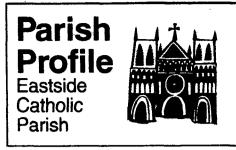
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Three Elmira churches face challenges as one



By Mike Latona Staff writer

ELMIRA - Many of today's U.S. cities are experiencing tough economic times.

For the urban area encompassed by the Eastside Catholic Parish, however, economic changes occurred much more rapidly 21 1/2 years ago.

From June 20-23, 1972, a major flood wrought by Hurricane Agnes literally wiped out much of downtown Elmira. Hundreds of homes and businesses were destroyed when the Chemung River swelled over its banks.

"The area became impoverished because many of the neighborhoods were just washed away," said Father Patrick L. Connor, who currently serves as the Elmira cluster's pastor.

Joyce Budney added that the economic recovery has been slow.

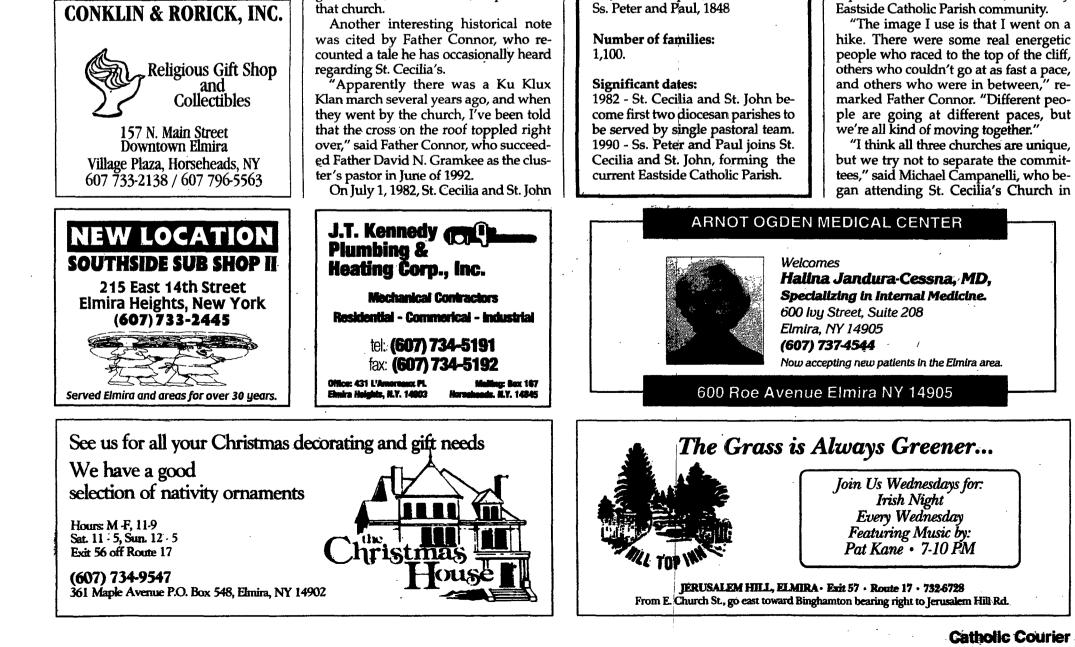
"We don't have major industries in Elmira to help us pull out of the economic disaster," she said.

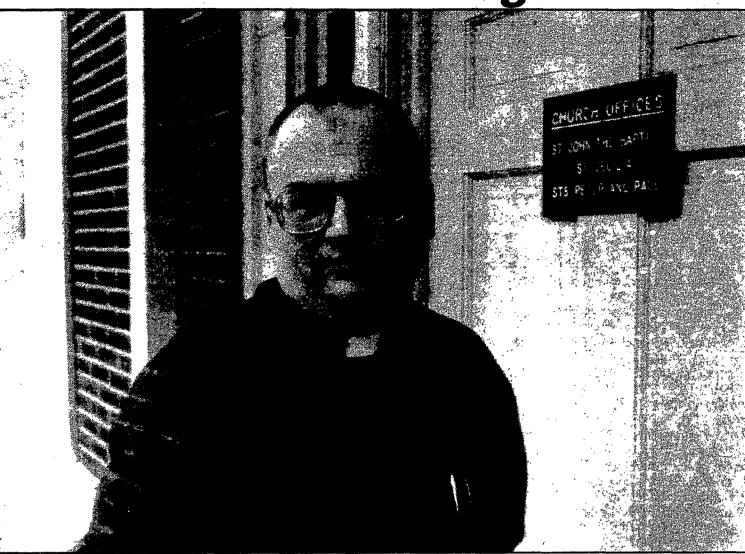
Yet despite the flood's adverse aftereffects, along with two phases of clustering in recent years, the three-church Eastside Catholic Parish has retained its longstanding vitality and loyalties.

Budney, for instance, now resides in Horseheads but still continues to attend St. John the Baptist Church, 325 Lake St., where she has been a parishioner for all of her 61 years.

"The young people have kind of left because of the economy, but we see the elderly carry on. However, with the youth groups that have been started, I have great hopes for the strength being continued," Budney commented.

The Eastside Catholic Parish's foun-





Father Patrick L. Connor, pastor of Eastside Catholic Parish, stands outside the cluster's office in Elmira.

dation dates back to 1848, when Ss. Peter and Paul Church, located at the corner of Market and High streets, became the city's first Catholic church (see related story).

St. John the Baptist followed in 1866. The cluster's third church, St. Cecilia, 950 Lake St., was founded in 1904.

Father Connor describes both Ss. Peter and Paul and St. Cecilia's as traditionally "geographic" parishes.

St. John the Baptist, meanwhile, is distinguished by its strong German heritage. Budney noted that her greatgrandfather, Albert Rohde, helped build

Vital Statistics

Name: **Eastside Catholic Parish**

Location:

St. Cecilia, 950 Lake St. St. John the Baptist, 325 Lake St. Ss. Peter/Paul, Market/High Sts.

Dates founded: St. Cecilia, 1904

St. John the Baptist, 1866

the Baptist became the first two parishes in the Rochester diocese to be served by one pastoral team. The Eastside Catholic Parish became three churches on Jan. 1, 1990, when Ss. Peter and Paul joined the cluster.

S. John Wilkin/Staff Photographer

Currently, five weekend Masses are celebrated at the parish. St. John the Baptist has Masses at 5:15 p.m. Saturday and 8 a.m. Sunday; Ss. Peter and Paul offers services at 4 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. Sunday; and St. Cecilia holds a Sunday noon Mass.

Slowly but surely, the clustering concept has taken hold in the 1,100-family

"The image I use is that I went on a

but we try not to separate the committees," said Michael Campanelli, who be-