

'Church' Is More Than A Building At Our Newest Parish

By Carmen J. Vigilucci

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines "church" as "an edifice consecrated for public worship, especially one for Christian worship."

The Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary offers a similar definition, describing "church" as "any physical structure designed or adapted primarily for the Christian community's worship of God in the Eucharist and the other sacraments, the Divine Office, but also for private prayer."

But in the soft, rolling farm country surroundings of the diocese's newest parish, Transfiguration in Pittsford, "church" is the community, the congregation, the parishioners, and right now they are considering putting up a structure which their pastor, Father Gerald Appelby, says will be a "home for our church."

A site for the home already has been chosen -- it will sit on 16 acres on West Bloomfield Road and the motif will be "simplicity," Father Appelby said, in keeping with the wishes of the parishioners.

There will be no campaign to raise money for the structure which will cost about \$300,000, according to Father Appelby.

"It will be 70 by 70 feet square but it will be laid out inside as a diamond. It will hold 400 to 450 and there will be no pews or kneelers. We will use 400 folding chairs arranged to surround the altar."

The builders will complete the basement with folding walls to allow for seven classrooms with the capability of a large meeting room for parish celebrations. But the main part of the building will be left unfinished.

Father Appelby, Transfiguration's founding pastor, said that parishioners will do the finishing work "to keep the feeling that this is 'ours.'" And though he also mentioned holding costs down as a secondary reason, he stresses that the parishioners "want a prayerful and simple church."

The parish was officially opened the weekend of Aug. 6 last year, on the Feast of the Transfiguration. Masses have been taking place in the Ames barn in the northwest corner of the parish. The new structure, expected to be ready by November, "will be just about in the center of the parish."

Hopefully, Father Appelby said, the parish will be able to get permission from the Ames estate "to use a couple of the beams from the barn to fashion a cross for the top of the new edifice. But we will have to find out if the estate is agreeable."

The parish has not been slow in getting off the launching pad. Father Appelby is able to point to such healthy first-year statistics as 47 confirmations, 27 First Communions, 20 first penances, 253 youngsters in Religious Education, 60 in the high school youth group.

Behind such figures is a parish staff consisting of Libby Vallie, bookkeeper; Mary Matteson, Religious Education coordinator; Sally D'Amico, secretary; Deacon Ambro Wilton; Mary Pucetta, minister of music, and Kathi Pichler, Family Service minister, "who visits homes, hospitals and generally helps handle family problems."

"And in July," Father Appelby said, "we will have a new minister of Religious Education, Mary Presutti."

The new pastor, who formerly was diocesan director of the Division of Special Ministries and campus minister at Rochester Institute of Technology, is obviously pleased by the fact that 10 couples have taken on a kind of joint youth ministry venture, presently working with about 60 teenagers.

But there is more to the new parish than figures and building.

Speaking of the parishioners, Father Appelby said, "They are extraordinary people with great love for the Church and great pride in what they are doing." And "what they are doing" or, more to the point, what they have already done is set up a kind of New England Town Meeting concept for parish governance.

"Right now we are preparing a new constitution," Father Appelby said. "We will be governed by a parish community council and every registered, confirmed member of the parish will have a vote."

Stressing that this all will have to be finalized by the parish, Father Appelby said, "we envision a core group of 10 to 12 members to act as auditors, as a nucleus. And two thirds of that group must be present as a quorum at any official meeting but individually their votes will have no more authority or weight than that of any other parishioner. Any parishioner who attends the meetings can vote. And we will make sure that all will be notified well in advance about meetings and agendas. After the vote, all results will be sent to the rest of our parish members for their affirmation."

Father Appelby said the parish has been using this system so far and "want to continue it as long as possible. Our constitutional committee will present the plan to the entire parish for review."

Undoubtedly as with any new undertaking, there will be starts and stops and changes in directions -- as Father Appelby put it, "Nothing here is locked in concrete." But, generally, on these warm days of early summer as new crops push their way into existence in the fertile Pittsford countryside, there is a pervasive feeling that Transfiguration parish will continue its fruitful growth and eventually provide the "spiritual home" its parishioners have been



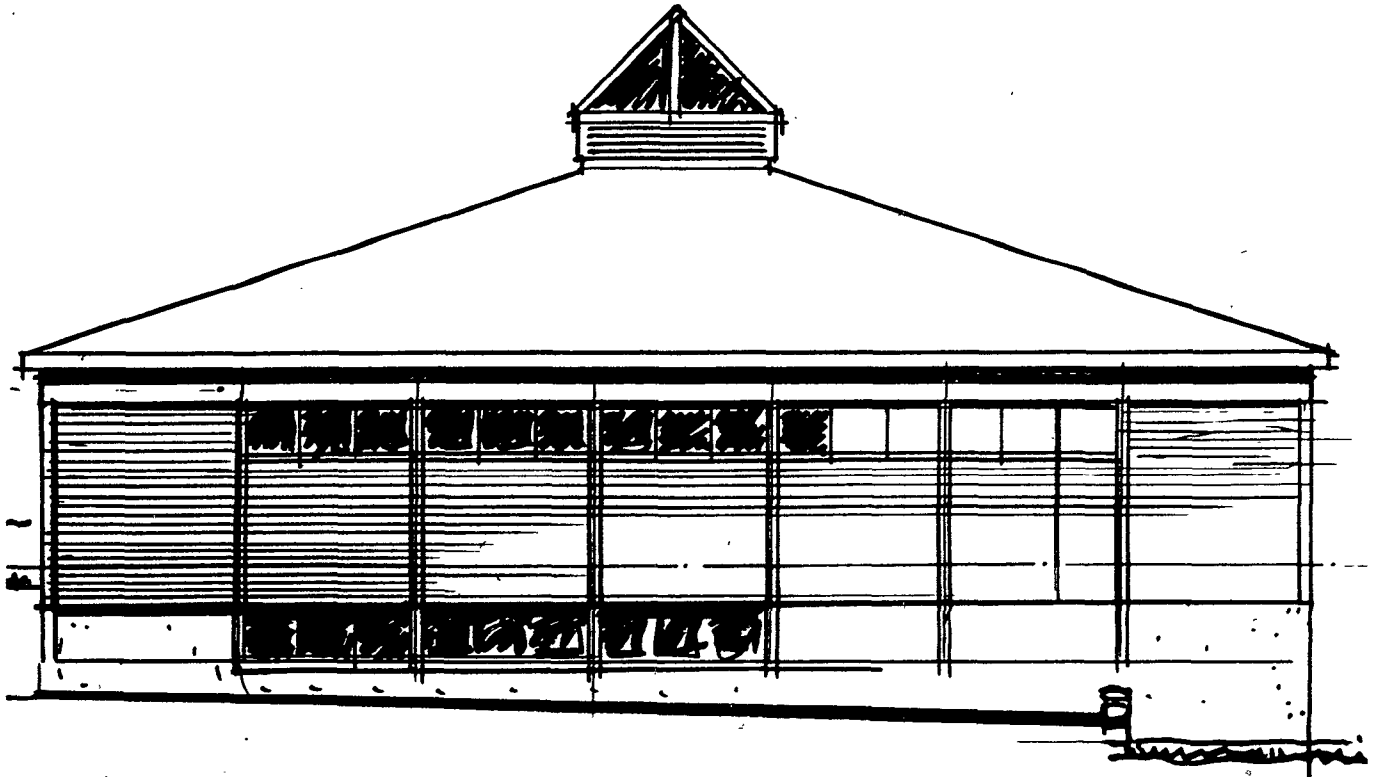
Father Appelby surveys the plot of land on West Bloomfield Road where a home for his parish will be erected this year.



Some of the parish staff going over routine business. Mary Matteson is Religious Education coordinator, Sally D'Amico secretary and Libby Vallie bookkeeper.



Father Appelby describes the work parishioners put in on the century-old barn presently being used for Sunday liturgy.



Rendering of the new Transfiguration 'home.'