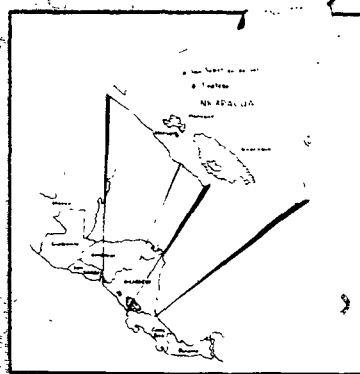




Saving graces

Ballroom dancing teacher Claire Leonard imparts social graces to a new generation of schoolchildren. See Page 6.



A witness for peace

Sister Beatrice Ganley, a member of the peace delegation that visited Nicaragua, offers reflections on her experiences. See Pages 8 and 9.

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World & Nation in Brief from NC News

Nation

Dissent counterproductive

Anaheim, Calif. (NC) — Students need assurance that the church is a reliable guide and thus it is counterproductive to teach them dissent, Auxiliary Bishop William J. Levada of Los Angeles said April 2, addressing the National Catholic Educational Association convention in Anaheim. The bishop, a former staff member of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said Catholic theology does not recognize the right to dissent "if by that we mean adopting conclusions which are contrary to the clear teachings of the authoritative, non-infallible magisterium and are presented to the public in such a way as to constitute equivalently an alternative...personal magisterium."

Uproar over Easter Mass

Honolulu (NC) — An Easter Mass celebrated at the home of deposed Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda caused an uproar among some Hawaiian Catholics and prompted Bishop Joseph Ferrario of Honolulu to defend all believers' right to the sacraments. The Mass was supposed to be private and was celebrated by Father Clarence Fisher of Holy Trinity Church, the parish in which Marcos' rented beachfront home is located. But it drew a swarm of journalists -- invited by Marcos -- and led dismayed Catholics to telephone the pastor and bishop.

World

Vatican document released

Vatican City (NC) — Catholics are called to work for the liberation of millions of people subjected to "economic social and political oppression," said a major Vatican document on liberation theology. But to be successful a Catholic liberation theology must be rooted in the Gospel message of love, justice and peace, the document said.

Claiming that material liberation is meaningless unless it springs from the need to liberate people from sin, the document said: "It is therefore necessary to work simultaneously for the conversion of hearts and for the improvement of structures."

The 59-page document, "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation," was prepared by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and made public April 5.

Leaders to meet in Assisi

Vatican City (NC) — Leaders of Christian and non-Christian faiths plan to meet Oct. 27 in Assisi, Italy, to pray for world peace, Pope John Paul II announced April 6.

Among those expected to attend the meeting are world Anglican leader Archbishop Robert Runcie of Canterbury, England; the Dalai Lama, the exiled head of Tibetan Buddhists; and representatives of the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

The pope said the encounter will represent "a vast movement of reflection and prayer." Last January, Pope John Paul extended an invitation to religious leaders to join him in Assisi for prayer.

The October date was set after consultations with those who accepted the invitation.

Mergers, clusters and closings:

Parishes grow through crisis to community

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article is Part I in a two-part look at new parish formations within the Diocese of Rochester.

By Teresa A. Parsons.

A year ago on Palm Sunday, parishioners from Holy Redeemer and St. Francis Xavier parishes celebrated an historic moment. For the first time, they came together as one community for Mass, celebrated in both English and Spanish as befits the thoroughly bi-cultural congregation.

It was a day touched by both optimism and sadness. Bishop Matthew H. Clark asked members of both churches to consider the merger as "the occasion of a renewal and strengthening of your life of faith," and at the same time as a lessening of their struggle to maintain parish facilities.

But after 109 years, Holy Redeemer Parish had closed its doors for the last time. The "for sale" signs that marked the church for months afterward were a constant reminder of changing times for urban parishes.

After years of dire predictions, the shortage of available priests finds church officials scrambling to fill parish and administrative positions across the diocese, not just in urban areas. The logistics differ from city to countryside, but everywhere the challenge is the same.

Of 173 diocesan parishes (including mission churches), 55 are located in the City of Rochester alone. Many are within blocks of each other.

But when they were built by congregations of immigrants — many of whom brought along their own priests from Italy, Germany, Poland or Greece — those parishes were worlds apart.

With time, some parishes left their ethnic identities behind. In other communities, an influx of blacks, Hispanics or Southeast Asians have altered the makeup of long-established congregations or have created their own parish identities.

Urban parishes thus face a continuing dilemma — how to best serve Catholics in traditional ministries and at the same time meet the needs of new neighbors who look to the Church as a sign of hope.

Two different diocesan responses are illustrated by Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier and St. Theresa parishes. In the first instance, a merger was the solution for too many buildings and too few people. Just around the block from Holy Redeemer, St. Theresa's Parish found another answer — a pastor shared with St. Stanislaus Parish.

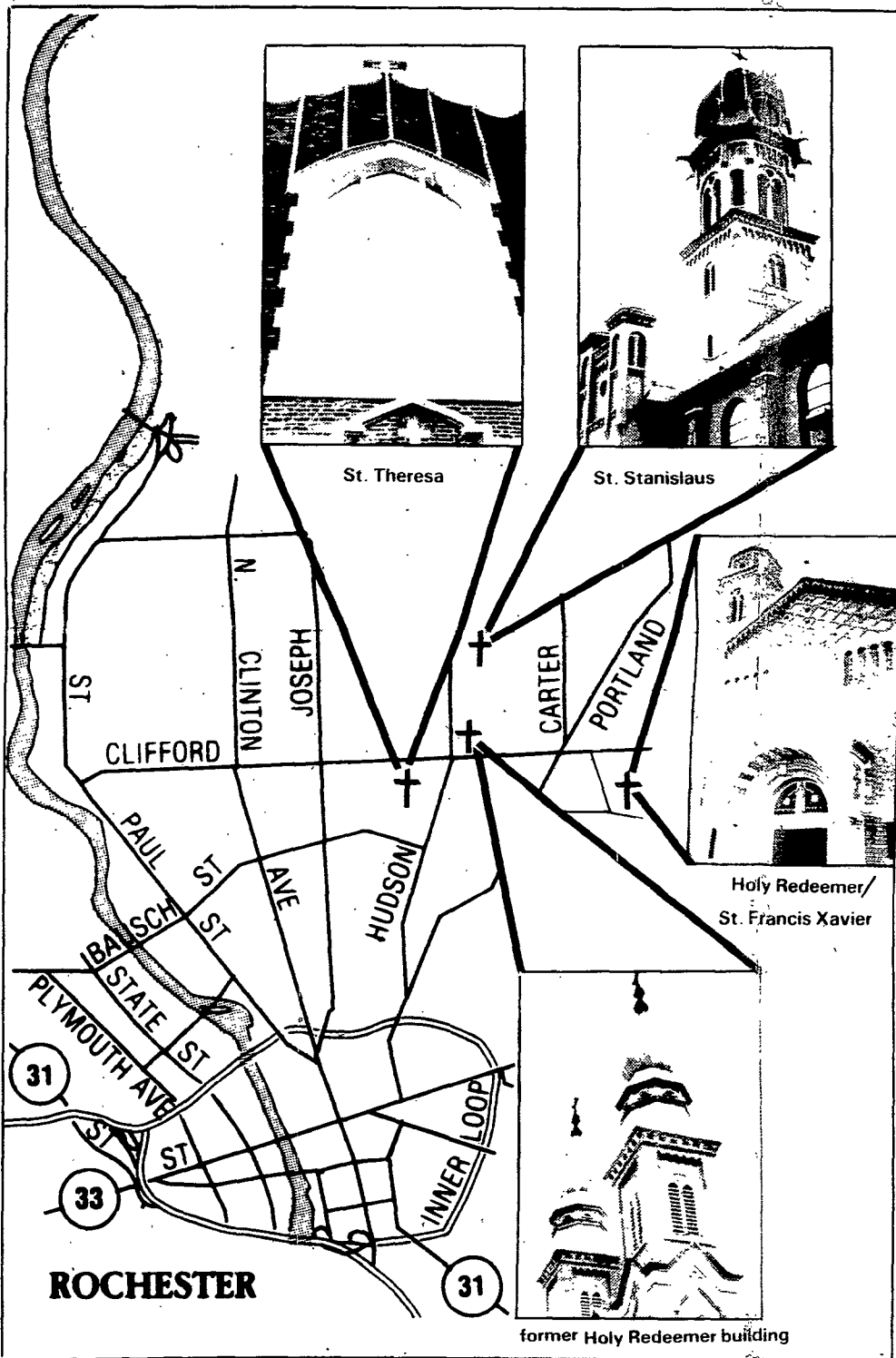
When Father William Leone arrived at Holy Redeemer in 1980, he found a core of dedicated parishioners fighting an uphill battle against 15 years of declining membership. Fewer than 200 people were worshipping in a church built for 1,000.

"We were like slaves of the buildings," said Father Leone. "We were behind the eight ball — always playing catch-up. It's debilitating to expend so much energy on things other than ministry."

At the request of Bishop Clark, parishioners from Holy Redeemer, St. Francis Xavier and St. Theresa parishes began meeting in June, 1984, with diocesan representatives to implement the Process for Institutional and Ministerial Consultation. They were joined by representatives from St. George's Parish, located on Hudson Avenue.

"We were looking at how the Church could most effectively maintain a Catholic presence in the northeast quarter of the city," Father Leone said.

St. Theresa is historically a Polish parish and St. George is Lithuanian by tradition. Holy Redeemer and St. Francis Xavier, on the other hand, have similar makeup — a core group of older English-speaking parish-



ioners, many of Italian descent, and a growing number of younger Spanish-speaking members.

Because of their similarity, the latter two seemed an obvious match, but the choice of which buildings to close was less apparent.

"We all knew we had to do something to survive," recalled Doris Rafoth, a parishioner at St. Francis since 1954. "Neither parish knew which church would be closed, but both had their arms open to each other before it was decided one way or the other."

Few people were surprised by Bishop Clark's decision, announced in January, 1985, to close Holy Redeemer. But it was still painful.

"A lot of life has passed through these parishes and sustained these places," Father Leone said. "It was like losing someone you knew was sick for a long time. The dying was still hard."

"I really commend the people here for going along with that hard process," he added.

"It was hard for me," agreed Conchita Ramos, an active Holy Redeemer parishioner for about seven years. "We were scared that we would not be accepted there (at St.

Francis). Ramos also feared that the Holy Redeemer community would split up when the parish closed, and for a time she was right. "Many of the people left and went to St. Michael's and (Our Lady of) Mt. Carmel," she said. "But a lot of them came back after awhile."

St. Theresa's also lost parishioners when rumors that the church would be closed began circulating as early as January, 1984. Those rumors intensified when the Conventual Franciscans of St. Anthony of Padua Province announced in July, 1985, that after 50 years they would no longer provide a pastor for the parish.

"They know we do not have enough priests to go around, but the people were upset and bitter at the beginning, thinking the diocese had already made a decision (to close)," recalled Father Andrew Grzela. "But in the meetings we had, the bishop didn't raise the question (of closing). None of the key people did."

In September, 1985, Bishop Clark announced that Father Andrew Grzela, the pastor of St. Stanislaus, another traditionally Polish parish, would serve both parishes.

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