing," she remarked, noting that the workers frequently sing favorite hymns from their hometowns in Italy and Sicily.

Even though the bakers worked smoothly and informally, Garofanello was clearly in charge. He answered questions, made sure everyone had enough dough, suggested that someone move to a different task, decided what is to be made next. The others listened to him with obvious respect.

Father Beligotti noted that Garofanello is responsible for the success of the St. Joseph's Table at St. Anthony's. He speculated that the store owner has some special devotion to Saint Joseph, observing that the store owner's first name — and that of his son — is Joseph. "Maybe the Lord has been good to them," he suggested.



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Giorgio Marcone (from left), Angelo Marconi and Mary Martusciello proudly display a trayful of rolls, the products of an evening of baking in the back room of Garofanello's Market. Volunteers had been baking in the room for the past month.