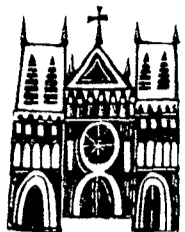


PARISH PROFILE

Rural faith community enjoys renewed enthusiasm

Parish Profile

St. Columba-St. Patrick,
Caledonia



By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

CALEDONIA — On Sunday night, April 16, more than 150 parishioners at St. Columba-St. Patrick Parish gathered for a potluck supper to honor Tom Cook, a former parish council member and social ministry volunteer, for more than 35 years of service, as well as Deacon Owen Bowers, who was leaving the parish after serving it for two years.

Cook, a tireless promoter of church and community volunteerism, told the parishioners that God allowed him to survive his fourth heart attack last fall for one of two possible reasons.

"He sent me back down for something here, or the devil don't want me, so here I am, you'll have to put up with me," he said.

The lighthearted supper took place in the St. Columba church hall. Founded by Irish immigrants in 1885 as "St. Columbkills" with St. Patrick's in Mumford as its mission church (which itself had been built in the 1850s), St. Columbkill became St. Columba in 1913. St. Patrick's closed as a church in 1992, but St. Columba still uses the building as a secondhand clothing distribution center.

The dinner looked like any social event at a Catholic parish, with adults chatting amiably as children scurried about, in-



John Powell/Photo Intern
Bill Reinagel and Mike Stephany, holding the pitcher, wash the feet of Judy DePalma during the Holy Thursday Mass on April 20 at St. Columba Church in Caledonia.

SNAPSHOT

St. Columba/St. Patrick
198 North St.
Caledonia, N.Y. 14423-1035
716/538-2126

Ministerial Staff:
Priest administrator:
Father Walter Plominski
Pastoral associate/
religious education coordinator:
Sister Virginia Taylor, RSM
Secretary:
Barbara Caluorie
Bookkeeper:
Victoria Dutton
Parish cat:
"Cardinal" Spunky

came here four years ago. The program, in place for the last three years at the parish, encourages the formation of small Christian communities in a parish that pray together and read Scripture on a weekly basis over several weeks.

"If you're going to build a church (spiritually), this is the kind of program that you would do," the priest said.

Father Plominski added that there are 18 small groups of various sizes encompassing 235 people participating in Renew at the 700-family parish. The program is divided into "seasons" of six weeks each during which the participants meet, often in one another's homes.

Peter Lent — who joked that both his names get batted around the parish quite a bit this time of year, Easter season — is one of the Renew program's small group facilitators.

"It gives me satisfaction that I'm contributing to the parish," Lent said, noting he and his wife, Barbara, have two boys and have belonged to the faith community since 1987. He added that Renew has allowed him to get to know his fellow Caledonia Catholics better.

"I think I can safely say that I can be as open with these people as with my family," he said of his small group.

Karen Pankow, who serves on the Renew steering committee with her husband, Jeffrey, said that Renew has answered a deep need within her soul.

"I was looking for something beyond just church every Sunday," she said. She noted she enjoys discussing the meaning of Scripture in her life with others and her husband.

"It's become something that we look forward to each season because we get closer to God."

Renew has also brought the parish closer to being a thriving faith community, according to Victoria Dutton, bookkeeper. She estimated that weekend Mass attendance and collections have increased 10 percent since the program started, enabling the parish to operate in the black after several years of deficits, and to hire someone like Sister Taylor who came to the parish last year.

But Renew isn't the only reason why the parish has come back. Building community is also one of the benefits of the parish's 65-member Knights of Columbus council, according to Jim Nailos, a parishioner for 43 years, who holds what he calls the Knights' "most coveted title" — past grand knight.

"It's a lot of work," he said of leading a council, though he quickly added that the fraternalism he enjoys with his fellow Knights is worth the effort. The community spirit exemplified by the Knights is only a reflection of the wider spirit Caledonia's citizens have in general, he said.

"It's just a great place to raise your kids," Nailos said. "People are friendly. People are caring. I'll never move from Caledonia. My next home is moving to a 4' by 8' (plot) in St. Columba's cemetery."

MISSION NEWS



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and father

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