

Livonia, Conesus open new church

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Catholics in Livonia and Conesus bid farewell to two churches March 14 and moved into a new church the same day.

Final Masses were celebrated in the morning at St. Joseph Church in Livonia and St. William Church in Conesus. Both churches are now closed, and their congregations have formed a new parish called St. Matthew on Route 20A in Livonia. The first daily Mass took place in the new church March 15, and will be the site for three Masses per week-end beginning March 20-21.

Father John H. Hayes, pastor of St. Joseph and St. William, will serve as pastor of St. Matthew.

Construction of St. Matthew was completed March 1. The new church has more than 600 seats, and its parking lot can accommodate up to 220 vehicles, according to Matt Flanigan, chairman of the project's oversight committee. Even with the ample seating and parking, St. Matthew will be full every weekend, according to Father Hayes.

"We're literally moving into the building, and people have been stopping by and asking if they could join the church," he said.

The new church includes a confessional room, four offices, mechanical room, choir practice room and conference/library room. The church was built to accommodate the steadily increasing populations

of St. Joseph and St. William, according to Alice Miller Nation, pastoral associate of the old churches and the new St. Matthew. St. Joseph could accommodate up to 300 worshippers for Mass, and St. William about 100, she said, and standing-room-only crowds at Masses had become common. About 800 families and counting make up the new St. Matthew, Father Hayes said.

St. William was built in 1875, and St. Joseph in 1911. St. William has existed as a mission church of St. Joseph since 1915. Both churches are to be sold to help offset construction costs of St. Matthew, although the new parish plans to retain ownership of Hagerty Hall in Livonia, which has served as St. Joseph's parish hall.

Flanigan said that St. Matthew's congregation will continue to use St. Joseph's parish hall until the community room at St. Matthew can be expanded. St. Matthew is already making plans for other additional building, Flanigan said. For example, he said, St. Matthew's worship area will eventually be expanded to accommodate up to 1,050 worshippers.

During his homily at St. William's final Mass, Father Hayes noted that both congregations have experienced bittersweetness about closing their churches and opening one.

"As much as we feel that something has died, a new life awaits us just a few miles down the road," Fa-



Eric Suca/Catholic Courier

The congregations of St. Joseph in Livonia and St. William in Conesus have combined to form a new parish in Livonia called St. Matthew. Father John H. Hayes, pastor, padlocks the doors of St. Joseph Church following the final Mass there March 14.

ther Hayes said.

Following the conclusion of the final Mass at St. William, members of both congregations drove to St. Matthew and brought in numerous items — missals, hymnals, candles and other liturgical objects — from their former churches. Miller Nation noted that the altar, ambo (lectern) and tabernacle from St. William were going to St. Matthew, as well as crosses, an organ and the Stations of the Cross from St. Joseph.

In the early afternoon, hundreds of people from St. Joseph and St. William participated in a brief prayer service at St. Matthew led by Father Hayes and Miller Nation. Members of the newly formed congregation then mingled at a reception in St. Matthew's community room. Many remarked that they were sad to leave their old churches, but excited about their new facility as well.

St. William's parishioners Dan and Shirley Mulvaney brought up the offertory gifts at St. William's last Mass, and said they had been parishioners for 76 and 54 years, respectively. The couple said that they'll miss their church, but also wel-

comed the opening of St. Matthew.

"We had a very close community (at St. William) — not that this won't be — but we were like family at St. William's, and I'm sure that will carry on," Shirley said. She added that she was glad St. Matthew has some items from her old church.

Sue and Mike Haugh have been parishioners at St. Joseph since the mid-1970s, and expressed mixed feelings about the day. Sue, a sacristan and former parish council member, said she will miss the "close and homey" feeling she had attending St. Joseph, but that she saw the need for the larger St. Matthew.

"Our community is growing... and I think the new church will draw a lot more young people," she said.

Her husband, Mike, added that he liked the design of St. Matthew, with its many windows allowing for ample natural light in the worship area. He also noted that with fewer and fewer priests available to serve diocesan parishes, St. Matthew may eventually attract Catholics outside of Livonia and Conesus. Father Hayes had indicated the priest shortage played a part in the decision to build St. Matthew because he was the only full-time priest available to serve the two former parishes of St. Joseph and St. William.

On that note, Father Hayes said that he welcomed the opportunity to centralize his ministry in one church. The priest added that he was delighted that the people of St. William and St. Joseph had worked so willingly to become one new parish.

"I could not be prouder of these people," he said. "As much as they had a sentimental attachment to the other buildings, they realized what our needs are because we were growing."

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