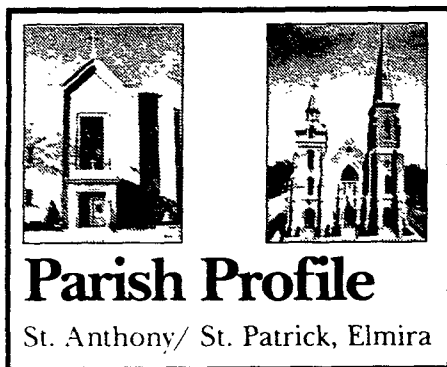


# PARISH PROFILE

## Elmira cluster strives for 'spirit of collaboration'



### Parish Profile

St. Anthony/ St. Patrick, Elmira

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ELMIRA — Blending two churches with firm but differing ethnic roots is not a process that happens overnight. Yet nearly seven years after clustering, St. Anthony and St. Patrick churches can cite many areas of progress — among them, a consolidated staff and a strong mix of parishioners at spiritual, social and service activities.

"Each church wants not to lose its identity, but to bring about the spirit of collaboration," said Father Walter Wainwright, who began as the Southern Tier cluster's pastor last June.

"I encourage the sharing of abilities, gifts and talents. I just refer to this as 'our parish,'" Father Wainwright added.

For instance, in the area of social ministry, Father Wainwright noted that this was the first year both churches teamed up to make Christmas baskets for the poor. And in recent years, St. Patrick's has begun maintaining a booth at the annual St. Anthony's festival. In addition, the Sacred Heart Ladies' Society — begun by St. Anthony's — just added 20 new members and most were from St. Patrick's.

Further evidence of balance: St. Patrick's and St. Anthony's have six members each on the parish pastoral council. And, the cluster's 8 a.m. weekday Mass is held November through April at St. Anthony's before shifting for the remaining six months to St. Patrick's.

According to Father Wainwright, St. Patrick's membership totals 700 to 800 families, with St. Anthony's standing at approximately 400 families. The churches are located a few blocks apart, near downtown Elmira.

Yet despite their proximity, St. Patrick's and St. Anthony's each have traditionally distinct communities.

St. Patrick's was founded in 1871 for the city's Irish Catholic population. The parish also has a smattering of Polish, Italian and German roots, according to Rose Kingston, 90, a lifelong parishioner who counts the Sunday collection.

One of St. Patrick's most noteworthy annual events occurs, quite naturally, on St. Patrick's Day. The church holds an 11 a.m. Mass on March 17 that is also attended by priests and nuns who formerly served at St. Patrick's.

St. Anthony's was established in 1907 to accommodate the city's quickly growing Italian community. This heritage is celebrated each September at the parish



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

(From left) St. Anthony/St. Patrick parishioners Dorothy Ames, Nick Marino Jr. and Cathy Marino refill a food tray at the St. Anthony parish center in Elmira Feb. 18, for an appreciation dinner for festival workers. Approximately 150 people attended.



Monica Schornstheimer, 5, reaches to touch her 2-week-old baby sister, Valerie, cradled by their mom, Linda, at the festival worker appreciation dinner.

festival, where participants are treated to a wide array of Italian foods.

"I've gone to the festival ever since I got married 40 years ago," said Jim Pirozzolo, a St. Anthony's parishioner for all of his 60 years. Pirozzolo serves on the festival's planning committee and is also co-chair of the cluster's buildings-and-grounds committee.

In recent decades, both parishes have been affected by the city's declining population. Parish membership has dipped, and St. Anthony's School closed in 1971 with St. Patrick's School following suit in 1985. Father Wainwright, a native Elmiran who grew up in St. Mary's Parish, commented that Elmira has never fully recovered from the memorable flood of 1972.

Another change — one that has affected the entire diocese — is the lack of available priests. Beginning in the summer of 1994, St. Patrick's and St. Anthony's be-

came a two-church community served by one full-time priest. That particular transition had some definite bumps along the way, Pirozzolo remarked.

"The traditions of the Italian people, it's something they relish. That's why it was so hard," Pirozzolo said. "We felt we would lose our identity, as well as St. Patrick's feeling the same way. The first couple of years, it was pretty difficult."

On the other hand, the cluster model has helped both churches to keep operating. Two other Elmira churches, St. Cecilia and St. John the Baptist, were closed in 1998.

"I feel thankful that no church (in this cluster) was closed," Kingston said.

As time has gone on, Pirozzolo said, the spirit of cooperation between St. Patrick's and St. Anthony's has grown significantly. For example, he said, all of the cluster's services recently had to be held at St. Patrick's for a couple of weeks after the boiler at St. Anthony's broke. Pirozzolo's reaction? "Thank God we've got St. Patrick's."

Kingston noted that people from both

## SNAPSHOTS

St. Anthony/St. Patrick Cluster  
St. Anthony's Church:  
W. Washington Ave.  
at N. Main St., Elmira  
St. Patrick's Church:  
Clinton St. at Park Pl., Elmira

Mailing Address:  
604 Park Place  
Elmira, N.Y. 14901  
Phone: 607/733-0300

### Ministerial staff:

Pastor:  
Father Walter L. Wainwright  
Deacon:  
Deacon I. Michael Mangione  
Pastoral associate:  
Sister Maureen Mylott, SC  
Social ministry coordinator:  
Sister Lucy Walawender, RSM  
Liturgical coordinator:  
Arlene Siconolfi  
Religious education coordinator:  
Rose Bennett  
Secretaries:  
Betty DeBlasio, Theresa Shea  
Cluster pastoral council chair:  
Kathy Carrier  
Organist:  
Bob Walsh  
Business manager:  
Faith Eaton

churches raise no objection to attending Mass in the same building.

"It's coming along much better than when it started," she said. "The hard feelings, if there were any, have more or less disappeared."

Kathy Carrier, the cluster's pastoral council chair, agreed that collaboration between St. Anthony's and St. Patrick's is getting better all the time.

"Each group has tried to involve people from both churches. It's the people of the body of Christ. You can't go back to what's yours and what's mine," said Carrier, a St. Patrick's parishioner for more than 30 years.

"It works. A lot of it is just breaking down old feelings and sentiments," Father Wainwright said.

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