

Fallston parishioners celebrate faith across generations

By Elizabeth Skalski

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FALLSTON – Parishioners and staff members say the welcoming nature of St. Mark, Fallston, has sparked youth and adult participation.

Charlotte Henderson, the parish's pastoral associate and a parishioner, said people ask others for help, "and, by that invitation they take ownership of our parish. Even the children are involved."

"There's a spirit about here," Henderson said, "The people here are just open and welcoming. The presence of the Lord is in the church, no matter if the church is full or empty."

Father Gerard C. Francik, pastor, brought enthusiasm to the church with his December 2010 arrival, Henderson said.

"His energy," Henderson said, "has brought a lot of younger people to doing more, spurring them on."

Father Francik said the parish was like "a flower that needed some sunlight and water."

"It's like the dam has broken and the water is flowing again," Father Francik said. "People feel very welcome here."

Last year, more than 100 families joined the church, said Father Francik, who anticipates the parish will continue to grow.

Jacob Schwendinger, St. Mark's youth minister, said parish youths serve as lectors

and extraordinary ministers of holy Communion alongside adults.

“The liturgy is the source and summit of the Catholic faith,” Schwendinger said, “and to see youth involved and give witness to the current state of the church (is awesome).”

The church, which will celebrate its 125th anniversary in September, has a Mass the second Sunday of each month which involves young people in the ministries. It allows parish youths to take “hold of their faith,” Father Francik said.

“They have a zeal for their faith,” Father Francik said. “They are our church, and they will be our church in the future. They own it, they feel part of it.”

Deacon Charles W. Hicks, a parishioner since 1958 and a deacon at St. Mark (retired), said Father Francik “just naturally relates to youth.”

“Father Jerry reaches out to them, they relate to him,” Deacon Hicks said.

Father Francik also “empowers the (adult) laity,” even if parishioners volunteer to answer the phone in the parish office, Deacon Hicks said.

“Father Jerry has got energy,” Deacon Hicks said. “He’s just on fire.”

The parish participates in interfaith events – including ecumenical Stations of the Cross and a Thanksgiving interfaith service – with Holy Communion Lutheran Church in Fallston, Fallston United Methodist Church and Fallston Presbyterian Church.

Father Francik is “very supportive” of interfaith events at the parish, Deacon Hicks said.

“The parish has a reputation as familial,” Deacon Hicks said. “Parishioners own the parish.”

Parishioners formed SPARK Family Ministry, a family fellowship group that began meeting monthly in September 2011, Father Francik said.

Each month a different topic is presented – either a social issue or a church

teaching, Schwendinger said. Families meet, break into age-appropriate groups to discuss the topic and then reconvene.

SPARK works to “keep the flame of faith alive,” Father Francik said.

Next month the group plans to dedicate its meeting to a day of service to beautify the parish grounds, Father Francik said.

St. Mark, Fallston

At A Glance

Location: 2407 Laurel Brook Road

Established as a mission: 1887

Established as a parish: 1968

Registered Families: 1,650

Pastor: Rev. Gerard C. Francik

Deacons: Charles W. Hicks (retired), Martin Perry

Pastoral Associate: Charlotte Henderson

Administrator of Faith Formation: Bridgit Goedeke

Youth Minister: Jacob Schwendinger

Phone: 410-879-9110

Web: saintmarkfallston.org

Masses: Saturday, 4 p.m.; Sunday 7:30, 9 and 11 a.m.; Monday through Friday 9 a.m.

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