

# Parish gives to community, African church

**Parish Profile**  
Our Lady of Lourdes,  
Brighton



By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

BRIGHTON — To learn about one of the most interesting aspects of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, try traveling to Kowak, Tanzania, where the curious will find Lourdes' "twin" parish of St. Brigit's.

Since September of 1992, Lourdes parishioners have given a monthly average collection of \$2,000 to fund a health center in Kowak. In addition, they have also paid to have donated textbooks mailed to a school there.

"It's new money," commented parish council secretary David E. Decker, who handles publicity and fundraising for the twinning project. "The contributions to the parish have not dwindled because of this."

Of course, keeping contributions steady does take some work on the part of Decker, who edits monthly newsletters from two lay Maryknoll missionaries — Dr. Gregory Ryan, a physician, and his wife, Marian Carney Ryan, a school teacher — who direct the parish's funds in Tanzania.

Letters the couple sends home become inserts in the Brighton parish's bulletin, Decker said, adding that he keeps a display of pictures from St. Brigit's in a side-entrance area to the church on the corner of Rhinecliff and Imperial drives.

"The idea is to keep it in front of the people so that they don't forget about it, and we can reach our goal of \$2,000," Decker said.

If any parishioner did happen to forget about St. Brigit's, frequent correspondence from the Ryans would quickly jog his or her memory of what the donated funds can achieve. A letter last February pointed out just how important the Lourdes-funded Kowak Health Center is to St. Brigit's people.

"The wards have been full and the outpatient department has been extremely busy as well," the Ryans wrote. The letter goes on to explain that since the first decent crop harvest in two years "people don't have to put everything they have into obtaining food, (and) now they have a little bit left over for luxuries like health care!"

Kowak Health Center has also attracted patients because of its famed health care — "we actually have medicine available," the Ryans wrote — and its staff members, noted because they did not request bribes!

Lourdes' pastor, Father John L. O'Connor, explained that frequent written contact with the Ryans helps his flock go beyond simply giving money to Catholic missions once or twice a year, only to put aside concerns about the African church until the next year's solicitation.

"Now, emotionally, we have a feeling for it that we didn't just by reading *Time*



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Parishioners at Our Lady of Lourdes in Brighton had the opportunity to celebrate First Friday Adoration in the church's chapel on Dec. 3.

magazine," the Brighton pastor said.

Such outreach is not confined to impoverished Catholic communities abroad, according to Sister Sheila Geraghty, RSM, social ministry coordinator.

The parish has donated thousands of dollars in grants to such programs as Livingston County Rural Ministry, Matt Talbot Ministries, Mount Carmel Mission, and such projects as soup kitchens, senior-citizen programs and battered-women's shelters, she said.

The parish also regularly collects food for Southeast Ecumenical Ministries, Sister Geraghty continued, and has sponsored Amerasian refugee families over the years.

Touching the community at large can attract new parishioners, Sister Geraghty said, noting that word of mouth on such efforts makes it back to her when new parishioners want to join.

"We have a lot of people coming to us and saying they had heard good things



A gift from Dr. Gregory Ryan and his wife, Marian, who serve as missionaries at Lourdes' twin parish, St. Brigit's in Kowak, Tanzania, hangs in the church.

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Name:** Our Lady of Lourdes Parish  
**Location:** Rhinecliff and Imperial drives, Brighton  
**Date founded:** 1928  
**Number of Families:** 800  
**Significant dates:** 1948 — Parish school opened; 1964 — Current church built; 1986 — Work completed on church's interior design according to Vatican II's liturgical directives.

about us," she remarked.

Part of what attracts parishioners to Lourdes is its extensive opportunities for lay liturgical involvement, according to Kathryn P. Weider, one of three music ministry coordinators at the parish.

Weider noted that Lourdes boasts a children's choir; a hand-bell choir; a mentoring program for teenagers interested in cantoring; a Resurrection choir for funeral services; an adult choir; and opportunities for instrumentalists to play at Mass, she said.

In particular, she explained the importance of including small children in liturgies through singing.

"It really does enable them to experience leadership at an early age," she said.

That emphasis on leadership through participation in parish life extends to the parish council, according to William G. Bauer, chairman.

The parish council has never put any issue to a vote, instead preferring to reach a consensus on issues, he said, noting that Father O'Connor sets the tone for such an approach by insisting that everyone's voice on the council be heard.

"We don't always all walk away happy, but we all feel we've gotten a say," Bauer said. "You feel an involvement in the process, rather than someone dictating to you."

Father O'Connor credited his staff for much of the parish's successes, concluding that upbeat attitudes toward church life such as the one evidenced by Bauer, have made his pastorate in Brighton a fulfilling experience.

"It ceases to be a job and starts to be a real joy," he mused.

EDITORS' NOTE — Our Lady of Lourdes offers many other programs, including a school of religion, a youth ministry group, devotional groups, and volunteer opportunities. The parish also serves as the site for grades 4-8 of Seton Catholic School.

To learn more about Lourdes, call 716/473-9656.

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