

# Elmira parish sells former church

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

With the recent sale of a second church building, an Elmira parish is closer to its goal of erecting a new parish center.

The former St. Cecilia's Church, 905 Lake St., was sold April 25 for \$180,000, according to Father Patrick Connor, pastor of Ss. Peter and Paul Parish. Also included in the sale were the St. Cecilia's rectory and convent. The new owner is Resurrection Tabernacle Inc., an evangelical church community from New York City.

Father Connor noted that Resurrection Tabernacle Inc. has arranged for Sisters of Mercy Mary Howard Kowa and Mary Rose Schum to continue living in the convent and operating the Mercy Care Center, an adult day-care facility located there.

The sale of St. Cecilia's comes four years after the former St. John the Baptist Church, 325 Lake St., was sold to the New Life Assembly of God, another evangelical community. Father Connor said he's pleased that both St. Cecilia's and St. John's will both continue to be utilized for worship purposes.

St. Cecilia's and St. John's had been clustered with Ss. Peter and Paul beginning in 1990, and the three churches became known as Eastside Catholic Parish. However, due to declining attendance, St. Ce-



Rebecca Gosselin/Catholic Courier

The April 19 Easter Vigil Mass at Elmira's Ss. Peter and Paul Parish began at the site of the former parish hall and school, which were demolished during Holy Week so a new parish center can be built there.

celia's and St. John's were closed eight years later. The Eastside Catholic Parish title remained until 2002 when the parish formally adopted the name of its only existing church, Ss. Peter and Paul.

Proceeds from the sale of St. Cecilia's, along with \$150,000 from the sale of St. John the Baptist, are being put toward creating a new parish center for Ss. Peter and Paul. Father Connor said an additional

\$350,000 in pledges has been raised toward the center, but at least \$200,000 is still needed.

The new building will be located at 160 High St., across from Ss. Peter and Paul Church on the site of the former parish hall and school. That structure, which was more than 100 years old, was demolished during Holy Week of this year. Father Connor said he hopes groundbreaking for the new building will

begin by fall, and that the project will be completed within a year.

The center will provide kitchen and dining space so that the Elmira Free Community Kitchen, an independent outreach, can move back to High Street. The soup kitchen had operated in the former church hall until this past winter, and has since been housed temporarily in Trinity Episcopal Church, 304 N. Main St. — about a half-mile from Ss. Peter and Paul.

"We're also looking at possibly applying for some grants to help cover the cost of soup-kitchen ministry," Father Connor said.

A gymnasium and a meeting hall are other planned highlights of the new parish center. Father Connor said the facilities will be available to the public as well as to parishioners.

"This parish center, we believe, will not only benefit our parish, but the community as a whole in terms of outreach," he said.

Father Connor, who has served in Elmira since he became pastor of Eastside Catholic Parish in 1992, said he hopes completion of the parish center will bring a positive end to a long unsettled period.

"For 12 years now we've been kind of laboring under the stress of reducing our buildings and calling our people to unity and peace. We see the parish center as a symbol of unity," Father Connor said.

## Bishops drop objection to contraception bill

Language is changed to reflect pro-life view

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

The New York State Catholic Conference, public-policy arm of the state's eight Catholic bishops, welcomed an agreement by the New York State Assembly and Senate to change the language in a proposed bill on emergency contraception for rape victims. The agreement modifies the bill's language to reflect pro-life concerns.

In a phone interview from his Albany office, Dennis Poust, conference spokesman, said that the conference does not think the proposed law is needed, but has dropped its objection to the bill, which passed the Senate on June 19. The bill passed the state Assembly Feb. 10, and Gov. George Pataki is expected to sign it.

The final version of the bill in-

cluded the following:

- The option for medical personnel to decline to offer contraception to a rape victim if the assault has already resulted in the conception of a child — or if there is a pregnancy that pre-existed the attack.

- Removal of language in the original bill that said "emergency contraception ... does not cause abortions." The church fought to have this statement removed because contraception can make a uterus inhospitable to a fertilized egg, causing the egg to be aborted. The Catholic Church teaches that an unborn child is a person from the moment of conception.

Poust said this change was particularly important to the conference because the bill's original language "in effect would have been statutorily redefining the beginning of life."

- A statement that health institutions should only prescribe contraception within a "medically appro-

priate timeframe." Poust said that emergency contraception is generally not considered to be effective if 72 or more hours have passed since an assault.

In a statement, Richard E. Barnes, executive director of the Catholic conference, said the conference was grateful that the Senate's leadership listened to its concerns, and added that the conference was pleased with the resolution of "this difficult issue."

"Catholic hospitals are second to none in providing compassionate, holistic care to survivors of rape," Barnes said. "This legislation will not affect how that care is provided. Catholic hospitals in New York will continue to offer these medications to rape survivors, consistent with this law and church teaching."

The conference statement noted that Catholic hospitals in the state al-

ready provide emergency contraception to rape victims who have not conceived — and that such provision is consistent with church teaching. The statement pointed out that the U.S. Bishops' "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services" addresses the plight of rape victims in these words:

"A female who has been raped should be able to defend herself against a potential conception from the sexual assault. If, after appropriate testing, there is no evidence that conception has occurred already, she may be treated with medications that would prevent ovulation, sperm capacitation or fertilization. It is not permissible, however, to initiate or to recommend treatments that have as their purpose or direct effect the removal, destruction or interference with the implantation of a fertilized ovum."

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