

PARISH PROFILE

Rochester parishioners bound by respect for others

Parish Profile

St. John's,
Rochester



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — For decades now, Alice Hauser has served as a volunteer at St. John the Evangelist Church, located at the corner of Humboldt and Floverton Streets.

Hauser, 85, takes Communion to parishioners who are shut-in. She launders the altar linen and altar cloths. And she cleans the church every Friday along with three other women — Carmel Adams, Marguerite Hartman and Eileen Rabideau.

Every weekday, Hauser prepares the altar for Father William V. Spilly, the church's pastor, who has given her the title of "sacristan" for her work. But Hauser humbly eschews the title, preferring one given to her by another pastor years ago — "The Lord's Housekeeper."

"If you can serve in church in any capacity ... you receive more than you give," she said, outlining her motivation for her work.

Hauser's statement might serve as the motto for St. John's, which is the spiritual center of about 900 Catholic households, according to Father Spilly. The parish is also the site of a diocesan school that houses more than 250 students attending grades pre-kindergarten through sixth.

According to Father Spilly and several parish members, St. John's is a place that emphasizes mutual respect among members and service to all. Those concepts are lived out by members in their golden years like Hauser as well as teenagers like Katie Curran, 17, a senior at Penfield High School. Curran serves as youth representative to the parish's pastoral council, with voting rights equal to any other member.

"I don't think they really regard me as a child, but as just someone else who works on the (council)," she said of her relationship with other members.

Most recently, Katie got the council to approve a proposal to paint a room in the church basement that will serve as a meeting place for the parish's 25-member youth group, she reported. She added that serving on the council has opened her eyes to the ways adults work out issues.

"I think it's made it a little bit easier to try and see their perspective on issues," she said of her fellow council members. "Working with them has made me more aware of working with details."

Parish Pastoral Council President David Munding noted the 17-member council's emphasizes including everyone's opinions in all discussions.

"We work together as a team, and everything we do, we do by consensus," he said of the council.

According to Connie Goonan, the council, along with other parish groups, builds consensus with the help of guidelines drawn up by the parish committee on women's issues. The guidelines stress mutual respect between parishioners in all parish discussions, she said. In operation at the parish since February, 1998, the guidelines state, in part: "Our language will be appropriate and respectful of race, gender, ethnicity, creed, and sexual orientation."

"(The guidelines) are really helpful if you're chairing a meeting and someone makes a comment that, in the chair's opinion, or in the opinion of anyone else around the table, might be hurtful or disrespectful to someone," Goonan said.

Goonan noted that St. John's has made an effort, in particular, to uphold and promote the dignity of women in the church, which is the Diocese of Rochester's Synod Goal 3. Goonan serves as liaison from the



Father William Spilly, right, presides over a Mass for residents of Beechwood Nursing Home along with 29 third-grade students from Rochester's St. John The Evangelist School Jan. 12.

parish's six-member Synod Goal 3 committee to the parish council.

Explaining the committee's work, Goonan said her group is currently exploring ways in which St. John's might support local organizations that aid women in difficult situations like unemployment.

Goonan also said that St. John's has emphasized inclusive language in both its liturgies and other events so that women can sense a respect for their gender in the church. She added that the parish has held several "Women of Hope" sessions attended by as many as 40 parish women to discuss various issues that relate to women's spirituality.

"We're creating a time and space for women to explore their faith and their relationship to God," said Patricia E. Curtis of the "Women of Hope" sessions. Curtis is one of two pastoral associates at St. John's, along with Sister Chris Treichel, OSF.

In addition to uplifting women in the church, St. John's tries to encourage as many people as possible to participate in parish life, the pastoral associates said. For example, Curtis noted that several St. John's parishioners reside in area nursing homes or are shut-in at home. Parish volunteers do everything from bring Communion and celebrate worship services with such parishioners, to providing them meals, she said.

Meanwhile, Rosalee Magee said 40 parishioners volunteer regularly to help out with the parish's administrative needs. And Sister Treichel added that about 300 parishioners volunteer to serve the church in other ways, as eucharistic minister, lectors, ushers, altar servers, musicians and singers.

Father Spilly added that the parish doesn't forget its members once they pass on to the next life. Every July 4, St. John's celebrates a Mass of Remembrance in its "Peace Garden," located behind the parish office building called the Sullivan Center (named after Msgr. John B. Sullivan, the parish's first pastor). Father Spilly credited Father Edward A. Zimmer, the parish's priest-in-residence since he retired in 1992, for creating the garden where the Mass for the deceased is celebrated.

"It used to be just a bunch of weeds back there, and when he moved here, he brought it back to life," Father Spilly said of the garden.

Speaking of new life, as parishes



St. John the Evangelist School third-grader Caitlin Fager, 8, sings during the Mass at the Culver Road nursing home.

throughout the diocese focus on pastoral planning for the next millennium, St. John's representatives are meeting with their cohorts at their neighbor parishes of St. Ambrose and St. James.

Joyce K. McAndrew, a St. John's parishioner who also serves as a co-chair on the three-parish planning team, pointed out that the three parishes, each currently with its own pastor, will probably be compelled to share two full-time priests and one part-time priest in the near future.

McAndrew said the parishes are considering a number of options, including having pastoral administrators run all three churches while priests focus solely on sacramental work.

However, she stressed that the parishes have not come to any firm decisions about their future together. She said she is optimistic about St. John's being able to adapt to any new situation since the parish has been innovative in the past.

For example, she said, St. John's had two co-pastors in the 1970s, Fathers John Mulligan and James Boyle. Indeed, Retired Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, diocesan personnel director in the 1970s, said St. John's co-pastorate arrangement was one of the first of its kind in the diocese. In the

SNAPSHOT

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Ministerial staff:

Pastor:

Father William V. Spilly

Pastoral Associates:

Patricia E. Curtis,
Sister Chris Treichel, OSF

School Principal:

Angela Fortunato

Business Manager:

Rosalee Magee

Parish Visitor:

Sister Elaine Kolesnik, RSM

Youth Coordinator:

Jennifer Knitter

Music Coordinator:

James Whitaker

Parish Secretary:

Alice Pratico

Priest In Residence:

Father Edward A. Zimmer

1980s, the parish was served by co-pastors again — Fathers Kevin Murphy and Peter Clifford.

"This parish has a very long history of doing things uniquely," McAndrew said.

She added that, in an era of priest shortages, any new arrangement will mean all three parishes will need even more lay involvement than they currently enjoy.

"Leadership is a misleading word now," she said. "We need to look at all people as leaders now, and utilize their strengths, and not just that of priests and people on salary."

Father Spilly concurred with McAndrew's view of a future St. John's existing in a world where lay Catholics will have to perform more and more of the tasks formerly assigned to the ordained clergy.

"I always say to the people, 'Don't look at what we're losing, look at what we're gaining,'" he said of pastoral planning. "That puts it in a positive light."