

PARISH FEATURE

Parish thrives with long history of involved laity

Parish Profile

St. Patrick's,
Seneca Falls



By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

SENECA FALLS — In 1848, people gathered in Seneca Falls to organize efforts to promote women's rights.

But even in the days of the historic Women's Rights Convention, energetic Catholics in this Seneca County town were already organized and set to build the second St. Jerome's Church.

That new church — to replace the edifice dedicated in 1836 — was subsequently named St. Thomas Church when it was dedicated in 1851. Ultimately, in light of the influx of Irish immigrants into the region, the building was rededicated in 1864 as St. Patrick's Church. That name was kept when another church building — the current edifice — was dedicated Feb. 15, 1931.

But St. Patrick's parishioners today are not resting on the laurels of a long and rich history. One need only look at the parish bulletin's front page to see the vast number of parish activities, ranging from such traditional organizations as the Guild and Altar Society, the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Daughters of America, to the "Seniors" group, Nicaragua Project and RENEW.

Indeed, in the last three years alone, this parish of some 1,545 families has collected between 35,000 and 40,000 pounds of clothing and supplies for an impoverished community in Nicaragua; last summer restored 15 Seneca Falls homes (the parish has already targeted seven more to repair this year); created an endowment fund of approximately \$240,000 to help cover future needs; sustained its 34-year-old school with an enrollment of about 160 students despite financial pressures; created a variety of committees to oversee RENEW, a massive parish renewal program that will help to fulfill many of the goals promoted in the Diocese of Rochester's Pastoral Plan for 1995-1999; and has formed a long-range planning committee to help the parish prepare for the future.

"I think there's enough of a variety of activities to suit most people," said Joyce Sinicropi, a member of the parish's Stewardship and Finance Committees and RENEW'S co-coordinator.

"Something's going for everybody," observed Frank Pagano, a lifelong



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

(From left) Carl Sassano, Mickey Schertl and Tony Sassano look on as Neil Sassano tosses the ball during a May 20 bocce game May 20, part of the St. Patrick's parish picnic at the SMS building in Seneca Falls.

parishioner who is also chairman of the Stewardship Committee and a member of the Cemetery Commission.

"It's just a great big melting pot of every kind of personality you'd want to know," said Joyce Zmuda, a member of "Seniors" and co-chair of one of the RENEW committees.

Father David N. Gramkee, St. Patrick's pastor since June of 1992, credits a great deal of the parish's success in recent years to parishioners' willingness to take on responsibility.

"One of the things that I think of St. Patrick's is the people of Seneca Falls are willing to take leadership in the parish," Father Gramkee observed. "People are willing to take committees and run with them."

Parishioners, however, are quick to credit the parish staff — Father Gramkee in particular — for the strong encouragement and support given to the community.

"I think many people have kind of blossomed with that kind of support," noted Gretchen Koch, a member of the Principal's Advisory Committee for St. Patrick's School.

Isabelle Fay, religious education coordinator, observed that during interviews with parents of children preparing to receive the sacraments, parents kept emphasizing that they want to be involved in their children's preparation because of encouragement and support from parish

SNAPSHOTS

St. Patrick's Church,
97 W. Bayard St., Seneca Falls
Phone: 315/568-5203
Established: 1831
Families: 1,545
Ministerial staff (partial listing):
Pastor:
Father David N. Gramkee
Parochial Vicar:
Father Walter Plominski
Office Manager: **Ann Prayne**
School Principal: **Louis Rizzieri**
Choir Director: **Joyce Mahoney**
Youth Ministry Coordinators:
Larry and Mary Lou Lang
Religious Education Coordinator:
Isabelle Fay

leadership.

"We had a confirmation retreat and we had parents coming around the clock to volunteer," Fay said.

Pagano noted that while parishioners have been actively reaching out to help others for many years, "it wasn't brought out in the open. I like it better now. It's more open. Everybody knows what's going on."

To illustrate one way in which parishioners' contributions are acknowledged, Pagano cited a breakfast slated for June 25. One of the plans launched by the Stewardship Committee to help stabilize parish finances was to ask people at the beginning of the parish's fiscal year, which is July 1, to pledge how much they will give each week to the collection. The annual breakfast is intended to honor those people who have kept their pledge — a figure he estimated to be at 134 this year.

That kind of support and openness has helped to foster a sense of real community, Zmuda said.

"I've met people living in town I didn't know before," Zmuda said. "You get to know the people. You may have heard their names. Now you get to know them."

"We just have a parish of wonderful volunteers," Sinicropi said. "Without them we couldn't do what we've done."

RENEW, which will officially start this fall, will hopefully encourage even more people to become active in the parish, declared Father Walter Plominski, parochial vicar.

"We hope to involve a good number of people in the process of deepening their faith and involvement in parish life and ministry," Father Plominski said.

Fostering even more lay leadership is vital to the parish's future, Father Gramkee said.

"One of the things we're planning for is when there is only one priest here or sharing a priest with another parish," the pastor said. "We're working under the assumption that the parish has been here since the early 19th century and we will continue to be here."

At the same time, the uncertain future engendered from being a small-town parish is one of the community's charms and strengths, parishioners said.

"I think a large number of kids who go to St. Patrick's are the children of people who went to St. Patrick's," remarked Mary Lou Lang, who coordinates the parish's youth ministry program along with her husband Larry.

"I think many of us who live here are proud of our village," Sinicropi said. "We like the quality of life. We like knowing the other people in the community."

"It's like a big family," Pagano observed. "Everybody's friendly. They say 'hello' to each other."

"I can't stress enough how the people of Seneca Falls — and especially St. Patrick's — are inclusive," Koch said. "They care about your ideas. They care about you."

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