



Informal conversations such as this one are typical of Immaculate's Sunday coffee hour after 10 a.m. Mass.

## Immaculate Inner City Success Story

(Continued from Page 7)

### Community Outreach

Perhaps the single biggest sign of the comeback of Immaculate Conception parish has been the "Community Ministry". Founded last June with Larry Coppard as community minister, the program is an ecumenical one (Larry himself is a member of the United Church of Christ) and serves as Immaculate's outreach to the whole neighborhood.

Father Kreckel puts it this way: "We have a stated principle which guides Immaculate Conception: we're a territorial parish, not by membership but by mission. Our attitude is that we don't live within the physical boundaries of a parish—we're community oriented towards bringing the church into this area."

"Bishop Sheen himself made a distinction between pastoral ministry to church members and the outreach of a parish to the whole community. Our parish is trying to join the two by orienting the work of the parish to involvement with the community."

Groundwork for the Community Ministry was laid when 15 nuns from the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Mercy Order trooped the streets of the Third Ward in the summer of 1967 to uncover the needs of the people to which the churches could respond.

From this survey four areas of need were discovered: Christian education, attention to the elderly, youth, and community issues (playgrounds, landlord-tenant problems, sanitation).

### Ecumenical Church School

Following up this research, the Ecumenical Church School was founded last fall. Four Third Ward churches, Emmanuel and Trinity Presbyterian, Calvary Baptist and Immaculate, have combined facilities so that some 300 children representing 153 families can attend classes on a Saturday morning (at Immaculate) and Tuesday afternoons (at the two other churches).

The faculty of 40, directed by Mercy Sister Josepha, is almost entirely composed of lay volunteers. "Such a setup," says Father Kreckel, "gives people an opportunity for mission. It provides a means of living out the Christian mission through our structures."

According to Larry Coppard, the school has been received so well that some students are being turned away now, because at this point there just isn't enough room.

Following up on their research once again, St. Joseph, Sister Kieran and two seminarians, one from Colgate-Rochester and the other from St. Bernard's, set out to tackle the ministry to the elderly and community problems. Working with existing inner city agencies, the trio has become involved with a whole flock of inner city projects: 101 lots, low-income housing, visitations to the elderly.

Young people present unique problems everywhere, but perhaps more so in the often grim surroundings of the inner city. Now, through the Community Ministry, 15 area residents meet regularly with two seminarians to plan how they may best work with youth. Thus far, negotiations have begun for a youth center on Jefferson Ave., summer programs have been planned and a cultural enrichment project for those under 14 years old is underway.

The parish council of Immaculate is a good example of just how beneficial this lay involvement can be. Father Kreckel explained it this way:

"The parish council is not to assist the pastor but to assume its rightful role in parish life. Too many clerics are performing too many roles which don't belong to them. Through this council, we're attempting to make our program here at Immaculate something other than a clerical enterprise."

**Gauging the Impact**  
What do the parishioners themselves think of the Immaculate comeback? One newcomer, Dr. George McVey, a Brighton resident, who has joined the Third Ward parish with his family, was first attracted to Immaculate because of its undefinable spirit and since then has actively contributed to it. He commented:

"My wife and I were looking for something in terms of parish life which is not easy to define. We went there on Sunday once or twice and eventually decided to join up." That was in October, 1966. Dr. McVey is an active member of the parish now currently acting as president of the parish council.

Mr. and Mrs. Albion Gruber drive over from Vassar St. with their children each Sunday and are now formal members of Immaculate Conception. "We wanted a place where we could contribute something—and we settled on this parish," explained Gruber.

While the newcomers have brought much fresh spirit and enthusiasm with them, it would be a mistake to spell out Immaculate's comeback in terms of the recent arrivals only.

Long time parishioners, many of whom are still living in the Third Ward, have made a great contribution of their own. Mrs. Betty de Rouen of Columbia Ave. is typical of the "old" parishioners, even though she is a young woman. But she has lived in the parish since she was a child.

Looking back over a 20-year affiliation with the parish, she said:

"There's no question about the activity that's showing up. We're finding new opportunities for our families not only to pray together, but also to play together. The parish is becoming a real center for many activities in the neighborhood."

Mrs. De Rouen now serves on the parish council as its program chairman, recently helped to get a Saturday film program launched for the kids, and is helping start a new group for parents of the Immaculate school children.

She considers the Plymouth Ave. parish "a mainstay" of the neighborhood. She mentioned the availability of the community school as a meeting place for various groups, at a small rental fee, as an example.

**Loud and Clear**  
Obviously the "voice" coming out of Immaculate Conception is being heard loud and clear. But never satisfied with what has been accomplished, Father Kreckel says: "I think we're all aware of the job we have to do. We have come a long way—but we have a long way to go."

Larry Coppard echoes the same sentiments when he says: "A project is never finalized—it's always in a state of transition. There's only one thing: get the job done. If we who are involved with Immaculate and the Community Ministry don't then why be there?"

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