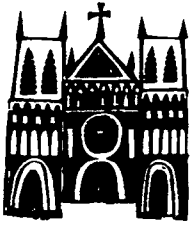


PARISH PROFILE

St. Leo's Parish becoming Hilton social center

Parish Profile
Church of St. Leo, Hilton



By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

HILTON — The Church of St. Leo loves to celebrate.

Baptisms (30 last year) during Mass bring churchwide applause. St. Patrick's Day parties bring out the "Irish." Santa Claus surprises the Christmas Eve Mass crowd. Parishioners break the ecumenical routine and enjoy silly songs and assigned colors with guests from local churches.

But 1996 begs for big-time celebrating. St. Leo's marks 50 years as an independent church; Hilton, 100 years as a village named Hilton; and the town of Parma, 200 years as a settlement.

"So it's a big deal here," Mary Eichas-Gavigan, church historian said. The anniversary celebration will begin Monday with a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

St. Leo's wants to be a welcoming church, a teaching church, and a church to turn to not only for worship, but also support, friendship, and fun, parishioners say.

While rolling out the red carpet, they canvassed 3,000 homes to identify area Catholics last May. They've been following up the census with invitations to those in the church's boundaries (Lake Ontario south to Peck Road, east to Manitow Road and west to Hamlin-Parma Townline Road).

The church also sent a joint letter with St. Lawrence Church a year ago to Catholics within St. Leo's boundaries but attending St. Lawrence, which has boomed in recent years. The letter welcomed them to consider St. Leo's, which has 550 registered families.

"It's alive. It's alive," Betty Murphy, parish secretary, said, admitting a loss for a better description. "Like the days of old, we're making church a social center again."

"Father says if people are comfortable playing together, they will be comfortable praying together," Murphy continued. "That's really what it's all about."

Eichas-Gavigan, a parish council member, noted a certain brightness at the church these days.

"The number of light bulbs needed in the parish center is unbelievable because the rooms are so used," she remarked.

Sharon Corcoran, religious education director for 18 years, noted another sign of activity.

"We never before had to put people on a waiting list," Corcoran said. "We are full up for programs we are offering now without finding another instructor and another day."

More than 400 children attend the programs, up from 270 two years ago. Groups of primary or intermediate students gather in "meeting rooms." Field projects replaced homework; handbooks replaced textbooks. Sessions are based on the lectionary, and offer crafts and other activities as well that relate to Scripture.



Patricia Gorman, director of music ministry (playing piano), leads St. Leo's parishioners in playful songs during a Jan. 20 ecumenical "rainbow dinner" at the Hilton church. All Hilton-Parma area churches were invited to St. Leo's for the "Prayer for Christian Unity" event.

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

"Children in it love it. They're not tied to a desk," Corcoran said. "They grab a carpet square, sit on the floor, and listen to a story or do readings."

Junior high students have "Youth to Youth" projects. Last year they raised \$378 for the homeless, after hearing a homeless person speak to them. Students delivered the money to a Salvation Army/radio station WPXY-sponsored benefit at Marketplace Mall, and helped load trucks with food, clothing, and other donations in a cold rain.

"Instead of working out of books and memorizing, it's hands-on Catholicism, really," Murphy said. "It's how to live your faith and make the right choices."

Staff members said they take care to explain that all the newness is not for the sake of change, but to update and move more in Second Vatican Council directions, and follow diocesan guidelines.

For adults, the pastor, Father John Glogowski, offers Bible studies and "Know Your Faith" classes. "He has no fear you will know more than he does," a grateful parishioner commented. Another described his attitude as "empowering."

Religious education at St. Leo's begins with baptismal preparation meetings for new parents, and continues with age-appropriate religious education material mailed every six months to their homes.

Attempts to address needs of younger people moving into the area are working. "There are little people all over the place," the delighted pastor commented.

"If only religion could be exciting and fun, getting together with people you like," Father Glogowski mused. By the time children face adolescent peer pressures, he said he hopes they can say, "Other people may not support my values, but I have friends who do at St. Leo's."

Children also begin bonding in the 26-member children's choir. They may progress to the adult choir, the junior and senior bell choirs, and the worship ensemble. All regularly present music at Masses. And if ever they can't, Father Glogowski comes down the aisle leading the singing.



Father John Glogowski, pastor of St. Leo's, shares his music sheet with Katlyn Gorman.

His approach to church activity is never minimal, according to the music ministry director.

"This priest is maximal, which is exciting," Patricia Gorman said. He travels to music conventions with the music directors and works with them, she said, so that the music when possible "coincides with the exact reading, the exact Psalm."

Music is presented by all the choirs during festive Masses, which is a feat, given the space available in the 30-year-old sanctuary.

It is a bright yellow cement-block section of the school/parish center, set west of the original frame church on Lake Avenue. The church was dedicated in 1884 as a mission church of St. John the Evangelist Church of Spencerport and became independent in 1946.

The parish center dates to the 1960s, when St. Leo's was in an unusual position. The church had decided to build a parochial school. However, the diocese declared a moratorium on new parochial schools in 1963 because there weren't

SNAPSHOTS

The Church of St. Leo
167 Lake Ave. Hilton
Established: 1884
Independent parish: June 11, 1946
Current church completed: 1966
Registered families: 550
Phone: 716/392-2710

Ministerial Staff
Father John J. Glogowski, pastor
James P. Steiger, parish deacon
Betty Murphy, parish secretary
Sharon Corcoran, religious education director
Nancy Fiorino, religious education secretary
Patricia Gorman, director of music ministry
Mary Ann Hubbell,
Sandra Santangelo, assistant directors of music

enough women religious to teach. "Since it couldn't be a (parochial) school," Father Glogowski said, "they decided to make it a school of religion and poured their hearts and souls into it."

The results "are a wise use of what they had," he said. The gymnasium/auditorium became the sanctuary. The kitchen became a nursery. Traces of a locker room provide storage and a lounge.

The sanctuary features a plaque in honor of the late Father Chester M. Klocek, pastor for 25 years until 1993.

The new pastor said there are no plans to expand, but acknowledged "very gentle dreams."

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