

St. Anthony's

Elmira Parish Marks Golden Jubilee



Mary Meteyer of the Courier Journal displays national Catholic Press Association award for "Best Front Page" won by the diocesan newspaper at the organization's annual meeting in Omaha.

The 570 families of St. Anthony's, Elmira, will mark their parish Golden Jubilee with a solemn Mass this Sunday, May 24, at 11 a.m.

Their anniversary Mass in a basement chapel is a reversal of their origin when their parish began in an "upper room" — in the borrowed quarters of a nearby school.

The basement ceremony will recall the 1917 fire which gutted their church and sent them, like the parish founders, into borrowed quarters once again, until the present combination school and church was completed in 1948.

Auxiliary Bishop Lawrence B. Casey will preside and preach at the jubilee Mass. Celebrant will be Rev. William A. Burns, pastor.

Today's St. Anthony's counts over 100 infant baptisms a year, 12 adult converts, and 60 First Communicants.

Bishop Casey will confirm a class of 61 Sunday afternoon following the anniversary Mass.

As early as 1905 Bishop McQuaid sent Father Ernest Zeigler to care for the increasing number of Italian people in the Elmira area.

When repairs were made, the sanctuary and vestries of the church were enlarged by reason of a generous answer of many people to Father Richard's appeal for help.

Here in this "Upper Room" were the beginnings of parish unity and here, too, this new name they have come to begin to lose its strangeness as they savored the old familiar things of their faith, bringing them peace and a renewal of hope.

Father Zeigler's successor was Father Antonio Trezza. In 1908, shortly after the arrival of Father Trezza, the Diocese of Rochester bought a house and lot on West Washington Avenue where the present Church-School building stands.

This house was remodeled for church services. It was here that the first Mass was held and it was here that the Italian people of Elmira found a spiritual home.

This, the first church building of the parish still stands, having been moved to make way for a new church in 1909. It is now the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph who teach in the parochial school.

In April 1908, Father Adolph L. Gabbanl became pastor of the new parish dedicated to St. Anthony. Father Gabbanl was the first pastor of the parish.

During that time this dynamic priest, at the request of his own strong spirituality on the people of St. Anthony's, shortly after his arrival he began plans for a new church building. Work was soon begun and in 1910 the new church was completed and dedicated by Bishop Thomas F. Hickey. It was a combination church, school and auditorium, which immediately became the center of parish religious, educational and social life.

An annex was added in 1921 to this building. Father Gabbanl while building a church of brick and stone did not forget that he was a spiritual builder as well but worked to form the minds and hearts of his people according to the highest standards of the year among the people of St. Anthony's he established the church organizations known as the Sacred Heart Men's Society, the Sacred Heart Ladies' Society and the Daughters of Mary.

These groups with their insistence on the monthly reception of Holy Communion led the people of the parish into the habit of frequent Communion.

Father Gabbanl's restless activity on behalf of his people was animated by an active charity and a lively good humor which endeared him not only to his own parishioners but to the whole Elmira community.

In July, 1914, Father Hermann Schaefer took charge of the parish while Father Gabbanl returned to Italy for a visit. In December of that same year Father Gabbanl was back in St. Anthony's and remained until 1925 when he was transferred by Bishop Hickey to the pastorate of St. Francis Assisi Church in Rochester. In 1935 he was made pastor of a Church in Auburn dedicated to the same patron. In 1947 Father Gabbanl was raised to the rank of Domestic Prelate by Pope Pius XII. This beloved former pastor of St. Anthony's died in Auburn in 1949.

Father Leonard Naab succeeded to the pastorate of St. Anthony's in July, 1925 and remained until July, 1927. Father Naab was a priest of the Diocese of Newark at the time. His two year charge of St. Anthony's was that of an able and forceful administrator.

In 1927 Father Naab returned to his native Diocese. When the division of the Diocese of Newark took place in 1937 Father Naab became a member of the newly formed diocese of Camden in which he now resides as



Interior of St. Anthony's Church, Elmira

pastor of St. Paul's Church in Stone Harbor, New Jersey.

Father Anthony Richard was St. Anthony's next pastor. He was a native of Italy who came to St. Anthony's after assignments in Rochester. This priest in his eight year stay at St. Anthony's was a kindly shepherd of his people and during the depression years his quiet strength gave encouragement to his people.

His self-sacrificing administration kept the considerable debt of the parish from becoming greater. In this despite a fire in the church building in 1933.

This was the Silver Jubilee year of the parish which marked the event with a celebration in the Spring. Joy turned to sadness when a fire whose damage was estimated at \$15,000 destroyed the church.

When repairs were made, the sanctuary and vestries of the church were enlarged by reason of a generous answer of many people to Father Richard's appeal for help.

The new pastor assigned to St. Anthony's to succeed Father Pece was Father Bernard C. Hanna. A native Rochesterian and nephew of the late Archbishop Hanna of San Francisco, Father Hanna made his theological studies in Rome where he was ordained in 1930.

Before coming to St. Anthony's Father Hanna had been assistant to Msgr. Gabbanl in St. Francis' Church, Auburn, N.Y.

Soon after Father Hanna became pastor of St. Anthony's he inaugurated publication of a parish bulletin, the "Antoniano." With his capable assistance, Father Vogt at the controls of the mimeograph machine the Antoniano began a career which has proceeded without interruption until the present time.

The reader of the early issues of the Antoniano gets a vivid impression of tremendous parish activity, religious, social, athletic.

The parish hall was in constant use by members of parish societies, bowling leagues of men and women, flourishing parish picnics were enjoyed by old and young alike; even a hockey league schedule is preserved for posterity in the Antoniano.

As a matter of record, there is brief mention of a probably even-bristler hockey match between Father Hanna and Father Vogt which had to be called on account of lack of breath!

As might be expected about this time the Antoniano early 1941 points out that the floor of the parish hall has grown thin. From thirty years of healthy use.

Father Hanna's appeal for funds for a new floor and volunteer labor to reduce the cost was met with so generous a response of both that besides a new floor the old hall was repainted. Later in the same year another appeal and a similar reply led to a complete redecoration of the church.

It was providential that the youth, especially of St. Anthony's had such priestly leaders as Father Hanna and Father Vogt at that particular point of time for the same young feet that beat the last signs of life out of the old floor in the parish hall would soon be marching on the training grounds and battlefields of World War II.

There is a fitness, too, in the fact that both priests soon entered the Armed Forces as chaplains. Father Hanna became a Navy chaplain and Father Vogt joining the Army both in 1942.

Father Hanna was succeeded by Father Albert L. Simonetti who was appointed Administrator of the parish in 1942. Father Simonetti took his theological training in Rome where he was ordained in 1936. He

came to St. Anthony's after assignments as an assistant pastor in his native Rochester.

Coming to St. Anthony's as he did in the early war years, Father Simonetti was a strong source of comfort and strength to those whose sons and daughters were leaving daily for military service.

He quickly organized a home front of prayer for parishioners in the service and kept alive the lines of communication between home and war front by means of letters and the pages of the Antoniano. Father Simonetti, himself, served as chaplain to a prisoner of war camp located in Chemung County.

A priest of rich talent, Father Simonetti was a gifted musician and an orator of force, charm and wit. The services of the church, under his direction spoke a message of beauty as well as truth.

As an able speaker in pulpit or on platform he was not only eagerly attended by his own parishioners but was sought after for speaking engagements at church and community functions in the Elmira area and beyond.

Father Simonetti proved himself a thoroughly capable parish administrator, too, in this his third assignment as a pastor. His predecessors in St. Anthony's had left the parish property in good condition but constant expenditures for operating expense, interest payments and the usual emergencies left a sizeable debt on the 30 year old parish.

Father Simonetti energetically directed a number of varied parish activities with the aim of reducing this debt. So well did he succeed and so generous was the cooperation of the people both in working and giving that the parish indebtedness was completely liquidated.

This happy event was celebrated Sunday, September 15, 1945, with a solemn High Field Mass of Thanksgiving. A mortgage-burning ceremony took place that day also with Msgr. William J. Brien, Dean of the Elmira Diocese, Father Simonetti and the parish trustees, Mr. Adolph A. Crull and Mr. John L. Cavaluzzi participating.

In November, 1945, Father Simonetti was named pastor of St. Anthony's by Bishop Kearney.

The people of St. Anthony's remember with affection the priests who served as assistant pastors—during these years.

From June, 1940, to February, 1941, St. Anthony's had the benefit of the ministrations of two assistants. Along with Father Vogt, Father Alfredo Morotti was assigned to the parish to assist the then pastor Father Hanna.

Father Morotti was a classmate of Father Vogt but exceeded him in age by a wide margin of years because he had entered St. Bernard's Seminary to study for the priesthood after a successful career in the business world. After ordination in 1938 he had conducted missions for Italian people in various parts of the diocese.

At St. Anthony's Father Morotti ministered with great effectiveness to the sick and elderly parishioners. When he was transferred in 1941, Bishop Kearney gave him a general assignment to minister to the elderly infirm people of Italian descent in the Rochester area.

Later on Father Morotti served in St. Patrick's parish in Rochester. After a long illness he died in Rochester December 4, 1958.

Succeeding Father Vogt in 1942 was Father Lawrence Sanson, now assistant pastor at St. John the Evangelist Church in Spencerport, N.Y. Father John Healy came to St. Anthony's in 1943, remaining until the Fall of 1944. He is now administrator of St. Ann's Church, Palmyra.

Father Bernard Hickey succeeded Father Healy in 1944. Father Hickey, a native of North Waverly served at St. Anthony's until April, 1946. After military service in the U.S. Army as chaplain, Father Hickey is now pastor in the recently formed Diocese of Miami, Florida.

Father Hickey was succeeded in 1946 by Father Ignatius S. George who was destined to remain at St. Anthony's until January, 1951. Father S. George aided in the organization of the Catholic War Veterans group and was an active participant with the young men of the parish in the revival of a community athletic program.

The peace of mind engendered by the liquidation of the longstanding parish debt in 1945 was rudely shattered for Father Simonetti, Father S. George and the people of St. Anthony's February 26, 1947 when a devastating fire destroyed the church building. Within hours the heart of parish life for 37 years was reduced to a smoldering ruin.

It was a terrible blow to the priests and people of St. Anthony's but they reacted with characteristic acceptance of all things, even this tragedy of tragedy, as an expression of God's will and within hours the offers to help came to Father Simonetti from all sides. Arrangements had been made to continue parochial life without serious interruption.

Accepted as the most practicable were the offers of Elmira College for the use of Cowles Hall Chapel for the Sunday Masses, of Father Szczepanski, pastor of St. Casimir's Church and of the Elmira Schools offering school rooms. The late Monsignor Brien had offered the use of St. Patrick's Church and this was accepted for the other necessary church services such as confessions, baptisms and weddings.

Plans to rebuild and to hold a fund raising campaign to meet the cost were soon being made and in a few weeks such a campaign was actually under way.

When the final auditing had been made, close to \$170,000 had been pledged. Once again St. Anthony's priests and people had turned a tragedy into triumph. The monument to that triumph was soon to rise.

Mr. Leo Considine of the local architect firm of Haskell and Considine designed it and Mitchell Brothers, Contractors, the lowest bidders, built it. This monument to the new St. Anthony's school and church building was ready for the cornerstone laying ceremony February 22, 1948 and was dedicated by Bishop Kearney December 5, 1948.

It was a day of pride and joy for Bishop Kearney, the priests, parishioners and their friends. It was a day of thanksgiving, too, especially for Father Simonetti who had his parish family back together again in its Father's House.

Two other events took place in 1947 worthy of note in the parish story. On March 28 in the midst of the fund raising campaign Sister M. Baptista, the principal of St. Anthony's School died. Sister had been an instructor in St. Anthony's for 33 of the 36 years of her religious life. The last five years spent as principal. The parish paused in tender remembrance and dedicated their remaining efforts in the campaign to her memory.

The other important event that year was the acquisition of a property at 912 College Avenue. Father Simonetti was desirous of having a place where the kindergarten could be taken care of and where the parish societies could hold their meetings.

This property with its spacious house served the purpose well and still is used as a meeting place for the church groups.

In 1950 Father Simonetti obtained permission to purchase the house and lot adjacent to the Rectory. After purchase the house was razed in 1952 and the property landscaped.

In January, 1951 Father S. George who had been Father Simonetti's strong right arm in the anxiety filled days of '47-'48 was transferred from St. Anthony's to Assumption Church in Fairport.

Father Nicholas P. Alletto, the present assistant pastor, succeeded Father S. George. Father Alletto was no stranger to Elmira having been stationed at Our Lady of Lourdes Church as assistant pastor to Father Schwab. He had also served in his own home parish, St. Patrick's in Rochester and in Assumption Church, Fairport.

Father Simonetti was appointed chaplain of the Elmira Deane Chapter of the Holy Name Society in May, 1951. In this new capacity he organized annually a day of recollection for all the area Holy Name Men.

Since 1947 the parish has acquired a new, completely modern school with St. Anthony's Chapel which saves at each church in the basement floor, two additional of property the one, known as St. Anthony's Annex on College Avenue, the other purchased in 1950 adjacent to the Rectory on North Main St.

In 1953 Father Simonetti was transferred to the Church of the Annunciation in Rochester where his well tested administrative and organizational talents were needed in order to adapt the over crowded facilities of that parish to meet needs of a rapidly expanding area.

Succeeding Father Simonetti as pastor of St. Anthony's was the present pastor, Father William A. Burns since 1958. Father Burns is a native of Elmira, a Catholic High School and assistant principal during the two previous years. An Elmira since the age of five years Father Burns was already well acquainted with the parish and people of St. Anthony's.

Such Opposites From Same Faith

Two strikingly opposite news items came to the Courier Journal editor's desk this week.

One was the testimony of 18 year old Shirley O'Neill who risked her life near San Francisco to save her shark stricken companion Albert Kogler and then baptized him moments before he died — the other was the report of how a 13 year old Catholic schooled boy stabbed a 12 year old girl who repulsed his immoral advances.

Miss O'Neill credits "my faith, my parents, my Catholic education and God's grace" for the heroic and quick-witted action which attracted the nation's attention.

Were it not for her firm faith, she told reporters, "I wouldn't have been able to go back for Al. I would have been too afraid to die."

Despite warnings to "get out of here," the daring teenager swam through the foaming red water to bring the dying boy to land where she baptized him and led him in making an Act of Contrition. A Lutheran minister who conducted the boy's funeral said the girl "could not save his life but she saved his soul instead."

THE TRAGIC OPPOSITE followed quickly afterwards in New Orleans where a lad from a good home, who regularly attained good grades at a private Catholic school stabbed to death the girl who refused his impudic suggestions!

The girl's pastor, Monsignor Gerard Frey, placed the blame for the tragedy on the "atmosphere of sexualism" which corrupts youngsters as they watch TV programs, movies, newspaper ads, magazines and comic strips.

He also said parents who prematurely push children into boy-girl activities and provide youngsters with everything they want condition their children to a soft and an emotion-ruled life.

He stated the need children have for discipline and sacrifice if they are ever to develop a sense of responsibility.

These two episodes — the prompt, courageous heroism at San Francisco and the tragic, frightening brutality at New Orleans — graphically illustrate how youngsters with the same faith can act so differently. The age-old parable of the seed falling some on good ground, some on rocks and amidst the briars takes on a twentieth century aspect in these two stories.

Both youngsters received the same sacraments, studied the same catechism, recited the same prayers, but one was given a dynamic sense of "faith first" while the other — in the heart of a kind and devout home — had that faith corroded by a pagan environment which violated the lessons taught by parents and teachers.

Strange But True



IN THE IRISH ARMY, THE ROYAL SALUTE IS RESERVED EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

Courier Journal advertisement with logo and contact information for the Rochester Diocese.



Priests and lay trustees of St. Anthony's, Elmira, recall the 50-year history of the parish. From left, Father Nicholas Alletto, curate; Father William A. Burns, pastor; and Adolph A. Crull and John L. Cavaluzzi.