

## Hospitality ministries lessen burden on funeral mourners

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Following a death in the family, the practical realities of providing food for friends and relatives attending the funeral can add an extra burden for those left behind.

In at least two parishes in the Diocese of Rochester, however, that burden is being carried by others.

Parishioners at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Apalachin provide a bereavement hospitality ministry. And at St. Mary's of the Lake in Ontario, the people have formed the Martha Ministry.

Although the two programs have different names, they provide essentially the same service: preparing and serving food in their respective church halls for people attending funerals at the parishes.

"To be able to sit down and visit after the funeral is important," noted Jean Kiedrowski, who coordinates Martha Ministry. "It's their first contact after the funeral itself, and it's a chance for them to catch their breath and say, 'OK, life goes on.'"

Kiedrowski can speak of the benefits of the ministry from her own experience.

Four years ago, her mother died in Springville, N.Y., Kiedrowski's home town. She received a call from the Martha Committee at her mother's parish, asking if she wanted the group to prepare food for after the funeral. Kiedrowski accepted the offer.

After the funeral, the committee served a hot lunch to the more than 100 people attending the funeral.

"It was just so nice to have family and friends around that day," Kiedrowski recalled. "We wouldn't have been able to do that at the house — not that many people."

Kiedrowski returned to her own parish, and a year later while she was helping prepare a meal after a parishioner's funeral she recalled her experience at her mother's funeral. She spoke with a few other women about the idea, and Martha Ministry was launched.

The roots of the hospitality ministry at St. Margaret Mary's are similar.

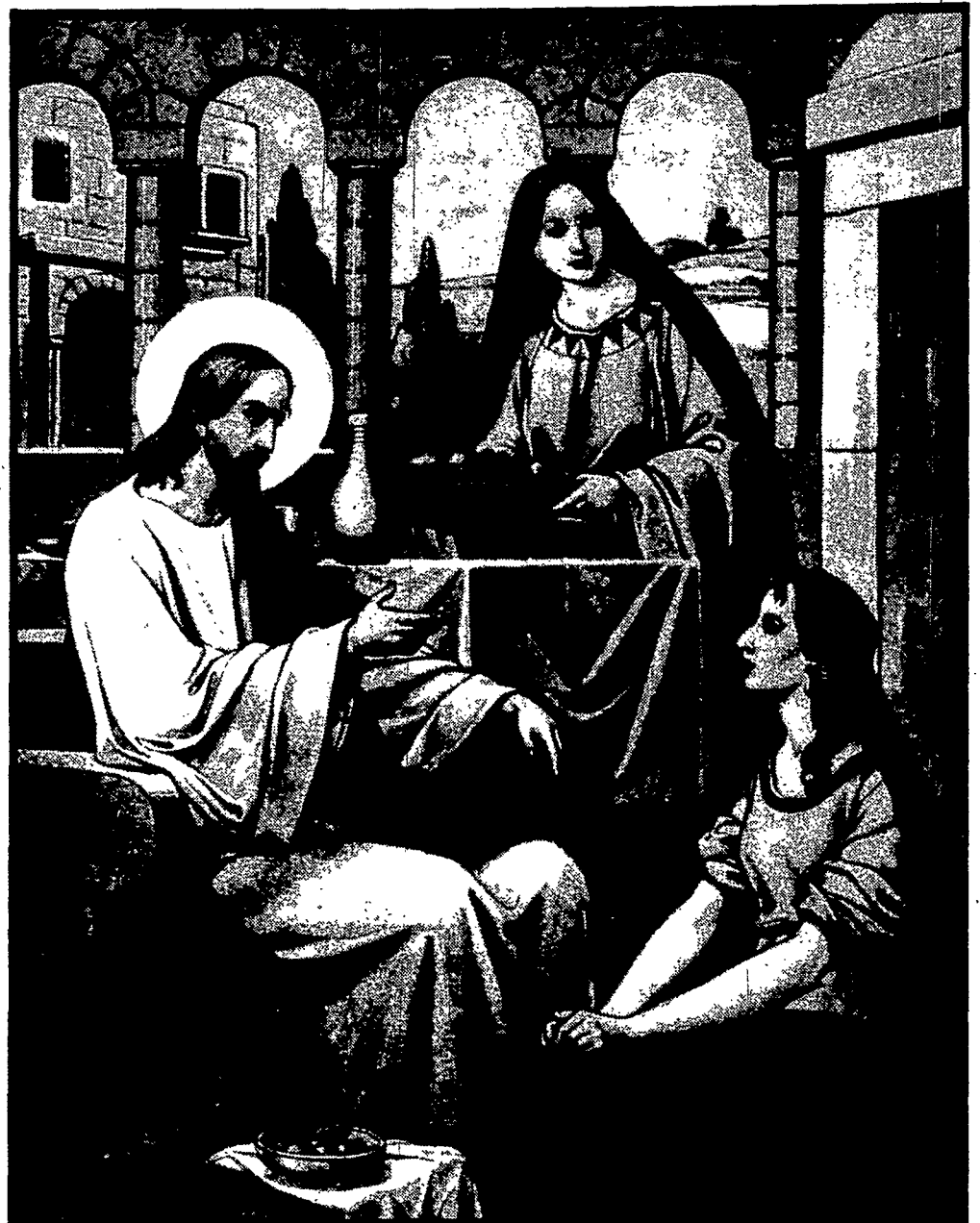
Six years ago, Marilyn De Marco attended an uncle's funeral at an Endicott parish that offered a hospitality ministry.

"After everyone paid their respects, everyone went down to share a meal, and the grieving started to let up," De Marco recalled. "Aunts and uncles who hadn't seen each other in years were talking. It was wonderful."

De Marco noted that such a ministry was common in the Binghamton area where she grew up. But four years ago she realized that it was not common everywhere when she attended her mother-in-law's funeral in a small Pennsylvania town. The church there did not have such a ministry, and the family had to gather at a house that did not have enough room for everyone.

After returning to Apalachin, De Marco thought about her experience, and realized that St. Margaret Mary's likewise did not offer such a ministry for grieving families.

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### How can I help a friend after a funeral?

Keep in mind that grieving people must deal with many feelings about the change in their life. You can help by visiting often and allowing your friend to tell you about their loss. Sometimes talking with someone they trust can relieve their depression and make them feel better. Sometimes it helps to offer practical assistance. House cleaning, babysitting or driving the person to the store can be important ways to assist. While you are helping your

friend, you can talk about matters of importance to him or her. The most important thing you can offer is to make yourself available. Many bereaved complain that they feel deserted after a funeral. Go out of your way to contact your friend.

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