

PARISH PROFILE

Helping hands are aplenty at Tompkins parish

Parish Profile

St. James the Apostle
Trumansburg



By Mike Latona
Staff writer

TRUMANSBURG — Staff members' pay is never a part of budget discussions at St. James the Apostle Parish — mainly because there isn't any payroll.

"It astounds me. We came from a very wealthy parish in Iowa, and it was paid (positions for everything)," said Laurie Miller, one of three volunteer youth ministers at St. James.

Volunteer support is the lifeblood of this parish in northwest Tompkins County. St. James will be at its volunteering best Nov. 4 when its bazaar, featuring a crafts and bake sale organized by the Women's Guild, takes place from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The youth group will make the chili that day, and other parishioners will help provide soup, hot dogs, sandwiches and dessert.

The bazaar is a major annual event for this small parish, which numbers approximately 265 families. Parishioners Jerri Broshears and Maiv Fairchild said that they enjoy being part of a modestly sized parish.

"Everybody feels a tremendous sense of community within this little parish, and everybody wants it to stay this way," Broshears said.

"You know more people, and probably we know Father better. He speaks to everyone after Mass," said Fairchild, referring to the pastor, Father Eugene O'Hara, OFM Cap.

And yet, because of its size, St. James was threatened with the loss of a full-time priest when Father Robert Kanka retired in 1994 after 14 years as pastor. He now lives in retirement at St. Ann's Church in Hornell.

Following discussions with diocesan officials, the parish struck an arrangement with Capuchin priests who were already staffing two neighboring parishes, St. Francis Solanus in Interlaken and Holy Cross in Ovid.

Father O'Hara is the second Capuchin priest to serve in Trumansburg. He succeeded Father John O'Hare, OFM Cap., pastor from 1994 until his death in 1996.

Father O'Hara celebrates three weekend Masses at St. James. Without the Capuchins, Broshears said, the parish would likely have been forced to reduce its Mass schedule and share a pastor with other churches.

"We're extremely grateful to the Capuchins. Because of that, the volunteer time is a nice reflection of our gratitude," said Broshears, who lectors, teaches religious education and serves on the parish pastoral council.

In turn, Father O'Hara is appreciative of the parish community.

"They're very dedicated, very friendly and cooperative. So you couldn't ask for much more," he said.

That dedication is exemplified, for instance, through youth-group service efforts. Miller said the 35-member group helps provide food for needy families, visits nursing homes and takes part in an area Crop Walk.

Fairchild and Annette Hade, members



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Lori Emmons, a volunteer religious education teacher at St. James Church in Trumansburg, passes out papers for the first Communion class to color Oct. 22. (From left): Dylan Hardesty, Danielle Emmons, Melissa Silenzio, Carly Allen, Britni Walter and Thomas Perkins, all 7-year-olds.

of the Women's Guild, said that group raises funds so the parish can buy supplies and equipment required for church upkeep.

"And we give a Bible to every graduating senior in the parish, whether they come to church or not," added Hade, who also leads a Medjugorje prayer group.

St. James the Apostle's first church, in a former Methodist church building, was dedicated in 1857. St. James was a mission of Ithaca's Immaculate Conception Parish until 1872, when it became a parish and acquired Interlaken's St. Francis Solanus as its mission parish. That arrangement lasted until 1956, when the Capuchins assumed administration in Interlaken.

In 1895, St. James Church was moved one block west from Main Street in Trumansburg to Whig Street. A 1949 fire destroyed the building, but it was quickly rebuilt and rededicated in 1950.

St. James has a strong spirit of ecumenism, joining other Trumansburg churches to operate a community food pantry. Those churches of various denominations join up for Christmas festivities as well, Father O'Hara said.

There is also collaboration with St. James' Catholic neighbors to the north, St. Francis Solanus and Holy Cross. All three parishes are in the same pastoral planning group and combine their RCIA and pre-cana programs, as well as some youth group events. However, St. James' 90-member religious education program remains a distinct entity.

Father O'Hara resides at a Capuchin friary on Cayuga Lake, nine miles north of the village. Ministering in the Trumansburg area is quite a contrast from the pastor's childhood setting of New York City, he said.

"There, you just kind of stayed in your own block. Here, you're always on the go — I don't know how many miles I drive a day," said Father O'Hara, who also lived in Rochester and celebrated his first Mass at St. Peter and Paul Church upon his 1961

ordination.

But just south of Trumansburg is the bustling city of Ithaca, renowned for its institutes of higher learning.

"Trumansburg is a little rural, but also very cosmopolitan. It's very on the borderline. You have families with farms for five

generations, and there's also a high level of scholarship going on," said parishioner John Chiment, a professor at Cornell University and former religious-education administrator at St. James.

"We're an in-between parish," Broshears added. "And we're open to everyone."

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