

Dansville church branches out in new directions

Parish Profile
St. Mary's
Dansville



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

DANSVILLE — Sometime in the 21st century, a descendant of one of the 750 families who currently attend St. Mary's Church will unearth a time capsule containing mementos of the parish as it marked its 150th anniversary in 1995.

According to Ralph A. Domesick, chairman of the church's sesquicentennial committee, St. Mary's this year is planning to bury such a capsule, which will include a copy of St. Mary's history and a history of parish organizations.

In addition to these records, Domesick noted that any parishioner wishing to donate photographs or a single-page family history will be welcome to make such contributions.

If parishioners take Domesick up on his offer, maybe the 21st-century investigator will find a picture of a smiling Vicky Cook and her 8-year-old son Christopher, who recently won the Parvuli Dei award from St. Mary's Cub Scout Pack No. 71.

Parvuli Dei means "Children of God," and along with fellow cubs Nicholas French and Jamie Huver, Christopher was recognized with the award for his completion of a scout project and a banner inscribed with the words "Hands to Work — Hearts to God."

"I felt kind of great," Christopher said about his award.

Many parishioners at St. Mary's seem to feel about their parish about the same



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Following the 10:30 a.m. Mass Feb. 5, Father Joseph R. Catanise, pastor of St. Mary's Church in Dansville, blesses a parishioner's throat in adoration of St. Blaise.

way Christopher feels about his award.

"It's great, it's a wonderful place because it's God's country down there," Deacon Gerard A. Hoerner said.

The parish's relaxed rural setting seems to bring forth similar comments from its pastor, Father Joseph R. Catanise.

"I go shopping at the Super Duper, and people say 'hi' to me," said Father Catanise, his eyes wide open as if the very notion of such friendliness was somewhat shocking.

Father Catanise has served as the Dansville parish's pastor since Father Andrew Teuschel, St. Mary's beloved late pastor, died after complications following an auto accident.

Having worked in such urban parishes as St. Mary's in Auburn, Father Catanise noted that he is still getting used to serving a church whose members are spread out over a large rural area. Yet, despite its laid-back country setting, the priest and others emphasized that St. Mary's has embarked on several new activities designed to unify and strengthen its congregation.

Christopher Cook's mother, Vicky, recently helped to establish a Mothers' Circle at St. Mary's. In only its third week, the group meets Tuesday evenings in the sacristy to study various subjects, including time management and relationships. Cook hopes that the group will catch on among both stay-at-home and working mothers.

"I think it would be good for a lot of mothers to have a place where they can share and talk," Cook observed. "I'm able to take what's going on in the home and get feedback from the members."



(From left to right) Lynne Reilly, Mike Vandurme, and Roger Krueger sing with the folk group during the Feb. 3 service.

The Mothers' Circle is one of a number of new programs begun with the help of Shirley Wildrick, the parish's coordinator of Christian formation and faith development. She pointed out that the 1993 diocesan Synod's adoption of lifelong religious education as its number one goal hit home at the Livingston County parish. To that end, the parish is planning a religious fair for April 2 in the parish's elementary school which houses 160 students in its pre-kindergarten and K-5 programs.

In addition to the Mothers' Circle, the parish is also now offering Bible study

and a "Catholic and Christian" series to be presented by Father Catanise from mid-February to early April.

Steve Rauber has benefited from another adult religious education program, a series of follow-up sessions St. Mary's has conducted since a parish mission last Advent. The course discusses such issues as unconditional love and Christian evangelization, he said.

"It keeps Christ alive in my life, sharing with other people and sharing with myself," he commented.

Parishioner Betty Mitchell and her husband William keep Christ alive for Catholic shut-ins throughout the area by distributing the Eucharist to the homebound on a regular basis. Just as Rauber benefits from sharing the Lord with others in his course, Mitchell and her spouse find joy in spreading the church's love for its shut-in members.

"You listen to them, and no matter what troubles you've got, it lifts you," she said. "You're bringing the living Christ with you, so it's good."

Finding Christ in her less-fortunate neighbors preoccupies Jean Bovee, a member of the parish's social ministry committee. Bovee noted she has participated in social outreach ranging from food distribution to needy families to friendly home visits to the lonely.

"We're a very prayerful parish down here," she said. "If somebody gets in trouble, we all try to pitch in and help them out."

Robert J. Goins, St. Mary's business manager, hopes to draw on such sentiments as the parish launches its first annual stewardship campaign. Beginning last Sunday, Feb. 5, Father Catanise has called on the congregation to contribute "time, talent and treasure" to the parish, Goins said.

Goins pointed out that the parish needs volunteers and money to do everything from improving the state of its buildings, widening its social outreach and revamping its information-gathering capacities.

"We're asking the parishioners to look into their hearts and determine what they can give," Goins concluded.

SNAPSHOTS

St. Mary's Church, 40 Elizabeth St., Dansville

Ministerial staff:

Pastor: Father Joseph R. Catanise.

Deacon: Gerard A. Hoerner.

Business Consultant: Robert Goins.

Administrative Assistant: Katie McGovern.

Faith Development Coordinator: Shirley Wildrick.

School Principal: Diane Sauerbier.

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