

Scottsville church marks 150 years

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

SCOTTSVILLE — Over the past 12 months, St. Mary of the Assumption Parish marked the 150th anniversary of its church building by continuing ongoing renovation work, and filling the building with music, musings and the creation of new memories.

The parish kicked off its celebration last summer with an exhibit of the art of the late Maryknoll Sister Marie Pierre Semler. Born in 1901 in Chili Center, Sister Semler studied art in Rochester and created more than 900 works of art in her career.

Among the other events that the parish held to mark the anniversary was a March concert by Rochester's Eastman School of Music Community Education Division. The celebration concluded Aug. 15-17, starting with a Mass on Aug. 15 that featured seven priests who had formerly served the church. Bishop Matthew H. Clark presided at a liturgy Aug. 17, which was followed by an ice-cream social attended by 210 people.

Irene Goodwin, the parish's pastoral administrator since September 2002, noted she was impressed with the hard work that parishioners put into the year-long celebration.

"They have worked many hours, giving tirelessly of their time and talent," Goodwin wrote in the Aug. 17 liturgy program. "In my first 11 months at St. Mary's, it has been a true blessing to me to see many work very hard together for the good of this Catholic community."

In an interview, Goodwin added that St. Mary's is currently home to 550 registered households, whose members worship in what is report-



Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

Bishop Matthew H. Clark presides at an Aug. 17 Mass to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Scottsville's St. Mary of the Assumption Church.

edly the oldest church continually in use in the Diocese of Rochester. The church itself is currently undergoing renovation, which has included work on its pillars and roof.

The church's cornerstone was laid Aug. 15, 1853, the feast of the Assumption of Mary, according to a parish history written by Glenn J. Kist. To bring St. Mary's history alive, the parish exhibited many historical artifacts in its hall this month, including an anvil once owned by Patrick Rafferty, a founding parishioner and original owner of the land upon which the church stands.

Consisting primarily of Irish Catholics, the parish community had actually existed for several years prior to the construction of the church, and was assigned its first permanent pastor in 1848. Since



Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

Bishop Clark addresses parishioners during the Mass.

then, thousands of Catholics have called St. Mary of the Assumption their spiritual home, including Alexander Gilbert, a parishioner for more than 70 years, and his wife, Catherine, a parishioner for 49 years.

"It's had its ups and downs, but if you think of the history of (St. Mary's) I think it shows you it's worth working for and keeping going," said Catherine, who served on the anniversary committee. As part of her work, she published historical facts about St. Mary's in the parish bulletin over the past year. Her husband helped design and build a model of the church for its 125th anniversary celebration in 1978, which was recently used as part of a parish float in an Aug. 16 community parade.

The Gilberts have also served the parish in many capacities over the years. Alexander has volunteered to maintain the parish grounds and property, and his wife chairs the parish's social-ministry committee.

The Gilberts' dedication to St. Mary's is shared by Donna and Ray Treat, both of whom serve as catechists to third-graders every Sunday between liturgies.

"I enjoy seeing their inquisitiveness and openness and learning at that age," Donna said of her students. "They have more insight than you realize."

The parish's sacramental minister, Father William Endres, said the parish is gifted with many young people interested in their faith.

"I think there's a great potential for vocations to the priesthood and religious life," he said. "And I think we've got some fine potential lay leaders."

One of the people helping to nurture that potential is Sean Esposito, who coordinates the parish's altar servers, in addition to serving on parish council and St. Mary's liturgy

committee. Esposito, who was an altar server as a child, noted that he wanted to pass on what he learned about the Mass to his young charges.

"I learned so much about my faith from being involved in the Mass," he said. "If I can inspire a little growth in all or some of them a little down the road it's a worthwhile thing."

Ray Treat noted that it was his experiences at St. Mary's that inspired him to convert to Catholicism a few years ago. In particular, he said he was attracted to his wife's faith through the sacraments.

"There's so much visualization of what we do through the sacraments," he said.

Sacramental preparation is among the duties of Wendy Krug, the parish's newly hired faith-formation coordinator. She and her husband, Jamie, also serve as the parish's music ministers. The young couple joined St. Mary's a couple of years ago and said they were impressed by its welcoming atmosphere.

"It's small enough where everybody knows each other," Jamie said. His wife added that after the couple attended their first Mass, a parishioner greeted them when they came back the next week.

"I was surprised that someone noticed that we were new and noticed that we were back," she said.

Such friendliness would be no surprise to Dolores Loftus, a parishioner since 1963. Loftus has worn many hats as a volunteer, including serving on the anniversary committee as well as the environment and floral committee, which oversees the appearance of the church and its altar. Loftus said St. Mary's is a place where generations have combined their efforts to live out their faith.

"I've always liked the way the older and younger generations work together," she said. "There's no separation whatsoever. Whatever needs to get done gets done."

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Rob Cullivan

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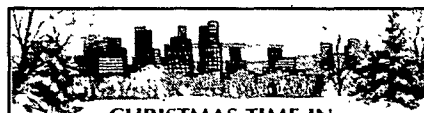
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