

Priest draws large crowds to 'very Catholic' healing service

By Teresa A. Parsons

Skepticism is the most common reaction to claims about healing ministry. Perhaps we liken them to the claims of snake oil peddlers or witch doctors, or maybe technological advances have made miracles seem obsolete.

Wherever his healing ministry takes him, Father Edward J. McDonough deals with that skepticism and confusion, especially among Catholics who want to believe but aren't sure that they should.

"One of the main reasons is because over the centuries, the gift of healing has been less and less used. That does not mean the Catholic Church hasn't always believed in healing," he explained.

"Healing is a very important part of the life and ministry of the Catholic Church. Nothing is more ancient or more traditional."

The Redemptorist priest from the Archdiocese of Boston drew more than 1,000 people to each of two healing services in Rochester Catholic churches last week, a response which was pleasing, but not overwhelming to him.

"I'm always surprised at how many people come out," he said mildly. "In the beginning, I couldn't even fill the church next door. Now, I could never keep up with all the places they want to me go."

One reason he's not overwhelmed is that Father McDonough views himself as nothing

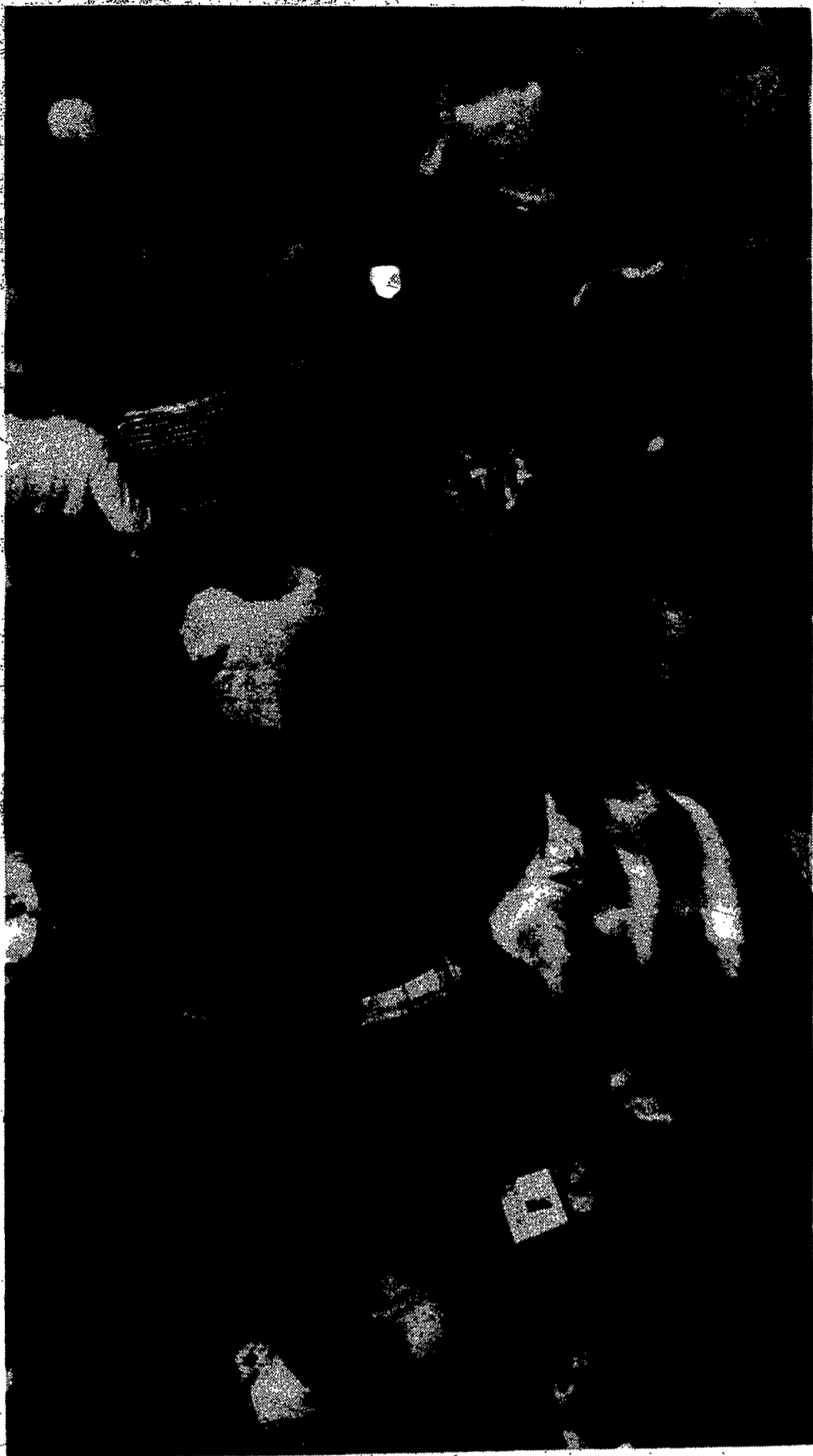
more than an instrument of God's power. He believes that healing is as much a part of the Good News as is scripture. Therefore, his ministry is no more outlandish than that of a parish priest.

Father McDonough was once a skeptic himself when it came to healing. "I was very prejudiced against it when I first heard of it," he said, citing the demanding, aggressive attitude of many television evangelists as one reason. "It was only after I had experienced it through the charismatic movement that, little by little, I started to understand."

During that time, he started a small prayer meeting at his parish in Roanoke, Virginia. In 1974, he was transferred to Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, also known as the Mission Church, in the Roxbury section of Boston. With the permission of Cardinal Humberto Medeiros, he began to work full time in healing ministry and charismatic renewal.

Since then, he has traveled around the United States and the world, leading services, retreats and workshops on healing. Attendance at his weekly services in Boston has grown to 1,500-2,000. More than 300 people attend prayer and Bible study meetings in Cambridge each week night. They serve as a prayer/support group for the healing ministry. Meanwhile, three phone lines take requests from people around the state for

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Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal
A member of the congregation "rests in the Spirit," as Father McDonough (lower right) moves down the aisle.



Connie Karean, 9, Serge Yazbeck, 8, and his brother Jean, 10, listen to Father McDonough as he preaches about healing as a ministry.



Father McDonough blesses Sister Marie Bernard, SSJ, center, and another member of the overflow congregation at Blessed Sacrament's healing service November 6. Ushers assisted a number of participants who had been overcome during the ceremony.



Lucretia Lettau comforts her mother Fay Bucci, who is resting.