

# Catholic Courier

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 115 NO. 2 ■ THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2003 ■ www.CatholicCourier.com ■ 75¢ ■ 16 PAGES

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Members of the newly formed Blessed Trinity Parish display banners during their first combined Mass, which took place Sept. 14 at Hickories Park in Owego, Tioga County.

## Parish consolidation rises

Forming a parish once meant erecting a church to serve the immediate area and getting a priest for the newly gathered flock. But out of necessity, that pattern is reversing itself these days in the Diocese of Rochester.

New parishes are still being formed with such names as Good Shepherd, Blessed Trinity and All Saints. Yet their establishment now involves consolidating pre-existing parishes and church buildings, primarily because there aren't enough priests to go around.

The process of dissolving a group of parishes, to form one parish with multiple churches, or "worship sites," was first implemented in the diocese in 1999 when the Southern Cayuga pastoral-planning group became Good Shepherd

Catholic Community. Since that time two other planning groups (Corning-Painted Post in 2001 and Tioga in 2003) have instituted that model, with two more (Northern Steuben/Southern Livingston and Western Steuben) set to do so next June and another (Western Livingston) expecting to follow suit within the next few years.

The process involves consolidating staffs, programs, Mass schedules and finances. According to William Pickett, director of the diocesan Office of Planning, the model is best utilized in areas where a single pastor is responsible for multiple parishes.

"It begins to make sense if you realize, instead of four parishes having four of everything, why don't we become a sin-

gle parish?" Pickett said.

Deacon Ray Defendorf is a veteran of this process, having been a pastoral moderator in Corning-Painted Post before serving from 2001-03 as pastoral administrator of St. James in Waverly, one of the six Tioga parishes that adopted a re-configuration plan to become Blessed Trinity Parish. He said consolidating resources can be a stressful process, but also beneficial if done with an open mind.

"It's a creative way of making lemonade out of lemons," remarked Deacon Defendorf, who is now the first-year pastoral administrator at St. Mary's in Bath.

In order to create a new parish, all participating parishes must agree to forego their individual canonical identities. As-

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Story by Mike Latona • Photos by Leila Navidi