

Parish lacks money, but owns wealth of spirit

Parish Profile

St. Bridget's,
Rochester



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — A group of St. Bridget's parishioners stood around Rose E. Barrows' office and pondered who it was that encouraged them to join their community.

"The Holy Spirit," Jane Cooper quickly answered.

"And all the time I thought it was me," Barrow's husband, Jack, quickly shot back.

Apparently, what attracts people to St. Bridget's, located at 175 St. Bridget's Drive, lies somewhere between the Holy Spirit's urgings and the friendliness of members such as Jack and Rose Barrows.

"I love them," Rose, the parish's administrative assistant, said of her fellow parishioners. "They are my family — my extended family."

Rose's extended family consists of between 150 to 200 parishioners, about two-thirds of whom are African-American, and the remaining one-third mainly white.

"We have godparents of different races, mixed marriages," Father Anthony P. Mugavero, St. Bridget's pastor, said. He added that the church was "refreshment" in a divided world thirsty for racial unity.

More than 140 years ago, St. Bridget's was primarily Irish, before later decades saw Italians, and then Hispanics, move into the neighborhood and become the parish's dominant ethnic group.

St. Bridget Church's current ethnic makeup is best reflected in the musical program it is sponsoring for this Friday, Nov. 11, from 7 to 9 p.m.

Donnie Lee Bailes, a country music gospel singer, will perform at the church along with St. Bridget's own gospel choir, which leans toward African-American spirituals.

St. Bridget's integrated character causes many of its members to suggest that the parish concretely embodies Christ's call to human unity.

"This is a church where you would find Jesus praying because the joy of the Holy Spirit is here," claimed Debbie Everhart, a member of the parish since 1983.

That joy is evident at the church's 10:30 a.m. Sunday Mass, a liturgical event marked by gospel singing and clapping by the church's black and white members. It was just this type of emotional worship — a style she had grown up with in Trinidad — that persuaded Luenza Boone to become a St. Bridget's parishioner when she moved to Rochester.

"I feel if I want to raise my hand and praise the Lord, I can do it," she said. "I don't feel out of place."

In addition to the public gesturing en-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
(Clockwise from top) Father Anthony P. Mugavero, pastor of St. Bridget's Church, Oct. 16 celebrated a lively Mass featuring Dixieland music; young members of St. Bridget's Children's Gospel Choir sing praises; 10-month-old Julie Ann Angle made her way to the altar to get a closer look during the homily.

couraged by the liturgy, the Mass' music seems to be another reason why many of the Catholics at St. Bridget's want to stay with the parish.

"There's a sense of excitement here," remarked Frank Pimentel, a native of Chili who recently decided to join St. Bridget's. "People who come here every week ... see it in song."

Deborah Brooks, the choir's vice president, joined St. Bridget's eight years ago for some of the same reasons Pimentel is joining now.

"Here you could feel the Spirit, and you leave with the Spirit, and that helps you through the week," she commented.

Brooks added that the choir, which

regularly performs at other diocesan parishes, serves not just as a charming backdrop to the Mass, but as a vital part of the liturgy's ministerial approach.

"Some people, you can't teach them during Scripture, but you can teach them through song," she said.

Other choir members have less spiritual, yet possibly equally important reasons for pursuing a ministry in music.

"It's cool, and I get to meet up with a lot of my friends," observed 9-year-old Gary C. Miller, who belongs to the children's choir, which performs at Mass once a month.

Lest the reader thinks that all the parishioners do is sing, the parish also operates or hosts a number of min-

istries.

There's the food cupboard that regularly serves almost 1,300 neighborhood families; the Catholic Worker's Bethany House, a home for women and children in need; and weekly meetings of both Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

The parish is also embarking on a new Stephen Ministry, and holds religious-education classes for its children on Saturdays, in addition to occasional field trips for its youth.

Behind all this activity looms the church's need for a lot of money — \$510,000 to be exact — to fix up water damage caused by leaks in the church roof. A recent walk-a-thon raised funds for the effort, and several other diocesan parishes have pitched in to help the reconstruction project.

Some parishioners, and Father Mugavero, admitted the parish's financial challenges can seem overwhelming at times. But they quickly regain their optimism when they look around at the faces that make up their community.

"This church is only held together by baling wire," commented Raynor Saunders, a member of the parish finance committee.

"And love," he added.

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