

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Mendon parish marks its centennial this year

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

On Sunday, June 9, Bishop Matthew H. Clark will preside at a 10:30 a.m. Mass of Thanksgiving in St. Catherine of Siena Church in Mendon to mark the parish's 100th anniversary.

The Mass will be followed by a parish picnic at noon, featuring a 1 p.m. Centennial Parade, with many of the marchers to be children wearing costumes from the parish's past eras. Games and entertainment will follow.

The June 9 celebration is one of several activities this year in commemoration of the centennial. Following Mass on May 23, parishioners enjoyed an ice cream social marking the 100th anniversary of the parish's dedication by Bernard McQuaid, first bishop of the Diocese of Rochester. They have also planned a pot-luck picnic for 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, July 9, during which parishioners will tell stories of their experiences at St. Catherine's. Other activities include a pilgrimage to Siena, Italy, birthplace of St. Catherine, as well as other sites, from Sept. 23 to Oct. 4; a Centennial Youth Dance in October; and an international dinner on Nov. 2.

The parish also recently completed a \$1 million fundraising campaign conducted over the past three years, according to Father James Lawlor, pastor. Seventy percent of the funds will be used to pay off the parish debt, he said, and 30 percent will be used to fund new programs, which are yet to be named.

Between 950 and 1,000 families belong to St. Catherine's, Father Lawlor said, adding that the community boasts a healthy mix of young and old parishioners. Members come from as far away as Naples and Canandaigua to attend services, according to the parish's Web site at [www.saintcath.org](http://www.saintcath.org).

Father Lawlor added that the parish has been caught up in the spirit of cele-



James Stein/Photo Intern

Parishioners participate in an outdoor Mass at St. Catherine of Siena Church in Mendon May 23 as part of the parish's 100th anniversary celebration. Just as worshippers did during the very first Mass at St. Catherine's in 1902, parishioners brought their own chairs.

brating its roots.

"I think as we get more into it and learn more and more, it's certainly a fascinating experience to learn how this parish came about," he said.

Before St. Catherine's was established, Catholics in Mendon and the surrounding area had to travel far and wide to receive the sacraments. Stories of Catholics walking as far as 50 miles to attend Easter Mass or have their children baptized were not uncommon in the 19th century, according to the parish history.

In 1900, weekly Masses began being celebrated in a hall that was donated by a local Catholic, "Yankee Tom" Finucane. However, two Mendon Catholics, Anna White Furlong and her husband, William, convinced Bishop McQuaid that Mendon needed its own Catholic church.

"Legend has it that when the bishop heard the area was good potato country,

he directed that one be started," the parish history states.

During its 100 years, the parish has successively been a mission church of the parishes of St. Patrick's, Victor; St. Louis, Pittsford; Good Shepherd, Henrietta; and St. Paul's, Honeoye Falls. In June 1956, the parish became independent and received its first resident priest, Msgr. Albert Schnacky, for whom St. Catherine's community center is named. The priest served the parish for 30 years, and was named its first resident pastor in 1970. He remained in that position until his sudden death on Jan. 22, 1986.

Anne Jozwiak, chairwoman of the parish council, said Msgr. Schnacky played a key role in convincing her to join the parish. St. Catherine's used to regularly host outdoor Masses, she said. When she met Msgr. Schnacky in the mid-1980s, he sold her on the parish when he said

she could bring her dogs to the outdoor Masses.

"He was a very giving, friendly person," she added of the late pastor.

Apparently, she should not have been surprised that Msgr. Schnacky was dog-friendly, as the parish history records that his dog Heidi, "a handsome German shepherd," was a constant presence on the parish scene.

"(U)ntil her death, she led processions, witnessed weddings and heard Mass while stretched out on the sun dappled altar carpet," the history notes.

The St. Catherine's community remained relatively small, little more than a couple dozen families until the 1950s. However, as suburban areas of Rochester grew in the post-war area, Mendon and its surrounding communities grew as well. The parish added acreage in the late 1960s, built its community center in the 1970s, and erected a new church in 1991. Father Charles Latus was then the pastor, and it was suggested that instead of demolishing the old church, the parish should move it next to the new church, which is attached to the community center. The original church is now the parish's daily Mass chapel, said Father Lawlor, who has served as pastor since Father Latus left the parish in 1998 to oversee St. Rita's Parish, Webster.

In addition to the growth evidenced by the parish's building expansions over the years, St. Catherine's has grown in many other ways, according to Harvey Limbeck, who is currently updating the parish history. He and his wife, Yvonne, have been members of the parish since 1970s, and have both volunteered in various capacities.

One of the new chapters of the parish history Limbeck said he is writing concerns the parish's various projects, including Benincasa, a home for the dying at which his wife volunteers. Opened in 1996, the home is an ecumenical effort of St. Catherine's and its neighboring Protestant churches. Limbeck added that he's also working on updating information on the parish's religious-education program and on the various Kenyan priests who have served St. Catherine's while attending St. John Fisher College in Rochester.

St. Catherine's parishioners stressed that the parish still feels like a relaxed, farming community, despite the influx of commuter families in recent decades. Indeed, the parish's rural ambience seems to have rubbed off on the families that have chosen the Mendon area as their bedroom community, parishioners said.

"I like to feel that we've maintained our country-type atmosphere," Limbeck said. "It's a neighborly thing."

"I think one of the things that attracted me to it in the first place is the fact that it is a very friendly, flexible sort of congregation," Jozwiak added.

## Obituary

### Fr. Elmer McNamara, 93; pastor, professor

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Father Elmer A. McNamara, a former Bloomfield pastor and professor at St. Bernard's Seminary, died June 3, 2002. He was 93.

Father McNamara grew up attending St. Michael's Church in Montezuma, N.Y., and attended St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries in Rochester. He also attended the North American College, the Gregorian University and the Pontifical Biblical Institute, all in Rome. He was ordained on Dec. 5, 1933, in the Chapel of North American College in Rome by Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani.

While in Italy, Father McNamara met Padre Pio, the famed Italian priest-confessor who had the stigmata. The *Catholic Courier* interviewed Father McNamara for an April 18 cover story on Padre Pio, who is slated to be canonized this month. Father McNamara recalled that he went to ask Padre Pio a question after he had celebrated Mass.

"He gave me the answer quickly. I'm sure the Lord told him what I would ask," Father McNamara told the newspaper.

A devotee of Padre Pio, Father McNamara was looking forward to his canonization, friends said. One such friend was Father Robert F. McNamara (no relation), diocesan archivist and historian, who attended North American College with the late priest. The two also taught at St. Bernard's at the same time, and both lived in McAuley Residence, where Father Elmer spent his last days. The residence is located at the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse in Brighton.



Father McNamara was named a professor of Sacred Scripture at St. Bernard's Seminary in 1938, and taught there until 1967. In the 1940s, he also served as a pro-synodal judge.

Father Robert described Father Elmer as "very positive, very thoughtful, very devotional and very solid." He added that Father Elmer was a "diligent teacher" who inspired a love of Scripture in his students, including Sisters of Mercy to whom he taught Scripture over the years at the motherhouse.

"He was always there, quite a good friend who made a wonderful contribution," Father Robert said of Father Elmer.

In September 1967, Father McNamara became pastor of the parishes of St. Joseph's in West Bloomfield and St. Bridget's in East Bloomfield, and stayed in that position until his retirement in 1984. Following his retirement, he lived at St. Mark's Parish in Kendall in the Diocese of Buffalo, staying there until 1998. Due to failing health, he relocated to McAuley Residence and remained there until his death.

At St. Bridget's, he had met Donald C. Rimlinger, currently a parishioner at St. Patrick's Parish, Victor. Rimlinger became reacquainted with Father McNamara when he moved to Brighton because Kathleen Rimlinger, his wife, works at McAuley. The two men became great friends, Rimlinger said, noting that he visited with the priest at least once a week. He added that he remembered Father McNamara as being particularly devoted to the sick and to children with health problems.

"He was an extremely good listener," Rimlinger said. "He would help anybody who had a problem, and they would always come back better after he listened to them."

Father McNamara is survived by his brother, Father Joseph McNamara of Syracuse, and several nieces and nephews.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark presided at a funeral Mass in the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse on June 5. Interment took place at St. Bridget's Cemetery in East Bloomfield.

Memorial donations may be sent to the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester, 1437 Blossom Road, Rochester, NY 14610.

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