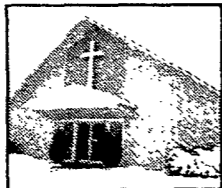


PARISH PROFILE

Talent abounds among Honeoye's hills, lakeside

Parish Profile

St. Mary's,
Honeoye



By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant Editor

When first asked to speak in front of her fellow parishioners at St. Mary's Church, Honeoye, Peggy Kelly declined. The idea appealed to her about as much as a polar-bear swim in nearby Honeoye Lake.

"They asked me again the next season, and I said no, right off the bat," she recalled.

The third time was the charm.

"Then I thought maybe I should, so the next time I was asked I agreed to do it," Kelly said.

Her topic was Renew, the parish renewal program, and the experience was not nearly as bad as she had imagined. In fact, it seemed to whet her appetite for further parish involvement, whether or not it required being in the limelight.

"I just couldn't believe when I look back over the past seven years, from the person I was before, how much I've grown," she said, particularly noting her change of heart about public speaking. "I wouldn't get up and do it in front of anyone before."

Time and again, St. Mary parishioners say similar things. When asked how they became involved, some say it was because the pastor, Father Edward Zenkel, asked them.

"He's a wheeler and a dealer," laughed Bob Belmont. "He's quite a guy."

Belmont and his wife, Helen, are among St. Mary's longest-term parishioners, having joined the parish when they moved to Honeoye 35 years ago.

The priest's predecessor, Father Mike Hogan, had established an interactive parish during his pastorate, Belmont said, and Father Zenkel has continued to perpetuate that since arriving five years ago.

Kay C. Gordon, a parishioner for four years, recalled that Father Zenkel called her a little more than a year ago because he had heard she played the piano.

"He called and said, 'Do you?' I said yes. 'Would you?' I said yes."

Thus Gordon, who has a degree in performance from Eastman School of Music, became music and choir director.

Such leadership empowers people, Belmont said. "A lot of people are just sitting back waiting to be asked. They feel they do not have the talent, but if asked, say,



Mike Mergen/Photo intern

Jacquie Dobbertin leads Sunday's children's liturgy at St. Mary's Church Jan. 16 in Honeoye.

'I'll give it a try.' It seems to be working. ...Empowerment can do wonderful things."

Belmont, who retired as Richmond Town supervisor in 1992, serves the parish as a eucharistic minister, greeter and cemetery committeeman. He also is a former chairman of the finance council and former parish council member. At Saturday evening Mass, he takes one door and his wife takes the other, to greet their fellow parishioners.

Though dating back to 1868 in what used to be known as Honeoye Flats, St. Mary's has a largely newer congregation. Few parishioners have been with the parish 30 years or more, Father Zenkel said.

The lake and surrounding hills have long made the Finger Lakes hamlet a popular place for retirement, and the area has been built up in recent years for year-round living. People tend to be either closely neighboring lake dwellers or more private hill dwellers, the priest observed. And they come to the parish with a variety of faith experiences, whether from Rochester, Buffalo or elsewhere, he said.

"It is a blessing when they bring a lot of faith life experiences from the communities they grew up in," Father Zenkel said. "There is necessarily a blending of that."

Kelly, for instance, moved with her family about seven years ago from Rochester, where she still works as a nurse in an allergy office. She joined the Dust Busters, a group of parishioners who regularly clean the church. And from there, her involvement grew.

Acknowledging she had not been very active at her former parish, she marveled that she was on St. Mary's original strategic planning committee, the parish council, in Renew and remains one of the original choir members.

Becoming involved in Renew "was the best thing that ever happened to me. I met more people and really felt more like a family with the other people at church," she said.

Her daughter, Anna, 10, also cleans with the Dust Busters and has enjoyed religious-education classes, especially a re-



Troy Dobbertin passes the time during St. Mary's children's liturgy Jan. 16 in Honeoye.

cent activity of creating a Noah's Ark bulletin-board scene. Anna said she was looking forward to learning the rosary in an upcoming class. And she just signed up to be an altar girl because it sounded like fun.

"There's a lot of people; they're very friendly there and you make a lot of friends," Anna said.

Deacon Roger Loomis has been at St. Mary's for 12 years. "Twelve's a long time down there," he said by phone from Midtown Tire in Rochester, where he is controller. He recalled that when he was studying for the diaconate, his involvement at St. Mary's was quite limited for four years. And when he returned after being ordained in June 1999, "I was amazed at all the people I didn't know."

Besides the permanent newcomers, St. Mary's welcomes numerous vacationers.

Mass attendance, normally 300 or more on Sunday and 100 on Saturday, grows to nearly 500 on Sundays and up to 250 on Saturdays during the summer and summer holidays.

Deacon Loomis preaches monthly at the parish, and also is assigned to Catholic Charities in Mount Morris, where he offers financial counseling to clients.

"It's kind of odd to go back as a parishioner who was one kind of person to go back suddenly as someone else," he added. "But we're all having a marvelous time right now. It has been a great experience for me. They have been very welcoming to me and Gail." His wife, Gail, finds adoptive and foster homes for Ontario County Department of Social Services.

Deacon Loomis also heads the parish's social-justice and ministry committee, which works to provide food and other emergency needs for the community. The committee sponsors Thanksgiving dinners and is forming a bereavement committee to host post-funeral gatherings for families. Such a ministry is important, he said, as a "show of warmth and love from the church."

For Karen Rice, that's exactly what St. Mary's Church shows. A fan of its Renew program, she continues to meet in one of the small Christian communities established during the program. Two such communities are currently active, she noted, adding that even "if you get 30 people just touching one person, you've got 60 and it keeps growing from there."

Excitement about the church spreads that way, she explained. Facing her own mother's health difficulties in recent years, she found important support in her Renew group. At gatherings, the group reads Scripture and talks about how it affects their own lives. They also pray for each other.

"They are just there to listen to you," she said. "If you need a shoulder to cry on, they're there for you. Just knowing they're there is all the support I need."

Rice insists she would never get on the podium about Renew. But hard as it is for her to imagine, given St. Mary's track record, someday she just might.

SNAPSHOT

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Ministerial staff:

Pastor:

Father Edward B. Zenkel

Deacon:

Roger Loomis

Youth minister:

Kathy Bouldt

Religious education coordinator:

Diane Brewer-Hawes

Music director:

Kay C. Gordon

Bookkeeper:

Gail Higham

Secretary:

Dianne Vallimont

Parish council chairperson:

Karen Rice

Finance committee chairperson:

Laurie Schenkel