


Parishes boast history of community

Parish Profile
St. Theresa's,
Stanley
St. Mary's,
Rushville



By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

When Bob Singleton refers to the parish communities of St. Theresa's, Stanley, and its mission, St. Mary's, Rushville, as being like the fictional television small town "Mayberry," he does so with obvious affection.

"It has some positive 'Mayberry' aspects," noted Singleton, a member of the two parishes' joint parish council for the last three years.

Among those aspects are that members of both parishes — which combined have about 150 families most of the year, with added visitors during the summer months — know each other very well. Parishioners also don't hesitate to chip in to get work done and volunteer their help whenever a neighbor is in need.

Singleton experienced the call to "chip in" the night of his first parish council meeting, when he unexpectedly found himself volunteering to serve as the parish's representative on the cluster school board and the co-chairman of a parish directory project. And recently, he was called upon to help clear out a beehive in the church.

"Because we're so small and we don't have the population, the opportunities are there to get involved," Singleton said. "The challenges are there, and the call is there."

"We're simple people who believe in the faith of the Catholic Church and doing things as a community and for each other," explained Tim Hebbing, parish council president. "People pulling together — that's really what community's all about."

Father John A. Lynch, the parishes' pastor, seconded this notion.

"The fact that with the relatively small size the people and priests can get to know one another on a personal basis, they can share as mutual friends," the pastor observed.

"(The parishes) are small, and that's what a lot of people like about it," acknowledged Barbara Bush, religious education coordinator. "Here, they feel that they're known. I do talk to new parents about what they like about the parishes, and that's what they tell me."

At the same time, the two communi-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Sue Cooper (right), a parishioner at St. Mary's Church in Rushville, organizes orders with 'Captain Yogi' during a March 31 Lenten fish fry at the Stanley Fire Hall.

ties are not as provincial as the fictional TV town, Singleton cautioned, noting that, "The people of Mayberry worked in Mayberry. We have people working all over.

"The people are close," Singleton added, "but not so close-knit that you feel like an outsider."

This perhaps comes from a history of being linked together for most of their existences. The older of the two churches, St. Mary's, was established in 1869. After St. Theresa's was incorporated in 1876, the two parishes have been joined ever since.

Today, beyond having a joint parish council, the parishes alternate weekend Masses, share an active Rosary Society, offer a Lenten Bible sharing group which often extends its activities throughout much of the year, and have Tuesday holy hours and a First Saturday program.

"I think one of the advantages of being a cluster parish, you have to deal with (outsiders)," Singleton said. "(The people) are constantly interacting with people on a close basis. So when other people come in, you never know if they're not just people from the other parish. That makes us more adaptable."

And during the summer months, the population of both parishes — especially St. Mary's — almost quadruples as people return to their summer residences on Canandaigua Lake, Hebbing said.

That spirit of working together ex-

tends beyond the parishes as well, Father Lynch observed.

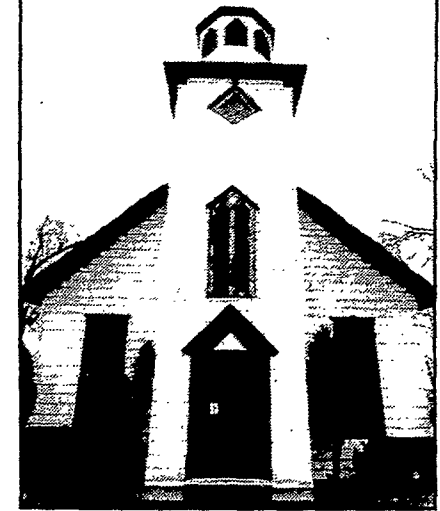
"There's a spirit of ecumenical respect and cooperation in the area," Father Lynch said.

That cooperation takes many forms, Hebbing observed.

He said during Lent, for example, the area's Christian churches celebrate a weekly, Sunday-evening ecumenical service that rotates throughout the churches. And when the parishes have their annual chicken barbecue in August, they use the United Methodist Church's kitchen for some of the cooking. In addition, the annual vacation Bible school is conducted in conjunction with the Congregational Church and the United Methodists. The parishes also have a monthly food collection for Middlesex's Friendship House, an ecumenical community project that helps the area's needy.

Adding to this sense of unity is the fact that the two towns are part of the Marcus Whitman School District, Father Lynch noted. "The school kids get to know one another, even if they live in the other parish," the priest observed.

They also get to know each other through a thriving joint religious education program that has some 100 students in Grades K-8, and approximately 20 more in grades 9-12. The parish also has a youth ministry program — led by Mary Bodine and Peg Hilton — a feature



SNAPSHOTS

St. Theresa's Church, Main Street, Stanley
Incorporated: 1875
St. Mary's Church, Gilbert Street, Rushville
Incorporated: 1869
Pastor:
Father John A. Lynch
Religious Ed. Coordinator:
Barbara Bush
Musical Director (St. Theresa's):
Ann Turner
Musical Directors (St. Mary's):
Howard Jaquith, Cindy Champlin
Telephone:
716/526-5566

that is unique for the area, Bush commented.

"A lot of parishes out in this area do not have one," Bush explained.

Indications are that the parishes will continue to need to focus on youths.

"A lot of the families that have been with us a while are having babies," Hebbing said. In addition, more people are moving into the area, he said, noting, "The numbers are increasing — the more the merrier."

Indeed, both parishes are even looking into the need to build a larger hall to accommodate religious education functions, Bush said.

Still, parishioners are aware of the realities facing the church today in light of the declining numbers of priests. St. Mary's and St. Theresa's parishioners have discussed the possibility of clustering with other parishes, but Bush said, "We've been together so long we don't want to split up. There is a strong sense of unity."

"We talked about (the future) even before the Synod started," Hebbing said. "Our intent is to stay together no matter what. We'll just have to wait and see."

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