

FEATURE

*Faith community held together by humor, dedication***Parish Profile**St. Cecilia's,
IrondequoitBy Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

IRONDEQUOIT — Gathered around a meeting table, St. Cecilia Church's staff members and volunteers rattled off one positive characteristic after another about their parish, from a high-tech audiovisual center to social outreach programs.

St. Cecilia's offers just about everything a Catholic could possibly need, the group added, from sacramental and faith formation programs to social clubs, bereaved support groups and a choir for children. Hundreds of parish volunteers work

both at the church and with area soup kitchens and food cupboards, they commented.

"If you like to have family involvement, this parish is a lot of fun, along with being religious and caring," said Sharon Trimaldi, chairwoman of the parish's Christian Formation Committee.

"I think this parish offers something different," said Tom Erb, a member of the Parish Life Committee. "It's a real camaraderie that you're not going to get at other places."

"The church has been the hub and center of a lot of activity for a lot of people," said Ken H. Walker, a volunteer with several parish programs. "Everything works here because we're inspired by the dedication and openness of the leadership."

Father Walter F. Cushing, St. Cecilia's pastor for the last 19 years, sat and smiled as the group talked.

"I'm glad I came to this," the pastor quipped. "It sounds like a wonderful parish."

Despite their dedication to the 47-year-old parish, St. Cecilia's staff and volunteers don't seem to take themselves too seriously, often prefacing and punctuating their comments with jokes. But beneath the banter, the group's enthusiasm reflected a widespread devotion to the faith their parishioners apparently share.

"I am overly impressed by the spirituality of the parishioners," Father Cushing said. "We have 150 people at daily Mass. To me, it's impressive the number of people that take part in religious things."

The parish was founded after World War II in a growing suburban neighborhood. Today, more than half of St. Cecilia's members are retired, Father Cushing said.

Judy Costa, chairwoman of the Parish Outreach Committee, said volunteers visit parishioners living in area nursing facilities, recovering at hospitals or confined to their homes. She added that the volunteers also send plants at



Easter and Christmas to such parishioners and often correspond with them.

Costa also said that the parish has a "phone pal" program for bereaved parishioners. Through this, volunteers regularly call individuals who have experienced the death of a loved one.

"Those living alone want to be checked on every day," she said.

Sister Marie-Therese Alaimo, SSND, the parish's pastoral associate, noted that St. Cecilia's has 50 volunteer eucharistic ministers who regularly take Communion to 100 homebound parishioners.

She added that the parish also has support groups for widows.

"They listen to each other, and ... they feel relieved," she said.

The parish may host a large elderly population, but Father Cushing pointed out that many younger families have been moving into the area in the 1990s. And Tim Carlin, the parish's youth director, said between 10 and 25 junior high and high school students regularly participate in St.



Greg Flume

Tim Carlin, St. Cecilia's youth director, (left) readies to tag out a Mother of Sorrows parishioner during a softball game between the parishes' youth groups Aug. 14, at St. Cecilia's. Amy Collin (above right), a member of St. Cecilia's youth group, views the action with her father, Daniel J. Collin.

Cecilia's youth group activities, ranging from softball games to spiritual retreats.

"It's important to keep the younger generation vibrant and alive and interested so that the parish will remain strong through the years," he said.

The parish's morale has rebounded from 1992 Father Cushing explained, recalling the year that St. Cecilia's elementary school closed.

"After the school closed ... a lot of families became less active in the parish," he recalled.

Mary Ann Noto, religious education administrator, credited the parish's scheduling of such activities as picnics for helping to unite St. Cecilia's 1,900 families.

"That's what held the parish together because when the school closed, it could've broken up," she said of St. Cecilia's. "We have had a lot of events to keep people together."

In fact, the group said communal dinners are some of the church's strongest selling points to new parishioners. "We feed them," Erb joked. "Food works."

"We have a large list of volunteer bakers," added Sister Roberta Tierney, SSND, parish life coordinator.

More than 400 people regularly volunteer for various parish programs and events, and the parish attempts to distribute their duties widely, the group noted.

"It keeps your volunteers from being burned out," said Duane Reid, a volunteer landscaper and computer expert.

St. Cecilia's is an attractive place to volunteer, according to Walker, who, at age 72, converted to Catholicism last year. In part, Walker credited his entry into the church to the welcoming experiences he's had at St. Cecilia's.

"You spend 70 years looking for something, and it's pretty satisfying to find it," he said.

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SNAPSHOT**St. Cecilia's Church**
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Phone: 716/467-4286

Ministerial staff:
 Pastor: **Father Walter F. Cushing**
 Pastoral associate:
 Sister **Marie Therese Alaimo, SSND**
 Parish life coordinator:
 Sister **Roberta Tierney, SSND**
 Religious education coordinator: **Ann Kubac**
 Religious education administrator: **Mary Ann Noto**
 Youth director: **Tim Carlin**
 Parish bookkeeper: **Suzanne Mackey**
 Parish musician: **William Folger**
 Maintenance staff: **Robert Webster, Jeff Agnello, Jim Reddy**

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