

PARISH PROFILE

St. John's: 'A big, big church ... but fills up easily'

Parish Profile

St. John
the Evangelist Church



By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

GREECE — St. John the Evangelist Church on West Ridge Road has such an array of ministries and organizations, some members simply could not keep track. So last year the Parish Council published a directory of parish groups from A (Altar Serving) to Y (Youth Ministry).

But the booklet itself couldn't keep up. Father Joseph D'Aurizio, pastor for 22 years at St. John's, recently added a Confraternity of Christian Mothers to the list. The confraternity is a way for young mothers to share their interests and spirituality, the pastor said.

As a young mother herself years ago, Elizabeth Shea found St. John's the place she wanted to raise her three sons.

"I think it gave them a lot of encouragement, of course religion and good manners, and to help other people," she said, adding two of her sons attended St. John the Evangelist School.

"The church is great. It has great people in it. ... When Father D'Aurizio speaks and needs something done, it's done. I once heard him say he could do with flowers up here. That's all he said. The next time I came in, he said he'd had turn some away to the hospitals and homes. That's the kind of people we have."

Shea, a licensed practical nurse, has volunteered through the church, especially helping the sick and elderly. Ten years ago she was hired to care for Al Wehner, which she continues doing today.

Wehner has been a member of St. John Church since he was baptized 93 years ago. Although he can no longer get to the church, he recently donated income from stocks he sold to finance new church lighting. He's seen plenty of changes and admittedly still misses the old church building that the parish moved out of in 1964.

"It was all farmland years ago, all around the church even," said Wehner, a lifelong farmer himself.

The church was started in 1865 by Father John Maurice, who bought the old Rowe Tavern with his own inheritance and had it rebuilt into a church. The church was in the Diocese of Buffalo, as the Rochester Diocese hadn't been created. Ten years later a second church was built; it remains a Ridge Road landmark.

As for the current striking 104-foot-high building, Father D'Aurizio said, "People think how modern it is, but it was built and ready for use in 1964.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

St. John the Evangelist School fourth-graders, from left, Kelsey Abelein, Danielle Tingle, Matthew Anthony (as President Woodrow Wilson) and Ashley Brown act out a scene from "Failure Is Not An Option: The Struggle For Women's Rights" during a dress rehearsal at the school March 17 for other St. John students. The play was presented for parents March 19 at Park Ridge Education Center as part of the fourth grade's study of the women's rights movement.

"And it's large, which is good," he noted. "In this day and age when there aren't too many priests, you can accommodate a lot of people."

The church can hold 1,061 and has 2,800 member families. Even the March 4 blizzard could not keep some 25 people from morning Mass. And nearly half the usual number attended over the following weekend, when some churches were closed because of 3½-foot snow.

Father D'Aurizio said such dedication extends to finances as well. He faced a sizable parish debt when he arrived, but thanks to the parishioners there is no debt now.

"And I never talk money except for the Thanks Giving Appeal," he said. Fifteen years ago the parish launched a tithing program, giving away 10 percent of Sunday collections — tithes currently total about \$75,000 a year, he said. Additionally, the parish takes up a monthly food collection and helps operate the Greece Clothes Closet. This year's Lenten money collection is going to five area food ministries.

Dozens of parishioners are involved in parish ministries to the sick and homebound, coordinated by Lois and Al Berke for 12-15 years. They regularly visit homes of 60 parishioners, plus Park Ridge Hospital, Hamilton Manor Nursing Home, Park Ridge Chemical Dependency and several senior apartment complexes.

"They are delighted to see us," Lois Berke said. "We have a lady (Arlene T. O'Connor) in our church who makes rosaries," she added. "We take them to hospitals and Chemical Dependence. Many people have died with those rosaries in their hands. We appreciate those rosaries so much."



In addition, many of the sick wear the rosaries. "It's something tangible they can hang onto," Berke said. Interest in ministry opportunities often begins in youth experiences, noted Jan Borromei, youth ministry coordinator. She also coordinates junior high religious education and confirmation.

For instance, junior high students deliver plants at Easter and Christmas to nursing homes. The junior high religious education program is unusual in that it gets away from the classroom, according to Father D'Aurizio. Students choose two options from each category: mini retreats, service projects and social functions, for a total of 25 hours to fulfill requirements.

"We are having really good success with it," Borromei said. "They're coming to more than they have to because they enjoy it."

Of the 624 children enrolled in grades K-8, 105 are seventh- and eighth-graders. In the fall 40-60 youth "Rake and Run," making surprise visits to about 28 homes where the homeowners can't take care of their yards. "They go and rake their lawns. They bag it and leave," she said.

Borromei recalled that four years ago when she came to the parish from one with 500 families. "It was overwhelming. It was scary. But the parish is really nice and the people are really good. I was fortunate to meet some very giving people when I came that really helped."

Longtime member Shea added, "It's a big, big church. But I tell you, it fills up so easily."

SNAPSHOT

St. John the Evangelist
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Ministerial staff:

Pastor: **Father Joseph F. D'Aurizio**
Parochial Vicar:

Father Dennis Bonsignore
Parish assistant/adult religious education coordinator:

John Dealy
School principal: **Robert Edelman**
Administrator of religious formation program: **Rose Battisto**
Youth minister: **Janice Borromei**
Pastoral ministers to the sick, lonely and elderly:

Al and Lois Berke
Music director: **Michael Szatkowski**
Parish council president:
Thomas Fien

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