

Visit celebrates Tier's past and present

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark
Sunday, August 12

This morning in Corning/Painted Post, we gathered to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first Mass celebrated in that community. The first eucharistic liturgy was celebrated in the home of Margaret and Thomas Keating by Father O'Riley, a noted missionary who had been the parish priest of the Keatings when they lived in Silver Lake, Pa. The Keating home stood on the corner of the same block on which now stands St. Mary's Church, the site of this morning's gathering.

In preparation for the celebration, I read some portions of *A Century of Grace*, the excellent history of St. Mary's Parish. The history was written by Father Robert McNamara, distinguished historian and priest of the Diocese of Rochester and himself a native of Corning.

I learned that at the time of the first Mass in the Keatings' home in 1840, Corning

was a part of the Archdiocese of New York. Father Patrick Bradley was pastor of the territory that included Corning. You will be interested to know that he lived at Holy Family, Auburn, and that in addition to Corning his territory included Elmira, Hammondsport, Jefferson, Tyrone, Penn Yan, Ithaca and Owego!

The sacrifice of our mothers and fathers in the faith have brought us a long way since then. Over the course of years, St. Mary's, Corning, was established as a parish to be followed by St. Patrick's and St. Vincent's in that same community, and by Immaculate Heart of Mary in Painted Post.

Representative from those four communities came to join the celebration at St. Mary's this morning. They did so with a deep reverence for the past and out of gratitude for the origins of eucharistic life in Corning/Painted Post. But they gathered as well with a lively sense of the changing circumstances of the day and, I am firmly convinced, with a strong commitment to the Catholic life of the future.

Those four parishes have joined together to form one parish. They continue to wor-

ship in their four churches, but are now served by one pastoral team consisting of three priests, three pastoral assistants, a permanent deacon and support staff. With the people of the parish, the members of this team are making the adjustments that are necessary to ensure the richest possible parish life under changed circumstances. I am much impressed by the quality of the work that has brought the community to this stage. And I am no less impressed by the enthusiastic spirit of the people who have achieved it.

To be sure, the road has not always been an easy one. What has taken place in Corning/Painted Post has demanded a vision of the church that goes beyond the local community. It has also demanded sacrifice, as always happens when people are asked to put aside familiar and cherished practices and to take up new ones. But the people of Corning and Painted Post have both the vision and the courage, and I admire them very much for what they are doing. I find in them the same qualities that made the memory of Margaret and Thomas Keating so much a part of Sunday's celebration.



When I left Corning after the wonderful liturgy of the day and a reception on the lawn for parishioners, I drove to St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads to meet with some members of our vocation team, a few of our seminarians and a group of young men from the Southern Tier who have interest in a vocation to the priesthood. The work of our program, Bishop Clark's Call to Priesthood, continues in quiet and effective ways. I will give you an update on that program shortly after the new school year begins.

Peace to all.

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they are appealing to the same way as they did 20, 30, 40 years ago."

Nichols also said that the patterns for people's involvement with parishes have changed, making communication and fundraising more difficult. Although the parish was often the center of a Catholic family's social life years ago, this is no longer the case.

"Busy people are not going to church as often, so there may be a need to stimulate the kind of communication that went on face-to-face," Nichols said.

Seeberg pointed out that 30 years ago, the priest may have been the most educated person in the parish. Now, many of the lay people are well-educated, and it no longer works for the priest simply to ask for money. Parishioners must be given reasons to contribute, he said.

Nor are traditional means of supplementing Sunday collections — bingo, festivals and raffles, which Monsignor Champlin lumped together as "bingo, bunco and bazaars" — effective ways to support the church today, Seeberg said.

"What we've really done in the American Catholic Church is ...

everything to avoid asking for more money," Seeberg observed.

Parishioners also need to be educated about how much they should contribute. Holloway observed. Many people have not substantially increased their weekly contributions, even though their incomes have risen substantially.

In addition to their Sunday offerings, Catholics need to be made aware of other ways they can contribute money to the church, said Donna Hunt, business manager at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Irondequoit.

"We're trying to educate Catholics to think about us in their wills," Hunt said. "Just as they'd leave \$100,000 to the philharmonic, they'd leave it to the church. It's just a matter of teaching people to think about the church as a charitable donation."

Hunt's comments point out that the church is — in a sense — competing for donations against other charitable and civic organizations. "Unfortunately, I think our people bring to the church the consumer mentality they bring to everything else," Bishop McManus acknowledged in a telephone interview.

The bishop observed, however, that people will give if they feel involved in the soliciting program. "(Studies) have established a highly positive result between participation and the amount people contribute," he said. "The more they participate, the more they feel involved in the church, the more cash they want to contribute."

Encouraging such greater involvement in the church does lead to success, Monsignor Champlin observed. Noting that parishes offering stewardship training tend to realize an increase in revenues, he pointed out that 103 such parishes in the Syracuse di-

ocese have realized an average increase in Sunday collections of 45 percent.

St. Margaret Mary's is a local case in point. Hunt said her parish has offered an annual sacrificial-giving program for the past six years, and has realized a 66-percent increase in Sunday collections over that span. That money is needed to help support the parish school and a variety of outreach ministries — such as a senior citizen program — offered by the parish.

But the effort requires regular contact with parishioners, Hunt said. The annual campaign consists of bulletin articles, brochures, letters, suggested contribution levels and "a lot of personal contact," she said.

Such regular contact is essential, observed John Foley, head of Foley Associates, a Rochester-based firm that helps parishes and institutions with fundraising endeavors.

"(Fundraising) should be an ongoing process," Foley said. "It's a continuous process that requires continuous management."

In addition, fundraisers must begin to develop a longer-range approach to soliciting money, Holloway observed. A lack of long-range planning contributed to the current retirement-funding crisis faced by congregations of women religious, he said, noting that congregations are now beginning to develop long-range financial strategies.

Parishes need to begin doing the same sort of planning, Holloway suggested.

"People look at fundraising and say, 'We're raising a lot of money to solve this problem, and then we'll stop. Then when the next problem comes up, we'll turn it on again,'" he explained. "That just doesn't work."

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