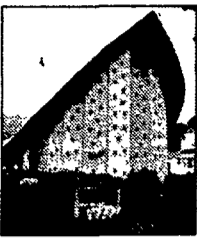


FEATURE

*Energetic parish 'steps up to the task' of clustering***Parish Profile**St. Januarius,
NaplesSt. Patrick's,
PrattsburgBy Mike Latona
Staff writer

NAPLES AND PRATTSBURG — True, the Naples-Prattsburg Catholic Community consists of two small-town churches. Yet according to Karen Keber, the parish's hustle and bustle is more reflective of a metropolis.

Keber, for instance, begins her Sunday duties by coordinating religious education after 8 a.m. Mass at St. Patrick's Church in Prattsburg. She then makes the 11-mile trek north on Route 53 to run the religious program after 9:30 liturgy at St. Januarius Church in Naples.

"I fly down the hill, just like Father," Keber said.

She was referring to Father Philip Billotte, the cluster's only full-time priest. Keber added that her pastor's busy schedule sets the tone for widespread social and ministerial participation among the laity.

"Father keeps us moving. We run hard," Keber said with a laugh.

Among recent activities, for instance, was the construction of a new youth room in the parish center basement located at St.

Januarius. In addition, the Christian formation committee has expanded its adult religious education offerings. Both churches have also launched sacrificial giving programs within the last two years.

St. Patrick's, a 125-family church, was formed in 1868. St. Januarius, which serves 325 families, began in 1876. The churches' long histories became intertwined beginning in June 1994, when St. Patrick's in northern Steuben County became clustered with St. Januarius in southern Ontario County.

Prior to that time, St. Patrick's had been a mission church of St. Gabriel's Parish in Hammondsport for 114 years. St. Januarius, on the other hand, had never been affiliated with another parish.

Bob Coombs, finance committee chairman at St. Patrick's, said the clustering sparked a mixed response among the laity.

"The range of reaction went from 'As long as I have a Mass to go to I'm happy,' to 'I'm happy I'm finally able to participate more fully in the parish,' to 'Oh my God, we've got a lot of work to do,'" said Coombs, a St. Patrick's parishioner since the mid-1970s. "We've had to step up to the task of performing more services."

St. Januarius' Mary Lou Rex said her church has adjusted fairly well to the new arrangement.

"They grumbled a lot at first, and so did St. Patrick's. It was mostly because of changes in the Mass schedule. But as it happened and nothing horrible came about, they were OK with it," said Rex, 56, a lifelong St. Januarius parishioner who served as secretary from 1979 to 1994.

Father Billotte said he attaches equal priority to both churches' activities.

"Our bulletin was enlarged and increased. We try to give coverage to all the events happening in the area," he said.

The pastor added that worshipers at both St. Januarius and St. Patrick's now at-



Greg Francia/Staff Photographer

From left, Kenny Raner, 14, Jamie Meredith, 17, Janet Montroy, 13, and Jack Meredith, 15, collaborate in the new youth room at St. Januarius Church, Naples, Sept. 11, on a sign promoting the youth-group of the Naples-Prattsburg Catholic Community.

tend liturgies and other events at each other's churches.

"We've worked hard on that," Father Billotte acknowledged. "It's been a long process, but it's beginning to happen."

But along with unification initiatives, each church also maintains its distinctive nature within the community.

St. Januarius pays extensive homage to its famous grape-growing and wine-making surroundings. The church is named after the patron saint of Naples, Italy, whose feast day is Sept. 19. The current church structure, erected in 1966, is noted for its multicolored glass bubbles in the shape of grapes. In addition, St. Januarius features an outdoor Our Lady of the Grapes shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The shrine rests adjacent to St. Januarius' hall and parish center, which opened in 1993.

Meanwhile, St. Patrick's still holds Mass in its original building. According to Coombs, the church, located in a farming community, is noted for its family-like atmosphere at liturgies.

"Everybody knows everybody. It's always like coming home," Coombs said.

Both churches are active at public events. For example, St. Patrick's featured a float in Prattsburg's annual Flower Festival last month; and St. Januarius will sponsor a booth on parish grounds for the Naples Grape Festival Sept. 20-21.

Rex and Coombs noted that travelers flock to their area not only for festivals, but also for worship.

"They may come from Rochester and the suburbs, even Buffalo," Rex said.

"We have parishioners from Rochester. They come down every Sunday, go to church, spend the day and go back," Coombs added. "They say it's a nice way to start the week."

SNAPSHOTSNaples-Prattsburg Catholic
Community

St. Januarius Church
180 N. Main St.
Naples, N.Y.
716/374-2414

St. Patrick's Church
North Main Street
Prattsburg, N.Y.
607/522-6101

Cluster phone number:
716/374-2414
Cluster mailing address:
P.O. Box 459
Naples, N.Y. 14512

Parish staff:

Pastor:

Father Philip J. Billotte

Weekend assistant:

Father John E. Roach

Parish deacon:

Michael E. McGuire

Business manager:

Christine Stanley

Secretary: Josephine Krajci

Religious education coordinator:

Karen Keber

Youth ministers:

Tim and Dawn Jensen

Music director: David Krueger

Parish pastoral council chairs:

Frans Jurgens (St. Januarius),

Ginny Appleton (St. Patrick's)

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