

PARISH PROFILE

Tompkins County churches thrive on diversity

Parish Profile



St. Catherine's, Ithaca
All Saints, Lansing

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Anyone attending St. Catherine of Siena Parish's 35th-anniversary Mass, held June 2, got a strong sense of the diverse elements within this Ithaca faith community.

"The little kids were cantoring. All ages were included in it," said parishioner Helen Garvey. "And the prayers of the faithful were said in Korean, Spanish, South African and Ugandan, because we have people from all those backgrounds who attend here."

"It was an artistic performance as well as a big spiritual event," Garvey added. "It was one of the best Masses I ever attended."

St. Catherine's cultural mix is a natural in the city of Ithaca, one of the most noted academic communities in the country. Many residents who attend St. Catherine's are also affiliated with Cornell University and Ithaca College.

"It's a varied (parish) community. We have graduate students and undergraduates, and our faculty are from all over the world," noted parishioner Rose Steidl.

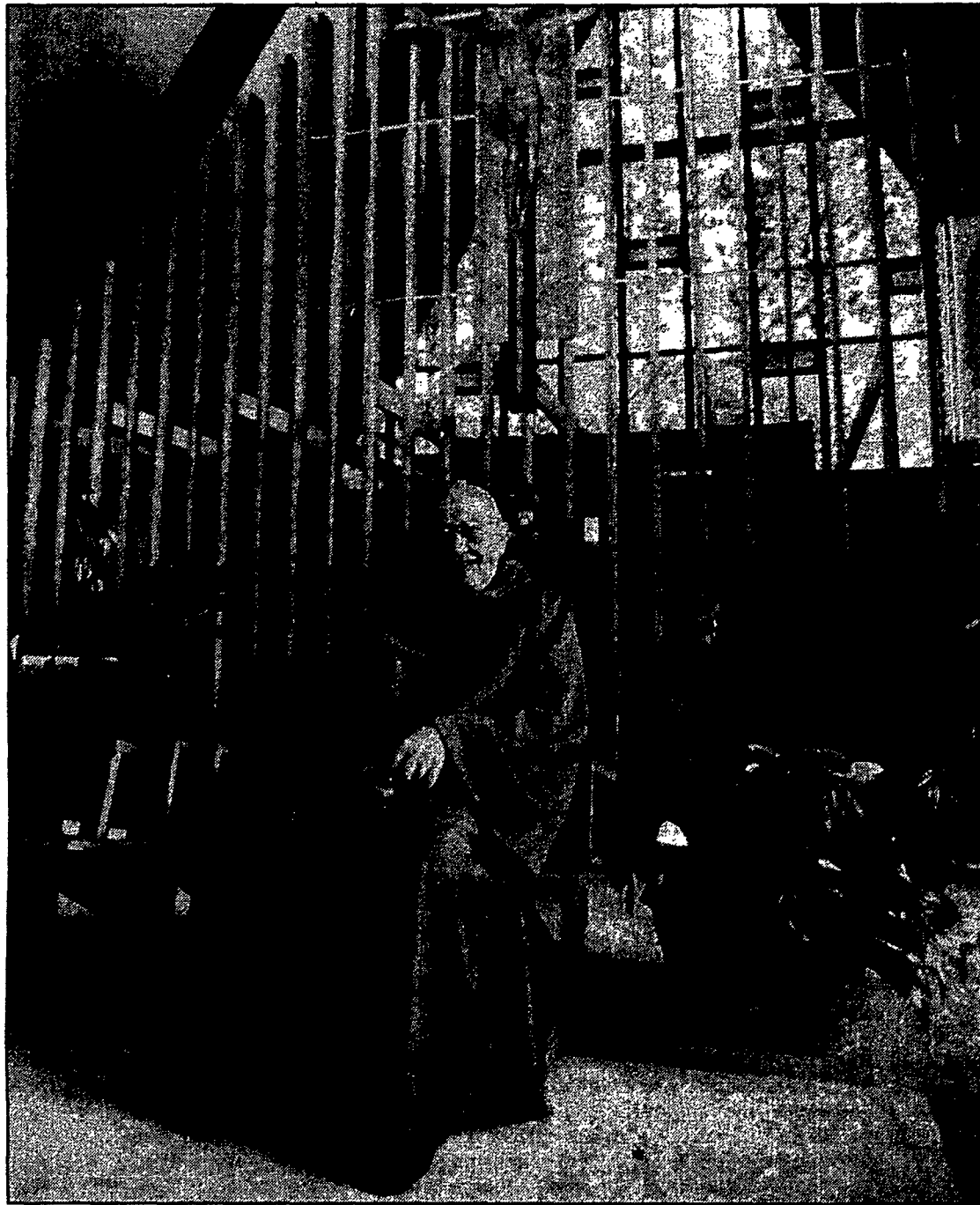
St. Catherine's became a sister parish in 1984 with All Saints Church, located eight miles away in the town of Lansing. Father Ronald Gaesser, the pastor of both churches, recently marked his ninth year with the Tompkins County churches. The June 2 Mass at St. Catherine's also honored his 35th year in the priesthood.

Ithaca's scholastic atmosphere is right up Father Gaesser's alley: He previously served as campus Catholic chaplain at both Auburn Community College and the former Eisenhower College.

"I have the ongoing intellectual challenge of dealing with a collegiate community, and the intimacy of a small community. In a sense, it's the best of both worlds," Father Gaesser remarked.

St. Catherine's and its academic neighbors have been intertwined, literally, since the parish's founding. Masses were held in facilities at Cornell University until the present church structure was completed in 1962.

Steidl, a charter member at St. Catherine's, has fond memories of the work that went into formulating the parish.



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Father Ronald Gaesser and St. Catherine of Siena Church, Ithaca, both celebrated their 35th anniversaries this summer.

"There was much to be done, but we worked together as a group. I think we got to be a pretty cohesive community," Steidl remarked.

Garvey, along with her husband Mark, are also St. Catherine's charter members.

"We had a lot of fundraisers. There were bake sales every Saturday," Garvey said.

Garvey also recalls intense discussions among parishioners in St. Catherine's early years. The talks not only involved planning issues, she said, but also the "poli-

tics, ideas and controversy in the Catholic Church. That was a wonderful time for us."

The parish was founded to meet the extensive growth of Catholics in the northeast portion of Ithaca. From its 300 founding families, St. Catherine's had doubled that membership by its 25th anniversary. Currently, the parish membership totals approximately 750 families.

Garvey notes that the college community helps to "infuse a lot of new ideas" in the parish.

"We've had some wonderful, wonderful speakers," Garvey said. She recalled, for example, an inspiring talk by Cornell professor Urie Bronfenbrenner, a family studies expert who spoke about the Head Start program that aids impoverished children and their families. Garvey also noted that St. Catherine's has hosted several peace-and-justice forums that have included Cornell faculty members.

In a parish with so much diversity, Father Gaesser noted, the challenge to keep people united is a constant. He explained that many Catholics at St. Catherine's move away from Ithaca as soon as they leave their respective college. In addition, the pastor said, worshippers at St. Cather-

ine's reside in several parts of Tompkins County.

"In a sense, we don't have a geographical focus," Father Gaesser said. "I can't go looking for my parishioners."

On the other hand, Father Gaesser said it's much easier to locate members of All Saints Church, most of whom reside in the small community of Lansing. The 170-family parish was founded in 1913, and its present church — located on Route 34B — was built in 1932.

Bill Miller moved to Lansing 10 years ago from a 1,500-family parish in suburban Philadelphia. Miller recalled that he and his family were immediately accepted at All Saints.

"It was virtually instantaneous, from the first Sunday we walked into church not knowing anybody," said Miller, who currently serves as All Saints' Parish Council chairperson. "If you stay around after Mass, the people will come up to you and extend themselves to you."

The church community, though small, is quite active and supportive — as evidenced by the new parish center, which opened last summer. The facility — located adjacent to All Saints Church — offers the chance for several types of gatherings in its offices, conference room, classrooms and meeting hall.

St. Catherine's, also, has a new building. A priest residence was completed on parish grounds two months ago, and the former rectory has been converted into offices.

Another recent development for the two churches is the implementation of the Renew program. Both All Saints and St. Catherine's are preparing to launch Renew this fall. According to Father Gaesser, the program involves "prayer, study and Scripture" by small groups of parishioners.

"This will implement and achieve the goals of the Synod. It's a precursor to forming small faith communities," Father Gaesser said.

The pride that members of both Tompkins churches have of their past and present bodes well for such future accomplishments.

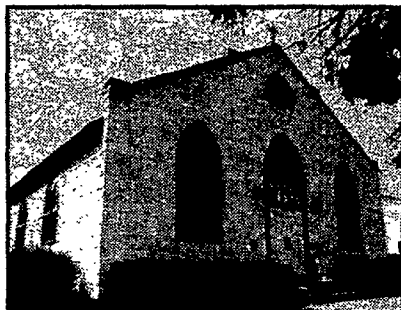
"We became family in a very short period of time," remarked Miller from All Saints.

And at St. Catherine's, Steidl stated, "I'm proud to say I'm a charter member."

SNAPSHOTS



St. Catherine of Siena Church
302 St. Catherine Circle, Ithaca
607/257-2493
Ministerial staff:
Pastor: **Father Ronald E. Gaesser**
Pastoral associate: **Dora Hankey**
Deacon: **Walter Srode**
Business manager: **Paul Hesler**
Bookkeeper: **Virginia Seacord**
Secretary: **Karen Hansen**
Parish council co-conveners:
Dorothy Carroll, Kevin Walsh



All Saints Church
347 Ridge Road, Lansing
607/533-7344
Ministerial staff:
Pastor:
Father Ronald E. Gaesser
Pastoral associate:
Sister Mary E. Wintish, RSM
Parish council chairperson:
Bill Miller
Bookkeeper:
Virginia Seacord



LANSING CHIROPRACTIC OFFICE
Robert Brown, DC
15 Auburn Road • Lansing
607-533-4231



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at **Community Corners**
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(607) 257-4144

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