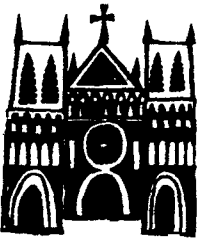


# 'Children of the church' build on saint's spirit

## Parish Profile

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Hamlin



By Lee Strong  
Senior staff writer

HAMLIN — During a recent tour of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, the pastor, Father William J. Amann, paused several times while describing with obvious pride the church's architectural details to remind his listener, "It's the people who are the church."

In the case of this parish — often referred to by parishioners simply by its initials, S.E.A.S. — it's also the people who built the church.

The current church edifice at 3747 Brick Schoolhouse Road was built largely with volunteer labor to replace a former railroad station where Masses were conducted. Those days are recalled by the main altar and the lectern, which are built of railroad ties. Parishioners held a "rock party" in September, 1987, during which they brought in more than 200 tons of stones to help provide a base for the driveway and parking lot.

They also brought in stones for exterior walls, and to complete two columns in the sanctuary wall. Working under the supervision of a stone mason, parishioners installed many of the stones themselves. Families can point to the stones they contributed to the sanctuary wall, and the parish has even published a booklet with stories behind some of the stones.

Meanwhile, parishioners still meet on a regular basis to finish uncompleted rooms in the church building.

At the same time they are building a church, the people of S.E.A.S. have also been building a parish.

"There's a strong sense of possession in the church," Father Amann said. "The people who built the church, built the community. It's still being created."

And growing.

Incorporated on Feb. 10, 1982, taking in territory and parishioners from



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Father William J. Amann (right), pastor of Hamlin's St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, celebrates the 10:30 a.m. Mass Jan. 22 with Deacon Ramon C. Datz.

Brockport's Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, St. Mark's in Kendall and St. Leo's in Hilton, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish has in 13 years swelled to some 950 registered families.

The religious education program, conducted with classes both in the church and in the catechists' homes, has some 40 trained leaders and 500 students.

Every year, thousands of people come to the parish the weekend after Labor Day for the parish's major social event, the Cabbage Patch Festival, which includes games, live entertainment, and an auction.

The "Fishers" group regularly goes to the homes of people who don't come to church to find out why and to evangelize in a low-key manner.

This low key — or as Father Amann puts it, "laid back" — style is part of the parish's small-town appeal, acknowledged Billie Dietrich, the parish's secretary.

"It's homey, friendly here," Dietrich observed. "The people know one another, and care about each other."

Dietrich cited the synod goal of fostering small Christian communities. "I think we have that in a sense — not in the way they desire — but in the sense that if I had to ask someone to help, they would," she said.

Part of the parish's appeal is that it is continually growing and is so new, acknowledged Kathy Cuzzupoli, parish council president.

"A lot of the people here are young families," Cuzzupoli said. "I think they identify with that sense of being part of things right from the beginning."

Deacon Ramon Datz was so impressed by the parish that after being assigned to serve as its deacon in December, 1984, he eventually sold his home in Churchville and moved to Hamlin with his wife Barbara.

"I guess what led us to decide to come out here and live in the community ... is the openness of the community, the overall giving of the people," observed



During the Jan. 22 Mass, confirmation candidates and their sponsors were introduced, including Christopher Beyrle, who is sponsoring his brother Nick.

the deacon, who serves as the parish's coordinator of adult and youth faith formation. "Things like the rock party, the building of the church, putting in the stone facing of the church, the stone columns in the sacristy, just typify the character of the people out here."

Deacon Datz and his wife have also helped to give people an outlet for their spirit through prison ministry. Barbara Datz has joined ecumenical efforts to visit prisons, and the deacon has not only conducted retreats in prisons, but also brought parish musicians with him.

This sense of ecumenical cooperation has also led the parish to help area denominations create the "Bread and Thread" outreach ministry to provide food and clothes for the needy.

One of the parish's strengths is that Father Amann — and other diocesan officials — allowed lay parishioners room to take the initiative when establishing the parish, observed Walter Lapinski.

Lapinski is in a position to judge such things. A former Nativity parishioner,

he was a member of the committee that called for creating the new parish — and then set about establishing it.

"I think the surprise was that all of us were typical laymen who didn't have expertise at this sort of thing — and we ended up running it," Lapinski marvelled.

Lapinski added that the parish was also one of the first in the United States named after St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, who was canonized in 1975.

The spirit of this saint — the first native-born American to be canonized — is also evident in the parish's character.

A shrine to her has been set up in the church's front entrance. A mahogany bas-relief of the saint will eventually be placed in the church.

Meanwhile, Father

Amann noted, homilists regularly try to incorporate the saint's words and deeds into their sermons.

On the weekend of Jan. 14-15, while preaching about the death penalty as part of a diocesan-wide campaign, Father Amann noted that he was able to bring the saint into the discussion. Despite her many problems — finding herself a young widow with five children — she found support in the church. In gratitude, later in life she told people, "Be children of the church."

He called on parishioners, as the church's children, to heed their bishop's call to consider signing petitions against the death penalty.

But even as he recalled the homily, Father Amann remarked, "Be children of the church. It's kind of our motto."

♦♦♦

**EDITORS' NOTE:** In honor of the 20th anniversary of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's canonization this year, the parish has scheduled several upcoming events.

A pilgrimage to her shrine in Emmitsburg, Md., is scheduled for May 5-7. An afternoon of prayer and reflection on the saint's life has been slated for 2-5 p.m. Sept. 24 at the church.

Meanwhile, the parish is collecting donations to help purchase a bas-relief of the saint for the church.

For information about the pilgrimage or the afternoon of prayer and reflection, or about contributing money toward the bas-relief, please call the parish at 716/964-8627.

## SNAPSHOT

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church:

3747 Brick Schoolhouse Road, Hamlin

Ministerial staff:

Pastor: Father William J. Amann.

Coordinator of Adult and Youth Faith Formation: Deacon Ramon C. Datz.

Deacon John W. Holmes.

Religious Education Coordinator: Kathleen Kehoe.

Music Director: Louise Pohl.

Coordinator of Youth Ministry: Josephine (Joey) Conlon.

Parish Secretary: Billie Dietrich.

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