

Thriving parishes make newcomers welcome

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states," Reed said. "This is one of the most inviting parishes I have ever been a part of."

In particular, the Reeds found the 9:30 a.m. Sunday Mass a beneficial experience for their children. Following the consecration of the Eucharist, the celebrant invites the parish's children to the altar to recite the Lord's Prayer, Reed commented.

"That was very reassuring to us that our children would feel welcome at the parish," Reed said.

Not only did they feel their children were welcome, but the parish's efforts to involve the Reeds at St. John's made the couple feel wanted, according to Carol.

She noted, for example, that Patricia Curtis — the parish's pastoral associate — took her picture when she registered, enabling greeters to know her face long before they actually met her.

"The new parishioners are very much on people's minds in terms of making them feel comfortable," Reed concluded.

Such hospitality to its faithful forms one of the key components of a successful parish in the 1990s, according to diocesan observers.

"Our Catholic churches have not had a very good reputation in years back of being warm and welcome," asserted Kay Egan, a "greeter" at St. Augustine's Parish, 410 Chili Ave., Rochester. "I think we've done a pretty good job of breaking that down."

Indeed, a number of diocesan parishes have instituted formal and informal processes over the last five to 10 years for welcoming newcomers. Many parishes now designate specific volunteers or professionals whose tasks encompass making newcomers feel wanted at a parish.

Generally, hospitality ministry comprises several steps, with a number of variations in style from parish to parish.

Greeters, who are often volunteers but are sometimes employed at the parish, seek out new faces showing up at weekend Masses. They meet with the newcomers, asking them if they're just visiting the church or if they're contemplating registering as members.

Josephine Gravino, a greeter at St. Andrew's Parish, 923 Portland Ave., Rochester, likened her work to entertaining friends at home.

"They feel it gives them a warm feeling," Gravino said of newcomers who are extended a welcome. "It's just like welcoming someone into your house."

Other observers noted that some pastors even begin their Sunday services by calling on parishioners to greet the person next to them, especially if that person is someone they don't know.

If a newcomer decides to register at a parish, the registration form often contains a questionnaire that explains what a new member can expect from a parish, and what the parish hopes to gain from the new member — particularly in areas of volunteer service.

Myra Humphrey, hospitality minister at Corpus Christi Parish, 864 E. Main St., Rochester, acts as a liaison between the parish's outreach ministries and committees and the parish's newcomers.

Like many others charged with welcoming newcomers, Humphrey calls up registrants to reaffirm their interest in the parish. She then writes a personal letter thanking them for joining Corpus Christi.

Several parishes also make a point of setting aside a special Mass every three to six months at which newcomers are cited by name and acknowledged as members of the parish.

St. Louis Parish, 60 S. Main St., Pittsford, is planning an extravagant newcomer weekend for Oct. 17-18, according to Diane Knittle, pastoral care coordinator.

The weekend's purpose is three-fold, Knittle said:

- newcomers will learn who St. Louis, a 13th-century French king, was and why he is canonized a saint.

- the history of St. Louis Parish and the surrounding community will be related.

- opportunities for service at the church will be listed, and services the parish offers to members will be explained.

The weekend will also feature display booths in the school gym sponsored by every parish group, a soup supper and refreshments.

St. Louis began emphasizing hospitality ministry this year after a parish survey revealed that a decision to renovate the church was unpopular, Knittle said.

"The survey showed people were primarily interested in community building rather than renovating the church," she commented.

The current emphasis on welcoming newcomers is a far cry from the parish's efforts in the past, Knittle added.

"Before, newcomers just got a phone call," she said.

In addition to phone calls, one of the most time-honored methods of hospitality practiced by parishes is the post-Mass coffee hour. Sister Chris Treichel, OSF, pastoral associate at St. John's, noted that her parish offers monthly coffee hours after Sunday Masses to which newcomers are invited.

Still, at least one parish has discontinued its coffee-hour program — St. Joseph's, 6105 Rush-Lima Road, Rush.

Judy Clark, St. Joseph's pastoral minister, noted that coffee hours were originally intended to welcome newcomers to the parish. In recent years, however, the socials have turned into functions during which old acquaintances catch up with one another, she said, which defeats the purpose of welcoming strangers to the parish.

"Our newer people weren't really coming," Clark noted.

Now the church plans to focus its efforts on individually contacting newcomers and inviting them to join in the parish's ministries, she said.

In addition to formal contacts with newcomers, parish hospitality coordinators noted that sacramental preparation programs are an ideal way to get new members involved in parishes.

"A lot of people register just to get their kids baptized," stated Sister Anne Marie Lennon, RSM, pastoral assistant at St. Andrew's. "We try to make sure somebody meets them."

And if somebody makes a new parishioner feel welcome, that parish may find itself welcoming a new member. Egan recalled the time when one woman told her she was swept off her feet by the hospitality at St. Augustine's.

"One lady said, 'This is the first time I've come to where anyone's been interested enough to ask my name and make me feel welcome,'" Egan remembered her saying.

"And I feel very much at home here," Egan said she added.

Ukrainian Catholics schedule retreat for Canandaigua

CANANDAIGUA — Notre Dame Retreat House, 5151 Foster Road, will host the 38th annual retreat for Ukrainian Catholics from Sept. 18-20.

Father John Sianchuk, C.S.R., of Redeemer House in Toronto, will direct the retreat, which will draw men and women throughout western and central New York.

Father Sianchuk, who recently returned from Ukraine, will offer his insights into the state of the Catholic Church in that nation.

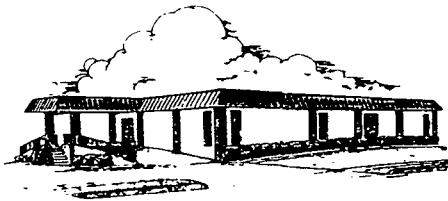
Scheduled to begin at 6:30 p.m. on Friday and to conclude at 12:30 p.m. Sunday, the retreat will include talks by Father Sianchuk, prayer times, and a Sunday morning divine liturgy featuring music by the choir at Rochester's St. Josaphat Church.

The retreat is open to Ukrainian Rite Catholics and Roman Catholics. The suggested donation is \$80 per person.

For information or to make a reservation, write or call: Nicholas Hober, 4 Castle Gate, Fairport, 14450, 716/377-3754; Mary Ann Skorochoda,

35 Lemoyne Ave., Rochester, 14612, 663-8966; Deacon Willis and Irene Homick, 16 Van Dwyne Ave., Auburn, 13021, 315/252-5674 or 252-5391; or Mark Slaybyk, 25 Stearns Ave., Lackawanna, 14218, 716/822-3643.

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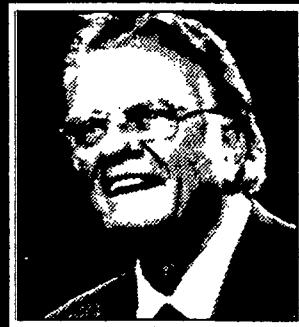
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