

# PARISH PROFILE

## Livingston County parish rolls with the changes

### Parish Profile



St. Joseph/St. William  
Livonia/Conesus

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

LIVONIA — For 17 years as pastor of St. Joseph/St. William Parish, Father Jerome Schifferli led a community that has willingly changed with the times — and often stayed ahead of the times.

For example, Father Schifferli said, the parish embraced extensive involvement of women and children long before many other parishes did.

"They were never ostracized," remarked Father Schifferli, St. Joseph/St. William pastor from 1972 to 1989.

Father Schifferli still thrives on emerging trends. The pastor emeritus belongs

to one of the parish's small Christian communities that began in response to a 1993 diocesan Synod initiative.

"I just love to share the faith this way. Everybody gets the same opportunity; I'm not the guru," Father Schifferli said.

Lucille Miller, a member of St. Joseph/St. William for more than 50 years, is a part of the same small Christian community.

"Everybody's so anxious to get there," said Miller, who serves as head sacristan at St. Joseph's.

Miller said that parishioners of all ages take part in new programs at St. Joseph/St. William — including the senior citizens, an age group that is often stereotyped as being set in its ways.

However, the parish's adaptability has been sorely tested in recent years. Father John H. Hayes, who became pastor on July 1, is St. Joseph/St. William's fifth administrator in less than four years. Two of those leaders, Father William Trott in 1996 and Father Robert Collins in 1998, died during their pastorates.

"In some ways, the parish drew closer together — not that you'd ever put yourself willingly in that situation," said parishioner Matt Flanigan, who also serves as executive director of Camp Stella Maris.

"I think that says something about the community and its flexibility. We have continuity in our faith," said Sue Drexel, youth-ministry coordinator.

St. Joseph/St. William is also a symbol of continuity in regard to residential growth in its area. Flanigan noted that eastern Livingston County is projected to expand rapidly over the next few years.

At present, St. Joseph's in Livonia has 584 registered families and St. William's in Conesus has 90. St. Joseph's seating capacity is 300 individuals, and St. William's is 150.

Both churches' summer liturgies routinely draw overflow crowds as boaters converge on Conesus Lake. But now, Father Hayes observed, Masses during the off-season fill the churches as well. He added that the parish has begun to explore remodeling of parish facilities to accommodate the growth.

Father Hayes noted that many young families now populate the St. Joseph/St. William community.

"I've done two weddings and 10 funerals since I've been here, but I've lost count of how many baptisms," the pastor said.

St. Joseph/St. William's religious-education program, under the guidance of Chris Coniglio, intergenerational faith



Mike Mergen/Photo intern

Jesse Galvin goes over last-minute details with his mother, Barbara, before boarding his plane Nov. 17 with fellow youths, below, heading to the National Catholic Youth Conference. St. Joseph's sent 18 youth and adult chaperons to the biennial conference.

formation coordinator, features 180 youths in grades one-five.

And the high-school youth group, under Drexel, has 85 members in grades six-12.

These, and other parish programs, are conducted at Hagerty Hall in Livonia. The facility is named for Father Roy F. Hagerty, pastor of St. Joseph and St. William from 1953 to 1972.

This month, 18 parish youths and seven adult chaperons attended the National Catholic Youth Conference in St. Louis.

The wealth of youngsters fits nicely with St. Joseph/St. William's reputation as a kid-friendly parish. Parish secretary Vicki Finazzo recalled an example of this friendliness when she attended her first Mass at St. Joseph's.

"There were rocking chairs in the back of the church instead of a crying room. I could tell children are welcomed," Finazzo said.

Father Hayes noted that youths serve as cantors and on parish pastoral council.

"In the six months I have been here, I have never heard a parishioner complain about the kids being involved," Father Hayes said.

Coniglio said that the parish is loaded not only with youth, but also with eager adult volunteers. For instance, she said,



many retirees volunteer for faith formation and youth ministry events. And Melissa Szczesniak, parish business manager, added that another band of seniors counts the Sunday collections.

"People are not just coming to Sunday Mass. They're involved," Coniglio said.

St. Joseph's is the newest of four faith communities that have existed near Conesus Lake. The parish was founded in 1911, 36 years after St. William's. In 1915, St. William's became a mission church of St. Joseph's.

The area's first parish was St. Michael's in Livonia Center, founded in 1848. And St. Margaret's Chapel, on the east side of Conesus Lake, was founded in 1907. Both St. Michael's and St. Margaret's closed in the early 1980s, Father Schifferli said, due to a lack of available priests.

## SNAPSHOTS

St. Joseph/St. William  
Faith Community

St. Joseph's Church  
14 Washington St.

Livonia, N.Y. 14487

St. William's Church  
Elm Street

Conesus, N.Y. 14435

Phone (for both parishes):  
(716) 346-3815

Fax: (716) 346-9445

Ministerial staff:  
Pastor: Father John H. Hayes

Pastor emeritus:  
Father Jerome F. Schifferli

Intergenerational faith  
formation coordinator:  
Chris Coniglio

Choir director (St. Joseph's):  
Edith Philipson

Youth ministry coordinator:  
Sue Drexel

RCIA coordinator: David Drexel

Secretary: Vicki Finazzo

Business manager:  
Melissa Szczesniak

Parish pastoral council chair  
(St. Joseph's): Karen Denney

Parish pastoral council chair  
(St. William's): Judy Hoffend



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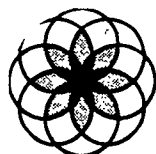
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