

Linked histories help to tie cluster together

Parish Profile

Cayuga Team Ministry



By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

Cayuga Team Ministry will mark 10 years as a cluster on June 26.

During this decade, the cluster has served as a model for subsequent clusters — even as it was itself working out the kinks of linking together four parishes in four different towns: St. Joseph's Parish, Cayuga; St. Patrick's Parish, Aurora; St. Michael's Parish, Union Springs; and Our Lady of the Lake Parish, King Ferry.

Part of the cluster's success comes from attempting to balance unity and individuality, noted Father Paul J. Ryan, pastor since 1990.

"We really truly try to emphasize that we are one Catholic Church," Father Ryan said. "But I think it's important to have your own local identity. There's a charm and a beauty to each of these towns.

"I don't think it even possible for us to be 100 percent homogenized," the priest added. "And I don't think it would be good."

Thus the parishes maintain separate organizations such as Rosary and Altar societies. In addition, their finances are kept separate, although they are overseen by a single finance committee. Masses are held in each of the churches — one in each church on weekends, and one during the week.

Each parish also had separate parish councils, but the churches voted in 1993 to dissolve those in favor of a single council with representatives from each of the parishes.

In addition to the Cluster Council, the parishes also share a single worship committee and a joint religious education program. A men's group has been formed for the cluster, and the youth group involves all four parishes. Social activities — such as the St. Joseph's dinner held March 19, and the annual cluster picnic — are held jointly.

"I think the cluster has run real smooth," noted Charles Walsh, a parishioner at St. Michael's Church for 40 years. He is also a member of the Worship Committee. "At first, people were uptight about the whole thing, but I must say they've accepted it well."

The clustering has even helped the parishes, noted Annie Salato, a member of St. Michael's Parish since the 1920s.

"Our parish isn't too big," observed Salato, who serves as the sacristan at St. Michael's. "But now that we're a cluster,



Lucas Ciulla anxiously waits as his plate of pasta is prepared during Cayuga Team Ministry's St. Joseph's Day celebration held at the Aurelius Fire Hall on March 19.

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

we're more united together. We're a small parish, but we're mighty strong."

Part of what may have helped the smooth move to cluster was that the parishes had a history of being linked, if not with each other, at least with other parishes, noted Deacon John Prave, who has served as part of the cluster team since 1984.

St. Michael's had been a mission parish of St. Patrick's for much of its history. St. Joseph's had begun with ties to St. Agnes (St. Patrick's) and St. Michael's, then from 1904 to 1972 was a mission of St. Aloysius Parish in Auburn.

The parishes were even linked at their beginnings.

Aurora boasted the first Catholic community of the four, with Masses celebrated in homes there as early as 1841. The first resident pastor was Father William Quigley in 1851. That same year, Father Quigley was named the first pastor of the newly created St. Michael's Parish in Union Springs. A church dedicated to St. Agnes was built in Aurora in 1855 by the parish's second pastor, Father Nicholas Byrne, who resided in Union Springs and also built the church in that community.

Meanwhile, St. Joseph's Parish was established in Cayuga by Father John Touhey in 1853. Father Touhey later moved to St. Michael's, serving as the pastor of St. Michael's, St. Agnes and St. Joseph's from 1856-64. He was succeeded by Father McCool, who established Our Lady of the Lake Parish in 1868. Thus the four parishes were united under one priest when the Rochester diocese was established that same year.

In 1877, a new church building was



Peggy Fuller (left) and Marilyn Salato prepare salads for the more than 150 people attending dinner for the four-parish cluster.

completed in Aurora, and that parish was renamed St. Patrick's. The parish subsequently became the main parish, with St. Michael's becoming its mission church. This process was completed under Father John Nelligan, who became pastor of Our Lady of the Lake, St. Michael's, St. Patrick's and St. Joseph's in 1891. Father Nelligan resided at St. Joseph's until 1901 when he moved to St. Patrick's.

St. Joseph's became a mission of St. Aloysius in 1904, but was re-established as an independent parish in 1972 under Father Ronald E. Gaesser (pastor from

1972-81). He was succeeded by Father George Gauthier, who remained there until the cluster was formed in 1984.

Our Lady of the Lake became an independent parish in 1913. Father Richard G. Stanton was the independent parish's last pastor, serving from 1962 until he retired in 1984.

St. Patrick's and St. Michael's remained together in a mission relationship until Father John S. Hayes, pastor from 1972 to 1984, retired.

The retirements of Fathers Hayes and Stanton, and Father Gauthier's depar-

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