

# Ontario parishes build future together

By Lee Strong  
Senior staff writer

Father Edward J. Dillon discovered something about the parishioners of Phelps' St. Francis Church and Clifton Springs' St. Felix Church during the blizzard that devastated western New York last March.

As Father Dillon, who had taken over as pastor of the cluster only two months earlier, headed over to St. Francis Church for the Saturday evening Mass March 13, he spotted a parishioner shoveling out the parking lot.

Inside the church, the new pastor found the usual number of people who attended the Mass — including the man who had done the shoveling. At the sign of peace, the priest approached the man to thank him.

"He said to me," Father Dillon recalled, "You're not supposed to thank me. It was my turn."

Father Dillon then drove through the blizzard to St. Felix Parish for Saturday Mass, thinking, "There's not going to be anyone there. There were 18 to 20 people there."

These events surrounding that snowy March weekend proved to Father Dillon that even though the two parishes have distinct histories and traditions, the people have a lot in common when it comes to their faith.

"They both are so welcoming, so generous and faithful," Father Dillon said. "People volunteer to do everything."

"They weren't afraid to work," acknowledged Father Anthony Calimeri, who served as pastor of St. Francis

## Parish Profile

St. Francis,  
Phelps  
St. Felix,  
Clifton Springs



Parish from 1983 to January, 1993, and administrator of St. Felix Parish from June, 1991 to January, 1993. "Every summer they cut the lawn, took care of the grounds," he said. "And it was all volunteer."

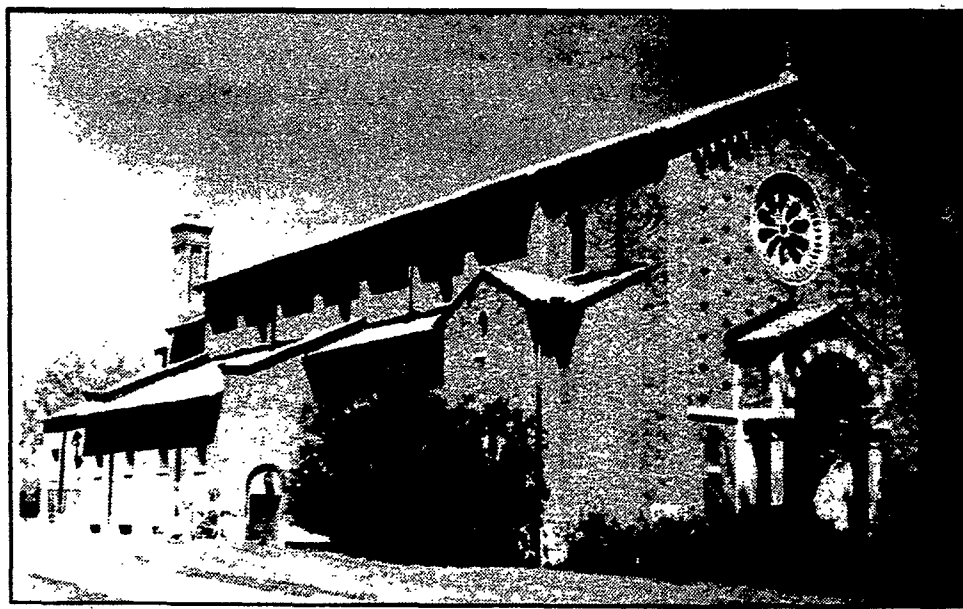
That volunteering spirit shines through the assistance both parishes provide for such ministries as the House of John — a hospice housed in a home owned by St. Felix Parish; the St. Felix Community Food/Clothing Center, which operates out of the basement of St. Felix Church; and the food cupboard operated by St. Francis Parish.

"Everybody seems to be very neighborly," Father Calimeri observed. "They don't seem to mind going out of their way to help people." Meanwhile, St. Francis Parish has also created an extensive religious education program that draws students through high school. Father Calimeri noted that young people's commitment to the parish is such that many of the altar servers continued to do so even in high school.

And Father John E. Roach, pastor of St. Felix from 1966-91, recalled a time when he decided to refurbish the parish's stations of the cross. "They wanted to donate more money that there



Parishioners of St. Francis and St. Felix churches attended a Feb. 15 potluck supper, held at the St. Francis parish hall.



### Vital Statistics

Name:  
St. Francis Church.  
Location:  
12 Church St., Phelps.  
Incorporated:  
March 25, 1869.  
Independent parish:  
May, 1885.  
New church dedicated:  
Oct. 4, 1931.

were statues," he said.

Father Roach cited the opening of the ecumenical community food and clothing center in the parish as an example of the people's spirit. Volunteers cleared dirt out of the church's basement to make room for the center in the early 1970s.

"They could see the need for something like this," he remarked.

Even as the two parishes continue the process of clustering, they can look back to histories that sometimes overlapped — dating back to the early 19th century when Dutch immigrants settled in the region.

At first the two villages' Catholic communities were served by priests who visited from nearby communities such as Canandaigua and Geneva.

Then Clifton Spring Catholics estab-

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