

FEATURE

Church offers all age groups a spiritual home

Parish Profile
St. James,
Irondequoit



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

IRONDEQUOIT — Allison Conrow, a 15-year-old sophomore at East High School in Rochester, used to attend youth group meetings at St. John the Evangelist Church on Humboldt Street, even though she's a parishioner at neighboring St. James Church.

"I've always wanted to be in a youth group," she said, adding that many of her friends are in the St. John's group. So she was more than happy to hear that her own parish was forming a youth group last July.

"It's nice to have other people to talk with about God," she said.

That might sum up the reasons most people belong to any parish, but it certainly applies in the case of St. James. The parish boasts a number of organizations and programs that offer opportunities for social and spiritual growth. Conrow found those opportunities in the 25-member youth group whose social activities, like softball and bowling, have been a favorite aspect.

"It's made me more open to people," she said of the group.

Since he was hired this year at the parish, youth ministry has become an important component of St. James, said Mike Latona, parish youth minister and a staff writer at the *Catholic Courier*.

"The parents seem to thrive on this stuff as much as the kids sometimes," Latona said, pointing out that the group's members have shared with their families such activities as bowling. "The support has been tremendous. It's not something the parish is doing because they feel they have to. It seems to be a genuine desire on all levels."

A genuine desire to be together apparently bonds The Adult Group, a senior citizens club headed by Stella Beahan. She said the 60-member organization meets every other Wednesday afternoon to socialize and do charitable work.

"I think it's just a delightful afternoon for them," Beahan said of the members. "Many, many of them wish we could do it every Wednesday."

Group members play cards, converse and sometimes knit clothing that is donated to charities, she said. For example, Beahan pointed out that the group has made baby bibs for clients of Problem Pregnancy Help Center, Inc., in Rochester, a Catholic-run organization that helps women faced with unexpected pregnancies.

The 50-member St. James Men's Club



Paul Conrow (center) lights the Advent candle during the Dec. 1 Mass at St. James Church, Rochester. Paul is surrounded by family members (from left to right) Kim, Jennifer and Megan, Brian, Allison, Jennifer, Rebecca, and Carolyn.

Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

is also engaged in a slew of social and charitable activities, according to George Perrotta, president. The club meets the third Tuesday of every month, and has sponsored golf and bocce tournaments as well as outings to Rochester Red Wings' baseball games, he said.

The Men's Club, which also sponsors dinners and parties throughout the year, raises money which the pastor, Father John A. Lynch, then distributes to people in need, Perrotta said. He added that the club recently gave \$200 to a member to help defray costs of a daughter's anticipated double-lung transplant.

Another parish group has devoted itself to working in St. Peter's Kitchen at Ss. Peter and Paul Parish in Rochester the fourth Friday of every month, according to Dorothy O'Flynn, who heads the 10-member group. They help to prepare meals for 300 to 400 people who eat at the soup kitchen, she said, adding that her volunteers also clean the serving and cooking areas after lunch.

O'Flynn said she and the St. Peter's volunteers collect clothing on behalf of Ss. Peter's and Paul's clothing outreach program, and she also pointed out that her group collects food on behalf of various outreach ministries in Rochester.

"You get great satisfaction out of just that little bit that we do," she said.

Her own good fortune has moved her to reach out to others, O'Flynn added.

"I am so lucky," she said. "I have five married grown children and that's what

SNAPSHOT



St. James Church
130 Brett Road
Rochester, NY 14609
Founded: 1949
Number of families: 700

Ministerial staff:

Pastor: **Father John A. Lynch**
Parish secretary: **Rita Lee**
Youth minister: **Mike Latona**
Religious ed coordinator:
Pauline C. Walsh

inspires me. We have been extremely fortunate. God has been so good in our lives, so let's spread the wealth."

Sharing the wealth of the Catholic faith with young children inspires seven volunteer teachers along with a volunteer religious education secretary, Gloria Melagessa, to teach Sundays and Saturdays, according to Pauline C. Walsh, the parish's religious education coordinator.

Walsh said that 75 students in grades first through eighth attend the classes,

which begin in September and culminate with the crowning of a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the first Sunday in May. The staff is dedicated, she said, noting the longevity of service that marks most of the instructors.

"Our teachers that are here now have a total of 94 years of service," she said.

Another parishioner with a long history of service is Rita Lee, parish secretary, who was married in 1952 in St. James Church and raised a family in the parish. Lee, a veritable walking encyclopedia of the parish, credited her devotion to the community to St. James' homey atmosphere.

For example, she pointed out that members of one of the parish's outreach groups recently took food to a friend of hers who had been in the hospital. Such kindnesses are characteristic of St. James' parishioners, she explained, and something that new parishioners can readily see.

"Most people who do come here say 'I've been coming here for a while and you seem so friendly,'" Lee said, adding that the parish holds a coffee hour after 9:30 a.m. Mass on Sundays.

Father Lynch echoed Lee's view of the parish. He added that its smallness in population additionally appeals to new parishioners.

"They like the family spirit and the spirit of community," he said. "People still feel that they can know relatively everyone, if not by name, by face."

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