

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Parish renovations, building projects multiply

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Parishes in the Diocese of Rochester seem to be approaching a peak period of considering, undertaking or completing renovation projects, according to Eric Patchke, diocesan manager of buildings and properties.

Between 15 and 20 parishes are in some stage of a renovation and/or new construction project, almost double the number of parishes doing such projects in the mid-1990s, he noted. Parishes in various stages of the renovation or building process include Holy Cross, Ovid; Eastside Catholic, Elmira; St. Leo's, Hilton; and Assumption in Fairport, according to a list provided by Patchke.

"There does seem to be something of a cyclic nature to these," he said of parish renovations. "Are we about to enter a valley, or are we about to enter a peak? I just don't know."

On average, there are between eight and 12 such projects going on at any one time in the diocese, Patchke said. The diocesan official said the diocese must review and approve any parish renovation or building project that will cost more than 10 percent of the parish's annual plate collection.

The diocese is preparing to release updated guidelines for parish renovation projects within the next two months, Patchke added. Among the new features of the guidelines, last updated in 1997, is a building project review process "check-off list" of 15 steps each parish must take to complete a project. Patchke said the new check-off list will enable his office, the Diocesan Building Commission made up of volunteers who review projects, and the parishes all to stay on the same page when undertaking projects.

"It's an attempt to streamline the process," Patchke said, noting that sometimes there has been confusion in the past over what requirements parishes had to fulfill in order to gain diocesan approval of a project. "It's an easier-to-understand process."



This is a view of St. Louis Church from Pittsford's Main Street, as the church undergoes renovation.

Karin von Volgtlander/Photo intern

Among the parishes currently upgrading their facilities are Our Lady of Mercy in Greece, where Bishop Matthew H. Clark joined parish leaders and members Aug. 13 for a groundbreaking. Fred Sauter, a member of the parish's building committee, said the parish has never worshipped in a traditional church building, and is renovating a combined gym/worship space where services have taken place since 1961. The parish was founded in 1957. It first held services in a local theater, and then in the parish school building before moving services to the gym/worship space, according to a parish history.

The parish plans to renovate in two phases, Sauter said. Phase one calls for the construction of a 1,930 square-foot addition to the gym/worship space, and will include a new eucharistic chapel; a gathering space, or narthex, adjacent to the new main entrance; a new baptismal font; stained glass windows; a handicapped-accessible ramp to the sanctuary; restrooms; an updated heating and cooling system; and new seating with pews in a semi-circle. The exterior will be refinished as well.

When completed, the parish will be able to accommodate 150 more worshippers at services than the current 350, Sauter said.

Phase one will cost \$1.5 million, he said, with \$1 million coming from a parish fundraising drive and the remainder coming from parish savings.

Phase two, "in the indefinite future," calls for the building of a parish center and offices on the site of the parish's school building. (The school closed in 1980.)

The first phase still needs final approval from Greece authorities, but Sauter said the parish expects to get the go-ahead. He added that the first phase should take six months to complete once started.

Meanwhile, in Pittsford, after a spirited battle last year with the Village of Pittsford over plans to renovate and expand seating and parking at the parish, St. Louis is well on its way to completing its renovation project, according to Father James A. Schwartz, pastor.

In an attempt to prepare the parish for the decreased availability of priests in the future, the parish had wanted to expand its seating and parking to accommodate

more worshippers for fewer Masses. But village authorities were opposed to the parish's original plan for both aesthetic and traffic concerns.

The parish scaled back its original plan to add seating for 180 more people beyond the current capacity of more than 450. It instead add seating for 100 more worshippers, he said. Additionally, the parish shelved its plan to expand parking, in favor of using a nearby parking lot on Sundays that is owned by the Town of Pittsford.

Father Schwartz added that the parish is also building a one-story narthex and a two-story building to connect it to the parish hall. The new structures will give the church more gathering and meeting space, and also two new classrooms for students at the parish school, which is located in two other buildings on the parish campus. Church renovation is expected to be complete by mid-November, and the new classrooms are expected to be completed by January. The pastor added that he is happy the project finally met with approval from local authorities.

"Hopefully, we'll live happily ever after," he said with a chuckle.

Like St. Louis, St. Patrick's Parish in Cato also decided to expand seating in its church in anticipation of fewer Masses with greater average attendance, according to Father William Leone, pastor of the Northern Cayuga Cluster, which also includes the parishes of St. John's in Port Byron and St. Joseph's in Weedsport.

By Sept. 1, a project to expand seating capacity at St. Patrick's from 120 people to 208 should be complete, Father Leone said, noting the project cost is \$275,000.

"We're basically bumping out both sides of the church as it has existed for 100 years," he said.

Like Father Schwartz, Father Leone said that such renovations are necessary in an age when fewer and fewer priests are available to say Mass.

"Back in the '50s and '60s, what you could do to alleviate crowding was add another Mass," he said. "Of course, these days, you can't do that."

## Trappist monastery head will step down after three decades

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

As head of Abbey of the Genesee for three decades, Abbot John Eudes Bamberger, OCSO, has enjoyed a strong sense of family among his fellow monks. For that reason, following his upcoming retirement, Abbot Bamberger has opted to stay put in Livingston County rather than return to the abbey's motherhouse in Gethsemani, Ky.

"I feel I belong here. A Trappist puts down roots wherever he is called an abbot," Abbot Bamberger explained.

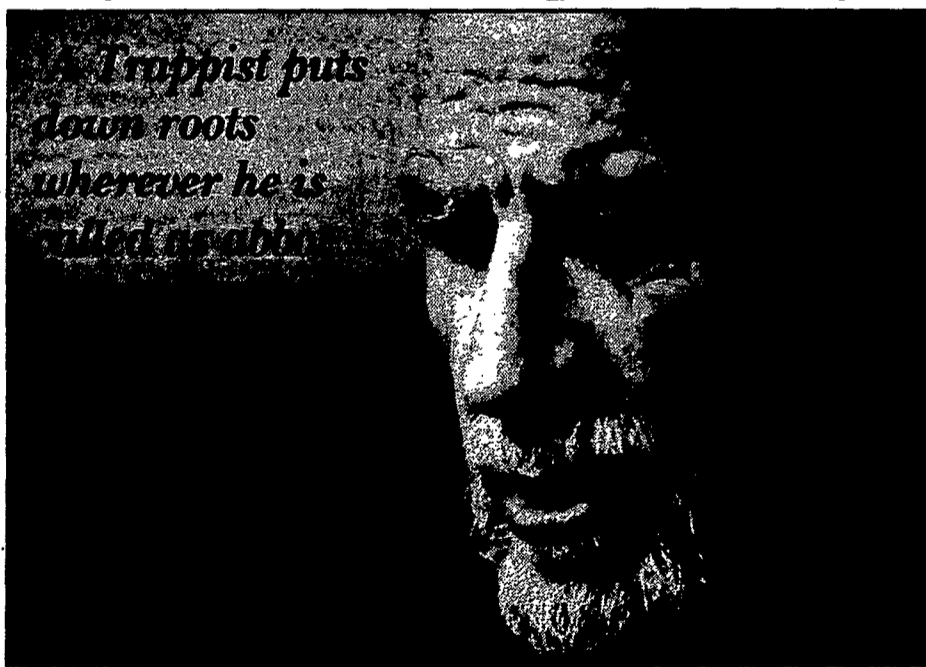
Abbot Bamberger will submit his resignation Aug. 24, his 75th birthday, as required by the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance. The resignation comes three months after Abbey of the Genesee staged its 50th-anniversary celebration.

A new abbot will be elected within two weeks to three months following Abbot Bamberger's retirement. His successor can come from either within Abbey of the Genesee or another Trappist community.

The abbot said he plans to continue full participation with Abbey of the Genesee's monks for daily labor and prayer, and he will also continue teaching. The most noticeable change will be his planned relocation to one of the hermitages located on the abbey's grounds.

"It's more withdrawn, less active," Abbot Bamberger said of his new life as a hermit. "That allows me to focus on the life of prayer, solitude, meditation, study and spiritual direction, and to do some writing."

Abbot Bamberger is a native of Coving-



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

ton, Ky., about 150 miles from the Trappist monastery at Gethsemani. He said he was originally drawn to monastic life after reading a book written by monks from Gethsemani. As a young adult in medical school, he made a retreat to the monastery.

"That place just felt right to me. It was intuition," Abbot Bamberger said.

He graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1949 and moved to Georgetown University Hospital as an intern. But in 1950 he entered Gethsemani, and six years later he was ordained a Trappist priest at Gethsemani.

Following ordination, Abbot Bamberger returned to Georgetown Hospital and

spent nearly two years as a resident in psychiatry. He then returned to Gethsemani where one of his chief roles was to provide counseling services.

In 1971 he was elected head of Abbey of the Genesee even though he had never resided at the abbey, which had been founded 20 years earlier.

"They knew me a bit from being secretary general (of the Trappists' international order)," he explained.

Abbot Bamberger was secretary general from 1969-74, serving two three-year terms. He was later elected twice as president of his order's international pastoral commission, serving a total of approxi-

mately 12 years.

At Abbey of the Genesee, Abbot Bamberger said he has attempted to foster a spirit of welcoming over the years. The monastery, located near the hamlet of Piffard, is a popular spot for retreats as well as visitors' day trips. Masses and prayer services are open to the public.

"In a way, the guests feel part of the congregation instead of observers," Abbot Bamberger said.

Yet the abbot's strongest ties, he said, lie within his cloistered community of brothers.

"Being abbot has been a blessing and a grace for me. I think it has been an opportunity for all of us here to grow together," Abbot Bamberger said. "We've had a lot of unity, cooperation and friendly spirit."

Abbot Bamberger is looking forward to this continued friendly spirit under the newly elected abbot. He said he's in fine health and doesn't really care to slow down despite being officially retired.

"That's the way I feel. I have to remind myself I'm this old," he said with a laugh.

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