

Scratch Benvenuto ... Make It WELCOME!

By SHARON DARNIEDER

So you think the English language is easy. Take it from a newcomer, it isn't.

"The first time was hard," said Mrs. Joanne Sorci, 33, who spoke no English at all when she and her family came here from Palermo, Sicily, almost eight years ago.

"But I understand it better now," she explains in a heavy accent, "although I still have a lot of trouble with the spelling."

She could have had more trouble learning the language if she hadn't attended classes at St. Anthony of Padua parish, where she and her husband and two children belong.

Adult classes for the non-English speaking portion of the parish were begun four years ago and were arranged through the City Board of Education.

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. classes are taught by public school teacher Germaine Caracelli.

In addition to teaching English, classes provide the newly arrived Italians with an introduction to America's cultures and ways.

The idea came from Father Charles Bennett, pastor at St. Anthony's, and a group of bilingual parishioners. Those concerned felt there was a need for such classes.

According to Father Bennett, there are a little over 700 Italian families in the parish. About one third are Italian speaking. The other two thirds are bilingual.

"We've always been an Italian parish," said Father, "but in the past six years we've gotten many more families who just came over from Italy."

He emphasized that much of the immigration is through families; once one family is here, they pass the word along and other relatives follow. It's that way with the Sorcis who have other relatives in the city and some who live right across the street.

Another thing that makes Rochester attractive is the clothing industry. That's what brought the Sorci family to America.

Mrs. Sorci's husband, Charles, 38, worked in the clothing business before coming here, but she found it impossible to get a job in Palermo. Here, she can work and thus add another income to the family.

"When we first came, he worked at Fashion Park" (which has since gone out of business), she said. "Now he works at Delco."

She enjoys her job at Bond's because, as she puts it, "if I see something I like here, I can buy it. I don't have to wait."

In addition to English classes, St. Anthony's tries to help their newly arrived parishioners in other ways.

"Most will have a job lined up before they get here," said Father Bennett, "and if they don't we'll help them make up their resumes and try to place them."

The parish also lends a hand in helping them prepare citizenship papers. Mrs. Sorci is a United States citizen already, but the rest

DISCUSSION GROUP

Newfield — On Saturday, Dec. 8 at 8:30 p.m. area people will hold a discussion group at Helen Schultz's home on Main St. The topic is the "Blessed Mother" in the Catholic Church.

of her family are still working on theirs.

The key to activities at St. Anthony's, according to Father Bennett, is to get newly-arrived Italian families used to American life but at the same time to get them to continue to preserve the depth of values in their own culture.

"We want them to learn English," he said, "but we also want them to keep their language alive too."

"I want to keep speaking it," explains Mrs. Sorci, "so Tony (her son) will remember Italian because he was only two when we came here."

The Sorci children, Teresa, 13 and Anthony, 9, have made the transition from one language to another easily.

"The kids pick up English fast at school," said Father Bennett, "and the fathers usually pick it up at work but we also were concerned about the rest of the family."

Both teachers and students at St. Anthony's school make an effort to help newcomers feel more comfortable in their American surroundings, but having two languages made it necessary for some adjustments, explained Sister Anne Maura, SSJ, principal.

"At parent-teacher meetings we have someone who can interpret for those unable to understand or speak English," she said, "and if we send any notice home concerning school or the children, we must also write it in Italian."

Sister Anne stressed the fact that the parents have the same concerns for their children parents everywhere have. They want them to become good citizens, fit into their new society and get a good education.

"Sometimes it's hard for them in school because even a child who eventually learns to understand and speak English will sometimes lapse into doing his thinking in Italian, she said.

"But the faculty here is very much aware of the group as a



Mrs. Dolores Imburgia lends a hand with reading skills to Italian speaking students Mario Lanza (left), Joseph Natale, George Delvecchio, and Rosalba Lanza.



Anthony (left), Teresa and Mrs. Joanne Sorci during interview.

whole, and they're continually finding new ways to help them adjust to the language, including giving a lot of individual instruction."

There is no lag among their peers to help out either. As Sister put it:

"I see a lot of charity among the children. They help those having difficulty."

There is no peak period for new arrivals from Italy and "they come at all times of the year," according to Sister Anne. This means there's always someone in school just learning the language, and at present there is at least one non-English speaking child per class. (The school has nine grades, kindergarten through eighth grade.)

Father Bennett receives a lot of help from Father Richard Masciangelo, CPPS, an assistant at the parish, who does counseling and home visitation for those who speak Italian. He's fluent in the language.

The parish also puts housing and job notices in the bulletin and offers an Italian Mass on Saturday nights. In an effort to help parishioners to get to know one another, an Italian Night festival was held in October.

Father Bennett is enthusiastic about his flock, and one of the things he finds so great about them is something he feels the American culture is losing.

"They've kept strong family ties, not only with their immediate families, but with uncles and aunts too," he notes. "One of the things these people can give to the U.S. is an assessment of family values."

Aware of the opportunities and culture America offers to her family and herself, Mrs. Sorci remembers another event about her first days in America.

"It was always warm in Palermo, 65 or 70 most of the time, and I always wanted to see snow," she recalls. "When we got here and saw all the snow my husband turned to me and said, 'You want snow? You got snow. I hope you're happy now.'"

She was.



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