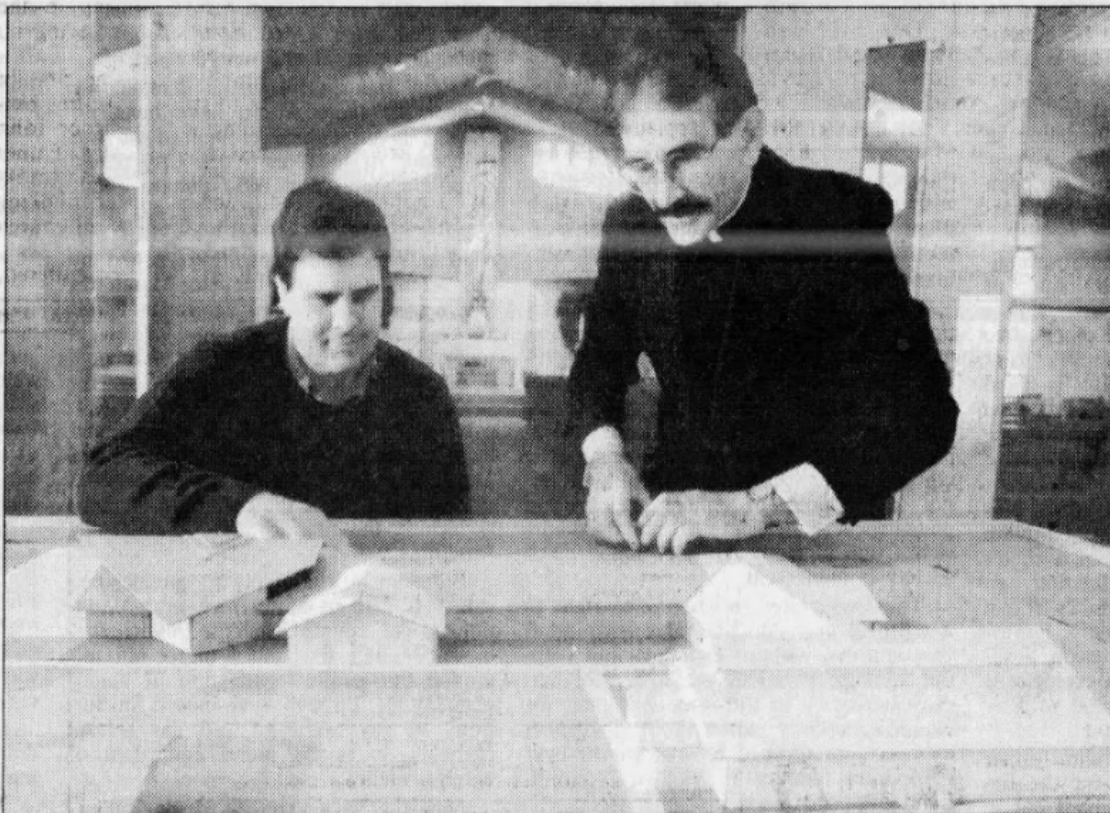




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Joseph Fleckenstein, building fund chairman, and the Rev. Herold W. Nuwer look over a model of the planned parish center for Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Cambria.

Cambria's growth brings parish expansion

Pastor's 'friendly style' credited with adding to flock

By LOU MICHEL
News Niagara Bureau

CAMBRIA — After a dry spell of many years, Immaculate Conception Catholic Church at 4671 Townline Road is now flourishing.

Membership in the last four years has more than doubled from 320 families to 650 families for a total of 2,000 parishioners. One parish expansion project has been completed while another is just getting started.

Families are joining the parish at a rate of two a week, making it one of the fastest growing parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo "with the highest percentage rate of growth," according to diocesan officials.

"There are some other parishes with more members, but Immaculate Conception has the highest percentage rate of growth, though I can't give an exact percentage figure," said Monsignor David M. Lee, diocesan director of communications.

Construction of new homes in Cambria and an increased effort to make young people feel more at home in the parish community are among the main reasons for new parishioners, according to the Rev. Herold M. Nuwer, pastor.

In the last two years, 76 new homes have been built in the town

and another 42 homes are expected to be built this year, according to town Building Inspector Amel S. Jowdy.

Increased ministerial roles for parishioners and activities aimed at expanding parish life also have added to his flock, Father Nuwer said.

Since becoming pastor in November 1988, he has established a Holy Name Society, a parish youth group, a group for senior citizens and retirees, and a Bible study class.

Raised on a farm in East Aurora, Father Nuwer said moving to rural Cambria was like coming home for him. Before being assigned to Immaculate Conception, he worked 10 years as pastor at Our Lady of Loretto Catholic Church at 172 15th St., Buffalo.

"A visitor at Immaculate Conception once asked me 'Don't you have a crying room for children?' and I said sure we do, the whole church," he said. "During Mass I invite the children up to the altar to say the Lord's Prayer with me."

To relieve overcrowding at Sunday Masses, a third Mass at noon has been offered since last fall. The Rev. Salvatore J. Piazza, a retired priest who lives in Sanborn, helps out by offering one of the Sunday Masses.

Gordon J. Knapp, chairman of

the parish building committee, credited Father Nuwer's "friendly style" with drawing new members to the parish.

"Catholic churches all over are losing members, and our parish was among them for a number of years, but through Father Nuwer's hard work and ability to relate to the younger generation, he's bringing people back to the church," said Knapp, a 32-year parish member. "Of course he won't admit any of this, but we (the parishioners) will."

The first effort to accommodate the influx of new parishioners involved doubling the size of the church parking lot from a half-acre to a full acre and refurbishing the inside of the church in 1990 and 1991 at a cost of \$128,000.

Phase one of the latest expansion includes building an 8,000-square-foot parish center, which will be attached to the existing 5,000-square-foot parish hall. The hall will be remodeled into classrooms and meeting rooms. The second phase of the project will increase seating capacity of the church.

Though costs for the new expansion are not being announced, a fund drive last year raised \$310,000 that will be used with other parish funds to pay for the project.