

## Corpus Christi

## Parishioners celebrate live-in commitment to the homeless

By Teresa A. Parsons

A circle of warmth surrounded Corpus Christi Parish's new Home for the Homeless, 100-102 N. Union St., last Thursday evening, despite chilly temperatures and cloudy skies. More than 150 parishioners and friends gathered in the back yard to celebrate the parish's weekly Folk Mass at the home, which is nearly ready for occupancy.

As people of all ages sang and shivered together, Father Jim Callan, the celebrant, reminded the congregation that at least their discomfort was temporary. "What we're feeling is just a tiny bit of what people without homes suffer in the winter and even at this time of the year," he said.

At Corpus Christi, parishioners hardly need reminding. For the past four winters, they have opened the church basement to provide emergency winter shelter. They have offered a year-round nightly supper to both neighbors and homeless people, and have distributed food to area families each month. And they have been frustrated by a lack of space and their inability to really concentrate on helping the shelter guests who want to change their lifestyles.

Eventually, all three outreach programs will be housed at the North Union Street address. Eleven parishioners plan to live at the home with up to five homeless men. By living and working closely with the men for a three- to six-month period, parishioners hope to help those who want to break the cycle of homelessness. The home's first floor will be devoted to the transitional living area, while the live-in volunteers and their families will live upstairs.

Behind the house is a garage with a four-bedroom apartment on the second floor. There, parishioners will continue to provide emergency winter shelter as well as the nightly supper program and food distribution. On the building's open first floor, they also hope to open a daytime drop-in center where counselors and health care will be available.

"It's really an ideal set-up," said Christine Garrison. "It's a blessing that it worked out the way it did," she added.



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

An Ascension Thursday Mass served as the dedication of the new Corpus Christi Home for the Homeless.

It was hard to recognize a blessing at work last August, when another property purchase fell through. Parishioners had offered to buy two houses and several lots on the other side of Main Street at 283-285 Lyndhurst Street which appeared to be ideal for both the home for the homeless and a proposed home for the dying. But when neighbors, including State Assemblyman David Gantt and County Legislator Ron Thomas, stated strong opposition to the plan, parishioners chose to withdraw and wait for another chance.

That chance came early this year, when Chester Etter sold the North Union Street buildings to the parish for \$155,000. Although both were in relatively good condition, electrical and plumbing repairs were

required before the larger building could be occupied.

Neighbors on North Union Street have been very supportive of the plan, according to Garrison. At the Thursday Mass, one woman, a painter who lives nearby, donated two of her own paintings of Christ to the home. "I'm so excited about this, I don't know what to say," she told the crowd.

As the Mass ended, Garrison invited everyone inside to inspect the home and to share a pot-luck dinner.

So far, most of the necessary plumbing and electrical work has been completed by volunteers and future residents.

Among them will be Garrison, her children and her husband, Wayne, an educational researcher who will take a year off from his job to devote to the home. They plan to sell their Rochester home next month, as does the Piersante family — Joseph, a Rochester police officer, his wife, Lillian, and their three children. Wally Ruelle, a lawyer who has coordinated the parish emergency shelter, and Sister Marjorie Henninger, parish associate, will also move to North Union Street.

Volunteers, who generally work on Saturdays, are still needed to help with repairs at the home. For more information about volunteering or donating to the home, call Garrison at either (716)325-2424 or 482-1533.

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