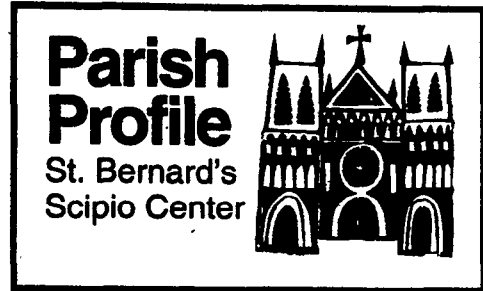


St. Bernard's abides as a close-knit community



Parish Profile
St. Bernard's
Scipio Center

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

SCIPIO CENTER — Each year, the people of St. Bernard's Parish gather at the parish cemetery for the blessing of the graves — this year, on Sept. 11 after the 10:30 a.m. Mass.

The ceremony also draws many former parishioners back to the Cayuga County parish, noted Margaret Redmond, a member of the Rosary Altar Society.

"The blessing of the graves is a kind of homecoming," observed Redmond, a member of the parish since 1958. "People come back from outside the area."

Unfortunately, "outside the area" is increasingly where many onetime St. Bernard's parishioners now live — thanks to a lack of jobs in the largely rural area. As late as the 1960s, the parish drew hundreds of people to weekend Masses. Now, the one Mass attracts some 45-65 people, according to the pastor, Father Robert Downs.

Still, that cadre of parishioners remains active and strongly attached to the parish, noted Father Downs, who also serves as pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Moravia.

"They are a very faith-filled people, and a generous people, not only to other people, but to the church," observed Father Downs, who has served at St. Bernard's since 1986.

The Altar Rosary Society still keeps the church in order and organizes social events. The rosary is said before every Mass. A hospitality committee arranges for coffee hours after Mass. The religious-education program operates each Sunday with the children of the parish.

John Kanalley — whose great grandfather helped to build the church and whose wife, Cathy, supplanted him as the parish's religious-education administrator — proudly observed, "It's one of the nicest small parishes around."

"It's a very personal parish," continued Kanalley, who also served as president of the now-defunct parish council and was a member of the Holy Name Society. "Everybody knows everybody, and everybody's willing to help one another. It's not just a church where you go on Sunday. There's an atmosphere where we expect people to be responsible members of the parish. It's a community."

"We've certainly become closer-knit" as the population has decreased, noted Redmond. "When you've got one of the synod goals small Christian communities, we've certainly got a close-knit community."

Beyond the current closeness of their community, parishioners can boast of a rich history dating beyond the founding of the Diocese of Rochester itself.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
During a Sept. 4 Mass Grace Kanalley (right), a parishioner at St. Bernard Church for 50 years, receives the blood of Christ from eucharistic minister Roger 'Bud' Bickel, who has been a member of the Scipio Center church since 1948.



Backup organist Tom Collins directed the music during the Sept. 4 liturgy.

St. Bernard's was established Oct. 13, 1867, as a mission of St. Michael's Parish in Union Springs. That event occurred year before the Diocese of Rochester split off from the Buffalo diocese.

Father Archangelo Paganini served as the parish's first pastor from 1872-73. He was succeeded by the first resident pastor, Father Hugh Francis Rafferty, in 1873. Father Rafferty, who remained at the parish until 1908, enlarged the church building and purchased the land for the present cemetery.

For the past decade, that cemetery has been home to a statue of St. Bernard that graced the campus of St. Bernard's Seminary for nearly a century from the school's opening in 1893. After the seminary closed in 1981, diocesan officials

asked Father Paul Cloonan, pastor of the St. Bernard's Parish from 1981-1985, if his parish — the only one in the diocese dedicated to St. Bernard — wanted the statue. He accepted, and the statue was installed and officially dedicated May 30, 1983.

After beginning its history a mission parish, St. Bernard's Parish later acquired missions of its own — St. Hilary's in Genoa (1911) and St. Isaac Jogues in Fleming (1846). St. Hilary's was closed in 1984, and St. Isaac Jogues was separated from St. Bernard's in 1986.

Roger Bickel came to St. Bernard's after the closing of St. Hilary's. But as a member of the Scipio Center church's mission parish since 1948, he had had contact with the community over the years.

"Every year they had a Father's Day barbecue," Bickel recalled fondly. "They'd serve 1,000 people. I never missed that barbecue."

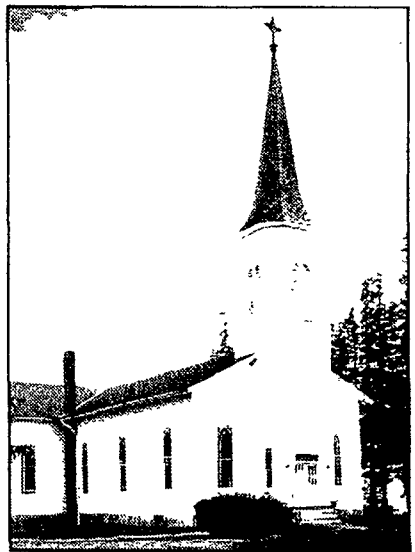
Bickel now belongs to the committee that runs the after-Mass coffee hour, supplying bagels.

"They used to have cookies and doughnuts," Bickel explained. "I'm a diabetic — and, by golly, I wasn't getting anything. So I started baking garlic bread to eat, then I started bringing bagels."

Redmond, too, has fond memories of a major parish social activity.

"Another tradition was the Washington's Birthday card party," Redmond said. "There was many a snow storm."

Redmond's husband, Richard, who



SNAPSHOTS

Name: St. Bernard's Catholic Church

Address: Center Road, Scipio Center

Number of registered families: 28

Significant dates: Church dedicated Oct. 13, 1867; St. Bernard's statue dedicated May 30, 1983.

had been involved with Holy Name Society for many years until it ceased in the early 1980s, described the parish as quiet, but said its people are still interested and involved. Their interest and involvement was evidenced by discussions during the parish synod sessions leading up to the diocese's General Synod Oct. 1-3, 1993.

"We had the discussion," Richard Redmond recalled. "That was a good thing. It was out of the usual."

But even as the parishioners remain active, they recognize that the parish's decreasing population may force it to close or join a cluster at some point in the future.

"The small, rural churches have outlived what they were built for," Bickel explained. In the old days, he noted, people were limited in how far they could go because they traveled by horse and carriage. "Now," he said, "I can drive to Auburn in 15 minutes."

Even as they acknowledge demographic realities, however, the people of St. Bernard's have chosen not to dwell on them.

"People realize that at some point they won't be able to maintain the parish," Margaret Redmond observed. But, "until then, the people have made a real commitment to contribute and participate."

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