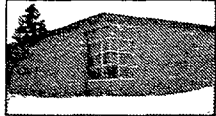


PARISH PROFILE

Faith is on fire at Henrietta's Guardian Angels

Parish Profile

Guardian Angels,
Henrietta



By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

HENRIETTA — If you want to get excited about your Catholic faith, stop in at Guardian Angels Church. Evangelization seems a way of life for parishioners there.

Take Emily Arden, 16, a eucharistic minister and peer leader with T.O.G.A. — Teens Of Guardian Angels, a group for youths in grades six through eight. Emily was baby-sitting David Valone, 12, a sixth-grader at Seton Catholic School in Brighton, when the subject of T.O.G.A. came up.

"She told me that it's lots of fun, and I tried it," David said. So he joined T.O.G.A. which meets weekly for various activities. "I wanted to learn more about God, and I wanted to get a better relationship with him, and I wanted to make new friends."

Emily said she likes working with the younger kids in T.O.G.A. because they look up to her as a friend in faith.

"It's nice to be needed," she said. "Once you work up a relationship with them, they come to you for advice."

Relationship-building is the key to Guardian Angels' evangelical emphasis, according to the parish's pastoral administrator, Dean Condon, one of six non-priest permanent pastoral administrators in the diocese. For example, from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost Sunday, the parish runs "From Ashes to Fire" — services and programs for both inactive Catholics and



Mike Mergen/Photo intern

Marilyn Spampinato, left, and Marie Barkley chat during Guardian Angels' "Cabin Fever Party" Feb. 12 at the parish in Henrietta.

parishioners. It is being coordinated this year by Rick Halsted and his wife, Elizabeth, who is also the parish's bookkeeper.

"Parishioners are strongly encouraged to invite people to church," Condon said. He noted that last year's "From Ashes to Fire" sessions drew 250 people, half of whom had not attended Guardian Angels' services before. He added that the program has brought several new people into the Guardian Angels community.

Founded in 1960, Guardian Angels is composed of 1,000 families from Henrietta, Pittsford, Brighton, Greece and Webster, Condon said.

Condon, who is currently studying to be a permanent deacon, became the parish's first lay administrator in 1995. He had been

director of a spiritual renewal office for the Archdiocese of Boston for six years.

Prior to Condon's hiring, the parish was served by the late Father John Kleintjes, pastor from 1960-1975, and Father Richard A. Hart, pastor from 1975 until his death in June 1994. Sister Barbara Kuhn, SSJ, then served as temporary administrator of the parish until Condon's hiring.

Tim Attridge, a parish pastoral council member, was on a team of diocesan and parish leaders who searched for a new administrator. The diocese had indicated the person would not be a priest due to the priest shortage.

"Initially, it was pretty difficult because the people were grieving for their pastor," Attridge said. "And now we were asking them to go for a new type of ministry."

Yet Condon's qualifications and effort have shown parishioners that a lay person can lead a Catholic parish, Attridge said.

"I believe for the most part that a resounding majority have realized what the diocesan situation is, and they've definitely accepted this new type of ministry," Attridge said.

Condon is not the only lay person to have a leadership role at the parish. Mary Bills, for example, heads the parish's youth ministry efforts and oversees T.O.G.A.

Bills described one popular activity that draws T.O.G.A. members together. They collect notes containing prayers from members and place them in a jar. The group then pulls the notes from the jar and prays together for each request.

"It brings them really closer together, knowing that they've prayed together and that they have a faithful God," Bills said.

Young people also are involved in parish council where Samantha Max, 14, serves as youth representative. Samantha said she

SNAPSHOT

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Ministerial Staff:
Pastoral administrator:
Dean Condon
Pastoral minister/youth minister:
Mary Bills
Sacramental minister:
Father Louis Sirianni
Permanent deacon:
Deacon Anthony Mercadel
Faith formation minister:
Gerry McLaughlin
Music director:
John Bunce Jr.
Organist/choir director:
Celine Derosia
Parish secretary:
Leanna Hale
Faith formation secretary:
Micki Fox
Bookkeeper:
Elizabeth Halsted

has full voting rights on the council and enjoys learning the ways of the adult world.

"A lot of the adults say that we're the future," she said. "It's nice for us to get a head start to see what it's going to be like in the future."

On a similar note, Gerry McLaughlin, the parish's faith formation minister, and an original parishioner, said the parish is currently preparing teens to soon serve as catechists. She added that word is getting out that Guardian Angels is a place brimming with new evangelical programs and efforts. And she's noticed that adults who grew up attending Guardian Angels, and tried other parishes when they reached maturity, are now attending the church again.

"I think people are talking about the different things we're doing now, and people are coming back," she said.

When they join the church, they'll find a welcoming community filled with people who want to share their faith, according to Elizabeth Halsted. More than two years ago, she belonged to another parish when she applied for the bookkeeper position. After working at the parish awhile, she and her husband decided to become members.

"I really felt the Spirit here," she said. "It's not insular, it's not parochial."

The church puts that impression into play in its tithing committee, according to Howard Hadley, a parish council member who attends church with his wife, Barbara, a catechist, and his three children: Clark, 6, Mary Ellen, 9, and Harry, 11, an altar-server. The parish supports a number of Catholic charitable and evangelical organizations by tithing its collections, he said.

That sense of outreach is also embodied in such programs as the parish's Unplanned Pregnancy Task Force, in operation for 17 years. The task force is headed up by Pat Pearson.

Debbie Resch, who attends the parish with her husband, Chuck, and their daughter Susan, helps raise money to purchase new and used materials for infants born to women in crisis pregnancies. The task force gets an average of five referrals a week from area social service agencies, she said.

She added that her faith is buttressed by the support she receives from the parish's staff, members and liturgies.

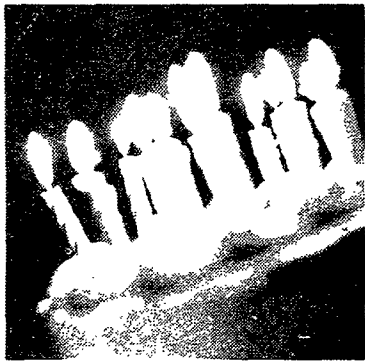
"You just can't help going back to where you're fed," Resch said.

That's a feeling shared by Micki Fox, faith formation secretary.

"I enjoy the people," she said. "I guess if I didn't like it, I wouldn't have been here for 27 years."

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