

PARISH PROFILE

St. Patrick's growing into faith, and new space

Parish Profile

St. Patrick's,
Victor



By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

VICTOR — Parishioners can see *what* is happening.

St. Patrick's Parish is gaining at least two or three families a month. The RCIA program averages 20 participants a year. Children are packing the pews, with about 1,000 people in all attending the four weekend Masses.

But *why* this is happening eludes an easy answer.

Maybe it's the "new" pastor, Father George Wiant, in his sixth year, and his ways, some parishioners say. Or the new permanent committees. Or the population growth. Or the parish's warmth, or the 70-year-old church's beauty.

"It's wonderful to see the people are coming," said Lena Catalano, a member since her birth in 1924. "They say that people are leaving the Catholic Church, but I don't see too many people leaving ours. The people involved are doing a terrific job."

The church's cemetery sexton, Eleanor Barry, admits that when she visits new residents to register them to vote, "Quite often I have church registration forms with me and if they say they are Catholic, I ask, 'Would you like to get registered?'"

Nearly 1,400 families are registered in the parish; fewer than 800 were registered in 1990. As the church grows, so does the challenge of getting to know one another, members said. But the new parish center, to open July 1, should help. The church is the largest in the village — 400 people can worship at a time — but they've had to socialize elsewhere.

Social events have generally been held at St. Patrick's School of Religion, which the church built in 1958 next to Victor Central School, about a mile away.

Today the school is for sale, with proceeds to go toward the parish center's \$1.3 million cost.

St. Patrick's earliest parishioners were Irish immigrants who first worshiped at a barber shop, the Universalist Church basement, and a schoolhouse, where Rochester priests celebrated Masses. Although the growing Catholic community faced objections from townspeople, a local couple sold it land in 1856. From 1850 to 1857 the parish was an out-mission of Palmyra and in 1858 it became an out-mission of the East Bloomfield Catholic church.

The wood frame church built in 1856 (at the current site) measured 1,944 square feet. The new parish center alone will have 11,000 square feet and will house an assembly hall for 275 people, a children's Liturgy of the Word area, and a parish living room. The current parish house will hold offices; Father Wiant will move to the old convent he has dubbed the Hogan House, for Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, who lived there from 1971 till this year.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

From left, Joe Addante of LaBella Associates, Greg Heimburg of the parish pastoral council, Father George Wiant (pastor), Sue Stehling of the building committee, and contractor Brian Marianacci break ground Sept. 17 for St. Patrick's new parish center. The Victor church plans to open the center in July 1996.

The parish center will provide 12 classrooms and a youth room — not a multi-purpose, but a *youth* room, noted Marsha Foote, coordinator of Christian formation.

"The parishioners are very invested in their young people," Foote commented. "When I came (two years ago) there was a group waiting to work with me, with concerns about the young people. ... And they are still there."

"This is a parish very aware they are church," she said. "I see it every day. They are not leaving it all up to us to do it."

Nearly 500 first-through-12th graders are active in four youth programs.

"The social pieces they can get from school and family," Foote said of the older children. "Being able to roll up their sleeves and be involved is what they needed."

The older children have worked at soup kitchens, collected paper products for an unwed mothers program, and ran a Halloween carnival for the younger children. They also have asked for evenings of reflection and prayer services.

Noting the overall enthusiasm of parishioners for more new activities, Sister Mary Kay Ryan, SSJ, pastoral associate said, "Our goal is not just to have multiple programs so much, but to involve people so they can grow into their faith as adults and families."

Programs such as RCIA have bonuses of bonding people in faith, she said, adding the RCIA groups meet long after joining the church.

SNAPSHOTS

St. Patrick's Church
115 Maple Ave., Victor
Phone: 716/924-7111
Incorporated: 1856
Ministerial staff:
Pastor: **Father George Wiant**
Weekend associate: **Father James Marvin**
Pastoral Associate: **Sister Mary Kay Ryan, SSJ**
Coordinator of Christian Formation: **Marsha Foote**
Music Minister: **Mary Ann Bunco**
Secretary: **Rose Stranz**

"It keeps us all together," Sister Ryan said. "We are interested in small Christian communities and it is a way to bond in faith and to bond in friendship, which is a very beautiful thing to see."

Recent converts have gone through full-immersion baptisms in a rented hot tub in the front of the church.

"After going through the whole process and knowing this is the way baptism has been done for centuries, they are willing to do it, to be a part of the Christian community," she said.

The Spirit is at work at St. Patrick's, Father Wiant said. Even his first impression of parishioners' spirit was positive.

"I found the people very warm and very welcoming," he recalled.

A firm believer in the power of prayer, Father Wiant initiated pastoral council

selection through discernment, now used by perhaps half of diocesan churches rather than election. Every three years, a new 12-member council is selected.

In each of the two discernment processes since Father Wiant arrived, parishioners contributed well over 100 names for council candidates. The sitting council narrowed them to 30-40 names. Greg Heimburg, parish council member and past chairman, said council members learned to pray together at the Mercy Prayer Center to help them work together through this process.

"There is more reliance on the Spirit helping us to make decisions, which is what discernment is all about," he said. "You rely on the names to come to you."

Those of the 30-40 people interested dropped their names into an old baptismal font. The council again prayed and drew 12 names. As it turned out during the first council discernment, that's all the font held — 12 names. The second time a council was chosen, the collection held 13. Father Wiant asked the 13th to be on standby; that person was needed on council within months.

"It is a beautiful, exhilarating experience to go through that discernment," Father Wiant said. "The Spirit really knows what's going on."

And to keep parishioners in tune with what is going on, Robert Muto, pastoral council chairman, said the council has especially focused on communication, which has helped bond and direct the parish.

"I really believe where we are going is good," Muto said.

Best Wishes to St. Patrick's Parish from the following Victor area businesses...

ACT 2
CONSIGNMENT SHOP
31 East Main Street, Victor
(716) 924-7260

BLACK DIAMOND HOTEL
61 Maple Avenue, Victor
(716) 924-9830

THE HAIR CLUB
• NEW NAME COMING SOON •
62 West Main Street, Victor
(716) 924-3727

HARLOFF-COTTON
FUNERAL HOME
26 Maple Avenue, Victor
(716) 924-3310

HOMETOWN HEROES
7387 Victor-Pittsford Road,
Victor
(716) 924-4490

LUCEY
FUNERAL HOME, INC.
301 West Main Street, Victor
(716) 924-5730

M'GHANS
NEARLY FAMOUS PUB
11 West Main Street, Victor
(716) 924-3660

MILLER PHARMACY
6181 Route 96, Farmington
(716) 924-1676

SIDE STREET
LAUNDROMAT
80 East Main Street, Victor
(716) 924-7414

VICTOR
COAL & LUMBER CO.
32 School Street, Victor
(716) 924-3032

WADE'S MARKET CENTER
6179 Route 96
Victor-Farmington
(716) 924-3667