

Parish practices love of neighbor

Parish Profile
St. Mary's,
Geneseo



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GENESEO — When it comes to Jesus' command to love one's neighbor, St. Mary's Church not only carries it out but the parish even organizes itself according to Christ's directive.

Located at 4 Avon Road, just off Main Street, this Livingston County parish is in its sixth year of operating Neighborhood Ministries, a network made up of dozens of parishioners who provide a vast array of services to their fellow Catholics. Among those services are:

- Respite for caretakers.
- Preparation and serving of meals.
- Transportation to doctor's appointments.
- Rides to church.
- Eucharistic visits to the homebound.
- Organization of funeral receptions for the deceased's family and friends in the parish center.

According to Father William J. Gordinier, St. Mary's pastor, the parish's geographic region is split up into 11 areas that encompass a total of 600 families from the towns of Geneseo and Groveland. Each region is served by volunteers of Neighborhood Ministries who are coordinated by a core leader, who contacts volunteers whenever they are needed to fulfill a certain task, the pastor said.

Neighborhood Ministries has done much to bring St. Mary's members closer, said Cindy Rider, the parish's director of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and Baptismal Preparation. She recalled, for example, getting her first phone call to prepare a casserole for a funeral reception to be hosted by a man who had lost a member of his family.

"Just because I didn't know him didn't mean he didn't mean something to me," she said.

Parishioners have grown even closer in recent years with the advent of several new programs such as Neighborhood Ministries, she and other staff members said. And that's a good thing, considering the variety of parishioners to which St. Mary's ministers, Father Gordinier said.

Irish and Italians, Germans and Nicaraguans, Vietnamese and Canadians all call St. Mary's their spiritual home along with about 200 college students from the State University of New York College at Geneseo.

Over the past year, the parish has had 54 baptisms, 22 weddings and 19 funerals, according to the pastor who said that his church pews fill up every weekend with everyone from little children to senior citizens.

"I think that says there's a certain balance there," Father Gordinier commented.

St. Mary's diverse population benefited enormously from the establishment



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Under the direction of Liturgy and Music Coordinator Peggy Szczesniak, members of St. Mary's Youth Choir sing during a May 7 Mass at the Geneseo church. Children in the congregation later placed flowers and crowned a statue of the Virgin Mary as part of the liturgy.

SNAPSHOTS

St. Mary's Church, 4 Avon Road,
Geneseo

Phone: 716/243-1100

Established: 1854

Current church built: 1889

Ministerial staff:

Pastor:

Father William J. Gordinier

Pastor Emeritus:

Father J. Walter Carron

Pastor-in-residence:

Father Eugene McFarland

Parish Administrator/Cemetery

Manager: Madilene Perl

Secretary and Receptionist/
Scheduling Coordinator:

Diane Hinerman

Religious Education Coordinator:

Cathy Meyer

RCIA Director: Cindy Ryder

Liturgy and Music Coordinator:

Peggy Szczesniak

Youth Minister: Pat Sica

Maintenance: Stephen Szczesniak

in 1986 of its parish center, which houses several rooms devoted to everything from religious education for the parish's children to a food pantry for the needy.

"The parish center has really helped to build our community a lot," observed Stephen Szczesniak, who oversees parish maintenance.

But even more than the parish center the staff credited the 1993 diocesan Synod and the pre-synodal process for opening up constructive dialogue both within the parish and with other Catholic churches in the diocese.

"People were able to speak out as to what our parish wanted," said Madilene Perl, parish administrator, of the pre-synodal meetings.

She and the other staff members pointed out that the Synod has borne fruit in many ways.

The parish, for example, has held an eight-week adult Bible study course that

attracted a number of attendees. Meanwhile, Father Gordinier said, St. Mary's is also forming a social ministry committee currently looking to define its mission.

Because of the Synod, the parish has also engaged in extensive collaboration with other area parishes on a variety of new ventures, including the establishment of a parish stewardship committee which taps the time, talent and treasure of St. Mary's members for the church's benefit.

Staff members pointed out that St. Mary's is not too proud to call up another parish and ask for advice on how to organize a program.

"I think one of the things the Synod has done is that it has broken down some of the parochialism," commented Peggy Szczesniak, liturgy and music coordinator.

Ryder agreed.

"There's no more trade secrets," she said of St. Mary's and other parishes.

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