

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Ss. Peter and Paul marks 150 years in Elmira

By Kathleen Schwar  
Assistant editor

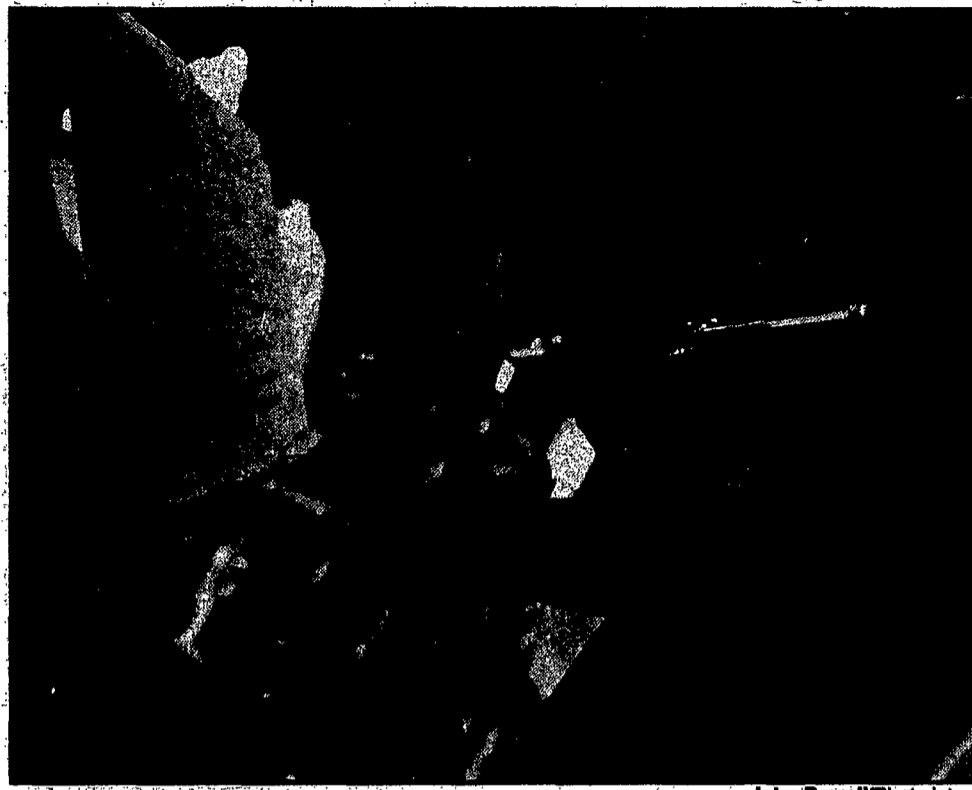
Ss. Peter and Paul Parish has been a rock of faith in Elmira since 1849 — no small cause for celebration. And indeed, the parish has been celebrating its sesquicentennial since last June. The culmination will be an 11 a.m. Mass Sunday, June 4, with Bishop Matthew H. Clark presiding and giving the homily.

Concelebrating will be Father Patrick Connor, pastor; Father Edward Foy, former pastor; and Father Bernard Creighton, OFM, former parishioner.

"I think the celebration, first of all, is an act of thanksgiving, gratitude to God for the blessings over the years and decades," Father Connor commented. "It's a recognition we are connected not only with people of the past in terms of our parish, but also the wider church, especially with the bishop coming down."

"... It's also asking God's continued blessings on our leaders, volunteers and people for guidance for the future."

According to *The Diocese of Rochester in America 1868-1993*, by Father Robert Robert F. McNamara, Ss. Peter and Paul



John Powell/Photo Intern

Lisa Phillips plays the flute at choir rehearsal at Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Elmira on May 28, in anticipation of the parish's 150th anniversary Mass June 4.

was the first church established in Chemung County. Ten years ago it clustered with two other parishes, which have since closed: St. John the Baptist and St. Cecilia. The parish now has 850-890 registered parishioners.

Father Connor noted the sesquicentennial celebration also recognizes the contributions of those two parishes.

Sunday's celebration will continue with a dinner at the American Legion Hall in Elmira Heights — at no charge for the 350 parishioners and others expected to attend. The 150th anniversary committee, headed by Jim McGann Sr., raised enough money to offer the free banquet, and buy an Oriental rug and new furniture for the sanctuary.

Strawberry festivals, vesper services, auctions and "lots of potluck suppers" have helped raise money for the banquet celebration, observed Millie Ziminski, an office administrator.

"We had a lot of social events to make money, because we are all going to eat out," she said, adding that the events were "spirited things to get us together."

The observance was extended into this year because it's the Jubilee Year 2000, Ziminski said.

In recognition of traditions celebrated more routinely in times past, the parish recently finished a nine-day novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

Ss. Peter and Paul has had a tragic history. Among the trials it suffered was the flood of 1972, when water rose 14 feet in the church, over pews, over the Stations of the Cross and wrought great destruction of the property. Its second church was said to have been built at the cost of \$50,000, three years and one life — that of Father John Boyle, the pastor, who died after a fall from scaffolding while inspecting construction progress in December 1856.

Buffalo Bishop John Timon dedicated the church July 19, 1857, when the church was still part of the Diocese of Buffalo. That church is believed to be the oldest today in the diocese that has been continuously used for worship.

During the Civil War, Father Martin Kavanaugh was pastor, and received permission from the government to minister at the prison camp in Elmira until the war ended.

Noting that St. John the Baptist, built for German immigrants in 1866, was the second church built in Elmira, Ziminski remarked, "History is repeating. St. John's is sold, and is back to the mother church. This is the only Catholic Church on the east side."

## Deacon personnel office begins transition

By Kathleen Schwar  
Assistant editor

The Office of Deacon Personnel begins a transition this month, as Deacon Tom Cass ends 3½ years as director, and Deacon David Palma prepares to take over July 10.

Also this month, the National Council of Catholic Bishops is expected to approve the first comprehensive norms for deacons in this country. Later this year, the Diocese of Rochester will approve its new guidelines for permanent deacons. The guidelines were developed by Deacon Cass and a committee.

"He has really done the laying of some very important groundwork as we go into the new millennium," Deacon Palma commented. "I am stepping into big shoes. ... My hope is I will be able to follow the example he set as a director."

Ordained as part of the diocese's first class of permanent deacons in 1982, Deacon Ed Sergeant commented that Deacon Cass "has been known for his leadership skills and his vision of the role of the deacon in the diocese. He has been very good about maintaining and promoting a high level of professionalism amongst the deacons."

"David, I think, also has a very good vision of the future of the role of deacon in the diocese and the role of service we bring to the church," he added.

Deacon Palma has been a campus minister at the Rochester Institute of Technology for three years. A Rochester native, he grew up in St. Theodore's Parish and was ordained from St. Mary's Parish. Before his ordination and ministry as pastoral associate at the Catholic Communities of St. Anne/St. Gregory Parish in Palmyra/Marion (1990-95), he taught Catholic junior high school and for 10 years was director of the Nazareth College youth theater program. He also was a migrant specialist.

He has a master's degree in theology from St. Bernard's Institute and a master's

in liberal studies from the State University of New York College at Brockport. The deacon's wife, Julianne, is a campus minister and English teacher at Our Lady of Mercy High School, and has her master's in theology from St. Bernard's Institute.

Deacon Cass, a deacon at St. Michael's Parish, Newark, plans to travel with his wife, Jean. Five of their seven children live in other states: Vermont, Texas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Connecticut. One is a Discalced Carmelite nun in Arlington, Texas. Another, their foster son, Craig Bullock, was just named pastoral administrator of Ss. Peter and Paul Parish, Rochester. The couple will celebrate their 40th anniversary in September while on a trip to Oberammergau, Germany.

Deacon Cass also is resigning from the board of directors of Catholic Charities and as president of the board of Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes. He also steps down from the Clifton Springs House of John home for the terminally ill, which his wife, a registered nurse, was key in starting.

"We essentially are freeing ourselves up and will see in the next chapter of life what unfolds," the deacon said. "Something we wanted to do quite a while is to simplify our life, get rid of a lot of these possessions."

## Parish's closing raises questions for its members

Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Father Paul Tomasso, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Rochester, spoke philosophically about the closing of the church slated for July 1. (See Page 1.)

"No priest gets ordained to close parishes or hoping that this is part of his vocation," he said. "No one can rejoice over the closing of a parish."

The parish will be the first to close in Rochester since St. Theresa's Parish closed in 1997. That parish's members merged with those of St. Stanislaus Parish, also in Rochester.

St. Francis has 180 registered households — including 40 shut-in members — and the combined average attendance has been 124 for the English Mass and Spanish Mass. The parish's small numbers was one of the prime reasons its parish council voted to close. Still, Father Tomasso expressed hope that the St. Francis parishioners would go on to enrich the lives of their neighboring parishes.

"I do believe that new life will come from this," he said.

The parish provided its members information on what's to come in a question/answer sheet distributed May 28, he noted. The sheet was designed to give background on the closing and help parishioners decide what steps they must take now in leaving their church for another.

For example, 78 parishioners regularly attend the parish's Sunday noon Mass in Spanish. The sheet indicated that the Mass will continue at a neighboring parish, and that St. Francis members will be surveyed to select the parish.

On another note, St. Francis property may be leased or sold, although the decision to do so will be "made slowly," taking into account such factors as the church's "spiritual and stabilizing influence in the neighborhood" and "that outreach and hope are needed in the neighborhood," according to the information distributed. It also states that various "ministers and agencies have expressed interest in the property" but that no meetings have been held with prospective tenants or buyers. A small committee of representatives from the parish may help determine the property's final fate.

Father Tomasso also is pastor of four other parishes: St. Anthony of Padua, Holy Family, Holy Apostles and Ss. Peter and Paul, all on the city's west side. The priest pointed out that all four parishes have invited St. Francis members to join them.

The west-side parishes are currently forming a Strategic Plan Implementation Team that will include three former members of St. Francis. The team is akin to similar teams of parish representatives throughout the diocese that have been formulating plans on how to deal with the priest shortage by sharing clergy and other resources.

Father Tomasso said that St. Francis members will be surveyed as to what neighboring parish will become the new home for St. Francis parishioners and the parish's records. The parish council at the "new" parish will also have three seats open for at least one term, and possibly as many as three terms, expressly set aside for former St. Francis parishioners.

Father Tomasso said that St. Francis would hold some sort of event to mark the closing of the parish, but that no date had been set yet.

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