

A Pastor Remembers . . .

Reluctantly at first, he took a small country church with barely 500 families and a \$103,000 debt and turned it into a 2,000-family community with parish facilities valued today at well over \$4 million.

Always a gentle man, he now sits quietly in the St. Charles Borromeo rectory before the evening meal, slowly sips his one before-dinner cocktail and remembers his many good years in Greece.

He is Msgr. Robert Keleher, pastor for 30 years of what is now among the largest parishes in the Diocese of Rochester. For years he helped raise the money to build and support the parish and bring food to the table of some 10 Sisters of Mercy who each year trained so many of today's Greece residents. Now, well over 75, he quietly feeds the birds from the small station outside the rectory kitchen.

And the odd part about it all is that as St. Charles Borromeo celebrates its 50th birthday, Msgr. Keleher takes none of the credit for the legacy he has left the parish and Greece.

It was 1939 when he became pastor. Reluctantly. He was from Shortsville — a small country town about half the size of what was then Greece, and he had been ordained some 20 years without having his own parish. That was a long time to wait. And he was ready—he had his eye on a pastoral opening in Palmyra.

After all, he was close friends with the vicar general, now Bishop Lawrence B. Casey; the then Bishop, James E. Kearney knew him well. But their answer was no. And it was definite. They both asked him to take charge of St. Charles Borromeo, then surrounded by apple and peach



Photo by Bill Repp

MSGR. ROBERT A. KELEHER

orchards and saddled with a \$103,000 debt.

His parishioners, to whom he has given much of the credit for building today's church, were country folk and truck gardeners, many of whom eked out their living by selling the vegetables they raised on their 10 to 15 acres.

But the real credit for the phenomenal growth of the parish, he says, goes to "The Infant" and that's a story in itself.

Plagued with worries about

carrying such a huge debt, he presented himself to the Reverend Mother of the Sisters of Mercy, Sister Liguori. "We need Sisters to teach," he remembers saying, "But I don't know how we're going to manage. I am worried. I don't know how I am going to handle it."

Sister Liguori, whom he had greatly admired for her administrative capability and financial acumen, simply said, "Do you have a statue of the Infant of Prague?" He knew the statue—a classic image of the Christ-child dressed in a beautiful, ornate cape—but didn't happen to have one. "Place a statue of the Infant in your church," she said, "and you'll never have any financial worries." Always a pragmatic man, he decided he would have to sleep on that suggestion.

But the next day, just as he was about to call Trant's about such a statue, the phone rang. It was Trant's. It seems that a woman had just walked into the store and had offered to donate a statue of the Infant of Prague to anyone who would see that it was placed in a church. Would he be interested? Yes he would. Very much.

The rest is history. Today, Msgr. Keleher still credits "The Infant" for relieving him from financial worry. And he quickly passes over his own financially-related accomplishments. For example, beginning in 1939, he walked up and down the streets of his parish asking for a special \$5 per family each year to help reduce the parish debt. And, unwilling to saddle the parish with a heavy bank mortgage, he boldly walked into the office of George Clark, an officer and board member of the Union Trust Company (now Marine Midland Bank) and asked for notes he could repay at 3-1/2 percent a year.

A single man who wasn't a Catholic, Clark nevertheless admired the work of the Sisters—his summer home on 80 acres that is now St. Joseph's Villa was across Dewey Avenue. Clark loved children and admired Msgr. Keleher's determination to borrow money rather than ask for an outright handout. Absolutely. Of course, he could have a note for \$100,000.

And even today, as this pioneer in Greece sits quietly before his evening meal and remembers his 30 years work with the popular parish, he takes none of the credit for growth. "The Infant took care of me," he says. "He let me do what I did."

Some Infant. Some man.



Photo by Bill Repp

Msgr. Robert A. Keleher, left, pastor emeritus of St. Charles Borromeo parish, recalls two of the nostalgia items to be displayed Sunday, Sept. 21 at the parish. Father L. John Hedges, pastor, holds a photo of the parish's first ball team and graduating class. Msgr. Keleher has the original application for water to be brought to the parish.

Nostalgia on Display At St. Charles Parish

St. Charles Borromeo parish, which celebrates its 50th birthday this year, will display a half-century collection of Greece nostalgia items on Sunday, Sept. 21, from 11 to 3 in the school hall. The display will follow a special Mass to be celebrated by Bishop Joseph L. Hogan.

Richard Stillman, chairman of the parish celebration, says visitors to the hall will see many items of historical interest, including:

* A section of the Sept. 29, 1926 Times Union that carried such items as a news story of movie actress Clara Bow soon to marry her current director, Victor Fleming;

* An advertisement of the day that offered the relining of a fur

coat or cloak for only \$8 (labor only).

* A 1938 graduation picture of the St. Charles eighth grade;

* The original application for water to be brought to the parish from the Eddy and Stone Road Water District.

* A scrapbook with the names of all the St. Charles school children who together bought \$4,160.00 worth of war stamps as of March 6, 1943.

Stillman says the 50th birthday celebration will continue for about one week and will include special talks by Father William Graf, St. Bernard's Seminary, on some of the events that are taking place in the Christian community today.

Region Sponsors Training Program

Religious Education coordinators in the Northwest Region have assembled a teacher training program offering instruction in three areas — pre-school, grade school, and high school — and including both Theology and Methodology. Classes began last night at Nazareth Academy and will continue on Tuesday evenings through Oct. 28, meeting from 7:30 until 9:30.

The Theology section will cover such topics as Church, Scripture, Conscience Development, New Rite of Penance, Eucharist, Jesus, and Prayer. Methodology, presented by experienced full-time teachers or coordinators, will deal with unit and lesson planning, audio-visuals, discipline, prayer, scripture, and activities.

Of particular note are the

sessions on High School Catechesis. There will be a different speaker each week on some aspect of this challenging apostolate. This is the only teacher training program to be offered this Fall for those who work with high school students.

On Tuesday evening, Nov. 4, Bishop John E. McCafferty will celebrate Mass and present certificates to participants who have attended at least six sessions.

The cost of the program is \$10 per person, or \$100 per parish for 10 to 20 participants; \$150 per parish for more than 20 participants.

Further information, including a complete list of speakers, subjects, and dates, can be obtained by calling Paul Tomasso, (716) 458-4422.

Sisters of St. Joseph Welcome Five Novices

Five young women were received into the Novitiate, and one made her first profession in the Sisters of St. Joseph at a ceremony at the Motherhouse Aug. 24.

The profession was made by Sister Donna Marie Cucci, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Cucci of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Rochester. Sister Donna Marie has just completed her novitiate year and is teaching music at Nazareth Academy.

The five novices are Sister Anne Alderman, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Alderman of St. Patrick's, Macedon; Sister Mary Ellen Campbell, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Campbell of St. Theodore's; Sister Nancy De Rycke, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond De Rycke of St. Pius X;

Sister Janet Meeker, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Meeker of St. Mary's, Elmira, and Sister Mary Louise Woznick, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Steven Woznick, St. Jerome's, East Rochester.

They will spend their novitiate year with Sister Eileen Conheady, newly appointed director, in an inter-congregational program centered in Latham, near Albany.

The liturgy for the ceremony was concelebrated by Fathers Joseph DeMaio and Brian Murphy, O. Carm.

NEW TEACHERS

Ithaca — Among the new teachers at Immaculate Conception School are Ralph Ditino, physical education and science, and Maurjen Clynes, fourth grade.

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