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Ecumenical efforts climax during Lent

A generation or two ago, ecumenical Good Friday cross walks — now fairly common in the Rochester Diocese — would have been almost unheard of.

It's also doubtful that you would have found an ecumenical Easter sunrise service at a Catholic cemetery. Or Lenten prayer services and educational series that bring Catholics together with faithful of other denominations.

But based on the wishes of the Second Vatican Council, Catholics are increasingly stepping up their ecumenical efforts. At no time is this effort more apparent than during Holy Week, according to the Rev. Robert Brandenstein.

"I think we come to the culmination of Christ and what he means in our lives during Holy Week and Lent, and that's a time when there's great community," said Rev. Brandenstein, pastor of United Church of Christ congregations in Wayland and Perkinsville.

Rev. Brandenstein and his churches join Catholics for several Lenten ecumenical events in northern Steuben County. During a recent gathering, he reminisced with a friend about the "old days."

"We were saying that 30 years ago, a Catholic priest would walk down one sidewalk — and if the minister of the United Church of Christ was coming the other way and they saw each other, he'd walk down the other sidewalk," Rev. Brandenstein remarked. He also recalled a Catholic priest during that era who saw one of his parishioners enter-



Father Paul Schnacky, left, of St. Joseph's, Wayland, and Rev. Robert Brandenstein of St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Wayland, and St. Peter's United Church of Christ, Perkinsville, greet each other at an ecumenical Lenten service they conducted at St. Paul's Church April 2.

ing a United Church of Christ. The priest stopped the woman and told her she was not allowed to go into that building.

Nowadays, such antagonism is on the wane and interfaith events are becoming more commonplace, according to two Rochester-based ecumenical leaders.

"There's a slow but steady increase in awareness of one another, and sharing when possible," said the Rev. J.

Paul Womack, president of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches.

"It's that cross-fertilization that happens when people talk to each other," added Deacon Brian McNulty, who chairs the diocesan Commission for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

Accepting diversity

Deacon McNulty said that the majority of this interfaith unity is evident

between Catholics and such "mainstream" Protestant denominations as Episcopal, United Church of Christ, Methodist and Presbyterian. The push is not as strong for such cooperation with denominations in which the beliefs and worship style are markedly different from Catholicism, such as Jehovah's Witnesses or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

"The closer you get to Rome, the

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