

PARISH PROFILE

Tier parish greets worshipers with open arms

Parish Profile

St. Margaret Mary, Apalachin



By Mike Latona
Staff writer

APALACHIN — There's an unwritten policy at St. Margaret Mary Church.

First-time visitors may enter the church as strangers, but they should depart with the sense that they're part of a community.

Preston Clark got that feeling a few years ago when he and his wife, Marge, were looking to join a parish in the Tioga County area.

"People greeted us as soon as we sat down," Preston recalled.

In subsequent visits, Preston discovered that parishioners would "say they missed you if you weren't there one weekend."

The Clarks became parishioners in 1994, and have already become involved with the St. Margaret Mary marriage preparation and Small Christian Community programs. In addition, Preston serves as a parish council co-convenor.

Involvement by newcomers is typical at St. Margaret Mary, according to its pastor, Father David P. Simon. He noted that more than two-thirds of the adult worshipers in this 600-family parish were born outside Tioga County.

St. Margaret Mary, located in the southeast corner of the Diocese of Rochester, was founded in 1955 to accommodate a large influx of employees at nearby corporations. Most of these businesses are located in Broome County's "triangle cities" of Binghamton, Johnson City and Endicott.

Diocesan borders also play a part in the parish's unique geographic makeup. While most parishioners are Tioga County residents, some — such as the Clarks, who reside in Endicott — actually live in the dioceses of Syracuse and Scranton, Pa.

Peggy Fay relocated to the Southern Tier from her native New Jersey when her husband, Ken, became the director of drug and alcohol rehabilitation at Binghamton General Hospital 14 years ago. Fay noted that, for job-related reasons, families move in and out of the Apalachin area rather frequently.

"So many of our parishioners are transient. In coming here, they find a warm and welcoming community," said Fay, who now serves as St. Margaret Mary's religious-education coordinator.

This welcoming atmosphere, Father Simon said, is a natural extension of a parish community that prides itself on lay involvement. He stated that he always encourages parishioners to consider ways they can take key roles in parish ministry.

For example, in 1984, St. Margaret Mary was one of the first diocesan parishes to implement a Stephen Ministry program. The parish now has 23 active Stephen Ministers who provide emotional support for Tioga County residents facing difficult situations.

"We have some very dedicated people — always willing to go out to other parishioners, be a listener, help with transporta-

tion, make visits in hospitals and shut-ins," said Stephen Ministry coordinator Marie Oberst.

Oberst noted that the annual parish mission, also begun in 1984, has attracted broad participation. She said that "more than 200 people came in on any given day" this past winter to hear guest speakers and take part in group worship at the week-long mission.

Strong youth involvement is another feature of the St. Margaret Mary community, Father Simon noted. The pastor said that the parish's Living Stations production, which has existed for two decades, was one of the first in the diocese. Approximately 80 youths took part in Living Stations this past Lent, touring area Catholic and Protestant churches each weekend.

St. Margaret Mary also began a monthly newsletter, "Heart to Heart," in 1987. According to its editor, Lee Hancock, "Heart to Heart" helps keep alive community spirit even after people move out of the Apalachin area.

"We've sent it as far as California and Europe. It's incredible," Hancock remarked.

One event that helped to reveal parish unity occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. That's when more than 100 parishioners took part in the renovation of the current church building, which opened in 1967.

Their volunteerism reduced the project's \$555,000 price tag by \$60,000, and also helped provide worshipers with a beautifully updated church. The church features an altar in the round, a large baptismal font complete with running water, a eucharistic chapel and a reconciliation chapel.

Currently, Father Simon added, a group of men are dedicating part of their summer to replacing the church windows — again saving the parish money. The combination of monetary and physical support, he remarked, enables St. Margaret Mary to thrive.

"No one gift is superior. The parish needs all the gifts," Father Simon said.

Father Simon joked that new projects and programs at St. Margaret Mary are



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer
Father David Simon baptizes Abbey Lee Breese in the baptismal font of St. Margaret Mary Church, Apalachin, Aug. 4. Looking on are Abbey's parents Dale and Kathy Breese and her brother Evan.



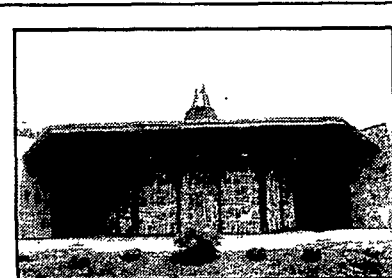
After the baptism, Father Simon introduces Abbey Lee to her fellow parishioners.

sometimes implemented with "shaking and trembling." Yet, he added, the parish prefers to be on the cutting edge of changes in the Roman Catholic Church.

"We always try to be sensitive to where we were, and where we are going," Father Simon said. "We're definitely a Vatican II parish, no doubt about it."

But the parish is not so modern, Marge Clark pointed out, that traditional church customs fly out the window.

"The tradition hasn't left — it's just in its proper place," she said. "There is tradition here, but there's also future here. We're not stuck in any one place."



SNAPSHOT

St. Margaret Mary Church
1110 Pennsylvania Ave.
Apalachin, N.Y. 13732
607/625-3191

Ministerial staff:

Pastor: Father David P. Simon
Pastoral Associate:

Patricia Federowicz
Deacon in Residence:

Joseph Federowicz
Religious Education Coordinator:

Peggy Fay
Pastoral Musician and Liturgical
Ministries: Colleen Craig
Youth Ministers:

Mary Ann Cascarino, Sue White
Stephen Ministry Coordinator:

Marie Oberst

Secretaries:

Marilyn Legault, Lucille Pignatelli
Financial Administrator:

John Callahan

Parish Council Co-Conveners:

Tim Mayglothing, Preston Clark

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