

## FEATURE

## Auburn's St. Alphonsus shares its spiritual wealth

## Parish Profile

St. Alphonsus  
AuburnBy Kathleen Schwar  
Staff writer

AUBURN — Perhaps the photograph of Father Foster Rogers on the wall gives a "false" impression of the parish as one enters the offices at St. Alphonsus Church.

A long black paper mustache is attached to it. Underneath, at times, has been the sign, "Employee of the Month."

Despite such joking around, parishioners stress they really are a seriously dedicated bunch.

The 1993 Synod, during which parishes got together to help establish such priorities as lifelong faith formation for the diocese, parishioners were affirmed in the approach to ministry being taken at St. Alphonsus — especially when they examined what other parishes involved in the process were doing.

"We were pleasantly surprised at the effectiveness and caring of our parish," said Bernie Watkins, parish council president.

St. Alphonsus has long been committed to the poor, which says much about the parish's belief in the consistent life ethic, he and others said. The church houses one of the largest, longest-running food pantries in Cayuga County. St.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Michael Schillace, center, is blessed by Father Foster Rogers during a "Presentation of Children" Mass Feb. 2 at St. Alphonsus Church, Auburn. At left is Marie Venaglia, liturgical coordinator for the parish.

Alphonsus Food Pantry, open six mornings a week, celebrated its 25th anniversary last fall.

The parish also collects each month for Cares and Shares money for emergency use for local residents.

"They're a very generous parish," said Jill DelloStritto, secretary/bookkeeper. She noted the parish recently sent nearly \$7,000 to Catholic Charities in Ogdensburg for disaster relief from the January ice storms. Father Rogers simply announced there would be a second collection one weekend, and donations appeared, parishioners said.

One might expect from such ready generosity that the parish is wealthy. But Father Rogers noted the parish is wealthy in a way that extends beyond money.

"Wealthy in spirit," the pastor said. "And commitment."

"If the people here see a need, a real need, they're willing to back you," added Marie Venaglia, director of Christian Formation. Similarly, the people back her in religious education — 15 teachers volunteered to work with the 125 children in grades one to 10.

"I have not had to get up in front of the congregation and ask for help. I have not had to beg," she said appreciatively.

Noting also that numerous parishioners are involved in such community causes as Red Cross and YMCA, Watkins, a police captain and volunteer EMT himself, said, "It's one thing to talk, it's another to do. We like to do."

To "do," the parish concentrates its work in four committees: social ministry,

liturgy, financial/legal, and buildings and grounds. The four meet monthly on a Tuesday night after the community Mass. Further, they are open to anyone — Father Rogers makes an open invitation during the preceding Sunday Mass.

The committees, and the parish council, meet at separate tables in the parish center gym. If a question arises a committee member can simply get up and go speak with another committee.

"I thought it was one of the best things about the church," said William Doeing, who served briefly on parish council. He and other parishioners said the system works well, and frees up the council to discuss major issues and take a visionary role.

A major interest at the church is in building community. The 7 p.m. Tuesday Mass, the only Tuesday Mass, draws much of the parish together during the week.

The church also hosts Auburn's regional Mass at 5 p.m. on Sundays. Helping out are 16 priests from Seneca, Cayuga and Onondaga counties, and some from the Syracuse Diocese. More than 200 people usually turn out for the Mass, and often different people each week.

St. Alphonsus, which was Auburn's second Catholic church and was founded as a German parish, also offers what appears to be the only 6 a.m. Sunday Mass in the diocese.

However, St. Alphonsus parishioners see their Catholicism as more than Mass, commented DelloStritto, who as a newer

employee has become quite familiar with parishioners though she is a member of Holy Family Church.

"They're strong, they're dedicated, they're focused here," she said. "It's not just coming to attend Mass. ... They have a purpose. That's really the impression you get up here."

Doeing has been left with another impression.

"The people are so open and welcome. And my children seem to like everyone here," he said. "Everyone treats them not just like children, but they treat them like family."

Lindsey, the youngest of his four children, enjoys sitting with various other parishioners when her family attends Mass.

"Lindsey has 75 grandparents over there," Watkins laughed. "You don't have to stay with the same people with your family if you don't want to."

The Doeing family drives 27 miles from their Genoa home to attend St. Alphonsus. All four of the children, 7 to 13, attend St. Joseph's School on the church grounds. Doeing and his wife, Brenda, also serve as facilitators for a Renew group that meets at the church on Tuesdays.

Renew has helped make people feel they belong, commented Mary Margaret "Chris" Pinckney.

"I think there is a feeling of community," she said. "I love it and wouldn't think of changing or going anywhere else. There's a very strong feeling there."

Parishioners Jim and Joan Hogan also have strong feelings about St. Alphonsus. The couple moved up from Florida in 1964 after buying a local meat market they named Hogan's Hometown Market. They ended up raising 12 children in the parish.

"A lot of guidance came from there," Jim Hogan said of the church, for which he now serves as buildings and grounds committee chairman. "That was the family."

The "family" realizes it will have to increasingly collaborate with other parishes, to help deal with fewer priests, parishioners noted. More than two years ago, Watkins said, it sent letters to Auburn parishes and priests to "get the ball rolling" on anticipated re-configuration. However, it appears that effort won't start till 1999-2000, when the churches are scheduled to plan under the diocese's Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium, he added.

"I think it's a very positive thing to see a parish with that freedom to be able to approach the future," said Father Rogers, who will move on in June, after serving St. Alphonsus for 19 years, including 12 as pastor.

Although the parish has an appreciation for the past, Watkins added, "We are concerned with now and tomorrow."

## SNAPSHOT

St. Alphonsus Church  
95 E. Genesee St.  
Auburn, N.Y. 13021  
Phone: 315/252-7261  
Membership: 2,100 individuals

## Ministerial Staff:

Pastor: Father Foster P. Rogers

Pastor emeritus:

Father Clarence W. Gardner

Christian formation director:

Marie Venaglia

Acting pastoral music director:

Brother Timothy Wentworth, FSC

Secretary/bookkeeper:

Jill DelloStritto

Secretary/receptionist:

Nancy Moschetti

Parish council chair:

Bernard Watkins

In residence:

Father Edward Foy

Father Paul Freemesser

Father Joseph T. Gaynor



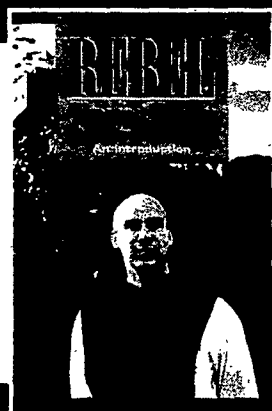
Meet local Author

William Shannon

Thursday, March 5  
7:30-8:30 PM

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