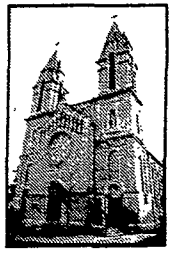


FEATURE

Holy Family parishioners serve, 'get to know Lord'

Parish Profile
Holy Family,
Auburn



By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

AUBURN — "Why is there a cathedral in Auburn?"

That question was posed recently by a non-Auburnian upon seeing a picture of Holy Family Church, home to Auburn's oldest parish.

The church isn't a cathedral. But it is a double-spired, stone-over-brick building with three front doors and a high-ceiling interior with multiple arches. The building dates to 1861.

"It's a very interesting place historically," noted Father Conrad Sundholm, pastor of Holy Family since 1982. "The first recorded activity (in the building) was recruitment for the Civil War."

After Father Michael Creedon, Holy Family's pastor, gave a stirring pro-enlistment address April 21, 1861, in the parish's first church — a Methodist church it purchased in 1834 — recruits signed up in the current church building, then being completed. The new building would not be dedicated until July 17, 1861.

"They've maintained the history, the antiquity of the church," Adelaide Hutson, religious education coordinator, said of her pastor and fellow parishioners. The oak pews from 1913 are intact, and the baptismal font now doubles as a holy water font at the south entrance, she noted.

During extensive renovating in 1988, a new marble top was built over the altar dedicated by Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid in 1885.

"(Teachers) use the church frequently throughout the year as a teaching tool. There's a lot there," Hutson said. "We bring the younger kids over and take a tour of the church."

The children learn that stained glass windows, such as the ones in the church depicting the Nativity and Last Supper, were used long ago to teach Bible stories to people who couldn't read. They identify the sacraments on plaques, talk about the altar and the tabernacle (one child guessed it's "where Father keeps all the money") and discuss the large plaster Stations of the Cross. They learn the life-sized ceramic statue of Christ, recently affixed to a heavy wooden cross behind the altar, is the oldest piece of art in the church, having come from Paris in 1862.

"They're not only teaching the children, they're also teaching the parents lots of times," Hutson said of the sessions.

Margaret Lepak, church secretary, can't say enough about church services, especially the penance services before Easter and Christmas.

Not only is Father Sundholm creative



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Mary Elizabeth Hutson, 9, places a crown of roses on a statue of Mary during the final day of May devotions at Holy Family Church, Auburn, May 28.

in presenting them, she said, "He tries to get to the kids."

She explained that after the penance committee determines the theme, Father Sundholm uses his computer to draw up the program, with graphics and readings, some of which particularly address youth. More than 700 people attended this year's two Lenten penance services, according to Hutson. The penance services often draw people from outside the parish.

"They're very moving," she said. For example, at one service, the people came forward with a black cards symbolic of sin, which they left in a basket. Then they blessed themselves with holy water, and received holy cards with the words, "I am the light of the world."

The fact that non-parishioners attended the penance services is not unusual, noted Joe Guerrero, parish council chairman. Auburn's Catholic churches are "all pretty much within walking distance of each other," he said. "People go where they want to. There are no lines of demarcation."

A regional Mass is celebrated at 5 p.m. on Sundays at St. Alphonsus Church. The churches even set up a way for parishioners attending Mass at another church to have their donation envelopes delivered later to their home parishes.

However, Guerrero prefers Holy Family. "As far as I'm concerned, the thing I like about Holy Family is its conservative nature," he said.

Father Sundholm figures that while some people chose to attend Holy Family "by blind luck," others came because of this religiously conservative nature there.

"We don't take up petitioning to get women ordained," he said, yet if the pope, on the other hand, chose to ordain women, "that would be fine with people here."



Anna Sperduti, 10, accompanied by Florence Lombardo, provided the music during the May crowning.

"The homilies I give are pretty much of a conservative nature," the pastor said. "We don't come out with a lot of social causes. The thrust of why the parish comes on Sunday is not to get politicized. They come to get holy and get to know the Lord."

The church has 807 families registered, about 80 of which joined from St. Aloysius Church after it closed in June 1995.

"We are a family parish here. We really promote the idea we are all one," Hutson said. She said the parish's CYO, which is self-supporting, helps to bring both children and adults together, no matter what school a child attends.

And through bringing the international Renew (parish renewal) program into the church last fall, Hutson said, it became clear that "what the kids really wanted to do was service."

So the youth served a Thanksgiving

SNAPSHOT

Holy Family Church
85 North St.
Auburn, NY 13021
315/252-9576

Ministerial Staff:
Pastor: **Father Conrad J. Sundholm**
Religious-education coordinator:
Adelaide Hutson
Music director: **Florence Lombardo**

dinner at the old Holy Family School adjacent to the church; collected winter coats to donate to the Cayuga Seneca Community Action Agency Inc.; and mailed greetings from the church to nursing homes, shut-ins, college students and military people at Easter and Christmas.

And this June, Teresa Smith will join the parish liturgy committee at the pastor's request.

"I was kind of surprised. I'm only 14 years old," she said. But she does have ideas, she was quick to say.

"In (Renew) youth group we were talking about how we want to have young greeters at the door to make people feel welcome. ... I think if someone at the door said, 'Hi, enjoy the Mass,' and would hold the door, it would put a smile on my face and I'd enjoy the Mass more."

Teresa also spoke of the benefits of Renew. She took part in the youth Renew groups, and her mother Nancy was a group facilitator. It has brought families close, Teresa said.

For example, when her mother became seriously ill early this year, Teresa said, "A lot of people came to our aid. We felt so cared for and we loved it. We had to set a schedule, everyone wanted to do what they could for us."

"It really helped that everybody prayed," she continued. "We really feel that was the main reason she was healed."

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