

PARISH PROFILE

Auburn church preserves Byzantine traditions

Parish Profile

SS. Peter and Paul,
Auburn



By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

AUBURN — Sister Mary Boniface Maclack, OSBM, has often had to explain that her church, SS. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic Church, is not part of some "Ukrainian religion."

The church is of the Byzantine Rite, the largest of five ritual groups of the Eastern rites that are part of the Catholic Church.

"There is a difference between the Eastern Rite and the Latin Rite, because of tradition. But it's not another religion," said Sister Boniface, a Sister of St. Basil the Great.

SS. Peter and Paul Church belongs to the Byzantine-Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of Stamford, Conn. But it also works closely with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester.

The school, for example, follows the Rochester Diocese's curricula. As principal, as well as a teacher, of SS. Peter and Paul School, Sister Boniface, meanwhile, attends Rochester Diocese school superintendents' and principals' meetings. Father Mihai Dubovici enjoys meetings with Auburn diocesan pastors, and at times makes hospital and nursing home calls for them.

"We are all part of the Catholic Church," he said.

SS. Peter and Paul was founded in 1901 to meet the needs of a growing number of Ukrainian immigrants who were attending the old St. Alphonsus Church, but wanted services in their own language.

"We try to preserve what was established by the first immigrants," said Father Dubovici, himself an immigrant from Romania in 1985 and ordained in 1994 in the Stamford Diocese.

Anticipating its 2001 centennial celebrations, the church recently had its domes repainted to renew their copper look, and the inside gold-leafed — the sacred icons in particular and floor-to-ceiling icon screen, even more ornate and larger than those in many larger Eastern rite churches.

The church is home to 250 families, including about 100 immigrants. A point of pride with many is the school. It is the on-



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Sister Mary Boniface Maclack, OSBM, principal of SS. Peter and Paul School, begins each school day by gathering the students in the school's foyer for prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. She summons the students to prayer by ringing a handheld bell.

ly original parochial school left in the city, Sister Boniface and Father Dubovici noted, and one of only three Ukrainian schools in the Stamford Diocese. St. Josaphat's Ukrainian Catholic Church of Rochester has another.

This year is the 50th anniversary of SS. Peter and Paul's first graduating class.

"We have a reputation all over the city," said Joann Regets, secretary for 30 years, mother of two school graduates, and grandmother of two current students.

Students are Byzantine, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant. They learn about both Eastern and Latin rites.

They come, Regets said, "because there's excellent education. ... Parents don't realize till their kids get into high school how much they learned in our school."

Today the school has 150 students, believed by staff to be the largest registration in its 57-year history. In fact, the school could have had 200 students — some had to be turned away for lack of accommodations, according to Regets.

Harry Hawuczyk, for one, praised what the teachers at the school have done for his stepdaughters, born in the Ukraine and still struggling with the English language.

"Over there, the nuns and teachers are bending over backwards for them, and I appreciate that," Hawuczyk said.

Meanwhile, his wife's (Galina) father was visiting from Ukraine, he said, and enjoys going to the Ukrainian language Sunday Mass. "He's up and dressed every Sunday, 'Let's go.' He loves it here."

John Bocon, a longtime parishioner born in Ukraine, and his wife, Mary, sent their five children to the school. Nowadays Bocon, a retired machine repairman, continues to help organize workers to keep the church in top shape.

"It means an awful lot to me," he said of SS. Peter and Paul.

"Every year I try to see what little things can be done," he said. "It's a small parish but people are very good, very faithful people. They never refuse me if I ask somebody to help."

He'd arrived in Auburn after the war. German soldiers had taken him to Germany as a teenager to labor in 1941; later he ended up in American camps, where he attended vocational school, until 1949.

He recalled his first Mass at the Auburn

SNAPSHOT

SS. Peter and Paul,
Byzantine Rite
132 Washington St.
Auburn, NY 13021
315/252-5573

Ministerial staff:

Administrator:

Father Mihai Dubovici

Deacon:

Deacon Willis Homick

School principal:

Sister Mary Boniface Maclack,

OSBM

Secretaries:

Joann Regets,

Mary Ann Pysnack

church was on an Easter Sunday. He met his wife-to-be at the Easter dinner at the church after it.

A SS. Peter and Paul member all her life, he said, "She speaks Ukrainian beautifully."

To help both their own members and the community understand the Byzantine Rite, Deacon Willis Homick has been conducting monthly seminars, Father Dubovici noted. The most recent one has been on the divine liturgy, comparable to the Roman Mass. He added that the sessions help fulfill Pope John Paul II's wishes expressed in the 1995 apostolic letter, "Light of the East," encouraging Eastern Catholics to preserve their customs and Western Catholics to become acquainted with other rites of the church.

"Our doors are open to anyone who wants to come," he said. "All the time we have guests."

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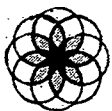
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