

FEATURE

*Eastern rite community upholds religious, cultural customs***Parish Profile**

Ukrainian Catholic Church of Epiphany, Rochester



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Buying cards for Mother's Day had to be a logistical nightmare for Anthony Hrynczysyn, a parishioner at Ukrainian Catholic Church of Epiphany, 202 Carter St.

"I don't know how many 'mothers' I have," Hrynczysyn said after 10 a.m. Mass on Mother's Day, May 11. "I have 40 mothers."

Hrynczysyn is not some unique biological phenomenon, but he is the product of a parish where everyone seems to know each other by name, not just face. Hrynczysyn's "mothers" are the many Ukrainian immigrant women who belong to the church and who watched him grow up along with his fellow first-generation Ukrainian-Americans.

"It's not just a church, it's a family," Hrynczysyn said.

It's that family atmosphere that makes Epiphany an enjoyable place to serve, according to Father Vasile Godenciu, the church's pastor, an ethnic Ukrainian who lived in Romania and emigrated to the United States five years ago.

"They respect priests, and they respect one another," Father Godenciu said of Epiphany's parishioners.

Home to 560 members, Epiphany is one of four churches in the Rochester Diocese that belongs to the Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of Stamford, Conn., which covers both New England and New York state. The Stamford Diocese adheres to the Ukrainian Catholic Rite in which Ukrainian Rite Catholics submit to the pope on matters of faith and morals, but retain their own liturgical and canonical traditions.

For example, Epiphany is home to a colorful iconostas, a large partition covered with icons that stands in front of the sanctuary. The priest celebrates Mass both behind and in front of the iconostas.

Epiphany was founded by Ukrainian Catholics in 1958. These Catholics were attending neighboring St. Josaphat's Church,



Altar server Matthew Rabarsky carries a candle during Mass at the Ukrainian Catholic Church of Epiphany, Rochester, May 11.

Kerry Huller/Photo intern

which also belongs to the Stamford Diocese.

When St. Josaphat's adopted the Gregorian calendar — the calendar observed in the United States and other Western countries — some members of the parish wished to retain the older Julian calendar, and hence formed Epiphany.

Hrynczysyn's father, William, a trustee of Epiphany, said the founding parishioners strongly cherished their Ukrainian traditions.

"People was so long under Russian government and the communist government," said the native Ukrainian. "I think it's important for them to show their beliefs."

His fellow trustee, Walter Rabarsky, attends Epiphany with his wife, Lesia, a choir member, and their two children, Alexandra, 9, and Matthew, 11.

Adhering to traditions like the Julian calendar have enabled Epiphany's parishioners to focus on the true meaning of such holidays as Easter, Rabarsky said. In wider

society, commemorating Christ's resurrection gets overwhelmed by celebrations of the Easter Bunny's annual visit, he explained.

"For us it's a very religious time of year," he said of Easter, which the parish celebrated April 25. "It's not as commercialized as the mainstream makes it out to be."

His wife, Lesia, added it's that kind of respect for tradition that Epiphany embodies that has sustained her spiritually through the years.

"I get great spiritual inspiration from our traditional Mass," she said. "A feeling of peace, a feeling of love, a feeling of togetherness inside these walls."

Her daughter, Alexandra, represents the second generation of U.S.-born Ukrainians at Epiphany to whom the older parishioners are trying to pass on their traditions, Lesia noted. Alexandra belongs to the choir, which sings in Ukrainian. Although she joked that she was "tortured" into joining the choir, Alexandra said she has grown

SNAPSHOT

Ukrainian Catholic Church of Epiphany
202 Carter St., Rochester, N.Y.
14621
716/266-4036

Ministerial staff:

Pastor: Father Vasile Godenciu
Choir director: Joseph Dzus
Cashier: Mykola Lytwynec
Maintenance: Alex Lobas
Cleaning: Elia and Julia Bucec

fond of singing in Ukrainian every Sunday.

"I like all of it," she said.

The parish's cantor and choir leader, Joseph Dzus, said many of the parishioners like the 10 a.m. Sunday Mass, when the priest and congregation sing in a call-and-response pattern.

"Everybody sings," Dzus said. "Ukrainians like to sing."

The church's altar boys are also learning to carry on the parish's Ukrainian traditions. Take Mark Siolkowsky, a 13-year-old altar server who enjoys helping the priest by reciting various parts of the Mass along with the other altar boys.

"The priest lets me read some parts if he doesn't want to," Mark said.

Andrew Hrycyna, 10, likes being an altar boy because it keeps him interested in the liturgy.

"You don't sit all the time," he said. "You walk around and help the priest."

Or, if you're like Matthew Hontar, 9, you get a specific task suited to your talents.

"I can do stuff like hold the candle," he said.

Matthew and his fellow servers help the priest celebrate in an altar area cared for by the Sisterhood of St. Olga, a 50-member women's group, according to its president, Marika Bodyk. Like her fellow parishioners, Bodyk loves her parish's religious and ethnic roots, and hopes that Epiphany will continue to nurture them.

"Our religious customs and our church are beautiful," she said. "(Sunday Mass) is just the way I've done it all these years, and I can't imagine celebrating it any other way."

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