

## Waverly parishioners respond to changing times

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

In many ways, St. James the Apostle Church in Waverly, Tioga County, is a difficult parish for others to pinpoint.

St. James is the Rochester diocese's southernmost parish, standing less than a mile from the Pennsylvania border and the Diocese of Scranton. Another 25 miles east, and it would be in the Diocese of Syracuse.

The makeup of St. James also defies easy classification. On the one hand, Waverly's small-town setting has translated into a large number of loyal parishioners whose affiliation with St. James spans several decades.

Yet the parish also is making several movements to accommodate an influx of young adults — and to address the challenges of life in the 1990s as faced by people of all ages.

"We see a lot of young couples who are obviously struggling with finances. A lot of efforts go into this area," remarked Father Thomas H. Watts, who serves as St. James' pastor.

Parishioner Don Johnson, who has lived in Waverly since 1964, acknowledged that "taking care of the elderly, jobless and homeless" has become a growing priority in the St. James parish.

"There's been an increased awareness, and more participation by volunteers," remarked Johnson, who helped coordinate the parish census taken last fall.

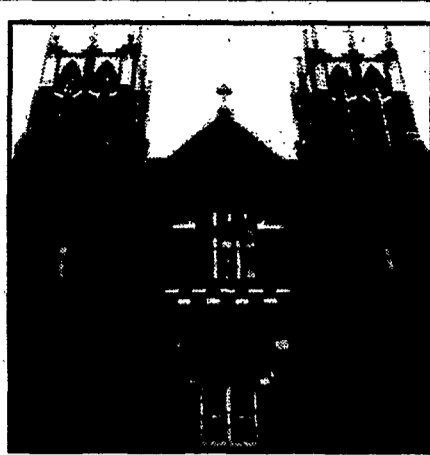
Waverly's neighborly spirit has been a key component, Johnson added. "The difference in small towns is that people help one another. On my street during a big snowstorm, you'd see 12 to 14 people shoveling somebody's car out."

Several years ago the Valley Food Pantry was begun at St. James; this ecumenical organization now operates in downtown Waverly. In addition, Tioga County Rural Ministry, based in neighboring Owego, recently began operating out of St. James one day per week. The parish also hosts Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

Along with its outreach to the entire community, activities among the 475-family parish are plentiful as well.

A completely renovated church hall is being enjoyed by the parish. Another significant development is the addition of a daily-Mass chapel in the former St. James School, which closed in 1988. Parishioners were responsible for all the construction work on the facility, and many donated items. The chapel was dedicated on Sept. 25, 1993.

"It was a more intimate setting for daily Mass. This way, everybody says hello



### Vital statistics

Name: St. James the Apostle Church  
Address: 503 Clark St., Waverly  
Number of families: 475 (approx.)  
Significant dates:  
First church opened in 1853  
Second church opened in 1871  
Parish incorporated in 1881  
Present church opened in 1912

to each other," said liturgy chairperson Meg Bunao.

Another key addition at St. James was the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) program in 1993.

Becky Amburg, who serves as RCIA core-team chairperson, emphasized that the program's priority is to attract as

### Parish Profile



St. James,  
Waverly  
St. Pius, Van Etten

many new parishioners as possible — not just in Waverly, but also in surrounding areas such as Sayre and Athens, Pa.

"I'd love to see more families and young people in church," said Amburg. "I've personally had nothing but positive feedback."

Sister Agnes Catherine Battersby, St. James' pastoral associate, agrees.

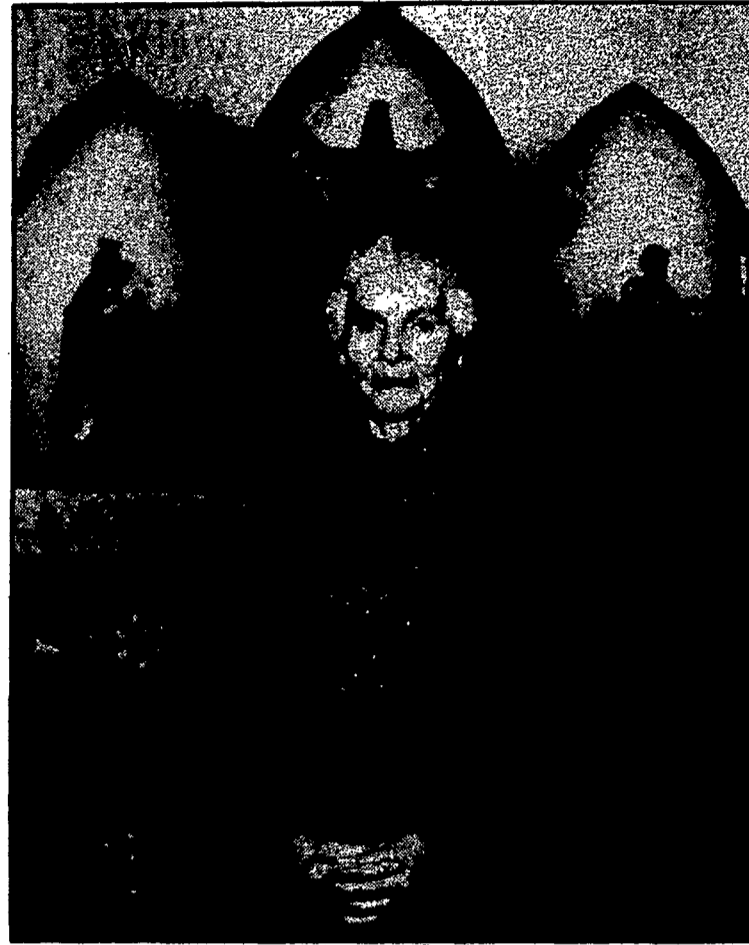
"We're really an older parish. However, in recent years a lot of younger families have gotten back in the parish and that's been a real joy," Sister Battersby remarked.

St. James originated as a branch of the Owego Mission in 1853, and became a separate parish in 1881. It

has existed at its present location since 1871; the current structure was built after the previous church was completely destroyed by a 1912 fire.

Father Watts, who holds the rare distinction of heading the parish in which he grew up, said Waverly has traditionally thrived from the railroad industry. In fact, he recalls making rail trips from Waverly to the former St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester in the 1950s.

The pastor noted that railroad trade



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Sister Agnes Catherine Battersby serves as pastoral associate at St. James the Apostle Church in Waverly.

has diminished greatly in recent years, and many people who now settle in the Waverly area are employed at Robert Packer Hospital in Sayre.

Father Watts, who came to St. James as pastor in 1989, said he's enjoying the opportunity to return to his roots.

"Sometimes it's no different than being in some other parish, but in a way it is different in that you know the people, families and territory," the pastor remarked.

## Lay input is vital at St. Pius X in Van Etten

VAN ETTEN — Although the Sandusky Hotel had been used for many functions, this 1953 event was undoubtedly a first.

That year, the hotel's upstairs lobby accommodated the first Mass ever celebrated in Van Etten.

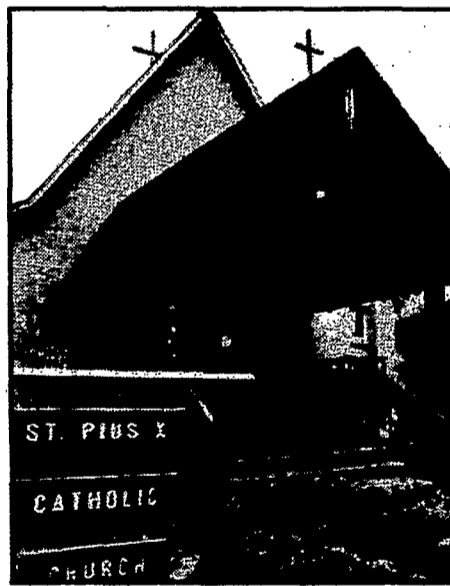
"We soon outgrew the lobby, and it was moved down to the main dining room of the restaurant," recalled John Sandusky, whose late father, John, was hotel proprietor at the time.

The hotel, located at 11 Waverly St., still operates today under the name of the McAnn Hotel. Masses, however, are conducted in a more traditional setting — St. Pius X Church at 132 Main St.

After the hotel dining room became too small, Masses took place at the Van Etten village hall and Masonic temple. Finally, a basement church for St. Pius X was constructed in 1954, and its upper portion was completed in 1965.

St. Pius X currently serves about 95 families, mostly residents of the villages of Van Etten and nearby Spencer.

Father Thomas H. Watts is pastor of both St. Pius X and St. James the Apost-



tle Church in Waverly. Although the arrangement of one priest ministering to more than one parish is generally called a cluster, Father Watts hesitates to use that term.

"(St. Pius X is) a separate parish. When you're 18 miles away it's kind of hard to be a cluster," noted Father

Watts, who resides at St. James.

With the lack of an everyday priest, strong support from the lay community becomes a necessity at St. Pius X. Sandusky remarked that volunteerism has never been a serious problem, even in a small parish such as his.

"We wear many hats and do many things," said Sandusky, who has served in several capacities at the parish over the years. In fact, he still logs occasional duty as an altar server.

Sandusky labels the St. Pius X parish as "one big family. There's a main group of people who volunteer, but if you go out and ask individuals to help out, they will. We all work together."

— Mike Latona

### Vital statistics

Name: St. Pius X Church  
Address: 132 Main St., Van Etten  
Number of families: 95 (approx.)  
Significant dates:  
Current church opened in 1954  
Parish incorporated in 1965

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