

# Palmyra parish sparkles with renovation, rekindled hope

By Teresa A. Parsons

What the people of St. Anne's Parish in Palmyra gave of themselves this year has come back to them in the form of a giant Christmas gift — namely their church.

On November 8, the doors of the church building closed. St. Anne's remained closed until Christmas Eve, when the 137-year-old building was opened to reveal an interior made new with fresh paint, new carpeting and a renovated sanctuary.

But the church's bright new interior was no match for the glow of a community renewed by nearly four years of effort for a common cause.

"Some people will say, 'You should be buying shoes for the poor instead,' but people who do not have very much worked hard for this, and I think it has paid off for the community of St. Anne's," said Harold Sampson, a member of the parish buildings and grounds committee. "This has actually pulled people together. It has bridged the gap between the older people and the younger ... It was all of them, 18-year-olds and 80-year-olds, all together."

Father Louis Vasile, St. Anne's pastor, regards the Christmas Eve celebration as an opportunity to rekindle hope among parishioners. "We've been trying to draw a parallel between the external renovations and the internal changes that should be taking place in us during this (Advent) season," he explained. "In every occasion we have from now on, I want to emphasize that what we have as a building has to be enlivened in what we are to the community at large."

Hope was a commodity in short supply among some parishioners two years ago when Father Vasile accepted an assignment as pastor of St. Anne's and its neighbor, St. Gregory's in Marion. It seemed to the priest that the tumultuous changes of the past two decades had worn people down — particularly those who were middle-aged or older.

They had absorbed the joys and pains of reforms wrought by the Second Vatican Council and post-conciliar renewal movements such as Cursillo and charismatic renewal. They had grieved over the closing of St. Anne's School in 1972, only 11 years after it opened. They had also weathered the initial challenge and uncertainty of being clustered with St. Gregory's in 1986, along with all the resulting adjustments in Mass schedules and staffing patterns.

None of those changes produced much of an outcry among Palmyra's Catholics. "Peo-



Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal

The bright new interior of St. Anne's Church in Palmyra is no match for the glow of renewed hope on the faces of parishioners, who sold pies, raffled cars, barbecued chicken and worked bingo for more than four years to pay for renovations to the 137-year-old structure.

ple just don't get too worked up over anything around here," observed parish council president Ted Bertot. "I don't know why that is."

Nevertheless, Father Vasile observed what he regarded as a legacy of sadness and resignation among parishioners. "In some ways, I think the parish had literally died," he observed.

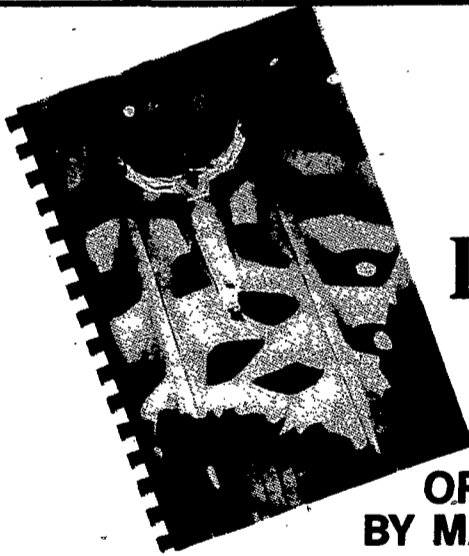
Until recently, the church building's condition mirrored the sadness Father Vasile described. Its disarray was most apparent inside, where walls had become dingy, peeling paint hung and sometimes fell from the ceiling, and water damage marred the ceiling in the entryway.

"I think it was a source of embarrassment when people came in for special events from out of town," said Mary Rutkowski, a

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Palmyra parishioners gathered last Sunday to finish preparing for Christmas Eve services, which will celebrate the re-opening of the renovated church. Above, Andy Waters (left) and his uncle, Bob Daly, replace the lectern.



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