

# News of Area Churches

## HOOSICK FALLS

### The Legacy Of Father Tom

by Bea Peterson

No, really, that's our priest... More than one member of Immaculate Conception Church in Hoosick Falls has had to explain to an outsider that the dude in the baggy shorts and over-size tee-shirt is Father Tom Zelker. Admittedly, Fr. Tom is not your average Catholic priest. He's different. He's exceptional. Everyone of every faith, throughout the Hoosick area, knows Fr. Tom. He's often seen walking or biking in the village. A true outdoorsman and former for-ester, Fr. Tom has taken adults and many many teens canoeing/kayaking, tubing, hiking, fishing, caving (spelunking), skiing and snowshoeing. To be part of any of these experiences is memorable. He's opened his home for years to dinners honoring St. Casimir, St. Kateri Tekakwitha, St. Patrick, Mardi Gras, wine tastings and more.

Fr. Tom has been pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Hoosick Falls for over 10 years. He has been reassigned to churches in the Middleburg area, effective May 1. He will say his last masses in Hoosick Falls and Cambridge this weekend. He says memorable moments for him while here in Hoosick Falls have been many. They include the hospitality of St. Mark's and First United Presbyterian Churches, the Christmas Mass at Hoosick Falls Central School, the people in the parish, the homebound and the hospitalized with whom he spent a good portion of his time until COVID. Other highlights include St. Mary's, Hoosick Falls and Cambridge graduations, the celebration of his 30th Anniversary as a priest in 2013, the parade, music, food and the roasting! He has loved sitting on his front porch waving to people, watching parades, especially the sports parades when they ring the church bell, attending school sporting events and participating in activities he's organized for young people. Special to him has been the installation of a monument for those deemed unworthy in the past and buried outside the boundaries of St. Mary's Cemetery. The Prayers of Remembrance for victims of atrocities, with drums played similar to those at the Kennedy funeral, the recent Black Lives Matter service, which, he said, is important for us as a village, as a nation, have also been special. From almost day one he has had to deal with the deaths of parishioners, from the many elderly of the parish to the young, to suicides and, most recently, COVID. He said the loss of Ron Jones had a deep impact on him.

Ric Ferraninni has served on several parish committees. He says Fr. Tom allows the committees to use their own wisdom, to listen to each other's opinions and see each other's views, adding his own opinion and to seeing how things play out. "It's a slow process, but it works." His reverence during Mass is notable. He practices what he preaches. His homilies are short, often humorous and always thought provoking. He brings faith and comfort to those he serves.

Fr. Tom came to Hoosick Falls to be pastor of Immaculate Conception Church. Then St. Patrick's in Cam-



Father Tom Zelker

bridge was added to his assignment. His stay here has also included being a Vicar for the Diocese for four years.

He's dealt with a leaky roof in the rectory, sections of the church ceiling nearly falling on him and a flood that severely damaged the lower levels of the church. When the church was deemed unsafe Fr. Tom said Masses in the gym of St. Mary's Academy. Then the parish went through a crisis with what to do about the church building itself, build a new one or save the old one. In the end the parishioners, supported by Fr. Tom, chose to restore the old church and a gigantic building fund was started. At this point test portions of the ceiling have been repaired and work on the roof is set to begin imminently. Masses were moved to the First Presbyterian United Church, then COVID shut down church services all together. Now Fr. Tom says Mass downstairs in the restored Immaculate Conception Church hall, with attendance limited by COVID restrictions.

#### HACA Honors Fr. Tom Zelker

Dianne Hosterman of HACA sums up Fr. Tom's time in Hoosick Falls perfectly. "Words cannot adequately express the gratitude the Board and the volunteers of the Hoosick Area Church Association, as well as those we serve, for the partnership of Fr. Tom over the years. His willingness to share his time and talents with us is recognized, valued, appreciated and cherished. It is important for Fr. Tom to know that all that he has done has made a huge difference, and his departure will leave an emptiness."

In addition to his gifts of service, Fr. Tom said he enjoys the 4th of July, Polish food, old movies, fishing, caving, skiing, canoeing and gardening. The latter can be attested to in the Community Garden adjacent to Immaculate Conception Church on Elm Street which has blessed the Food Pantry each summer with fresh vegetables.

Fr. Tom has served on the HACA Board, assisted with the annual food distributions at Thanksgiving and Christmas, participated in the Lenten Lunch programs, the Good Friday Walk, Taste of Hoosick, and many more events too numerous to mention. The fruits of his labor have lent a hand to show kindness and caring that makes the greatest difference in the lives of the individuals who have been touched by his kindness."

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### A Place At The Table

On May 3 Catholic Charities Tri-County Services will launch a one-week virtual event illustrating the needs within our communities and the ways in which Catholic Charities is making a difference. Virtual attendees will have an opportunity to support our work by making a gift of their choosing.

Amidst the challenges our world is facing today, Catholic Charities meets people where they are. A Place at the Table will offer a glimpse into the world our clients navigate every day, having to ask themselves questions such as:

- My son is growing and needs new clothes. How will I ever make ends meet?
- Should I pick up food for my children or pay the heating bill?
- I have recently been furloughed from my job and have fallen so far behind. How can I keep enough food on the table?

Their struggles are very real and hunger is most often a symptom of a larger issue in their life such as: having no bus fare to go to work, a past due heating bill, or needing to pay for Internet now that their child's education depends on it. Our goal is to see that no person goes hungry with a larger hope to strengthen their lives and our communities.

I invite you join me in supporting our local communities. You can help by liking our Facebook page at facebook.com/cctricounty or by signing up for our e-newsletter by contacting Justine Carroll at jcarroll@ccalbany.org. Our work will be highlighted through daily videos shared via these venues from May 3 - May 7. The success of our work is truly the result of community support. We simply cannot do it without you.

### Gilead's Body and Soul Pantry

As I'm writing this, I'm trying to figure out if what I see are snowflakes or if Mother Nature has a bad case of dandruff. I hope it's snowflakes because I

know we don't have any Head and Shoulders on our pantry shelves.

We wish we could have you come back inside on Thursday, April 29 and have dinner with us, but the virus still has us doing take out meals. This month our menu is a barbeque chicken leg and thigh, pasta salad, vegetable, and dessert. The hours are 3 to 6 pm. This will be our last dinner until the end of September.

Those who have not visited us before can find us at the intersection of Routes 7 and 278 in Center Brunswick. We are located in the Gilead Lutheran Church fellowship hall.

### Eagle Bridge Thrift Store

The Eagle Bridge Methodist Church is resuming its weekly Thrift Store on Wednesdays through October 27. COVID-19 protocols will be followed. The church is located on Route 67 in Eagle Bridge.

### Rummage And Food Sale in Pittstown

The Pittstown United Methodist Church will hold a Rummage and Food Sale on Friday, May 21 from 9:30 am to 4 pm and on Saturday, May 22 from 9:30 am to 2 pm at the Church Hall, 57 Old Route 7 in Pittstown (Valley Falls mailing address). Bag Sale on Saturday only. \$2 per bag. Buy 2 bags and get 1 free. For information call Carolyn at 518-663-8253 for clothing and small items or Herb at 518-753-4427 or 518-593-0003 for other items.

### Craft Fair Vendors Needed

Vendors are requested for a Craft Fair on Saturday, June 12 from 9 am to 4 pm at the Pittstown United Methodist Church Hall, 57 Old Route 7 in Pittstown (Valley Falls mailing address), sponsored by the United Methodist Women of Pittstown. All Vendors are welcome. \$20 per table. Indoor and Outdoor space available. Tables provided. Contact: Carolyn O'Donnell, 6 Factory Hollow Road, Valley Falls, NY 12185 at 518-663-8253. Food will be available at event for purchase.

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