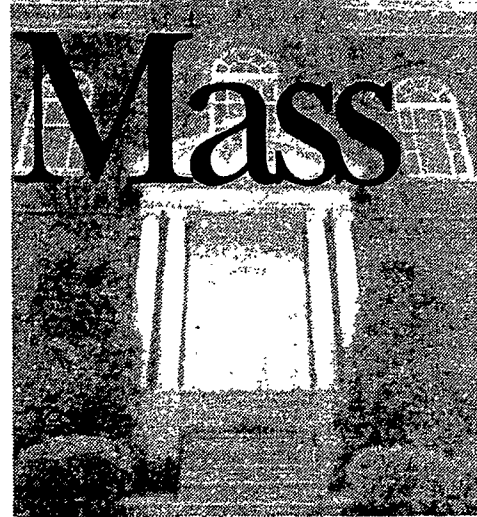


St. Aloysius

Last
Mass

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Monsignor Joseph O'Connor (from left); Bishop Matthew H. Clark; Father Conrad Sundholm, pastor of St. Aloysius; and Father Albert Shamori were on hand to celebrate the Auburn parish's last Mass June 27.

Tears, memories mark St. Aloysius' final Mass

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

AUBURN — Frank Gentile and Rose Rosa Ammerman were talking at the back of St. Aloysius Church the evening of June 27, just before Mass was to begin. "It's hard to believe it's the last time you'll come down here," Gentile commented. "It's like a member of the family dying."

The two had "come down" to 162 Van Anden St. on that humid Tuesday evening to mark the passing — if not of a family member — of something that was a vital part of their lives.

The Mass was the final one at St. Aloysius Church.

When Isabel Chase, who served as a Eucharistic minister for the final Mass, left the building after Communion to take the remaining consecrated hosts to Holy Family Church, St. Aloysius officially ceased to be an active Catholic parish.

Some 200 people gathered for that final Mass, celebrated by Bishop Matthew H. Clark. Concelebrating with him were the pastor, Father Conrad Sundholm, and two "children" of the parish: Father Albert Shamori, now administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel in Fleming, and Monsignor Joseph O'Connor, a retired priest of the Diocese of Trenton, N.J.

"All I can say is St. Aloysius has been a tremendous contributor to the faith of the area," the monsignor observed, pointing to the number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, as well as the many active lay Catholics who grew up in the parish. "The heritage of St. Aloysius is going to live on a long time."

Bishop Clark announced the closing — or, in canonical terms, the "suppression" — of the parish in a decree dated April 12, 1995. That decree followed a Jan. 10 vote by the St. Aloysius parish council to petition Bishop Clark to close the nearly 94-year-old parish.

In an interview at the time Bishop Clark issued his decree, Father Sundholm said the closing of the parish — which was incorporated July 6, 1901 — 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 at that time. "There was just not enough people to support the ministries of the parish."

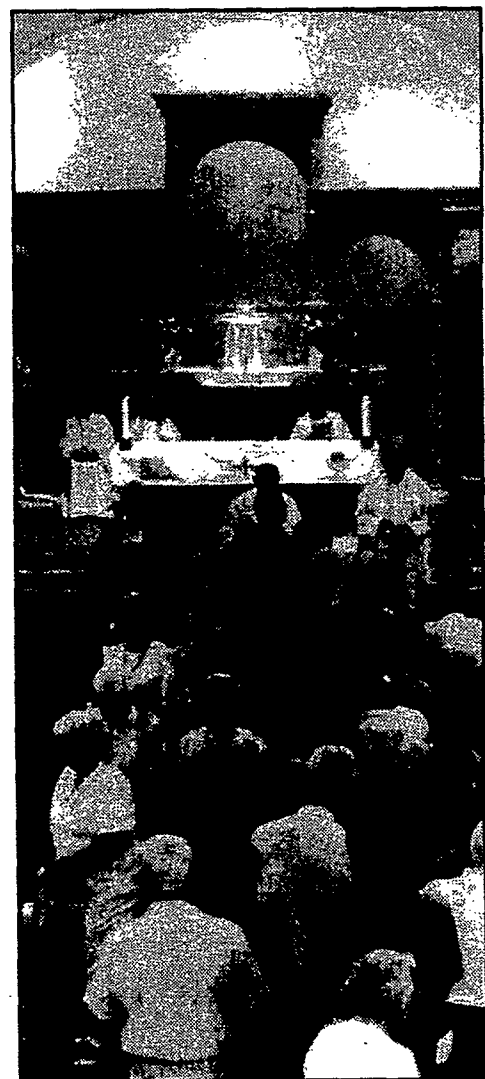
In his homily at the Mass, Bishop Clark had praise for the parishioners for the way they had dealt with the closing.

"Let me just express a word of honest and sincere and deep thanks to this community for the faithful, mature, sacrificial way you have led us all to this night," Bishop Clark said. "I think it's a tremen-



(Above) Yolanda DeRosa (right) and Diana Stout pray together. DeRosa, a neighborhood resident, frequently visited St. Aloysius.

(At left) Father Conrad Sundholm, pastor of St. Aloysius, talks with altar servers Lindsay Murphy (center) and Andrea Gadsby before the June 27 closing Mass.



Bishop Clark distributes Communion to parishioners during the last Mass in the 94-year-old church.

dous tribute to Father Conrad, to the parish council, to the whole community that you have read the signs of the times and made this practical judgment into the future, even though there is clearly a cost to the judgment made."

As part of the process of closing the parish, the approximately 161 parishioners were asked to declare what Auburn-area parishes they would attend. The majority of parishioners selected Holy Family, where Father Sundholm also serves as pastor.

The church building will be put up for sale. Large items in the church — such as the pews and the organ — will be made available to other churches. Smaller items — including some of the statues — will be distributed among parishioners who have submitted requests for them.

The parish corporation will continue for some time, Father Sundholm explained, because it continues to receive income from church properties sold previously. At some point in the next few years, however — and after the church building is sold — the corporation will be dissolved and the money will be distributed proportionately among Auburn-area parishes, based on the number of former St. Aloysius parishioners they took in.

Meanwhile, the church's statue of St. Aloysius will be placed in a shrine at the entrance of Holy Family Church.

Louis DeFavero, a trustee of the parish who met his wife there and put his seven children through the parish school, noted, "It's a terrible thing, but I understand it. It can't be helped. It's going to

happen everywhere."

Although many parishioners had hoped the closing would not come, Chase observed, "It's something you have to look at with common sense."

Chase acknowledged that she had had to fight tears as she distributed Communion.

"It was rough," Chase said. "I saw some of their faces, and I knew they had been crying."

One of those individuals who shed tears was Chris Feeney, DeFavero's daughter.

"I grew up in the shadow of the church," Feeney said. "I was married here. I've always been affiliated with the parish."

Feeney added that she has been inspired by the people of the parish.

"It was a very humble church," Feeney explained. "It was never a wealthy church. It was attended by humble, hard-working people. It was sustained more through faith than by money."

At the end of the Mass, Father Sundholm read an updated version of a poem written some 44 years ago for the parish's golden jubilee by Lillian Hatch, whom Father Sundholm described as St. Aloysius' "poet laureate." A member of St. Aloysius School's class of 1917, she now lives in the Schultz Towers senior complex across the street from Holy Family Church.

The poem's concluding lines are: "Today as we pass through its portals May faith fill all our hearts, And love for St. Aloysius, From our memory never depart."