

## FEATURE

## Tioga County churches prefer intimate settings

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

NEWARK VALLEY AND CATATONK — St. John the Evangelist and St. Francis of Assisi parishes are diminutive enough to have shared one pastor for the last 66 years.

And worshipers are perfectly happy with the small-town ambience at the parishes — St. John's, located in Newark Valley, and St. Francis, its mission, in Catatonk.

"I've always enjoyed the fact that I know everybody. If a few people are there that I don't know, it won't be long until I do," said Ellen Harris, a St. Francis parishioner since 1973.

"You go to some of the bigger churches, and there's not that camaraderie," added Rose Niznik, a lifelong parishioner at St. John's. Niznik is also secretary for both churches.

Father William A. Moorby, pastor of St. John's and St. Francis, remarked that visitors are also taken by the neighborly atmosphere.

"When people come here, they feel a sense of belonging even if they aren't from the parish originally," said Father Moorby, who has served both churches since 1993. "You find that a lot of times in small church communities."

Parishioners also display affection for their churches through their willingness to pitch in on church repair and upkeep efforts, Deacon Warren Rutan said.

"We take a great deal of pride and ownership, because we do the work. The people turn out and work together, and they have a good time doing it," said Deacon Rutan, a St. John's parishioner since 1964. He has served both parishes as deacon since his 1993 ordination.

St. John's, founded in 1881, is the larger of the parishes, serving 240 families. St. Francis, located 12 miles to the southwest in the center of Tioga County, accommodates 125 families. The churches have shared a pastor ever since St. Francis was created in 1929.

Beginning at that time, the churches were staffed by Polish priests who served the immigrant farmers who had begun

### Parish Profile

St. John the Evangelist, Newark Valley

St. Francis of Assisi, Catatonk



populating the area. Glenna Wickline, a St. Francis parishioner for the past 40 years, recalled that "we had the Gospel and sermon said in Polish" when she first began worshipping at the Catatonk church.

Nowadays, Father Moorby describes the ethnic makeup of both parishes as "a hodgepodge." He added that the farming families have largely been replaced by professionals — who travel to nearby cities for work — and their children.

According to Anne Daly, religious-education coordinator, the grade K-12 program includes approximately 100 children at St. John's and 55 at St. Francis.

Adult participation is evident through the parishes' social ministry committees, which engage in such projects as Operation Rice Bowl and food pantry collections. Wickline added that the committees recently conducted letter-writing campaigns to speak out on partial-birth abortions, the death penalty and welfare issues.

One of the newer ministerial efforts, Deacon Rutan noted, is the "Good Samaritans" program that started two years ago at St. John's and is just beginning at St. Francis. Through the program, volunteers stage dinners for bereaved families after funerals, and also deliver food to shut-ins and hospital patients.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

St. Francis of Assisi, Catatonk, parishioner Nellie Gerace (left) talks with Alice Kocourck during the church rummage and bake sale Oct. 10.

Along with the historical link between St. John's and St. Francis, four other parishes began cooperative efforts with those churches earlier this year through the diocesan Pastoral Plan for the New Millennium. The strategic planning process joins St. John's and St. Francis with St. Patrick's, Owego; St. James, Waverly; St. Margaret Mary, Apalachin; and St. Pius X, Van Etten.

The effects of sharing parish resources are already being felt: this past June, Father Moorby also became administrator of St. Patrick's Church in Owego.

Beth Fisher, a member of St. Francis' strategic planning team, said she was initially "skeptical" about the six parishes' ability to cooperate. However, she reported, meetings have proceeded quite smoothly.

"It was really uplifting, the camaraderie," said Fisher, a St. Francis parishioner since 1993.

Daly, also, said that St. John's and St. Francis have become more accepting of the strategic planning process.

"I've noticed a big change in attitude," said Daly, a St. John's parishioner since 1974. "Instead of saying, 'What's going to happen to us?' the people are saying, 'Is Father Bill (Moorby) okay, because he's worked so hard to bring this together?'"

### SNAPSHOT

St. John the Evangelist Church  
24 Rock St., Newark Valley, N.Y.  
607/642-3328

St. Francis of Assisi Church  
Route 96, Catatonk, N.Y.  
607/642-3328

Mailing address for both churches:  
P.O. Box 458  
Newark Valley, N.Y. 13811

#### Parish staff:

Pastor: Father William A. Moorby  
Parochial vice: Father Brendan Doherty, CPT  
Parish deacon: Warren Rutan  
Parish secretary: Rose Niznik  
Bookkeeper: Rose Niznik (St. John's), Alice Cysnowicz (St. Francis)  
Religious coordinator: Anne Daly  
Adult faith formation coordinator: Marian Rutan  
Liturgy coordinator: Al Gilbert  
Music director (St. Francis): Glenn Friskin  
Parish council chairs: Sue & Dick Wood (St. John's), Kim Hogan (St. Francis)

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## Upcoming Supplements

### PARENTING/FAMILY LIFE

Publication Date: November 28 — Deadline: November 14

Expanding on its monthly Parenting/Family Life feature, the Courier will publish this section to offer a closer look at raising Catholic children in the 1990s. This section will feature the church's insights on such topics as discipline, education and faith development. Other topics may include developing strong communications with teenagers and letting go of maturing, older children.

### BOOKS, MUSIC AND VIDEOS

Publication Date: December 4 — Deadline: November 18

Just in time for Christmas shopping, this exciting new supplement will highlight some of the latest offerings in inspirational and thought-provoking literature, music and movies available on videotape. It will include profiles of writers, musicians and performers — especially ones with local ties — and reviews of recent releases.

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