

Priest carries on tradition of faith at St. Peter Church

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Where the Rev. James McLoughlin spent 14 years building a fire of faith in Geneva, the Rev. Joseph **Jarmoluk** is adding more logs to keep it burning bright at **St. Peter** Catholic Church and School in Geneva. "Father Joe brings an enthusiastic excitement that puts us to the test but builds a desire to stretch, to reach out, to have courage and enjoy it (life and work) at the same time," said John Lamperis, director of religious education at **St. Peter**.

That spark and devotion is probably why McLoughlin hand-picked 42-year-old **Jarmoluk** to succeed him at **St. Peter** when he left six months ago.

McLoughlin led the congregation through landmark change from 1983 to November 1997. During his tenure, he oversaw construction of a new church that opened in 1993. He watched as the congregation almost tripled from 850 to 2,200 families and as school and religious education enrollment increased. And he oversaw the start of many new religious programs.

"I've been doing a lot of listening, observing and finding out how things work," **Jarmoluk** said. "It's foolish to come in and change things.

His focus right now is getting to know people, he said.

Large congregations are not unfamiliar to **Jarmoluk**.

At his last post, he led two Carroll County parishes 30 miles south of Galena that had a combined membership of 400 families. But **Jarmoluk** has spent time working at larger parishes with memberships between 1,000 and 1,500 families, including **St. John Neumann** in **St. Charles** from 1984 to 1987.

"We're very blessed to have Father Joe with us," said Carol Jacklin, director of administrative services. "He makes you feel comfortable with him right away.

"People have welcomed him warmly. It's a nice match."

Jarmoluk's and McLoughlin's similar views on faith and their role in the church also has helped ease the transition.

Jarmoluk believes he must focus on reaching out to young and old to teach and reinforce the Catholic identity and traditions, which was a thrust of McLoughlin's efforts before he left, **Jarmoluk** said.

"They both look at the big picture for the church," parishioner Chuck Lencioni said. McLoughlin led the building campaign and hired staff members to serve the growing congregation. Equally dedicated, **Jarmoluk** is building momentum for parishioners' involvement to increase, Lencioni said.

"It's refreshing," Lencioni said. "He's got a lot of energy. He's going to add a lot of spark to this parish."

Jarmoluk motivates people because he is positive, uplifting, enthusiastic, focused and perceptive, Lamperis said.

"He has a way of making you feel valuable, a way of seeing a person's hidden gift and nurturing it," Lamperis said.

The church membership and participation in its 67 religious programs reflect that faith. **St. Peter** has one of the highest worship attendance rates in the Rockford Diocese, **Jarmoluk** said. The congregation has grown so much that **Jarmoluk** is adding another Saturday service this fall.

Not only are the church pews filled every Sunday, but classroom chairs are filled in the school and a waiting list continues.

With another 1,000 parish families expected during the next two years, he also is assessing facilities.

"He seems like he's good for the young and the old," lifelong parishioner JoAnn Emma said. "He's firm and yet warm, just like a good parent.

"They give discipline, yet they show great love."

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