

Merged parish set to open

New St. Matthew will be in use as of March 15

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

Sunday Masses will be celebrated for the last time March 14 at St. Joseph Church in Livonia and St. William Church in Conesus, as members of the faith community prepare to make St. Matthew Church in Livonia their new parish home.

Construction of St. Matthew was completed March 1, and the first weekday Mass will be celebrated there on March 15, according to Melissa Szczesniak, the parish's business manager. Three weekend Masses will also be celebrated at St. Matthew, beginning the weekend of March 20-21.

Father John Hayes, pastor, said the experience of preparing to close two churches and building and moving into a new one is the "quintessential definition of the word 'bittersweet.'" He said parishioners are grieving the closing of the churches they've come to call home, but on the other hand they are also excitedly anticipating worshipping in the new church they've worked so hard to build.

"The closing ceremonies will be so emotional," he said. "It's also a joyful time. It's like a wedding of two churches."

Closing ceremonies — planned by a team of parishioners — will take place beginning at 9:30 a.m. March 14 at St. Joseph, Father Hayes said. The closing of St. Joseph will be immediately followed by a closing ceremony at St. William. After the closing in Conesus, the Eucharist, altar and ambo from St. William will be transported to St. Matthew, where a prayer service and reception will be held.

"It's exciting," Father Hayes said.



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Four-year-old Emma Coniglio skips to the front of the new St. Matthew Church in Livonia March 9. Emma came to work with her grandmother, Chris Coniglio, the parish's faith-formation coordinator.

The decision to merge St. Joseph and St. William into a new parish arose from rapid population expansion in eastern Livingston County and a growing number of parishioners, Father Hayes said. The faith community includes 800 families and counting, he said, while the combined seating capacity of St. Joseph and St. William is 450. St. Matthew can seat 600, he said.

The priest shortage also factored into the decision, Father Hayes added, noting that he is the only full-time priest for the faith community, whose two existing churches were 8 miles apart.

Since the summer of 2002, nearly \$1.8 million has been raised through the faith community's joint capital campaign. This is approximately 64 percent of the \$2.8 million total cost of the construction of St. Matthew, Szczesniak said. Matt Flanigan, chairman of the oversight committee, noted that new pledges continue to come in, demonstrating the

parish's support of the project.

St. Joseph was built in 1911, and St. William was built in 1875, although it has been a mission church of St. Joseph since 1915. The parish has received purchase offers for both church buildings and is currently negotiating their sale, Szczesniak said. Proceeds from the sale of the two buildings will help offset construction costs for the new church. At this point, the faith community has decided not to sell Hagerty Hall in Livonia, which has served as St. Joseph's parish hall, she added.

So far, the reaction from the parish has been very positive, Szczesniak said.

"It's very hard leaving your old home ... but the excitement is overwhelming," she said.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark is scheduled to preside over the formal dedication Mass for St. Matthew, which is scheduled for May 2.

"It truly feels like a really blessed time," Father Hayes said.

EXPERT SEES TREND IN SEX-ABUSE DECLINE

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The declining rate of child sex abuse by clergy in the 1990s parallels what seems to be a general drop-off in abuse incidents in U.S. society, says David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire.

Statistical trends in the 1990s offer "the hopeful idea that fewer children are becoming victims." But he warned that child sex abuse remains a major problem, citing the hazards of Internet child pornography and online seduction of children.

The March 2 *USA Today* article was a commentary on the statistical study by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, commissioned by the U.S. bishops' National Review Board.

POPE NAMES NEW OGDENSBURG BISHOP

Pope John Paul II has appointed Msgr. Robert J. Cunningham, diocesan administrator of the Diocese of Buffalo, as the 13th Bishop of Ogdensburg. He succeeds Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito who was appointed Bishop of Palm Beach last July.

Bishop-designate Cunningham, pastor of St. Louis Parish in downtown Buffalo, has held a number of pastoral and administrative positions in the Diocese of Buffalo, including chancellor and vicar general.

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Sun., Mar. 14: Exodus 3:1-8A, 13-15; Psalms 103:1-4, 6-8, 11; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12; Luke 13:1-9.

Mon., Mar. 15: 2 Kings 5:1-15B; Psalms 42:2-3, 43:3-4; Luke 4:24-30.

Tue., Mar. 16: Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Psalms 25:4BC-5AB, 6-7BC, 8-9; Matthew 18:21-35.

Wed., Mar. 17: Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Psalms 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20; Matthew 5:17-19.

Thu., Mar. 18: Jeremiah 7:23-28; Psalms 95:1-2, 6-9; Luke 11:14-23.

Fri., Mar. 19: 2 Samuel 7:4-5A, 12-14A, 16; Psalms 89:2-5, 27, 29; Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24A or Luke 2:41-51A.

Sat., Mar. 20: Hosea 6:1-6; Psalms 51:3-4, 18-21B; Luke 18:9-14.

Bishops back marriage amendment

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. Catholic bishops again joined their voices to those calling for a constitutional amendment to preserve the traditional concept of marriage as a Senate subcommittee held a hearing on "the judicial invalidation of traditional marriage laws" March 3 on Capitol Hill.

Although no representative of the bishops spoke at the hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on the Constitution, the chairman of the bishops' Com-

mittee on Marriage and Family submitted two 2003 statements on the topic and asked that they be included in the record for the hearing.

"We commend you for scheduling hearings ... on this vitally important issue," said Bishop J. Kevin Boland of Savannah, Ga., in a letter to the subcommittee chairman, Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas.

The two texts submitted by Bishop Boland were "Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex

Unions," approved by the full U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops last November, and a September document of the 47-member USCCB Administrative Committee titled "Promote, Preserve and Protect Marriage."

"We offer general support for a federal marriage amendment to the U.S. Constitution as we continue to work to protect marriage in state legislatures, the courts, the Congress and other appropriate forums," the latter document said.