

Local News

Combined parish faces bilingual future in second century

By Rob Cullivan

On Sunday, December 18, Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Parish will celebrate a feast day that doesn't appear on the Church calendar — The Feast of Ourselves.

That's not to say that the parish is glorifying selfishness. On the contrary, Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier hopes to pay tribute to its community spirit, which has experienced great growth and challenge, most notably in the four years since the two parishes merged.

Holy Redeemer was 109-years-old when it closed its doors in 1985. St. Francis Xavier was a younger community, but hardly inexperienced, and this year marked its 100th anniversary. Parishioners celebrated the centennial on Oct. 29, drawing more than 1,300 people, including many former parishioners, to the festivities. Yet, as 1989 beckons, Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier looks to the future rather than the past as it continues to create its identity as a combined parish. The Dec. 18 celebration is a step in that direction.

The community's new identity started to form when the two parishes merged on Palm Sunday, 1985. At this Sunday's celebration, the congregation will bid farewell to the man who, by all accounts, forged the merger with a minimal amount of difficulty to both congregations.

Father William B. Leone was named pastor of Holy Redeemer in 1980. While there, he built a reputation as a pastor sensitive to the needs of his parishioners, half of whom spoke Spanish as their native tongue. Enrique Ruiz, a Holy Redeemer parishioner, remembered that his fellow Hispanics were impressed early on by the priest's desire to serve their community.

"He would listen to our problems, and he would never force his opinions on us," Ruiz recalled. "When he came, he wanted to become part of us. He actually took Spanish," Ruiz remarked, referring to Father Leone's study trip to the Dominican Republic prior to his assumption of the pastorate.



Members of Coro Parroquial, the Hispanic choir of Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Parish, lend their voices to a Sunday Mass. The choir expanded considerably when the two parishes merged in 1985.

The Holy Redeemer pastor's reputation as a listener met its greatest challenge when his parish merged with St. Francis Xavier. Father Leone's appointment in June, 1985, as pastor of the newly combined parish ensured the merger's success, according to Monsignor George A. Cocuzzi, who is serving as administrator of the parish while Father Leone is on sabbatical.

"The affection the people of Holy Redeemer had for (Father Leone) very definitely was the single most important factor," Monsignor Cocuzzi said. "Had the rest of the (Holy Redeemer) staff come, and not Father Leone, it wouldn't have been a success."

Joseph Cilano, a parishioner of St. Francis Xavier for 25 years, also credited Father Leone for the merger's happy outcome. "There could have been a lot of problems," he said. "I'm sure the people from Holy Redeemer would have liked to have seen their parish stay open. He was the right guy at the right time."

Doris Rafoth, president of the English-

speaking Sacred Heart Women's society, termed Father Leone a man of action. "Once I said to him, 'We need a railing on the front steps of the rectory,' and the next thing you know it, there was a railing," Rafoth remembered.

At numerous meetings before and after the merger, Father Leone consulted leaders from both communities on how to operate the parish, and he was careful to consider each side's stance. "Rather than a win/lose situation, we wanted it to be a win/win situation," Father Leone recalled of his approach to the merger.

The pastor remarked that the two parishes' similar congregations — both of which were divided about evenly between English- and Spanish-speakers — helped the merger succeed, whereas one between two more disparate parishes might have failed. "It was a hand-in-glove kind of merger, as far as makeup was concerned," Father Leone explained. Cilano echoed those sentiments. "All you got was a bigger picture of what already existed (at St.

Francis Xavier)."

But the merger of the two parishes actually combined four communities — the English-speaking parishioners of both parishes along with their Spanish-speaking counterparts. And although the combination of the parishes was executed rather smoothly, the effort to integrate the two language groups still continues, with mixed success.

The English-speakers of both parishes were for the most part middle-aged or elderly. The Hispanic populations, on the other hand, consisted of several young families. According to Monsignor Cocuzzi, who was pastor of St. Francis Xavier before the merger, the addition of Holy Redeemer's Hispanic members brought a stronger identity to his own Spanish-speaking congregation.

"Among the Hispanic people, we saw a kind of flowering of their sense of belonging because their members increased," Monsignor Cocuzzi recalled, noting the increased size of the Hispanic choir as one obvious improvement. Currently, about 400 people belong to the parish. Most are either Hispanics or English-speaking whites, along with a small number of blacks and Asians.

Today, St. Francis Xavier/Holy Redeemer's Hispanics belong to several different parish groups, all attempting to preserve Hispanic culture, which for the vast majority means the Puerto Rican culture. The Hispanic counterpart to the Sacred Heart's Women's Society is Sagrado Corazon, while the English-speaking Holy Name Men's Club has its Hispanic complement in Santa Nombre de Jesus. The parish celebrates Spanish Masses on Monday and Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings.

The parish choir, Coro Parroquial, is made up exclusively of Hispanics, a fact attributable to the aging of the English-speaking parishioners, Monsignor Cocuzzi noted. The parish also boasts a Hispanic youth group, Bible study group and charismatic renewal group.

The Comité Hispano, or Spanish Commit-

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Dedication of chaplains and students keep Cornell community thriving

By Richard A. Kiley

Cornell is not exactly your average, run-of-the-mill university, and the same could be said about the Catholic community which matriculates inside and outside the walls of the renowned institution.

The Cornell Catholic Community — which is celebrating its centennial in 1988 — had modest beginnings but has grown to become the largest, year-round religious community on any campus in the Rochester diocese.

The seeds of the Catholic community at Cornell were planted in 1888 by six students, who began meeting weekly in the basement of Ithaca's Immaculate Conception Church and eventually formed the Cornell Catholic Union.

Soon after, Catholic students met up with resistance from Bishop McQuaid, who vehemently opposed the attendance of Catholic students — especially women — at non-Catholic colleges.

The students did not disband, however, and when the bishop's policy was changed, male and female students for the first time came together to worship on campus around the turn of the century.

In March of 1914, the Cornell Catholic Union — which was still affiliated with Immaculate Conception — joined the National Newman Club Federation in a nationwide alliance of Catholic college campus ministries.

In 1929, due to increasing numbers, Masses began to be celebrated in Barnes

Hall. That same year, Father James Cronin was named the first full-time chaplain at Cornell.

Father Donald Cleary, who is considered one of the key figures in keeping the Catholic community thriving, became the chaplain soon thereafter and served Catholics at Cornell for more than three decades.

An alumnus of Cornell, Robert McDonald, remembered helping Father Cleary with keeping the Catholic community financially viable.

"He was just a tremendous individual. He was interested in the students, and he was an excellent speaker," said McDonald, who was involved with the community throughout the seven years he attended Cornell. "He put himself out for the whole community, not just the Catholics. He was not only an outstanding priest, but an outstanding man. He built the Catholic community at Cornell."

McDonald, who is now a retired partner in the law New York law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell, helped spearhead an effort called the "Committee of 100" around 1950. The committee was made up of people who agreed to contribute \$100 annually to support the Catholic community at Cornell.

The effects of Father Cleary's dedication can still be seen and experienced as today's students reach out to people within and outside of the college community.

Nearly 3,000 students and community residents are members of the Cornell Catholic Community, which was incorpo-

rated in 1971. Masses are now held in the auditorium of Anabel Taylor Hall, which is the university's faith center.

Five full-time staff members — three chaplains, an administrative assistant and a secretary — now provide stability for the first time since 1968, when Father Richard Tormey left as chaplain.

"When I arrived in 1983, there had just been a rather stressful period where there was a lot of turnover in chaplains," explained Father Michael Mahler, who along with Father John Forni and Edie Reagan, serve as chaplains at Cornell. "I think a lot of it had to do with adjusting to changes after the Vatican Council."

Father Mahler, who arrived at Cornell one year before Father Forni and two years before Reagan, said the community had lost its "influence and credibility" by the early '80s, because it lacked a stable staff situation.

Those days appear to be long gone, however. Today, the community offers 32 ongoing programs and activities for its parishioners. Among them are F.A.S.T. (Faith, Advocacy and Service Together), which has students working for the benefit of the Ithaca community. This year, Reagan and 20 F.A.S.T. members devoted their efforts to Habitat for Humanity, an international organization that helps build affordable homes for low-income families.

Christa Staeuble is one of two Cornell students who took it upon themselves to aid the hungry and the homeless of Ithaca.

Staeuble, who is on the Cornell Catholic Community's parish council, recently became aware that Ithaca's only soup kitchen provides meals for the city's less fortunate residents during the week — but not on weekends.

"We've served three meals already," Staeuble said of her efforts with fellow Cornell student, Laura Philipps, on behalf of Ithaca's poor.

Recently, the community set up the Catholic Chaplaincy Endowment Fund as a way to supplement the regular parish collections necessary to provide the pastoral and support staff needed to meet the increasing demands on campus ministry. The idea for the endowment was spearheaded by Dawn Redlin, who, among other things, is development director for Cornell's Catholic Community. The goal for the fund is \$3 million dollars.

"The students can't be expected to do everything because they pay rent and utilities and whatever else," said Redlin, who is celebrating an anniversary of her own with 10 years of service with the community. "We've received \$250,000 from three people," she pointed out.

Readers wishing to make donations to the endowment fund may write to: Cornell Catholic Community, G-22 Anabel Taylor Hall, Ithaca, N.Y. 14853.


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