

The Church in Rochester Changing to Meet A City's Needs

Catholic Charities

The beginning of diocesan Catholic Charities can be traced back nearly to the origins of the City of Rochester, according to Maurice Tierney, executive director of Catholic Charities here.

He has established that Charities has been partially operative in Rochester since 1836 with the establishment of an orphanage at St. Patrick's Church and strongly since 1857 with the establishment of St. Mary's Hospital.

The organization, however, really came into its own in the first decades of this century.

"Indirectly, or directly, Charities has had presence in Rochester, through parishes and their institutions, through at-large institutions, and through its own evolution and development, beginning in 1912," Tierney said.

He cited the example of the development of St. Joseph's Villa to demonstrate Charities' continuity in the Rochester community, starting with St. Patrick's Orphanage, then the Roman Catholic Orphanage Asylum in 1842, St. Mary's Asylum in 1864 and St. Joseph's German Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum in 1867.

"Eventually all our child care facilities were organized into what is now called St. Joseph's in 1941," he said.

As the organization is known today,

Charities actually began in 1912, when diocesan women banded together in a guild providing aid to the poor, Tierney's researches indicate.

Three years later, men organized the Charities League to finance the efforts of the guild. Also in that year St. Elizabeth's Guild was founded.

Albany took note of the developments and passed a law in 1917 sanctioning the charitable works. Charities filled in corporation papers and, in that same year, Charles House opened.

In 1918 the forerunner of the United Way of Greater Rochester was established, and Charities was a part of that pioneer fundraising effort.

The following year, community agencies united in the Community Chest, and again, Charities was a partner.

In 1936, the Catholic Youth Organization was founded; in 1950, Catholic Family Center; in 1958 the DePaul Clinic; and in 1978 the Kinship Group Homes.

"Charities today, with its incorporated and unincorporated affiliates serves thousands of people in Project Poder, in inner city outreach, in counseling, in child care and placement, in services to the unmarried, in senior services, in nutrition, in camping and day camping, and in adoption and foster care," Tierney noted.

St. Bridget's

Thirty years ago when St. Bridget's was celebrating a century of service in inner city Rochester, the parish published its history, "One Hundred Years of Grace." It begins: "The year of 1854 was a proud year for the Irish living in the Dublin section of Rochester -- that year the Irish built St. Bridget's Church on Hand Street ... Franklin Pierce was president and there were 33 stars in the flag. That year saw the start of the Crimean War ... Commodore Perry signed a treaty that opened the island kingdom of Japan to trade with the West."

The history also noted that "a century has seen many changes both in Rochester and the parish of St. Bridget's. Priests and laity have come and gone but these alone have not changed: The Mass has been offered and the same Catholic faith has been preached from the sanctuary of St. Bridget's for one hundred years."

And those sacramental truths have survived the 30 ensuing years as well. However, the hardy Irish who founded the parish might be surprised to see how St. Bridget's has changed with the times. The parish is vibrantly involved in community projects, many of which center around its "campus." In addition to serving its own Catholic congregation, it is one of the sponsors of the Afro-American Cultural Extravaganza; it includes on its staff as

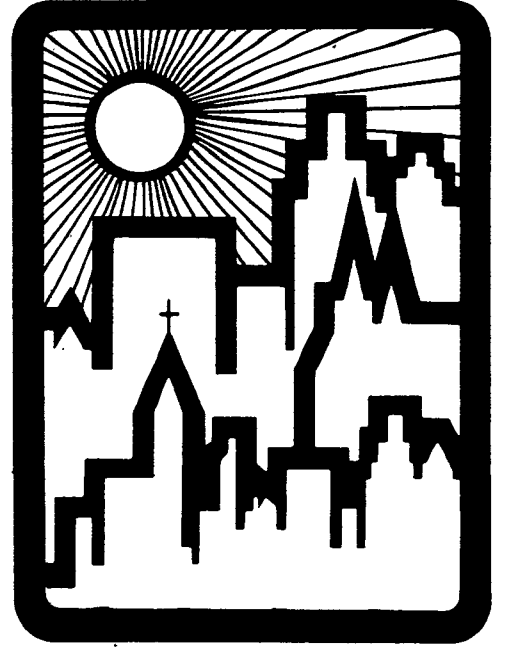
cultural minister, Minister Lawrence Evans, who heads Akwete's Cultural and Resource Center of the First Community Interfaith Institute which uses campus facilities; another campus building houses The Catholic Worker Bethany House, a temporary shelter for victimized women; the Bethesda Church of God and Christ has just purchased the school building and the Faith Temple of the Living God conducts its Sunday services at St. Bridget's.

And there is more. Its parishioners join many other local organizations in an urban garden. Father Robert Werth, pastor, seems particularly proud of its Boy Scout troop which is headed for a Philmont, N. Mex., campout. Also "on campus" is the Dragon Knights Karate Club. The parish has a black Gospel choir and is establishing a youth choir. Active, yes, but Father Werth stresses that is only one of many church and neighborhood groups involved in campus and communities and not "the overseer."

"The more things change, the more they are the same," said a philosopher. And St. Bridget's is just one of the city parishes reflecting that truth as the Church's face changes but its services survive. Established to fulfill the spiritual needs of Irish immigrants, St. Bridget's is still on call, daily serving and more diversified and ever-changing populace.



St. Bridget's Gospel Choir.



St. Michael's

In a pasture of Rochester known as the Butterhole a vigorous group of German immigrants in 1872 began St. Michael's parish. Not too long after, the School Sisters of Notre Dame were teaching parish children. The pasture long ago became urbanized; the atmosphere is now "city." An Hispanic populace has supplanted the original German parishioners. And the church has kept up with shifting times, continuing to meet the ever-changing needs of the neighborhood. Above, Father Frank Santana of the diocesan Spanish Apostolate, talks with parish youths.

Unusual Ministries



Years ago, religious sisters were found primarily teaching in diocesan schools or attending the sick in hospitals. How times have changed is evidenced in today's city. Sister Anne Maloy, RSM, left, is director of the Mercy Center with the Aging -- a ministry to help parishes and churches in assessing, evaluating and complementing services to the elderly. She is assisted by Sister M. Gratia L'Esperance, RSM, and their office is in the convent at Holy Family parish. Also handling a city ministry is Sister Eileen Conheady, SSI, right, director of Project More (More Options Really Exist) -- a ministry to women who are seeking alternatives to prostitution. This program is sponsored by the Catholic Family Center and offers free outreach, career and educational counseling, crisis intervention and community awareness.