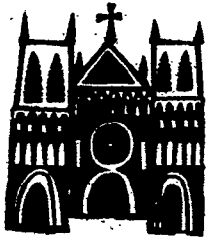


Parishes nurture 'God's country'

Parish Profile

St. Michael's,
Penn Yan
St. Andrew's, Dundee



By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

Some businesses like to proclaim themselves "the only game in town."

But St. Michael's Parish in Penn Yan and its mission parish of St. Andrew's, Dundee, can make an even bolder claim: they are the only Catholic "game" — i.e. parishes — in Yates County.

But Father William C. Michatek has a different boast when he talks about the parishes and the region they serve.

"This is God's country," proclaimed Father Michatek, the 12th-year pastor who will leave the parishes this June to become pastor of Spencerport's St. John the Evangelist Parish. "The scenery is beautiful."

God's country or not, the two parishes have managed to survive and even grow in this rural, largely non-Catholic region, which has experienced little population growth for many years.

Indeed, Father Michatek pointed out that there is a statue in Penn Yan honoring Yates County men who served in the Civil War between 1861-65. The statue records the county's population at that time as 20,600. Approximately 130 years later, the population is 22,000.

But at the parishes, a new Knights of Columbus Council is thriving. The Catholic Daughters of the Americas court is active at St. Michael's. St. Michael's School, which saw its enrollment dip below 100 in the late 1980s, will enroll approximately 150 students in the 1994-95 school year.

St. Michael's Church has been renovated in the last decade, and St. Andrew's has added a parish hall.

Both parishes have begun parish councils and have emphasized increasing lay involvement. A religious education program has been developed.

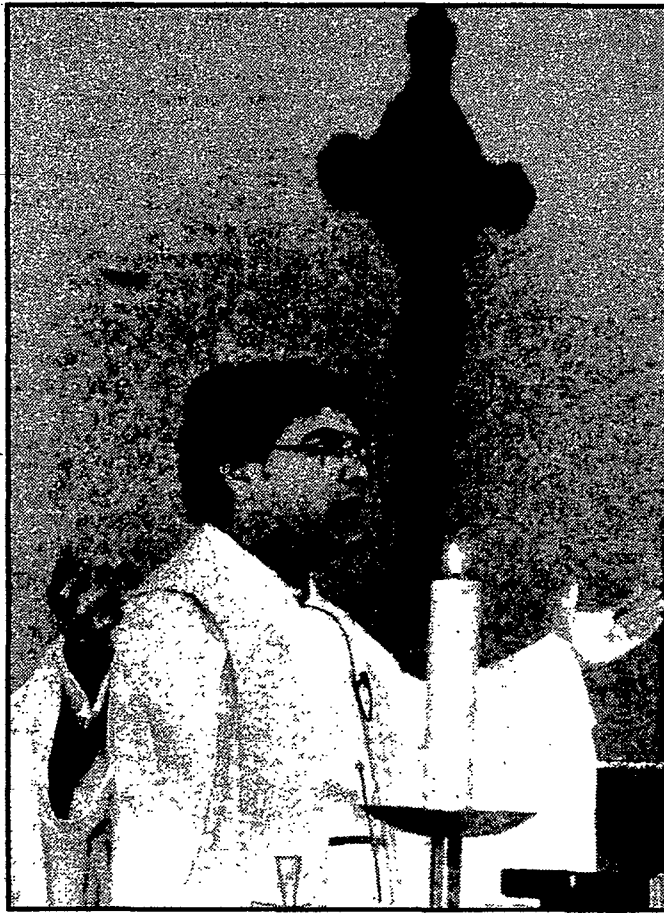
The parishes have also begun working on implementing the recommendations of the diocesan Synod, and are beginning to act on recommendations from their parish discussions. The most recent manifestation of that effort is a parish newsletter — published in response to requests that the parishes improve communication. Titled *The Archangel*, the inaugural issue was published last week.

Meanwhile, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults has added approximately 100 people to the parishes in the last 10 years, Father Michatek estimated. Other people have moved to the area over the years to take advantage of small-town living, the community's spirit, and the region's beauty, he said.

Among those people are Deacon Claude Curtin and his wife, Patricia, who moved to Penn Yan from Waterloo 10 years ago.

"It just seemed the people were friendly," Deacon Curtin said. "There used to be a sign on the way into Penn Yan: 'Penn Yan: A Friendly Village.' We used to say there's something true about that. And the parish reflects that."

"It's really an interesting mix," observed David Reeve, chairman of St. Michael's parish council and one of those people who entered the church through RCIA at the parish. "We have a great number of longtime, very dedicated folks. But there is of course the influx of new members — which is



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Father John F. Gagnier, parochial vicar of St. Michael's Church in Penn Yan and St. Andrew's in Dundee, celebrates a Priests' Appreciation Day Mass June 5.

healthy."

People are attracted to the parishes because of the beauty of the region and the parishes, Reeve suggested, but also because they are encouraged to get involved.

"There's a great opportunity to plug in if you want to get involved in service," Reeve said.

Deacon Curtin cited renovations to parish buildings and the development of new groups as symbols of what has been happening to life in the parishes in recent years.

"I think they symbolize the overall gradual drift to really good Catholic parishes," he observed.

The parishes began in largely rural communities, but in recent years the region has become a popular resort area for vacationers. Each summer the number of people attending services swells, Father Michatek said. He estimated that St. Michael's Sunday Mass attendance burgeons from some 800

to approximately 2,000 during the summer, while St. Andrew's average attendance triples from a little less than one hundred to between 250 and 300.

Both parishes trace their histories back to well before the region became a summer-resort area.

St. Michael's was founded by 15 Catholic families who settled in Penn Yan in the 1840s. The parish was established in 1850 in the first St. Michael's Church. That edifice was replaced in 1902 by the current church building.

Ironically, even though St. Andrew's Parish — established in 1878 as a mission of St. Michael's — is actually younger than the Penn Yan parish, it boasts an older church building. St. Andrew's Church was completed in 1833, and housed the Free Christian Church for many years. That church failed, however, and Dundee's Catholics, with the help of Father Eugene Paganini, St. Michael's pastor, purchased the building in 1877. It was rededicated as a Catholic church later that year and continues to serve the community.

Diana Jayne has been a member of St. Andrew's Parish since 1956. She was especially happy to see the addition of the new parish hall under Father Michatek.

"That has brought social life to the parish," said Jayne, who has been cleaning the church for 22 years, and is also former president of the parish council.

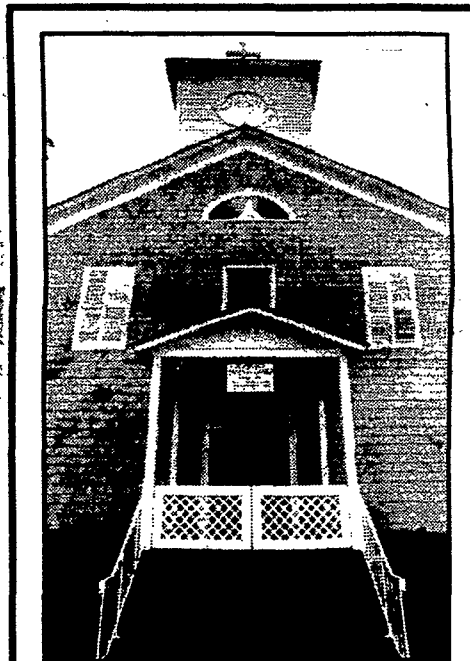
She likes the mission parish's small size. "I think if I was in a big parish, I'd get swallowed up."

Even though Father Michatek is leaving, the two parishes are already getting indications of continued life and growth in the future. Fathers Charles Mulligan and Peter Deckman, co-pastors as of June 28, are taking over for Father Michatek. Meanwhile, as a result of diocesan attempts to reach out to Hispanics and migrants, St. Michael's will be the site of weekly Masses in Spanish. The first of these Masses was held June 4.

Father Michatek noted that his replacements will find both parishes in good shape.

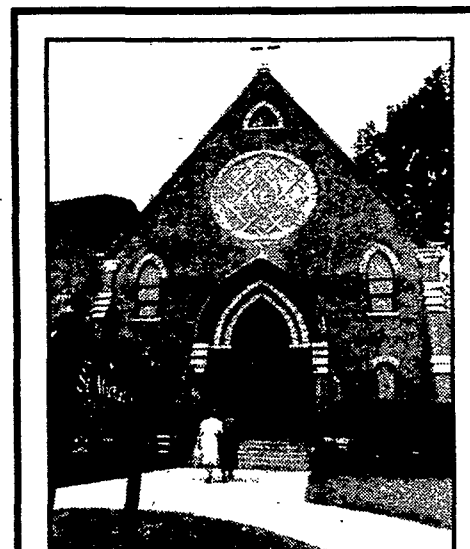
"The place just kind of carries itself along," Father Michatek said. "The people are very self-directed. They have assumed responsibility. You can almost see the Spirit at work in the community."

Of course, it also helps to be the only game in the county.



Vital Statistics

Name: St. Andrew's Parish
Location: Union Street, Dundee.
Number of families: 75.
Significant dates: incorporated on Jan. 1, 1879; church purchased on April 7, 1877.



Vital Statistics

Name: St. Michael's Parish.
Location: 312 Liberty St., Penn Yan.
Number of families: 800.
Significant dates: established in 1850; current church built in 1902; school dedicated in 1882.

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