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ST. JOSEPH'S DAY

Community events mark celebration of quiet saint

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

New Testament documentation on St. Joseph reveals a man who tended to linger in the background.

So it's rather fitting that the feast of St. Joseph is observed on March 19. That's only two days after St. Patrick's Day — which in the United States, serves as the most popular of saint celebrations.

St. Joseph's Day affairs aren't nearly as numerous, and their celebrants don't march in parades, wear green clothing or drink green beer.

"Some of the St. Patrick's stuff is more the fun and hoopla. I don't know that it's so much a religious angle," remarked Sister St. Luke Hardy, SSJ.

However, the feast of St. Joseph does resemble St. Patrick's Day in that it's marked by various forms of community observances.

For instance, Sister St. Luke is serving as coordinator of the upcoming St. Joseph's Day festivities at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse, 4095 East Ave., Pittsford. She expects close to 500 members of the SSJ congregation, as well as guests, to participate in a liturgy and reception on the afternoon of March 19.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark, along with Monsignor William H. Shannon, chaplain for the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent Infirmery, will preside at this liturgy. Sisters of St. Joseph who attend the service will renew their vows at that time.

"The chapel is always filled. We always have to set up special chairs," noted Sister St. Luke, who also serves as pastoral associate of the four-parish Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward in Rochester.

At St. Joseph's Church in Wayland, the parish school is preparing to hold its 14th annual "Grandparents Day" on March 18. This celebration begins with a special Mass at St. Joseph's and then moves over to the school, where students will provide entertainment for their senior-citizen guests.

"St. Joseph is the special patron of our church, and also our (Sisters of St. Joseph) patron saint. So we wanted to make the day special," said Sister Marie Stanislaus, SSJ, who originated Grandparents Day when she was the St. Joseph's School principal. She is now retired.

Sister Marie Stanislaus recalled one Grandparents Day when children were assigned letters from St. Joseph's name. They then explained how each letter pertained to St. Joseph: "J" for justice, "O" for obedience, and so on.

In the Italian culture, a more widespread observance of St. Joseph's Day comes in the form of the St. Joseph's Table.

These tables originated several centuries ago following a severe famine which swept through Sicily. Peasant farmers prayed to St. Joseph for help, and the famine soon subsided. In gratitude, the farmers paid homage to St. Joseph by filling an altar with food.

Typical St. Joseph's Tables contain abundant supplies of donated bread, fruit and other foods not containing meat. Those who assemble for the table make petitions to St. Joseph for favors, or give thanksgiving for prayers answered. Money donations for charitable organizations are also frequently collected on the day of the table.

Peter Latona, who conducts three St. Joseph's Tables in the Rochester area, and Teresa Fraser, who is serving as a coordinator for a St. Joseph's Table in Monticello, recall attending St. Joseph's Tables with Italian family members during their childhood.

Because the practice of St. Joseph's Tables have remained largely among Ital-

ians, the tables are not celebrated by a large percentage of American Catholics. However, those who participate do so with great fervor — as evidenced by

Latona and his wife, Dolores, who held their first St. Joseph's Table in 1980

to pray for their son, Lewis, who had dropped out of college and joined a cult.

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Image by Elizabeth Burkhart, SSJ