

## Chili parish marking 25 years of 'progressive' outreach spirit

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

NORTH CHILI — Some Catholics find St. Christopher Church so hospitable that it almost seems like the end of a long journey, noted Sister Carol Fox, RSM.

"I've been here 15 years, and people who come often say they feel they've come home," the pastoral associate said of St. Christopher Church, located at 3350 Union St.

Sister Fox's sentiments certainly found hit home with Laurie Schulmerich, who directs the parish's Peace Choir — which sings at funerals — and the Children's Choir — which performs at Sunday Mass once a month.

Schulmerich, her husband Dennis and their three children moved to Chicago a few years ago and joined an affluent Catholic parish — one the choir director found to be somewhat elitist.

Unfortunately, that parish was nothing like the community she left behind at St. Christopher's, where she joined the folk group about 14 years ago during the second week she attended Mass there.

"It was not as warm a parish," she said of the Chicago church. Even the choral group to which she belonged was marked by the parish's exclusive atmosphere, she added.

"You did not volunteer for the group, you were asked to join," she said.

When she and her husband moved back to the Rochester area, they quickly rejoined the North Chili parish she described "as friendly as any church I've been to."

The Schulmerichs are among the 1,170 families looking forward to marking St. Christopher's 25th anniversary with a special Mass on Saturday, Nov. 6, at 5 p.m. Bishop Matthew H. Clark will celebrate the liturgy, along with former pastors and parochial vicars, and the current pastor, Father Bernard F. Dollen.

After Mass, a dinner-dance will take place at Dandrea Restaurant & Party House, 1713 Lyell Ave., Rochester.

One of the first diocesan parishes established after Vatican II, St. Christopher's considers itself a "progressive" community, according to Sister Fox.

The church building, completed in 1971, contains no pews or kneelers. Instead, the community uses movable chairs so that the structure can be used for many activities, she said.

According to a parish history au-

**Name:** St. Christopher Church  
**Location:** 3350 Union St., N. Chili  
**Date founded:** June 22, 1968  
**No. of families:** 1,170  
**Significant historical dates:** Parish plant completed in January, 1971; parish center annex completed May, 1976; Bishop Matthew H. Clark rededicated renovated church building May, 1986.  
**Special celebration:** 25th anniversary Mass scheduled for 5 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 6, 1993.

thored by Henry Korytkowski, prior to completion of the current structure, St. Christopher's parishioners first attended Mass in each other's homes in July, 1968.

By August of that year, Mass was celebrated at the North Chili Medical Building, 3161 Union St. Catechism classes took place at the United Free Methodist Church building while a temporary rectory was constructed on Buffalo Road. The current rectory stands at 220 King Road and has been used since 1969.

A parish center annex was completed in 1976 for the purpose of educational, social and spiritual activities. And the main center itself was rededicated by Bishop Clark in May, 1986, following the completion of renovations begun the previous summer.

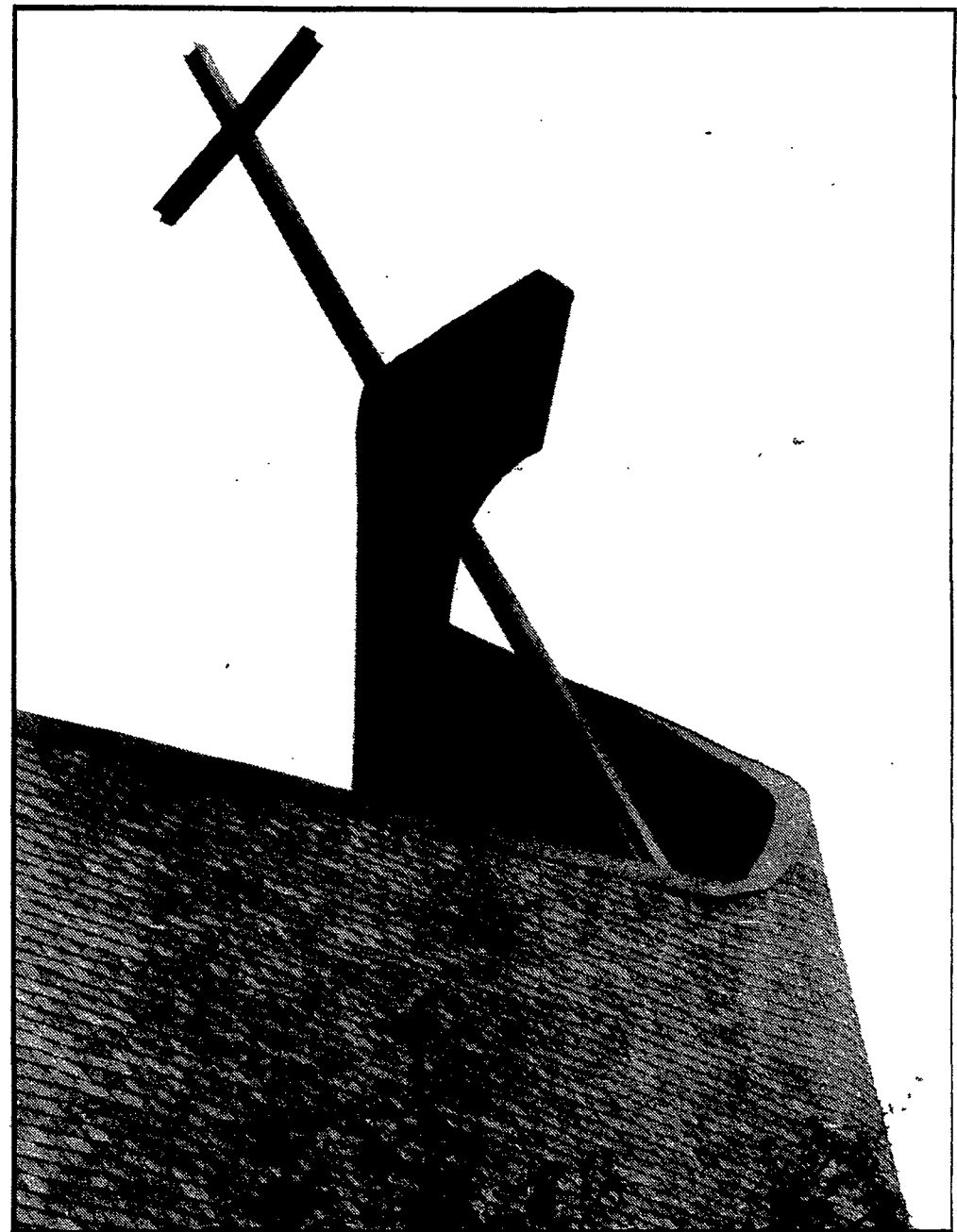
St. Christopher's main parish center stands prominently on Union Street, where a steel cross rising out of the church is angled to reflect the story of the parish's patron. According to the legend, St. Christopher fell while carrying the Christ-child across a stream.

Over the years, the progressive spirit embodied in the church's distinct design has figured in St. Christopher's approach to outreach ministries. The parish instituted tithing in 1978, donating a portion of its monthly receipts to "a parish council, designated parish or charitable organization in need," the parish history read.

Once a month, the parish also collects food for distribution to various soup kitchens, Sister Fox explained. Some of the food is kept for local needy people, she added.

"We do have quite a few people who knock on the door for food out here," she said.

Tom Phillips, the parish's coordinator for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, tries to bring some of that outreaching spirit to his volunteer



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

St. Christopher Church will mark its 25th anniversary with a Nov. 6 Mass. Bishop Matthew H. Clark will celebrate the liturgy along with current pastor Father Bernard F. Dollen, former pastors and parochial vicars.

work at St. Martin's Place, a food program located at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, 53 Ontario St., Rochester. As a deacon-candidate, Phillips is required to perform community service, a spiritually rewarding experience at St. Martin's, he said.

Noting that his home parish's friendly atmosphere lends support to his ministry, Phillips stressed that the faith of his fellow parishioners was conducive to his decision to convert to Catholicism in 1972.

"The people were so outgoing and receptive," he said.

A decision he had been contemplating since his family joined the parish in 1968, Phillips waxed philosophic when asked how St. Christopher's and his family brought him to the church of which he will be an ordained minister in a few years.

"I guess it was the hand of the Lord," he said.

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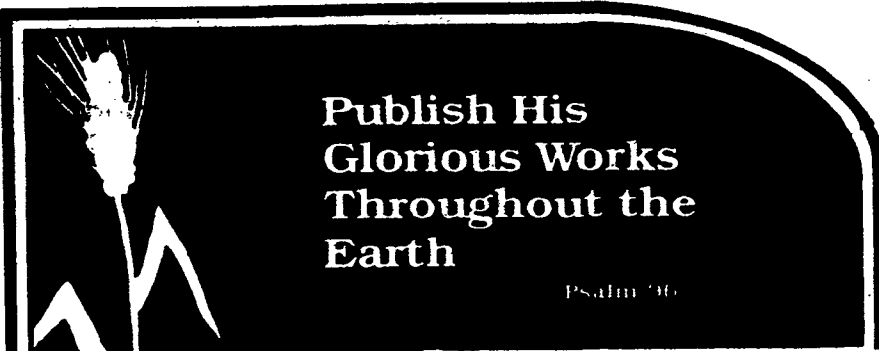
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