

# The show has gone on for 25 years in Owego

## Parishioner airs Masses on radio

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

OWEGO — He dragged cable wire while chasing after Bishop Fulton J. Sheen in the late 1960s. He waded through belt-high snow to get to St. Patrick's Church during a blizzard earlier this year.

Without a doubt, Jim Raftis has gone beyond the call of duty to ensure that the show will go on.

That "show" is actually the 9:30 a.m. Sunday Mass at St. Patrick's, 300 Main St. Raftis, a St. Patrick's parishioner, has conducted weekly radio broadcasts of the Mass — on a voluntary basis — for the past 25 years.

And, to commemorate his quarter-century of service, Raftis, 61, was honored during St. Patrick's 9:30 Mass this past Sunday, Dec. 5.

Raftis believes that the radio Mass' longevity can be attributed not only to his personal effort, but also to that of radio station WEBO-1330 AM.

"I feel that it's important for shut-ins who can't get to church," said Raftis. "It's something that the station has committed to, too, which for an AM station is pretty unique."

Raftis' ties to WEBO go all the way back to 1959, when he began broadcasting Owego Free Academy varsity

football games — a role he still holds.

A radio Mass became a viable option after the Second Vatican Council, when, among other things, approval was given for Masses in the United States to be said in English rather than Latin.

Raftis' initial effort aired on the first Sunday of Advent in 1968. It was soon after that he conducted a memorable broadcast featuring Bishop Sheen.

The late archbishop visited St. Patrick's to dedicate the parish school in an outdoor ceremony. Rain forced the proceedings to be moved inside the church, and the bishop allowed time for Raftis to rearrange his broadcast setup. The sun later appeared, and Bishop Sheen decided to go over to the school — with Raftis attempting to keep pace while carrying his equipment. His effort was successful; a one-hour live broadcast ensued.

More recently, Raftis recalls the challenges presented by the "Blizzard of '93" this past March. Although the rest of Tioga County was virtually shut down, Raftis was determined to follow through on his Sunday ritual. After being driven to St. Patrick's in a village police car, he and St. Patrick's pastor Father William G. Darling dug through the 23-inch snow so they could get into the church.

"Those in the Southern Tier never missed Mass, because we broadcast that day," Raftis said proudly.

Raftis has overcome other obstacles

as well: when Masses were moved to the church basement from July to November of 1992 during renovations to the church building, he continued the broadcasts by utilizing a closet.

"It was also used as a confessional," Raftis added.

Originally, Raftis would air Masses by laying cable on the church floor and setting up microphones. Now, in St. Patrick's newly renovated facility, he is able to broadcast by going directly through the church's sound system.

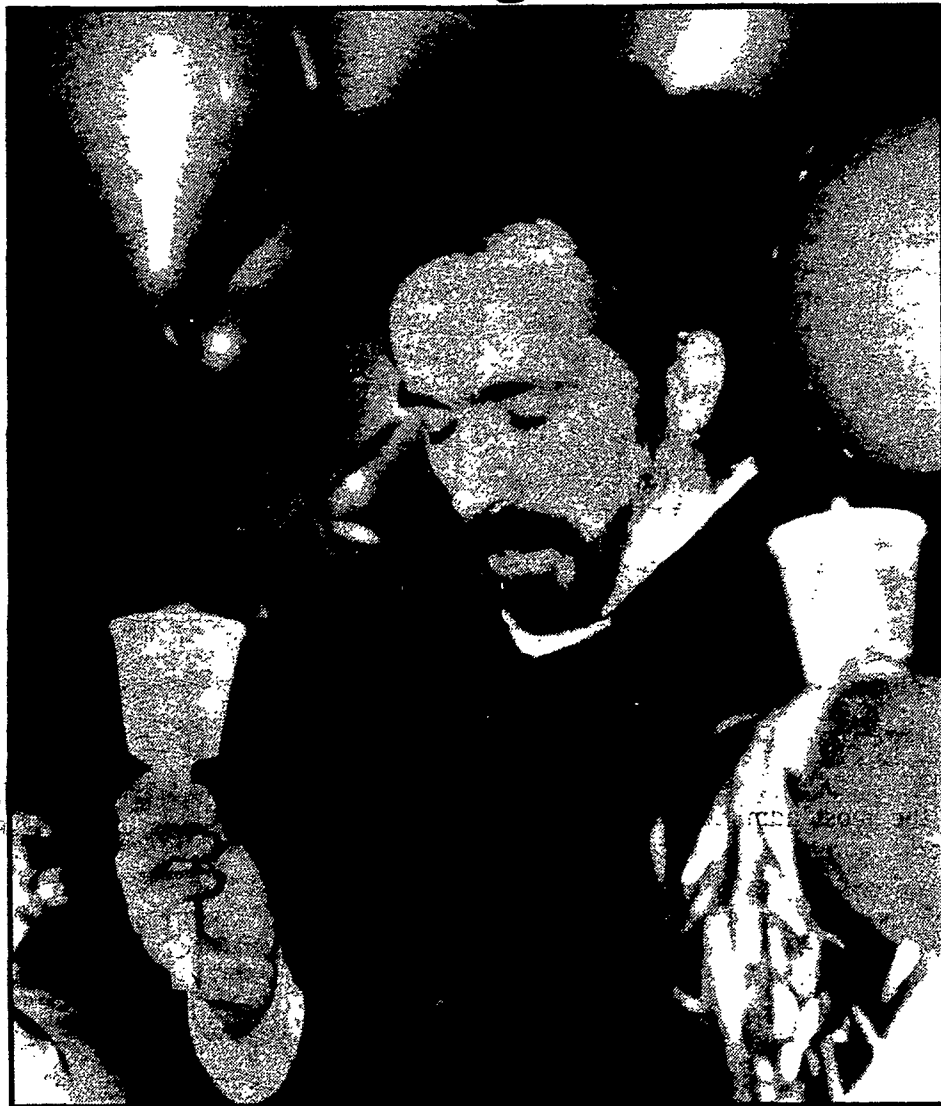
WEBO is a 5,000-watt station which can be heard in Endicott and Bingham-

ton as well as Owego. The station also airs Presbyterian and Baptist services.

Raftis is on the air each Sunday from 9:20-10:30 a.m. Before Mass, he conducts an introductory program in which he examines the readings for the day and mentions special intentions.

In addition to his longstanding association with St. Patrick's and WEBO, Raftis has a lengthy span of service with Owego's IBM Federal Systems division, where he serves as personnel adviser. He is the only original member of that branch — which opened 39 years ago — still employed there.

## Remembering victims



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Carl Leban of Rochester bows his head in prayer as the names of people who have died of AIDS are read during a candlelight ceremony at the AIDS Remembrance Garden in Rochester's Highland Park Dec. 1. The service was part of the sixth annual observance of World AIDS Day in which participating communities throughout the United States dimmed lights and sounded bells. According to the event's organizers, the commemoration "demonstrates the commitment to the fight against AIDS and is a tribute to those living with and who have died from the disease." Rochester Mayor Thomas P. Ryan Jr. issued an official proclamation endorsing World AIDS Day in a ceremony preceding the candlelight ceremony.

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