

Former mission parish marks 25th

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — Father Peter A. Deckman said he now has some sense of what it's like for a parent to send a child off on his or her own.

The co-pastor of Penn Yan's St. Michael's Parish experienced that feeling late last month when he returned to La Paz, Bolivia, to join St. Joseph the Worker Parish (San Jose Obrero) — a parish he helped found — celebrate its 25th anniversary.

"We could let go," Father Deckman explained. "They are on their own. We're not to get in the way, and everybody has moved off into different things. It was healing in many ways."

Father Deckman, who served in Bolivia from 1966-74 and again from 1980-86, traveled to the La Paz parish for the July 12 celebration along with Father Edward Golden, pastor of Fairport's Church of the Assumption. Father Golden served the La Paz parish from 1968-74. The two diocesan priests were joined by Thomas O'Brien, a former priest now living in California who also helped establish the parish.

In addition to visiting La Paz, Fathers Golden and Deckman traveled to Santa Cruz, Riberalta, where Father Deckman served from 1980-86, and Cochabama, site of the Spanish-language school where both diocesan priests studied.

The two priests were invited to the celebration by the parish, which has been run by a lay team since 1974. Since 1981, the team has been working in conjunction with women religious from Sisters of Charity of St. Anne.



Provided photo
Fathers Peter Deckman (left) and Edward Golden (center), along with Thomas O'Brien, traveled to La Paz, Bolivia, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of St. Joseph the Worker Parish, which they helped found.

Fathers Daniel P. Tormey and Paul J. Freemesser, two diocesan priests who also served in La Paz, received invitations to the ceremony but were unable to attend.

During the celebration, Father Deckman received a silver plate expressing the lay-operated parish's appreciation to the Diocese of Rochester for helping it get started.

The parish might have begun with diocesan support, Father Golden observed, but that support had been phased out over the years (as planned) and parishioners have expanded the parish on their own. They completed a new church building in 1989, and built a parish center and a health clinic without any assistance from the Rochester diocese.

"The church, the hall, the clinic — we made no contribution as a diocese," Fa-

ther Golden said. "They were acting on their own."

The Rochester diocese became involved in Bolivia in 1966 when Father Deckman and O'Brien traveled there as Maryknoll associates, Father Golden explained. In sending the priests, the diocese was acting in response to Pope John XXI's request that dioceses with the resources to do so help the missions. Also in response to that request, the Sisters of St. Joseph began working in Brazil in 1964, while the Sisters of Mercy started their mission in Mexico in

1965, Father Golden noted.

In 1967, O'Brien and Father Deckman separated from the Maryknoll Associates but remained in La Paz. Father Golden joined them in 1968. Together all three men helped to create St. Joseph the Worker Parish in 1969.

Father Golden noted that the celebration focused on the La Paz parish, not the Diocese of Rochester's involvement with it. The parish has continued to thrive since diocesan priests left in 1974, he added, and that growth is a tribute to the parishioners, the lay team overseeing it, and Archbishop Luis Sainz of La Paz.

"The archbishop is strong in affirming the role of the laity, in the pastoral ministry of the people, in encouraging them to be responsible to the Lord's call," Father Golden concluded.

Brian Buff sentenced as part of plea bargain

ROCHESTER — State Supreme Court Justice John D. Doyle July 26 sentenced Brian C. Buff to one-to-three years in prison for sodomizing two teenage boys who were students at Catholic Central High School in Troy.

The sentence was part of a plea bargain agreement in which the former Aquinas Institute teacher and administrator pleaded guilty to three counts of third-degree sodomy — one each in Monroe, Albany and Rensselaer counties. Doyle is scheduled to sentence the 28-year-old Buff again Aug. 4 in Albany and Rensselaer counties in connection with the charges there.

The guilty pleas mean that Buff will spend a total term of three-to-nine years in prison.

According to Gary Muldoon, Buff's attorney, the former Aquinas official will surrender to authorities following his Aug. 4 sentencing.

Buff was charged last February in connection with the repeated sexual abuse of two teenage students at Catholic Central High School, where Buff served as vice principal from August, 1991, to December, 1992. Buff worked at Aquinas from 1988-91, and then again from January to August, 1993.

Neither boy in any of the incidents was an Aquinas student.

Charges are also pending against Mary Anne Cioffi, a former teacher at the Troy high school who allegedly had sexual relations with one of the boys in Buff's Rochester apartment during the spring of 1993. She pleaded guilty June 16 to sexual misconduct, a misdemeanor carrying a sentence of one year in jail, and is scheduled to be sentenced in Rochester City Court Aug. 25.

Mercy Health, union sign contract, avoid strike

AUBURN — A strike at Auburn Mercy Health and Rehabilitation Center was averted last week when negotiators from the nursing home and the union representing some 300 health-care professionals and support staff reached agreement over a new three-year contract.

Union members approved the contract 179-24 on July 28.

The contract includes a bonus for the first year, 2-percent increases for the second and third years, and bigger pensions based, in part, on years of service.

Officials of the Service Employees International Union, Local 200B, had issued a 10-day strike notice threatening a walkout July 29 if a new contract had not been approved.

The previous contract expired June 30, 1994, but was extended to July 19 while negotiations continued. The strike

notice came when negotiations stalled over salary and pension issues, according to Norma Donnelly, the center's human resources director. Differences over those issues were resolved July 26 when both sides offered concessions, she reported. She declined to discuss the nature of those concessions.

Donnelly noted that, had the strike taken place, Mercy officials had a contingency plan in place to keep the 297-

bed, extended-care facility in operation. Tasks normally performed by striking workers would have been carried out by nonunion employees, supervisors, volunteers and patients' family members, she explained.

Had the strike taken place, it would have marked the second work stoppage at Auburn Mercy Health and Rehabilitation Center since 1987.

— Lee Strong

Sisters of St. Joseph vocations team plans August events

Registration is currently open for two events being sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph Vocation Ministry team.

A dinner gathering will take place on Sunday, Aug. 14, from 5-9 p.m. at 1017 Lake Ave., Rochester. After-dinner activities will include a video titled "Wings

of Desire," as well as a discussion led by Sister Beatrice Ganley, SSJ.

In addition, there will be a camping excursion in Watkins Glen State Park the weekend of Aug. 26-28. Tent sites, camping equipment and car-pooling will be provided.

For registration information on either event, call Sister Deanna Gears, SSJ, or Sister Barbara Lum, SSJ, at 716/586-1000, ext. 122.

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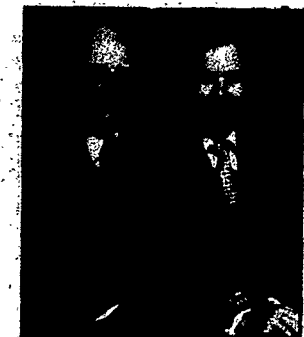
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