

ST. GEORGE PARISH

1912 – 1942 – 2008

LOOKING BACK TO REMEMBER

CHARISMA

THE WAY WE ARE

LOOKING AHEAD IN MISSION

LOOKING BACK TO REMEMBER

Jewettville

West Falls

Griffins Mills

The parish of St. George was born on what is now known as the Old Glenwood Road, located on the west side of the present Route 240, approximately two miles north of West Falls, New York. The countryside in the mid to late 1800's and early twentieth century was very peaceful. The land comprising the present parish was also known as "*Pine Tree*", so named for the ancient pine tree at the Hayes Stage Coach Inn on the Old Glenwood Road, then the main road leading to West Falls and Colden.

After the era of stagecoach travel the area began to see the development of roads and railroads. In 1849 the Buffalo-Cattaraugus Plank Road was built of four inch planks laid across logs from Ashford at Cattaraugus Creek north to the Elk Street Market in Buffalo. This enabled local farmers to move their product, livestock, wood and lumber for trade in Buffalo. A toll was charged for each head of oxen or horse at the west side of Davis Road at the Pipe Creek Bridge and at a tavern owned by James Henshaw.

Abijah Paul who lived on the east side of West Falls Road was the carpenter who built the Pliny Hayes House on Old Glenwood Road, called the Pine Tree Inn. He also operated a coach line on the plank road and served as a cobbler for the West Falls, Griffins Mills and Jewettville area.

Between 1882 and 1883 the Rochester and Pittsburgh Railroad Company built a branch line on the plank road right-of-way. This enabled Henry Jewett, a local horse farmer, to transport horses which he bred and trained to other areas of the country when the Jewettville Depot was built in 1890.

At the forks of the Old Glenwood Road was a cider mill and to the north of the mill was the Snyder Pickle Factory.

Loveland Brickyard was the earliest factory in the area. At one time, known as the Empire Clay Products Company, it produced many kinds of colored brick. The Jewettville Brick Company, owned by the John H. Black Company, produced "*pug brick*". These brick companies prospered with the railroad. The Statler Hotel chain ordered brick to build what is now known as the Statler Hotel in downtown Buffalo.

Later brick production in Jewettville provided the U.S. Government with "*haydite*", a light material, to line battleships during WW I. The brickyard businesses eventually closed.

The three communities of West Falls, Jewettville and Griffins Mills have always cooperated in the services of the people and continue to provide a volunteer fire company since 1919. Both fire and ambulance service is available from the fire hall in West Falls.

The Catholic people of these small communities traveled by horse and carriage or sleigh to share in the Mass at the parish in Orchard Park, about six miles to the west.

In the spring of 1912 Jacob Nuwer, representing the people of the area, approached Father George Crimmins, pastor of the Orchard Park parish which was named Nativity of Our Lord, to see about the possibility of starting a new church in Jewettville. Mr. Nuwer and Father Crimmins visited Bishop Charles Colton, Bishop of Buffalo, to make the formal request. The Bishop required that a petition be signed by fifty Catholics. This was easily accomplished and the necessary permission was granted.

Land on the Old Glenwood Road was chosen and generously donated by August Hager and Adrian Metz. Many families were present when Harry Schichtel came with a team of horses and a scoop for the ground breaking in August 1912. Plans having been drawn up, the farmers came with horses, plows and scrapers to dig the excavation. Loads of stone for the foundation were hauled from the local farms of Harry Schichtel and Michael Kendell.

Early in August the cornerstone was laid. Henry Volk and George Echmier laid the stone wall for the foundation while Walter Volk and Mike Nuwer mixed the mortar. Henry and George McDonald, onetime brickyard workers in Jewettville, came back from Pennsylvania for the laying of the brick walls of the new church. Bricks and cement were purchased from the Jewettville yards.

Henry and George stayed at the Hager Home (not the Parish House) while working on the church.

Steve Pusztay, Winfield Sprague, Frank Wensell and John Dinger also helped build the walls of the church. With walls completed and basement floor poured, a furnace was installed by August Hager.

Nine beautiful stained-glass windows, donated by Mr. And Mrs. Charles Seames, Adrian Metz, Michael Metz, Mathias Metz, Felix Bieger, Matthew Crimmins, Albert Kelly, James Judge and Ellen Vigneron were installed.

Eight pews were placed on either side of the middle aisle and an organ was placed at the end of the last pew on the right side of the aisle.

A wealthy woman from Buffalo gave \$125.00 for the altar, while a church bell was a gift of Robert Paxon.

The dedication took place on November 12, 1912 by Bishop Colton in honor of St. George, the patron saint of Father Crimmins.

At the same time Sacred Heart parish in Colden was also beginning under the direction of Father Crimmins. These two mission churches, mothered by Nativity of Our Lord Parish in Orchard Park, began as sister parishes, linked through the service of Father Michael Tobin, the first pastor. Father Tobin lived in Colden and commuted by train between the churches.

NAMES TO REMEMBER FROM THE EARLY DAYS AT ST. GEORGE'S

Among the pioneers and workers were the following families:

Hager	Kendell	Paxon	Spangler
Schichtel	Volk	Pusztay	Seames
Metz	Echmier	Karg	Waltz
Vigneron	Zdrojewski	Ellis	Lathrope
Ryan	Judge	Bieger	Sporney
Nuwer			

These names are familiar to many present parishioners. Many of their descendants are active in the parish to this day.

ST. GEORGE'S FIRSTS:

Baptism: Irene Pusztay, February 18, 1913
Daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Steve Pusztay
Married Name: Mrs. Howard Barton

Marriage: Oliver Herbst and Julia Schmidt

Death: Mrs. William Strauss

Altar Boy: Michael A. Nuwer, son of Jacob and Elizabeth Nuwer

Trustees: Harry Schichtel and Floyd Sporney

Organist: Frances Vigneron

PASTORS OF ST. GEORGE'S PARISH:

Rev. Michael Tobin 1912 – 1915

Rev. James Hawley 1915 – 1917

Rev. Eugene Airy 1917 – 1937

Rev. John McNamara 1937 – 1938

Rev. Harold Gonter 1938 – 1953

(1942 St. George and Sacred Heart became separate parishes)

Rev. Joseph Mahoney 1953 – 1954

Rev. William Snyder 1954 – 1981 (died while pastor)

Rev. Harold Huber 1982 – 1991 (died while pastor)

Rev. Peter Drilling 1991 – 1995

Rev. Albert Hansen 1995 – 1999

Rev. David Zwifka 1999 – 2000

Rev. Walter J. Szczesny 2000 – 2008

Rev. Pascal D. Ipolito 2008 – present

(2009 Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and St. George merged into one parish as part of the Diocesan Plan: Journey in Faith and Grace)

A TIME OF GROWTH

In July of 1942 while Father Gonter was pastor two acres of land were purchased from Fred H. Sherman. The property included the Hager House, a barn and several small buildings.

The parish of 1942 was composed of 400 people. The growth warranted becoming a separate parish. Father Gonter continued as pastor.

As time went on the number of families increased. During Father Snyder's pastorate plans for a larger church began to develop. In 1956 a combination church and auditorium was planned to be constructed so that it could readily be converted into an eight-room school as the need arose. An earlier, more elaborate plan for a stone church, presented by Charles O'Donnell, was not approved because it featured "*too much glass*".

However, Edward Pauly, a prominent church architect volunteered his services. He continued to serve the parish in every need concerning construction for the next twenty years.

The actual construction of the present church rivals the tales of the cathedral builders of the Middle Ages. Cooperation, coordination, faith and determination marked the efforts of parishioners to build their new church.

The groundbreaking took place in March 1958 on the Old Glenwood Road, directly behind the first church, now known as the Memorare Chapel. Under the guidance of Father Snyder and with the expert direction of the Balling Brothers Construction Company of Tonawanda, workers and volunteer parishioners brought the new church to life. From the setting of the steel girders, to the laying of floors, painting, buffing, cabinet-making, sewing and polishing, parishioners labored to build their "*handmade church*".

The pews were donated by St. Margaret's Church in Buffalo where Father Snyder had once served. They were brought to Jewettville by truck and made to look like new by many artful hands.

Father Snyder, in his own special style, thanked everyone for their outstanding accomplishment. . .

Your pastor has been busy thanking you all year long for the endless succession of favors and benefits that you have so generously conferred upon him. Now he wishes you to know that of all places where his Lord and his Bishop could place him, none are more attractive than St. George's Parish and its delightful people. God grant that we spend whatever years of life remain, here in Jewettville and together happily work our way to Heaven.

The people of St. George's, being an enterprising community are also collaborative and adaptable. They were able to respond to the various ministry styles of each pastor.

Father Snyder, a charismatic leader, strong, directive and decisive, seemed to be "*the embodiment of his flock*", says one parishioner. His era of parish ministry was expressed in firm principles, strength, generosity and an extraordinary sense of purpose and mission.

Father Huber was very concerned about implementing the renewal of Vatican II. His reserve and meekness allowed the laity to express another aspect of church community through dialogue and collaboration.

Father Peter Drilling, administrator and professor of systematic theology at Christ the King Seminary, is empowering the community to bear responsibility for their parish life, worship and mission.

CHARISMA . . .THE SPIRIT OF ST. GEORGE'S PARISH

The greatest asset of any parish is its people. St. George's people are rooted in the tradition of building something from nothing. They are independent and self-reliant, yet care for one another and are immensely generous. They are obedient and respectful of authority, yet continue the dialogue which fosters newness. They are a small-town community in the midst of the hustle and bustle of modern life. Many live in the quiet corners of the woods and fields, yet also enjoy the proximity to services and closeness to the city, where many work.

The ethnic heritage is strongly German, but many other European nationalities are also represented. There is a noticeable sense of family, neighborhoods, respect for property, nature and the value of good friends. Not without problems, as are people everywhere, St. George's people value their faith and the active participation in their faith community and welcome the newcomer graciously.

As in any community, the older people express a stability, holding close the deep memories of past struggles and accomplishments. They continue to struggle with many of the self-determination issues and again try to understand where their role begins in relationship to yesterday's guidelines, in the face of today's issues and innovations.

There is now a whole new wave of young families who look to church to assist in helping them to define values in their children's lives and reaffirm them in their own. Many come to church on Sundays and do not necessarily get too involved with the functioning of the parish unless asked to, and then are, for the most part, ready to step forward.

One rather new parishioner makes this observation:

I wonder if it is possible to define who Saint George's parish is today without discussing where it is. West Falls is a culturally and economically diverse community. It is home to some families that have lived there for Generations and know it as a small community off the beaten path, very conservative politically and theologically. On the other hand it has the second highest per capita income in the county and is home to many successful people looking for some rural tranquility after their day in town. I have often wondered how many of come to West Falls as an escape from the problems of urban America and specifically Buffalo. I say this because I sense we here at St. George's see these problems and know that we must help but either don't know how or are afraid what that commitment might mean. Again this is not a condemnation but is a very real and human emotion. We all want security in our lives but as part of this Catholic community know we have an obligation to reach out and help. I see this evidenced by the constant support to charitable requests. I also see the beginnings of more overt involvement. This is demonstrated by the Haiti project.

A PARISH ON MISSION

St. George's is definitely a parish with a mission!

In 1972, under the leadership of Father Snyder, St. George's Parish was presented with the "**Centurion's Shield Award**" by the Consolata Mission Fathers of Buffalo for the missionary activity of building over twenty chapels all over the world from South America to Oceania, India and Russia.

Parishioners also financed the building of a new mission in Kenya, Africa, which was also named St. George. This mission includes a church, school, hospital, a home for sisters, a social hall, a home for priests, and a college for catechists.

To this day St. George's Parish in West Falls continues to support St. George Mission in Kenya.

In 1993 with the help of Father Peter Drilling, a small committee initiated a parish twinning project with St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Jacmel Diocese, Haiti. Money, medical supplies, seeds for planting, etc. have been sent along with personal letters, pictures, cards and photo albums.

The Haiti Project has been accepted with the same enthusiasm as was seen when the parish reached out to share in the mission of spreading the Good News of Christ in Africa. With both sister parishes St. George parishioners reach out personally in order to create a 2-way relationship with the people, not just a monetary contribution. The people believe that this ministry is primarily one of relationship and sharing the gifts of faith and secondarily about giving funds. Visitors to St. George's are delighted with the many African artifacts and pieces of art which grace the walls and shelves of the parish buildings. A real missionary spirit is a vital part of parish life.

THE WAY WE ARE

Tradition is the handing down orally of beliefs, customs and stories. St. George's Parish has its many traditions, many rooted in long-standing "*deep memories*" of the spirit and spirituality of the community.

For as long as one parishioner of about thirty years remembers, "*Loretta has always done the altar linens and Chuck was the person who taught the altar boys, and they were always on time and looked neat and reverent. People never left Mass until it was completely over.*"

The Rosary Altar Society, the traditional women's group, continues many of the long-held traditions. The RAS banner is hung during the month when a member had died. Certain money-raising functions continue, e.g., bake sales, bazaar, penny sale, etc. The RAS sponsors the nightly rosary, a Mass for the deceased members in November and a breakfast for the local firefighters.

The women are always available to assist with funeral breakfasts, so generously prepared by Bernie, "Mr. P".

The parish continues to pray the Monday night Novena of the Miraculous Medal in the Memorare Chapel.

The annual bazaar serves as the major fund-raiser for the parish.

Each Monday night the men of the St. Vincent de Paul Society meet to plan their response to people in need, both within and beyond the parish.

Some traditions and customs have been dropped for one reason or another and new ones are claimed. The all pervasive theme seems to be that people respond to one another's needs and structures are created as needed to satisfy the various needs. The tradition of St. George Parish community might be described as "*responsible caring*".

LOOKING AHEAD

1993 – 1994 marks a year of creative imagination for St. George's as well as for all the parishes of the Buffalo Diocese. In light of the diminishing number of priests, smaller parishes are challenged to look at themselves in light of their viability with regard to spirituality, vitality and resources.

St. George's, continuing in the tradition of self-reliance and determination, has participated in the diocesan "*New Visions*" process through the parish self-study, regional dialogue and the proposed increased collaboration with neighboring parishes which that dialogue promotes.

Although small, the parish sees itself as a vital, mission-oriented and welcoming community, determined to continue into the future with alternative models of leadership, including administrator and pastoral associate and possible, a "*Parish Life Coordinator*" and "*Sacramental Minister*".

St. George's seeks collaboration with other Catholic and non-catholic parishes especially in providing fuller opportunities for youth ministry, outreach lay ministry preparation.

The needs of all parish communities are also reflected at St. George's. Spiritual growth is always a goal. At present, needs in this area are being addressed through the liturgy committee, traditional devotions, Bible study, continuing religious education for children and adults, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, parish retreats and workshops.

Social needs are met through cooperative efforts for the bazaar, sales, dinners and other social/cultural gatherings.

Personal needs for sacramental (Baptism and Marriage) preparation, pastoral counseling, home visits, spiritual direction and the visitation of the sick are addressed by the pastoral staff and volunteer parishioners.

Parish needs for maintenance, buildings and grounds care, long-range planning, decisions, etc. are met through the Parish Council and its committees in collaboration with the pastoral staff.

There is always room for growth in parish life and ministry. St. George recognizes certain needs calling for continued attention and fuller response. Such needs are in the areas of youth and young adult ministry, ministry to single people as well as families and the elderly, a process for welcoming new members into the community which encourages fuller integration and community participation.

St. George's Parish community faces the future with faith, hope the love which has always been its special charisma.

SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to the following people who have served on my parish committee for Clinical Pastoral Education. They have provided much information on the history of the parish as well as their rich personal reflections on the meaning of this well loved parish community.

Marguerite Callahan
Frank Dolce
Donna LaValley

William Curran
Jeanne McIntyre
Carol Vimmerstedt

Much of the historical material was taken from a booklet, prepared on the occasion of the parish's seventieth anniversary in 1982.