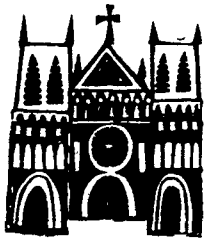


# Irondequoit parish retains traditional practices

**Parish Profile**  
St. Thomas the Apostle



By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

**IRONDEQUOIT** — When Gregory Sampson of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish was in the permanent diaconate formation program, many of his fellow candidates recalled the traditional practices that had once marked their parish life.

Recollecting such practices as eucharistic adoration, reciting the rosary before daily Mass, and Benedictions, Sampson's colleagues spoke about such things with a nostalgic gleam in their eyes, always starting off their reminiscences with the phrase: "Do you remember when we used to do so-and-so?"

"Usually these so-and-sos are things we still do at St. Thomas," Deacon Sampson said at a meeting of the parish council on Wednesday night, March 8.

Indeed, in an era when many parishes pride themselves on innovation and experimentation, St. Thomas the Apostle sees itself as a bastion of traditional Catholicism and a bulwark against perceived liturgical abuse.

The parish council members cited a number of ways St. Thomas has resisted modern changes.

No guest speakers give the homily, which never includes any kind of public service announcement, they remarked.

Once a month, the 73-year-old parish even offers a Sunday Mass in Latin, complete with Gregorian chant.

And, at the sign of peace during Sunday Masses, St. Thomas' worshipers briefly engage one another in polite handshakes, in contrast to the gregarious hugging and kissing that often marks this moment at other parishes.

St. Thomas' parishioners like their Catholicism pious and devotional, and they have no bone to pick with those who would label them conservative — a label they seem to relish, not reject.

"I really think that St. Thomas is a place where an orthodox person can come and still feel at home," observed Mike Martin, a parish council member who also serves as lector and eighth-grade catechist.

Martin's point was seconded by Denise Flanigen, parish council secretary.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

(From left) Jack Ertle, Virginia Stevens and Dennis Drozda sing with the St. Thomas the Apostle Church choir during a recent Mass at the Irondequoit parish.

## SNAPSHOTS

**St. Thomas the Apostle Church,** 4536 St. Paul Blvd., Irondequoit. For information, call 716/342-2323.

**Ministerial staff:**  
**Pastor:** Father L. James Callan.  
**Parochial Vicar:**

Father Ralph Fraats.  
**In Residence:**  
Father Robert F. McNamara.

**Permanent Deacon:**  
Deacon Gregory Sampson.  
**Director of Religious Education:**  
David Higbee.

**Business Manager:** Barbara Kelly.  
**Parish Council Chairman:**  
John Hayes.

"I can't imagine being anywhere else," she said of the parish. "I guess I really feel that I'm Catholic when I go here."

Indeed, a Catholic yearning for the kind of sacramental practices that once distinguished the church from other Christian denominations could find them easily at St. Thomas the Apostle.

Father Ralph J. Fraats, parochial vicar, pointed out, for example, that parishioners still line up in droves for Saturday confessions, which take place over the course of two to three hours.

Commenting on the large numbers

of parishioners at weekend confessions, John Hayes, parish council president, added that a common joke at St. Thomas is that it's one of the few parishes where people actually sin.

Behind the joke, however, lies the parish's commitment to the seriousness of the Catholic faith especially as proclaimed through the Mass, a seriousness stressed by its pastor, Father L. James Callan, during his homily at the 10:30 a.m. Mass on Sunday, March 19.

Father Callan, who will retire this year after celebrating his golden jubilee, emphasized that Catholics are called to participate in Christ's passion during the eucharistic liturgy.

"The Mass is not just a social event," Father Callan told his listeners. "It's a sacrifice ..."

The parish apparently emphasizes the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist by retaining the practice of kneeling at an altar rail for communion. Members of the parish council pointed out that kneeling produces a sense of reverence they feel is missing when Catholics simply line up for Communion.

"I like how we kept the kneeling at the altar," remarked Lori Merkel, a parish council member who helps run the parish's coffee hour following Sunday's 9 a.m. Mass.

She pointed out that the parish prefers to keep the tone of the Mass reverent, and save a more relaxed tone for its social events, of which she noted there are many. She added that she and other

younger parishioners are working on creating programs for some of the parish's younger members, including a single adults' group.

The parish may prefer a pre-Vatican II liturgical atmosphere, but St. Thomas was actually ahead of many diocesan parishes in encouraging regular adult education, a concept embraced by the 1993 diocesan Synod, one of whose priorities was lifelong faith formation.

In May of 1992, the parish hired David Higbee, full-time director of adult education, who has brought a number of innovative programs to St. Thomas, including the establishment of the Irenaeus Study Center just south of the church.

The parish has also become well-known throughout the diocese for sponsoring a number of intellectual speakers in its school hall. These programs regularly draw between 200 to 400 listeners.

Many of these speakers have talked about church teachings or the various contemporary issues with which the church is wrestling.

Dr. Peter Kreeft, a philosophy professor at Boston College, will speak on "The Battle for the Catholic Soul in America" at the school next Friday, March 31, at 7:30 p.m., and on Saturday, April 1, at 9:30 a.m.; 11 a.m. and 1:15 p.m.

And, in an attempt to foster parental involvement in their children's education, the Legion of Mary is visiting families of St. Thomas' religious education students, according to the legion's Mary Murphy.

St. Thomas hopes to improve its catechetical programs by compiling compliments and complaints from the families, she said, using such information to upgrade their educational offerings.

**EDITORS' NOTE:** Father Callan has invited his fellow jubilarians and Bishop Matthew H. Clark to a Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Thomas the Apostle Church on Wednesday, May 10, at 11 a.m. The liturgy will be followed by dinner in the church hall. Call 716/342-2323 for details.

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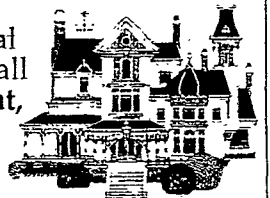
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