

1984 and now serves as the cluster's permanent deacon.

Campanelli noted that collection envelopes are kept separate for the three churches, but all the money goes into one bank account.

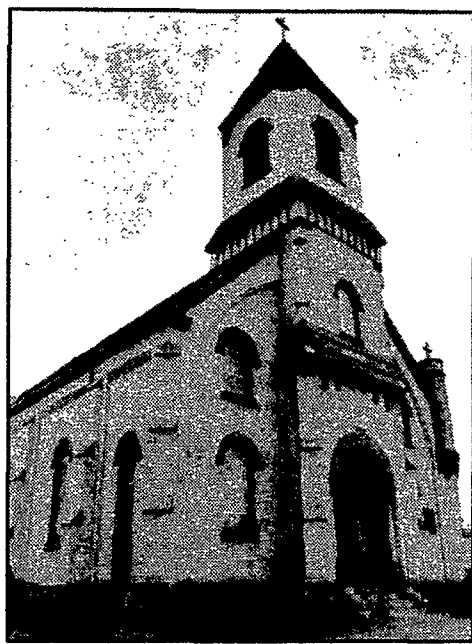
The clustering aspect surfaced frequently during the recent diocesan Synod, said Budney.

"One of the needs we had heard was the need for community and caring within our parish. That was brought out in the first (parish-level) meetings," acknowledged Budney, who served as a regional Synod commissioner for Chemung and Schuyler counties.

She added that these meetings helped reaffirm the concept of three parishes as one.

"There had not really been a time before that when we could sit down and share our concerns. I think we all gained from it and seemed to become closer," said Budney. "The word 'community' keeps popping into mind. We are three small communities who have learned to share with one another."

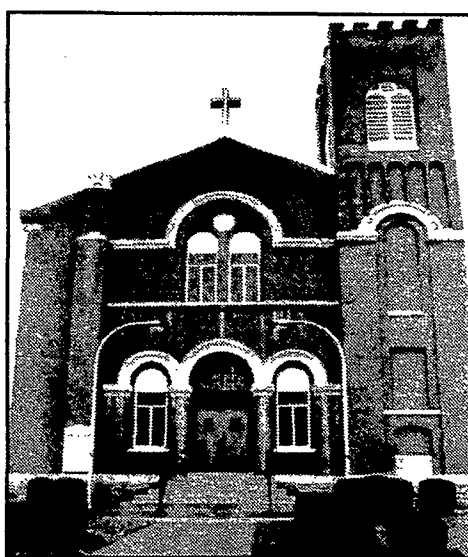
Both she and Father Connor were



Founded in 1866, St. John the Baptist is located at 325 Lake St.

pleased that "Building Small Christian Communities" was one of the five priorities selected at October's General Synod in Rochester.

"We're giving people a sense of be-



St. Cecilia's Church, 950 Lake St., was founded in 1904.

longing and identity while still being in a cluster," said the pastor.

Father Gramkee, who now serves as pastor of St. Patrick Church in Seneca Falls, noted that he constantly promoted the all-for-one, one-for-all attitude during his tenure as the cluster's pastor,

which covered almost 10 years.

"One of the things which pleased me so much was that those who would tend to be enthusiastic with their individual parishes were always willing to override those feelings," remarked Father Gramkee. "It was always marvelous."

Not only is the parish adapting to clustering, but also to the changing face of a neighborhood which lost much of its residential section with the flood.

Whereas many parishioners once lived just walking distance away from the three churches, many of today's parishioners — such as Budney — no longer live in eastern Elmira but come from other parts of the city as well as surrounding towns.

Sister Kathleen Bayer, RSM, who serves as the cluster's pastoral associate, noted that geography tends to take a back seat to parish loyalty.

"The people certainly love their church very, very much," remarked Sister Bayer, who arrived at Ss. Peter and Paul as pastoral associate nearly 10 years ago. "And I think that's why they continue to stay with it."

## 'Mother Church' endures adversity to become a diocesan treasure

By Father Robert F. McNamara  
Guest contributor

The first Mass of record was celebrated in Elmira in 1834. Since Chemung County was then part of the New York diocese, Elmira's Catholics were served by New York missionary priests working out of Auburn, Geneva, Binghamton or Owego for the next 13 years.

When the Buffalo diocese was established in 1847 to include both Chemung and Tioga counties, John Timon, the diocese's first bishop, instructed Father John Sheridan of Owego to establish a parish in Elmira. Father Sheridan subsequently built a small brick church dedicated to Ss. Peter and Paul.

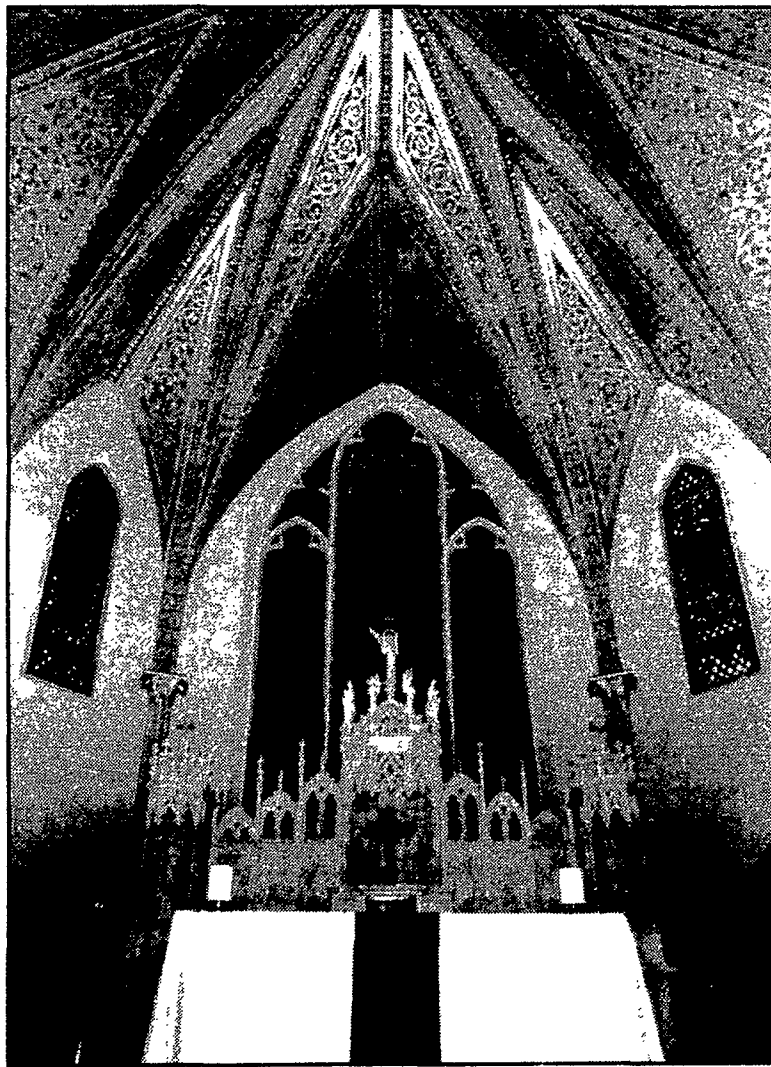
Named in 1850 to succeed the ailing Father Sheridan, Father John Boyle soon discovered that the original church building was poorly constructed. In 1854, therefore, he launched plans to construct the current brick edifice. Little is known about the architect, William Quinlan, but the new church — though modest — has an air of quiet distinction.

Like the Catholic Church itself, this building has experienced trials as well as triumphs.

Its first misfortune occurred during the painfully slow building period from 1854-1857. One day in December, 1856, Father Boyle, after mounting the scaffolding to inspect the project, fell to the ground and died of his injuries. This and other events deeply disturbed the parishioners. Bishop Timon was finally able to dedicate the new church on July 19, 1857. Thrilled by the building's reverent atmosphere and jewel-like windows, the congregation was deeply gratified.

One Elmira described the event in a letter to the *New York Tablet*: "Already," he added, "the most respectable Protestants have spoken for pews, and some are making preparation for baptism."

Elmira's Catholic "Mother Church" subsequently parented "seven daughter churches". Along the



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

The interior of Ss. Peter and Paul Church has suffered damage from two floods since its founding in 1848.

line, however, it suffered three more major shocks.

First came the fire of 1915. Father John Long had just finished lengthening the building and redecorating the edifice when a fire broke out inside. The

renovations had to be done all over again.

Even worse were the floods of 1946 and 1972. Ss. Peter and Paul Church is no more than a third of a mile from the Chemung River, usually placid but sometimes dangerous.

On May 28, 1946, the Chemung jumped its banks, inundated downtown, and submerged the church's pews. After the ebb, the pastor, Father William J. Naughton, had weeks of house-cleaning ahead of him.

The "Agnes" flood from June 20-23, 1972, which was even more destructive, did not provide a fond welcome for the newly arrived pastor, Father Edward J. Foy. The wild, yellow waters inundated the church's interior more than 10 feet high, leaving a layer of viscous muck not only on the floor but up the walls. Fortunately, the rich marble Fitzgerald altar (1924) suffered little, but renovation was not completed until the fall of 1973.

Since World War II, the neighborhood has changed and the parish population has diminished. Now the "Mother Church" and two of its daughters from the Eastside Catholic Parish are under one pastor.

Ss. Peter and Paul Church remains, nonetheless, a building of nostalgic beauty. As the third-oldest functioning church in the Rochester diocese, it lifts its square-crenelated tower proudly on high.

Father McNamara, diocesan archivist, lives at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Rochester.

## ★ ★ ★ ★ MOVIE TRIVIA ★ ★ ★ ★

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RULES: ALL ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY MIDNIGHT, DECEMBER 10. Random drawing of correct entries to be held December 13 by Catholic Courier Representatives. Entries must be returned by mail to: Catholic Courier, Movie Trivia, 1150 Buffalo Rd., Rochester, NY 14624-1899. Winner will be notified by mail. Prize is one year of Wegmans Video Rentals, membership is free and is required. Prize is not exchangeable for cash or other merchandise.

Question: What is the name of the evil Sultan in the movie *Aladdin*?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Last month's winner: *Cathy Simmons* of Rochester correctly identified *Andie MacDowell* as the sweet TV News Producer in the movie *Ground Hog Day*.

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