

Final Mass at St. Aloysius June 27

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

AUBURN — An aging and decreasing membership, coupled with declining revenues, were the reasons the diocese was forced to close St. Aloysius Church. The closing is effective June 27.

In a decree dated April 12, Bishop Matthew H. Clark, acting on the recommendation of the St. Aloysius Parish Council and after consulting the diocesan Priests' Council, declared the "suppression" of the 94-year-old parish.

"Suppression" is the canonical term meaning that an organization, action or devotion is closed or ended by the proper church authority — generally the authority that issued the original authorization.

Bishop Clark is slated to celebrate the final Mass at St. Aloysius Church, 162 Van Anden St., Tuesday, June 27, at 7:30 p.m.

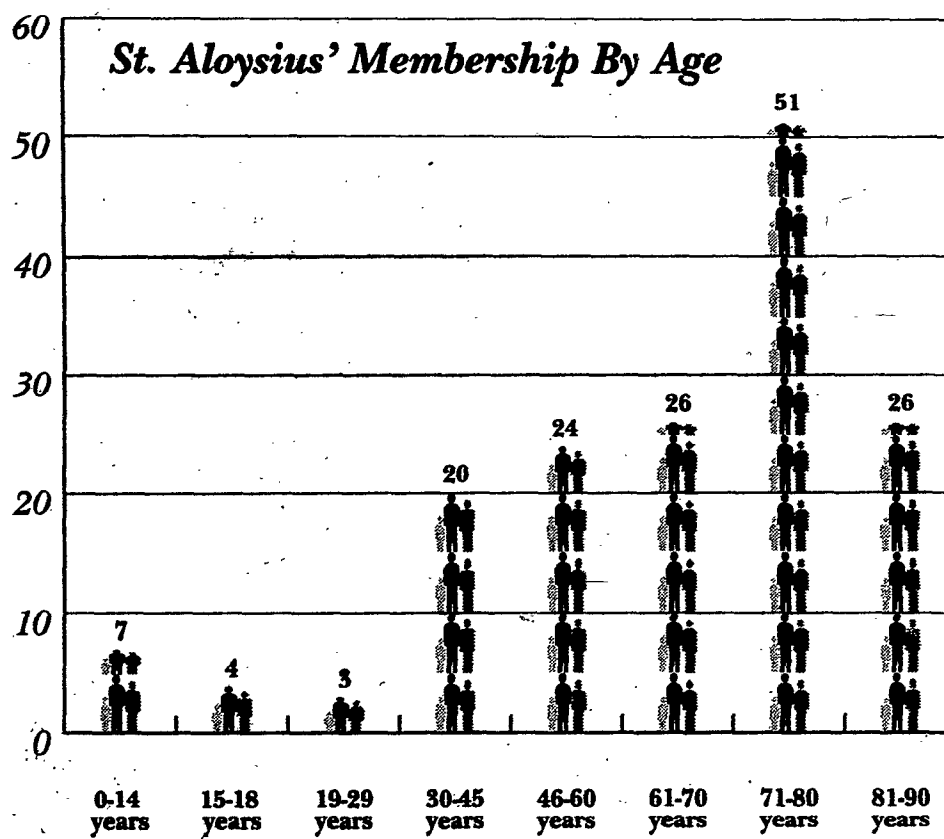
All church records from St. Aloysius will remain at Holy Family Church. St. Aloysius and Holy Family have shared the same pastor since 1982. According to Father Conrad Sundholm, pastor, St. Aloysius' closing is a consequence of decreasing membership, an aging parish population, and revenues not keeping pace with expenses.

"There were so few people coming there, and no way to replace resources," Father Sundholm said. "There was just not enough people to support the ministries of the parish."

Incorporated July 6, 1901, the Auburn parish had been living off its savings for some time, Father Sundholm explained, noting, "In the early part of the year, we began talking about the fact that we would run out of money in late '95, early '96."

Father Sundholm had prepared two informational graphs to illustrate the situation for parishioners. One showed the parish's dwindling financial resources; the other showed that of approximately 161 people in the parish, some 48 percent are over age 70 (see accompanying graphic).

According to Father Sundholm, after showing the graphs to the parish council Jan. 10, the council voted to petition Bishop Clark to close the parish. A subsequent meeting with parishioners to discuss the data and the decision to close the parish was held Feb. 14. The vast majority of the parishioners understood and accepted the reality of the situation facing



Total Membership - 161 people - 77 (48%) are over 70

the parish, the pastor observed.

"If the facts are made clear and understandable, people accept things," Father Sundholm said. "It was an easy call as far as, 'Should we do this?'"

June Lovig, parish council secretary, acknowledged that the need to close the parish was clearly evident.

"At the meeting in February, there were a few questions asked, but nobody showed any real opposition," Lovig said. "They realize it had to be."

"When you don't have the young families, you have no way of growing," Lovig added. "It was simply a matter of time."

Of the approximately 110 families registered at St. Aloysius, Lovig noted, some 94 had already registered at Holy Family Church. Although a few had not yet indicated where they will be going to church, other parishioners had registered at other Auburn parishes, she said.

Paul Mallon, parish council president, is among those parishioners who will attend Holy Family.

"You hate to see it end," observed Mallon, who has been a member of the Cayuga County parish for much of his life. "But there's a shortage of priests and there's the age of the people there."

Noting the presence of eight

Catholic churches in Auburn, Father Sundholm said St. Aloysius' closing will not cause hardship for area Catholics. Indeed, the church had been offering just one weekend Mass, he observed.

The pastor added that after the parish is officially closed, the church building will be sold — reporting that there had already been inquiries but no firm offers on the building. Over the years, the parish's rectory, convent and hall, known as the "Grand," had already been sold, leaving the church, garage and parking lot.

Of the religious articles inside the church, Father Sundholm said, donated items will be returned to the donors' families, where possible. Some items will be distributed among parishioners who have expressed an interest in them. Larger items, such as statues, pews and organ, will be made available to other churches.

Meanwhile, the parish's statue of St. Aloysius will be placed in a shrine at the entrance of Holy Family Church "as a remembrance to St. Aloysius," Father Sundholm said.

"It's really sad," Father Sundholm said of the parish closing. But, he added, "It's a much more sensible way of looking at the Catholic Church in Auburn."

Guadalupe image slated to commence Tier tour

The Missionary Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe will be displayed in several Southern Tier venues over the next few weeks.

Our Lady of Guadalupe's image, sent by Roman Catholics in Mexico, is an exact photographic replica of the original image left by the Virgin Mary on Blessed Juan Diego's cape in 1531.

Dates and locations for the image's appearance in May are as follows:

May 22 — Church of St. Mary Our Mother, 811 Westlake St., Horseheads; 7 p.m. services followed by a vigil from 10 p.m.-6:30 a.m.

May 23 — St. Casimir's Church, 1004 Davis St., Elmira; 6:30-8 p.m. services.

May 25 — St. Casimir's Church, Elmira; 9 a.m. Mass.

May 30 — St. Mary's Church, 155 State St., Corning; 7:30-8:30 p.m. holy hour of prayer.

May 31 — St. Mary's Church, Corning; services begin at 7 p.m.

For June dates and locations, or for further information, call Karen Kilpatrick at 607/562-8630.

Courier hires Ramos as sales representative

The *Catholic Courier* has hired Iyan Ramos as a sales representative in the newspaper's advertising department. In his new post, Ramos will be assisting businesses and organizations outside Monroe County with advertising and promotional needs.

Ramos is a former producer and director for WXXI, a Public Broadcasting Station in Rochester. Among the programs he produced were "Que Pasa? Rochester," "94 Innovative Teacher Awards," "Puerto Rican Silver Anniversary Festival," "Together We Sing!," and "The Rochester I Know."

Previous to working for WXXI, Ramos worked in the tri-state area (New York-New Jersey-Connecticut) as director of public affairs for Family Stations, Inc.; as a production assistant at MCA Broadcasting; news director for Salem Media Corporation; and as a public service director at POF Radio.

Locally, Ramos has been active in various civic activities, including serving as president of Rochester's 1993 Puerto Rican Festival.

Escaped con caught with trunk full of chalices, artifacts

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

Hamburg police have arrested a man they believe is responsible for the recent rash of burglaries of gold and silver chalices and other artifacts from churches and religious institutions in New York and Pennsylvania.

Among those burglaries were May 7 thefts at St. Michael's Church, Newark; St. Mary's Church and Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua; and St. Januarius Church in Naples.

Hamburg police arrested Robert Lee Dixon May 11 after he was involved in a hit-and-run accident following an alleged burglary attempt at the friary at St. Francis High School in Hamburg, a Buffalo suburb. In addition to finding a lap-top computer in the car's trunk, police discovered garbage bags filled with more than 200 chalices and other religious artifacts.

Many of the chalices had been disassembled, including some in which the gems had been removed.

According to Detective Sgt. Tom Biersbach, the estimated value of the recovered items was between \$200,000 and \$250,000. But, he noted, "It's very difficult to put a price on these. Some of them are priceless."

It will also be difficult to identify the owners of all the items because some have been taken apart, Biersbach observed.

Nevertheless, Hamburg police were able to identify a chalice belonging to Father Edward E. Steinkirchner, pastor of St. Michael's Church in Newark, because the base of the chalice — a gift from his family for his ordination some 46 years ago — was engraved with his name. However, a diamond given to him by his mother and set in the chalice had been pried loose.

The chalice was among four taken

from the locked Newark church, along with four ciboria and four or five patens, Father Steinkirchner said.

Biersbach said they are also fairly certain that the lap-top computer found in Dixon's car was the same one stolen from Notre Dame Retreat House. Police had also identified items taken from St. Elizabeth Church in Smethport, Pa., as well as from a number of Catholic and Jewish religious items taken from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

Although he acknowledged that he was not certain if his sterling silver chalice — given to him in 1965 by his mother — was among those found, Father Walter Wainwright, St. Mary's pastor, expressed relief that the alleged perpetrator was apparently caught.

"I sent a drawing (to police)," Father Wainwright said. "They are taking a photograph of some of the items. My understanding is that the (Canandaigua police) investigator and I will go to Buf-

falo to identify it."

Also stolen from St. Januarius Church was a chalice belonging to the pastor, Father Philip Billotte, along with another chalice and a silver paten.

Meanwhile, attempted burglaries were also reported at St. Michael's Church in Lyons, and St. Francis de Sales Church in Geneva. No items were reported stolen from those churches.

Biersbach reported that Dixon had escaped from a maximum security prison in Springfield, S.D., where he was being held under the name Gary A. Heiman. He had a history of burglarizing churches and was serving a 10-year sentence on two burglary counts.

Dixon, who pleaded innocent, has been charged with burglary, possession of stolen property and assault stemming from two injuries in the hit-and-run accident during his get-away attempt. He is currently being held in the Erie County Sheriff's Holding Center.