

PARISH PROFILE

Chapel is like 'family' to old-timers, newcomers

Parish Profile

St. Isaac
Jogues, Fleming



By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

FLEMING — St. Isaac Jogues Chapel has seen a lot of improvements in the past few years: new air conditioning, better heating, roofing, and landscaping, an all-new kitchen, and a parking lot doubled in size.

But Father Albert Shamon has further ambitious projects in mind for the parish he administers.

"I want to dominate the land with a big cross," Father Shamon declared.

He knows what he'd like — a steeple like the one at St. Mary's Church in Rexville, which he spotted in a picture in the *Catholic Courier*.

It's not that people are having a hard time finding the chapel, though.

Sunday morning Mass draws so many more than the 70 registered families, that chairs are set out into the vestibule, children sit on the steps, and people stand, as well. People come not only from Auburn, five miles up the road, but also from Seneca Falls, Sterling, Skaneateles, Moravia, Jordan, Fair Haven, and Ithaca, for example. They are doctors, business people, professionals of all kinds, and a few remaining farmers who once dominated the parish rolls.

"They come because of Father Shamon," said Lorraine Fitch, secretary, estimating that just one-fourth of the parishioners were there long before Father Shamon. "He is very traditional, very conservative, and I think that's what people are looking for."

She noted he came 11 years ago, as a retired priest to help "temporarily." But he's become the chapel's longest-serving priest. Church auditor Jerry Crowley, who lives next door with his wife Sharon, has already offered Father Shamon a room should he ever become unable to make the drive from his home in Auburn.

A couple of months ago, Father Shamon added a 4 p.m. Saturday Mass, to help spread the people out. "The cars were parked along the highway and I was worried about that," he explained.

People also line up for monthly, if not weekly, confession for 1½ hours every Saturday, as well as for a half-hour before Sunday Mass.

And the more children at Mass, the better.

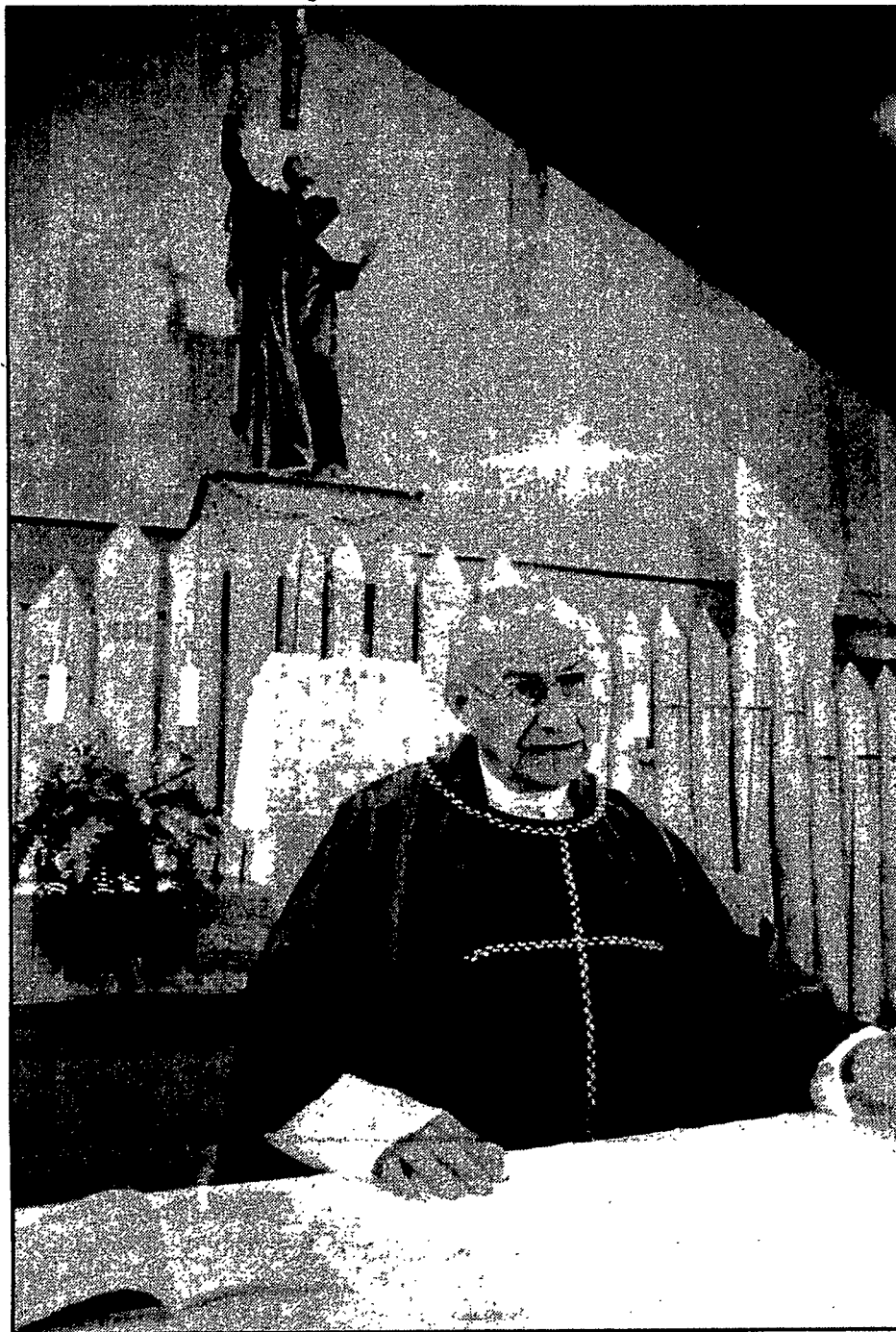
"I tell them church is a family," Father Shamon said. "There is a beautiful spirit there, rapport."

"I tell them, 'Don't you worry if they cry or anything else.' I don't want a cry room because I want them with the families. There is growth going on there without you even knowing it. Just by being present with the assembly," he said.

The assembly celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Fleming resident Catholics had persuaded Father Francis Turner to start the church as a mission of St. Bernard's Church in Scipio Center. (From mid-1984 through 1985 both churches were part of a six-church cluster, the Cayuga Team Ministry, until each separated.) Edward and Julia Larkin donated the original two-story wood frame building, once a grist mill, at Route 34 and Mill Street.

Julia Larkin remains a faithful parishioner today and still runs Larkin's Grocery down the road.

The present chapel, however, dates to 1962, when it was built by just 25 families after Route 34 was widened and the old building had to be demolished.



Matthew Scott
Above, Father Albert Shamon celebrates Mass in St. Isaac Jogues Chapel. He administers the Fleming chapel, which was named after a Jesuit missionary martyred among the Mohawks in eastern New York. Right, the chapel draws worshippers from miles around.



Catholics and non-Catholics pitched in to build the new chapel for \$28,000 with donated labor and materials. It is on two acres donated by Crowley's father, Hugh V. Crowley, himself the nephew of a priest.

The altar rail came from St. Joseph's Hospital Chapel in Elmira, as did the vestment case in the sacristy; pews were donated by the former pastor, Father Turner, from St. Felix Church in Clifton Springs.

Parishioners chose to name the chapel after St. Isaac Jogues because no other church in the Diocese of Rochester honored the missionary saint.

The rustic, wood-beam arched chapel in Fleming features a row of three-dozen pointed logs, creating a "stockade altar." Each log is engraved with a red cross. St. Isaac Jogues is said to have carved crosses and "Jesus" into trees or villages' stockade fences for spiritual consolation while among the Mohawks. A five-foot wood statue of him hand-carved in Italy is placed high above and behind the altar, with the Jesuit missionary's right hand raised aloft holding a cross.

Long hours of work by many hands built the chapel, according to the late Anita Sedar, who compiled a history for the building's 10th anniversary. She noted,

for example, "The children helped Father (Raymond A.) Wuest and the men strip the bark from the pointed logs and varnish them."

The building also features plastic side-walls that simulate stained glass windows. Father Shamon hopes to soon install the altar, pulpit and sanctuary light stand he acquired from St. Aloysius Parish in Auburn, which his twin brother, the late Father Edward Shamon, served as pastor and which closed last year.

St. Isaac parishioners look forward to several activities, including an annual parish picnic, a monthly coffee hour, and twice-yearly breakfast "just to build the

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Parishioner Judy McKay holds her grandson, 1-month-old John Paul Germano. Children are welcome at the chapel's Masses.

SNAPSHOTS

St. Isaac Jogues Chapel
Route 34, Fleming
Phone: 315/255-2912 or 252-7365
Ministerial staff:
Administrator:
Father Albert J. M. Shamon
Secretary: Lorraine Fitch
Organist: Esther Giacolone
Catechists: Patricia MacDavitt,
Bob and Laurie Faiola,
Dennis and Cynthia Donahue,
and Cynthia Jones
Sacristan: Elmer Sedar

family," as Father Shamon put it. A two-week summer Bible study is planned for children. Father Shamon, who also chairs the occasional informal parish council, offers courses on Catholicism throughout the year. "We have seven to eight converts every year," he said. And 11 people were confirmed this year.

Overseeing religious education is Sister Teresita Williams, RSM, of Rochester, who drives in every week to help out at the chapel.

Father Shamon welcomes all forward during Communion — he blesses children and non-Catholics, who come with arms crossed over their chests, with the host, but does not give it to them, in keeping with church law.

"I say, 'Don't sit in your pew,'" he explained.

This spirit of reaching out fills the parish, said Judy McKay, a member of the parish for about four years.

"Everybody is so congenial, loving," McKay observed. "It's a pleasure to go to church on Sunday. ... It's the holiness, Jesus is there and he (Father Shamon) brings that out in such a manner that you walk out and know you spent time with the Lord."

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