

PARISH FEATURE

Gates parish focuses on creating family of faith

Parish Profile

Holy Ghost, Gates



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GATES — Ask lay people active at Holy Ghost Church how they would describe the parish and, unprompted, nearly everyone replies "family."

"It's like a home as far as I'm concerned," commented Sue M. Anderson, chairwoman of the parish's social-ministry committee. "There's a lot of spirit."

"We're not just a Sunday parish," said Lori Osgood, director of music at the church. "We're friends all through the year and all of our lives."

Creating a place where people want to spend their spiritual lives together drives the pastorate of Father Alexander H. Bradshaw. But his parishioners often tell of two worlds that vie for their attention, he noted.

One world consists of endless car commutes to various activities, while the other comprises their participation in the church's life.

"There's a contradiction between being stretched in all directions and seeking to provide a kind of a community of stability and peace realized and found in the church they belong to," he explained.

Resolving that contradiction prompted the parish to change its religious-education program about five years ago, according to Katie Fechtor, director.

Fechtore pointed out that today's Catholic kids often spend nearly their whole day in day care, school, and extracurricular activities. By the end of the day, they are too exhausted to pay attention to the lessons offered in a traditional weekly religious-education program, she said.

With that in mind, the parish decided to switch from teaching students in grades kindergarten through eight on a weekly basis, to conducting the entire year's religious program during a 33-hour, two-week program scheduled for the last week in July and the first week in August.

"By the middle of the summer, they're bored," Fechtore said of the students. "We're challenging them with the Gospel at a time when they're fresh and



Holy Ghost parishioners (from left) Caroline Armellino, Happy Leipold and Mary Jo Gizzi show their spirit by participating in a 'Sweat Shirt Sunday' Mass, held at the parish on May 22.

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

alert. The retention level is very good, and they form a miniature faith community."

In contrast to the sullen, tardy group of students she once taught, Fechtore claimed that the students now exhibit a genuine interest in the religious-education program, an interest represented by an increase in enrollment from 99 kids five years ago to 167 last year.

In addition to exploring alternatives in religious education, the parish is also venturing into young-adult ministry, an effort prompted by diocesan synodal discussions last year.

"The young adults were not being represented in the parish," recalled 25-year-old James L. Caputo, one of five core members of the young-adult group called Directions. "The name, Directions, is what I see young adults as needing," he added.

To that end, a group of eight to 12 people, ages 18-35, meet for a monthly evening of Scripture discussion and reflection, he said. The group also has worked on a service project helping a paraplegic man fix his home, and members participate in various social activities.

The hunger young adults feel for spiritual direction is a longing many Catholics at the parish share, according to Maureen O'Neill, one of the parish's pastoral associates.

The parish now offers a Wednesday-night meeting to everyone interested in talking about how their faith plays into their reactions to current issues, she said.

"We talk about where our faith journeys have been — how do we find the church relevant in our lives," O'Neill said.

Discussion and education also concerns the Holy Ghost Younger Seniors Club, according to Marie J. Pantaleo, president. Recent speakers at the club's monthly meetings have included a motivational expert, a financial adviser, a fire chief and an ophthalmologist.

Along with numerous other activities, such events have increased the popularity of the 110-member club, which meets at the Gates fire hall on the corner of Buffalo and Coldwater roads, she said.

"I think a lot of people are lonely, a lot of people are living alone," Pantaleo observed of the club's attractiveness. "It just mushrooms with friends."

Despite the ever-growing sense of community that marks Holy Ghost, the parish does not simply look inward. Nearly all of its organizations participate in service projects on behalf of the parish and the less fortunate.

According to Anderson, the social-ministry committee doles out 2 percent of Holy Ghost's weekly collections to such programs as a home for AIDS pa-

Vital statistics

Name: Holy Ghost Parish
Location: 220 Coldwater Road, Coldwater — a hamlet in the Gates-Chili-Odgen area.
Number of families: 1,100
Significant dates: Incorporated July 3, 1876; school erected in 1875 (children no longer required to take German by 1905); current Medina stone church erected in 1906; school building (former church) burned to ground in 1938; new school built in 1939; Parish Council established in 1968.

tients; an inner-city outreach center; and the Catholic center of a local college.

Parishioners regularly donate funds to cancer research and to gift-giving efforts on behalf of the poor and others, she added. Even the parish's own families have benefited from her committee's efforts, she explained.

Such giving is par for the course for Holy Ghost members, according to O'Neill, who has served at the church since 1991.

"When you meet them, they welcome strangers," she said of the parishioners. "The people make you feel right at home."

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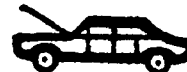
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