

PARISH ANGEL

By Peggy Weber

Photo courtesy of St. Mary Parish

Vinny Pulchtopek is pictured with his pastor, Father Piotr Calik.

'MY FAITH MEANS EVERYTHING'

95-year-old Vinny Pulchtopek continues volunteer work as parish 'yeoman'



WARE

~~WARE~~ Vincent Pulchtopek graduated from Ware High School in 1942 and a month later he was at sea on a Navy convoy in the Atlantic Ocean.

He was only 17 but served as a yeoman on the ship. That meant he assisted the captain as his clerk and aide. He had the skill set to quietly help, stay organized, and make sure things got done.

And for the last three decades, he has been the "yeoman" to many pastors at St. Mary Parish in Ware. The 95-year-old has spent almost every day helping out at his parish and getting a lot of things done.

His current pastor, Father Piotr Calik, praised Vinny and nominated him as a Parish Angel. He says, "He is a very humble person, who knows, without a doubt, his Catholic faith and prayers in both English and Polish."

Father Calik adds, "Basically, he does everything: setting up for Masses, lighting the candles, preparing the readings of the day, and being sure that I have the Roman Missal on the correct day for prayers. He opens and locks the church."

"I think that the best way to describe him is that he is a deacon without being ordained a deacon," Father Calik says. "He is a very organized person. If for some reason I am running late, which means I am in church 10 minutes before Mass instead of 15, he is already worried that we will not start Mass on time."

Vinny takes on many tasks in the parish. He cleans church items, teaches the altar

servers, acts as an usher, and serves the daily Mass at 7:30 a.m. He also organizes the votive candles by setting them up and collecting the money each week. Vinny says he just likes to help in any way he can but that his favorite part is serving Mass.

He retired in 1979 from a paper factory and began helping lots of people – especially his parish community. "It's what I learned in the service. If someone wanted some help I was there. I like helping out people," he says.

Vinny is very skilled, but he says he never learned to drive a car. "It usually takes just 12 minutes to walk to church, but I start an hour early in case I run into someone."

Steve Kutt has been working alongside Vinny for the past 17 years. He notes that Vinny arrives at 6 or 6:30 a.m. to prepare for Mass.

"He is a wonderful mentor. The energy he has is unexplained. He is a humble guy. With him it's all about the church – it's all about the people. He's very into his faith. He's a giving person. He follows the Mass so intently. He is so spiritual. He never looks for credit. He's just one

great individual," says Steve.

Vinny prays the rosary every day by leading the prayer before Mass. He says he enjoys helping out and that "my faith means everything. Without it, I don't think I could exist."

Vinny, who is one of 11 children, graduated from the former St. Mary School in Ware. He says he is proud of his Polish heritage and faith. His wife, Dorothy, died in 2000 after 56 years of marriage. He has two adult children, grandchildren, and lots of nieces and nephews. His favorite saint is Pope John Paul II.

Father Calik says that Vinny is very caring and always prepared.

"Back in November, Vinny started asking if we had a tomb ready for Good Friday. That was before Christmas when he was already thinking of being ready for Easter. I am very glad to have Vinny's help, but also to know him.

"He is an inspiration to me and to all who know him," Father Calik says. "We need more people like him, those who truly believe in the word 'volunteer.' Yes, that means doing work for the glory of God without asking for a return favor." †

Parish Angels

Nominations of lay volunteers from the Springfield Diocese for

The Catholic Mirror's "Parish Angel" series may be sent to r.drake@diospringfield.org; or Rebecca Drake, Editor/News Director, Catholic Communications, P.O. Box 1730, Springfield, MA 01102-1730.

Please include contact information for the person or persons being nominated.