

# PARISH PROFILE

## Many stories of grace fill large parish in Penfield

### Parish Profile



St. Joseph's, Penfield

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

PENFIELD — Working for a parish is a little different than working in the commercial world, according to Sharon Dries, parish secretary for the past decade at St. Joseph's Church.

A veteran of the banking world, she noted that her current job consists of more than the office duties she'd been called to perform in her previous professional life. Sometimes it involves informal ministry as well.

For example, she said, a few weeks back, she sat down with a woman who needed to make funeral arrangements for a relative. Instead of simply compiling the necessary information, she conversed with the woman about the deceased for a substantial amount of time. Dries said she was so moved by the woman's story that she wound up taking time out of her workday to attend the funeral a few days later. The woman sent her a thank-you note.

"I really enjoy my job, and I enjoy the interaction I have with the parishioners," Dries said. "Even though there are some days where I have total chaos, there are other days when I think 'This is such a great job!'"

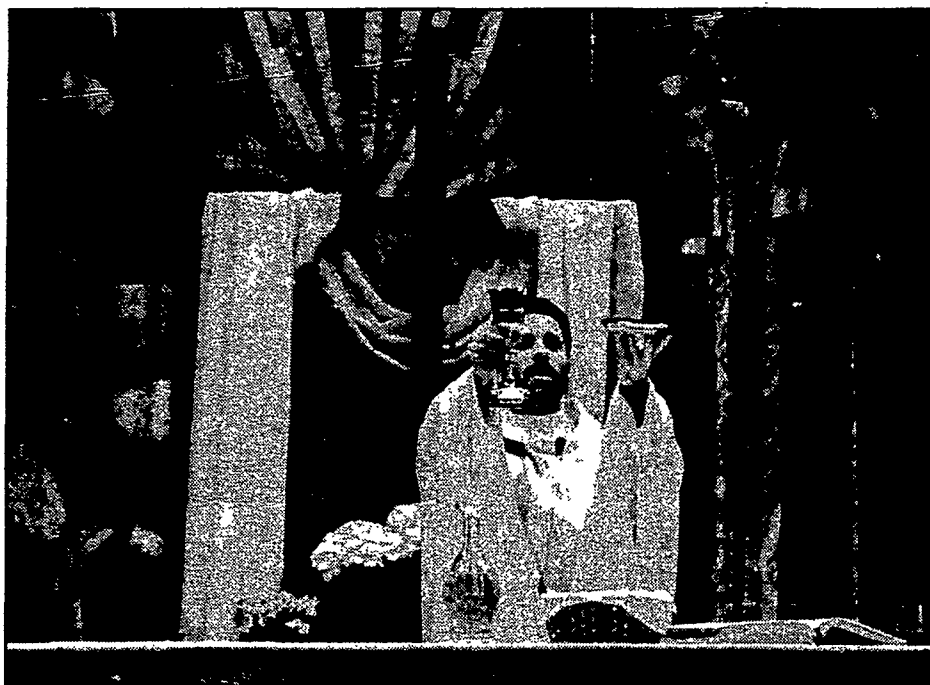
### State of the parish

Dries certainly has plenty to keep her busy at St. Joseph's, which is second only to St. Lawrence Parish, Greece, in numbers of families registered at a parish in the Diocese of Rochester. More than 3,000 families are registered at the parish, and about 10,000 people attend its services, according to Father Kevin P. Murphy, pastor for the last five years.

"We're a small city unto ourselves," he said. "We have a full church now at most Masses."

Founded in 1860 by German immigrants as a mission church of the now-defunct St. Joseph's Church, Rochester, the parish was modest in size until after World War II. Then, as Penfield itself grew, St. Joseph's membership surged from a little more than 100 families to almost 1,000 by 1965.

Today, unlike many parishes that are made up primarily of the elderly or the young, St. Joseph's has a great deal of both, according to Lisa Smith, chairwoman of the parish's pastoral council. She noted that a recent study of the parish revealed St. Joseph's has more than 1,400 members between the ages of 4 and 14. It also has more



Karin von Voigtlander/Photo intern

Father Eric Phillips, parochial vicar, consecrates the bread and wine at Mass at St. Joseph's in Penfield April 21.

than 1,100 over 60.

The study also looked at such areas as programming and staffing, she said, and will be used to help the parish map out its future. Smith said Father Murphy plans to share the results of the parish study with parishioners in a "State of the Parish" speech tentatively slated for June 3.

One thing Smith won't need to learn from the study is the fact that St. Joseph's is "very children-friendly," she said. Three of the church's five liturgies each weekend contain Liturgy of the Word sessions for children during which the kids leave the general congregation to go into separate rooms to listen to readings and commentary by adult presiders. Smith and her husband, David, have three boys: Benjamin, 11; Thomas, 8; and Zachary, 7. At special times of the year, like Christmas, she said, the children have even been invited up to the altar to listen to the homily.

"They engage the kids in a way I don't see elsewhere," Smith said of the pastoral staff.

A parish volunteer who regularly works with parish children is Meg Godly, who attends the church with her husband, Christopher, and their daughter Laura, 8, a second-grader at the diocesan school located at St. Joseph's. Godly is a lector, eucharistic minister and member of the parish's liturgy committee, Worship Work Group. Additionally, she also chairs the school's development committee and her husband volunteers at the school.

Godly serves as a presider for the children's Liturgy of the Word. Such work entails bringing the high-minded notions embodied in Scripture down to a level at which the children can comprehend them.

"You don't have to take a passage and perform exegesis on it," she said. "You can take a feeling and that makes the Word come alive to kids — and more alive to me."

### Be prepared

Another member of the worship group is Patricia Filor, a Buffalo native who has belonged to St. Joseph's for four years. Filor serves as a eucharistic minister and lector at the parish. She said that the lectors put a lot of thought into their readings, just as the parish puts a lot of thought into its liturgies.

"I feel it is very important to prepare (the liturgy) properly so those in attendance can get the most from having it well-prepared," she said.

That philosophy extends to the parish's music ministry as well, according to George Henkel, who directs the adult choir for the Sunday 9 a.m. Mass. A retired director of music from the Brighton school district, Henkel said he doesn't have the choir sing just any bunch of hymns each Sunday. For example, he said, a Gospel passage about the risen Christ greeting his Apostles would be supported by a hymn referring to Christ's peace.

"It doesn't always match up perfectly, but (the music) has the same kind of tenor that the readings do."

His wife of 41 years, Marty Henkel, is a soprano in the 9 a.m. choir. Like Father Murphy, she noted that the parishioners have a strong commitment to singing.

"They also stay till the end of Mass and sing four or five verses," she said. "You might think you were in an Episcopal or Methodist church," she added with a laugh.

The parishioners may sing like Protestants, but it's the parish's Catholic faith that attracted Alison A. Peterson who, with her husband, Kevin, has two daughters. Peterson grew up attending the Church of God, a "Bible-based" Protestant church in Orange County, Calif., and said her upbringing was actually anti-Catholic in nature. However, her friendship with a Catholic woman and her reading of a book titled *Rome Sweet Home* by Catholic convert Scott Hahn led her to adopt the faith of her husband. Peterson was one of 11 people to enter the church through St. Joseph's Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults program this Easter. She was joined by her daughters as well, Chelsea, age 7, and Katelyn, 9.

Peterson said her own story of conversion is documented in the recently published book *When Only One Converts* (Our Sunday Visitor Books). The Catholic friend who played a role in her conversion, Michele Fitzpatrick, was a contributing author, she said. Peterson credited such people as Pat Fox, the parish's faith formation director, and Father Murphy for helping her explore the Catholic faith.

"They are just so easy to talk to," she said. "No question was too stupid."

### SNAPSHOT

St. Joseph's Church  
43 Gebhardt Road  
Penfield, N.Y. 14526  
Phone: 716/586-8089  
<http://www.frontiernet.net/~stjoseph>

#### Ministerial staff:

Pastor:  
Father Kevin Murphy  
Parochial vicar:  
Father Eric Phillips  
Pastoral associate:  
Sister Pat Switzer, RSM  
Pastoral associate:  
Nancy Giordano  
Deacon:  
Ken Arnold  
Liturgy/music director:  
Nancy Veronesi  
Parish visitor:  
Judy Roth  
Faith formation:  
Pat Fox, Ursula Arnold

#### Youth ministry:

Johan Engstrom  
Business manager:  
Brian Waldmiller

#### Secretary:

Sharon Dries

#### Receptionist:

Eleanor Czarniecki

#### School principal:

Marylin Dewey

#### Pastoral Council chair:

Lisa Smith

#### Pastoral Council vice chair:

Mike Dane

#### In residence:

Father Pius Pathmarajah

In residence at Mercy Living

Center: Father L. John Hedges

Faith formation is an important component of parish life. For example, a total of 162 families participate in a home-based family faith program, according to Ursula Arnold, program director. Groups of three to six families come together once or twice a month in each other's homes to learn about their faith, she said. The families also engage in service projects.

On that note, the parish also has a strong commitment to social justice, according to Sister Pat Switzer, RSM, one of two pastoral associates along with Nancy Giordano. Parishioners have participated in a dizzying array of social service efforts over the years from furnishing a hospital in Haiti to building a home for Flower City Habitat for Humanity Inc., which works with low-income families and individuals.

Currently, more than a dozen parishioners are participating in a pilot program in Monroe County designed to pair such people with families moving from welfare to work, she said. The program is overseen by Catholic Family Center, the Rochester District of the United Methodist Church and Greater Rochester Community of Churches, to which the diocese belongs. Titled "Walk With You," the program is designed to put families working to get off welfare into relationships with families that can help them with such issues as budgeting, job-hunting and transportation. If the program flies at St. Joseph's, it will be expanded to other churches, Catholic and non-Catholic, throughout the area as well, Sister Switzer said.

As for Sister Switzer herself, after 16 years at St. Joseph's, she's leaving at the end of June. Her efforts will be recognized at a parish volunteer appreciation party Friday, April 27. Sister Switzer said he has enjoyed her years at the parish and said she particularly liked the attitudes of its members.

"They're very generous people and very kind of natural," she said. "I think the parish, in a way, is kind of casual. They're not stiff. ... They have a good sense of humor."

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