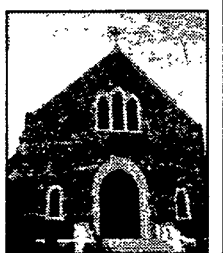


PARISH PROFILE

Southern Tier parish blends tradition and change

Parish Profile

Our Lady of Lourdes, Elmira



By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ELMIRA — From the administrative end, continuity has been the name of the game at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish.

According to Sister M. Raymond Joseph Griffin, RSM, this is due in no small part to the affable parish community.

"This is a great parish. The people here are very affirming and lovable," said Sister Griffin, pastoral associate since 1991.

Sister Griffin said she has resided happily at the parish convent for 28 years. And prior to 1998, only three pastors had served at Our Lady of Lourdes since its founding in 1940: Msgr. Leo Schwab (1940-67); Father Francis Davis (1967-78); and Father Paul McCabe (1978-98).

Father Jeremiah Moynihan, the current pastor, can vouch for the parish's warm manner. He came to Our Lady of Lourdes under difficult circumstances nearly a year ago following the sudden death of his predecessor, Father McCabe. Father Moynihan said he has been touched by the friendliness of the people.

"Sometimes transition can be very stressful. I've been made to feel welcome," said Father Moynihan, who had served the previous 16 years as pastor of St. Ignatius Loyola Church in Hornell.

This congenial atmosphere is evident to Bill Wayne, a member of the 1,000-family parish for the past 46 years.

"We've never been cliquish," Wayne remarked.

Even in times of transition, Wayne said he has been a staunch supporter of his parish.

"I've seen a lot of changes and they've all been good," Wayne said.

Added Ed McGarrell Jr., another longtime parishioner: "I love Our Lady of Lourdes. I've seen it grow into a wonderful, wonderful parish."

Rita Sartori, parish pastoral council chairperson, noted one such change earli-



Mike Mergen/photo intern

Father Jeremiah Moynihan says Mass at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Elmira, July 24.



Jordynn Kurcoba attends Mass with her grandfather Bob July 24.

er this summer when her daughter married a Jewish man at Our Lady of Lourdes.

"Several years ago you would never see a Jewish rabbi and a Catholic priest brought together in this church," Sartori said.

Change is a popular topic as Our Lady of Lourdes enters its pastoral planning process this year with other faith communities in Chemung and Schuyler counties.

"There's been a general openness and reception to changes," said Brian Stutts, parish liaison.

Stutts cited community outreach and youth ministry as two planning-group focal points for sharing parish resources. Our Lady of Lourdes seems well-equipped in both areas: McGarrell and Wayne are members of a bustling parish social ministry committee, and McGarrell added that adult parishioners welcome youth involvement in service projects and liturgies.

"There are a lot of high school lectors. I think it's great," McGarrell said.

Kayla Geiger, 16, said that the youth group is active not only in its own parish, but also with neighboring parishes and at diocesan events. Kayla noted that she will join hundreds of diocesan teens at the National Catholic Youth Conference in St. Louis, Mo., this November.

Sister Griffin said the parish is also well-known for its reverence to Mary. In fact, the church altar is adorned with statues of Mary appearing to St. Bernadette, at Lourdes, France.

Mary is said to have appeared 18 times in 1858 to the 14-year-old St. Bernadette — who died in 1879 — was canonized in 1933, seven years before the Elmira parish bearing her hometown's name was founded.

"We've always had a strong devotion to

the Blessed Mother," Sister Griffin said. She added that the parish holds a novena every Monday, as well as an annual May crowning. In addition, students at Holy Family Intermediate School — located on parish grounds — recite the rosary every Friday in October and May.

Another strong tradition at Our Lady of Lourdes is its CYO sports program, according to Jack Crowley, a longtime coach. CYO basketball teams compete in the parish center that was built in the 1980s and dedicated to Father McCabe in May.

"Many guys we've had here have gone on to greater things," said Crowley, noting that former CYO athletes from Our Lady of Lourdes have become high school and college stars.

Fellow parishioners refer to Crowley as "Mr. Sport." However, they also hasten to add that he takes little credit for his volunteerism.

Such humble attitudes are prevalent around Our Lady of Lourdes, Sartori said.

"People don't promote themselves. They just do things," Sartori said.

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Parish center director:

Theresa Bacon

Director of faith formation:

Maggie Johnson

Sacramental preparation minister:

Lisa Rustici

Youth ministry director:

Janet Geiger

Parish pastoral council chair:

Rita Sartori

Organist and liturgy coordinator:

Mary Montanarella

Choir director:

Susan Amisano