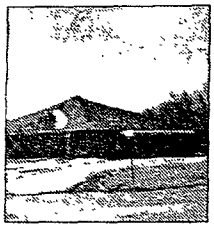


PARISH PROFILE

Growing Chili parish preserves feel of community

Parish Profile

St. Pius Tenth, Chili



By Mike Latona
Staff Writer

CHILI — A group of St. Pius Tenth parishioners spent the better part of two hours trading stories about their beloved parish, and Jim Cullen couldn't contain his enthusiasm.

"Whenever we get together like this, I just love it," Cullen exclaimed.

"That's because they're good memories," Glenn Schneider told him.

And with a steadily growing parish, there are still many memories to be made at St. Pius Tenth, located in the town of Chili on Monroe County's west side.

At 2,435 families, the St. Pius Tenth community totals about 7,000 members and is one of the largest parishes in the diocese. How much has suburban sprawl affected St. Pius Tenth? Take a look at the youth programs: More than 500 youths (pre-K through grade eight) attend religious education; more than 100 children will receive first Eucharist this year; and the parish sponsors 13 CYO basketball teams as well as a thriving Scout program.

Despite the parish's massiveness, parishioners consider it a tight-knit community where members know each other well.

"Going to Mass here is like going to a family reunion," Schneider said.

Such is the case for Lisa Conway, who grew up in the parish, went elsewhere as a



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer
Mary DeFazio dishes out food at the St. Joseph's Table held March 19 at St. Pius Tenth in Chili.

young adult, but returned to St. Pius Tenth in the late 1980s. "It's amazing to see all the familiar faces," said Conway, a religious-education instructor.

The parish's history dates back to 1854, when it was founded as St. Feehan's, a mis-

sion parish of St. Vincent DePaul in Churchville. Exactly one century later, in 1954, the parish was renamed St. Pius Tenth in honor of St. Pius X, the early 20th-century pope who was canonized that same year.

A new church on Chili Avenue was dedicated in 1957, with a larger and more modern version to follow in 1972. The St. Feehan's church building was eventually moved from Chestnut Ridge Road to the Genesee Country Museum in Mumfords, where it is still used occasionally for special liturgies.

Until recent years, St. Feehan/St. Pius Tenth was located in an area parishioner Mary Lou Ognibene described as "all-farm."

"When (St. Pius Tenth) started, there were 45 families in the parish," noted Carolyn Gommel, secretary/book-keeper

and a St. Pius Tenth charter parishioner. Her mother, Helen Mannix, was parish secretary for 32 years.

That 45-family figure has increased 50-fold in the last half-century or so. Father Foster P. Rogers, pastor, said he strives to preserve a personal touch by mailing birthday greetings to every St. Pius Tenth parishioner. Yes, that's 7,000 salutations a year — an average of 20 per day!

Father Rogers is only the third pastor in St. Pius Tenth's history. Over its first 44 years, the parish was led by the late Father Donald J. Murphy, from 1954 to 1977. Father Gerald T. Connor was pastor from 1977 until 1998 when he retired and Father Rogers came aboard.

Father Rogers said the parish's many positive characteristics can be directly attributed to his predecessors.

"I give Father Murphy, Father Connor and all those who were with them all the credit in the world. When Father Murphy started, (the parish) was a field," Father Rogers remarked.

One of the pastors' greatest strengths, Schneider observed, has been to get people involved. "The priests have created an atmosphere that makes you want to volunteer," he said.

Gommel said that such people as Cullen, a parishioner since 1965 and self-described jack-of-all-trades, is a perfect example. "You don't build anything bigger than a doghouse without consulting Jim," Gommel remarked.

"Before I came here, the people claimed ownership," Father Rogers said. "I think that's an incredible witness they give. There's a wonderful spirit — a spirit of great desire. It comes from the heart."

Joan Nowak, social-ministry chairperson, attests to that statement. She said help is readily available for such causes as the Christmas giving tree and clothing drive.

"There isn't anything in this parish that people don't respond to," Nowak asserted.

Ognibene said more than \$12,000 has been raised for the poor over the past 15 years through the parish's St. Joseph's Tables. The annual event took place March 19, on St. Joseph's Day. People attending the meatless dinner offer freewill donations.

"All the food is donated," Ognibene added, saying that parishioners bring the breads, fruits and other traditional St. Joseph's Table items to the school gymna-

SNAPSHOT

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Pastor:

Father Foster Rogers

Priest intern:

Father Michael Mayer

Pastoral associate:

Sister Mary Anne Bookman, CSJ

Ministry to seniors:

Sister Brigid Quinn, RSM

Parish deacons:

Deacon Victor M. Yanaitis,

Deacon John E. Zierle

Faith formation director:

Ann Hastee

Faith formation administrator:

Sister Mary Cumbo, SSJ

Youth coordinator:

Amy Johnson

Secretaries/bookkeepers:

Connie Aman, Carolyn Gommel

Music director:

Joe Schalm

Parish pastoral council chair:

Thomas Belknap

St. Pius Tenth School principal:

Stephen M. Oberst

sium.

More volunteerism of note: Ognibene, who directed the adult choir for 16 years, pointed out that the parish has four liturgical music groups: youth contemporary, adult contemporary, adult traditional and children's choir.

"We have different music at different liturgies so that all tastes are served," Ognibene said.

Father Murphy, who died in 1995, paid close attention to finances as well as volunteerism. He began a credit union, which now has its own building on the parish campus. A parish scholarship program is named after Father Murphy as well.

Speaking of finances, the parish's biggest fundraiser will take place the first weekend in August, when the annual Country Fair is held. This event alone raises nearly \$40,000 over two days, according to Schneider and his wife, Jane, former chairs of the fair committee.

The Country Fair also reflects a blend of parishioner help. Jane Schneider noted that she was first woman to serve on the planning committee, and that the current volunteer corps includes many couples — especially younger ones.

"The groups running our Country Fair are all in their 20s and 30s. They're all our former (CYO) ballplayers," she said.

Parishioner Chris McConnell, a student at St. John Fisher College, agreed that many young St. Pius Tenth parishioners are taking active roles in parish life. He noted that the youth program, under coordinator Amy Johnson, has grown significantly over the past five years.

"I started in ninth grade and we had 10 or 11 kids; now it's close to 30. There's a very good commitment, and the parish is really supportive of it," said McConnell, who still serves as eucharistic minister and lector when he's home from college.

McConnell cherishes the education he received at St. Pius Tenth School — so much so that, in 1998, he wrote a letter of appreciation to the K-6 school's faculty.

Warm feelings about St. Pius Tenth seem to be universal in the parish, Glenn Schneider remarked. In fact, he said, St. Pius Tenth has been largely devoid of controversy in the 25 years his family has belonged there.

"It's Camelot," he commented.

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