

Diversity filters through downtown parish

Parish Profile

Our Lady of Victory/
St. Joseph,
Rochester



By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The night of Oct. 18, 1974, added a sad section to an otherwise sparkling history at St. Joseph's Parish.

Yet even after a fire completely destroyed the large Franklin Street church's interior, it was not St. Joseph's final chapter.

Thanks largely to the strong loyalty displayed toward its Redemptorist priests, much of the old St. Joseph community has remained intact in the two decades since that disaster.

In 1975 St. Joseph combined with Our Lady of Victory Parish, located just a block over at 210 Pleasant St. The Redemptorists, who had been associated with St. Joseph since its inception in 1836, also took over administration of the new Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph Parish at that time.

Today, Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph remains the only diocesan parish to be staffed by the Redemptorist order. Father Thomas B. Loftus, CSsR, currently serves as pastor; and Fathers Leo Dunn, CSsR, and James Cannon, CSsR, assist as parochial vicars.

"We have marvelous priests. They have a wealth of theology and spirituality," commented Judy Echaniz, who has served as the parish's musical director since 1985.

Charles Bayer, 85, credits past Redemptorist priests at St. Joseph's for providing "a drawing card of spirituality that was lacking in the other churches."

For this reason, Bayer acknowledged, he and many other former St. Joseph's parishioners felt comfortable making the transition to Our Lady of Victory.

"We always felt very much at home with the Redemptorist Fathers," said Bayer, whose nephew, Father Peter T. Bayer, serves as chaplain at St. Ann's Home in Rochester.

Actually, the addition of parishioners due to the fire and the presence of the Redemptorist order are only two of the many unique aspects attached to Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph.

According to Father Loftus, the 7:30 p.m. Sunday Mass is the latest regular weekend Mass offered in the diocese.

It's also one of the few parishes to offer an early-afternoon weekday Mass, at 12:10 p.m. Monday through Friday. Penance service is available every day of the week as well.

And, due to its downtown location and comparative isolation from populated residential areas, the parish includes members from all over Monroe County and beyond. Father Loftus noted that the 220 registered parish families hail from 34 different zip codes.

The pastor acknowledged that it's easy to spot some of the many downtown visitors who also drop into Our Lady of Victory Church.

"Sometimes you can tell when people have been at a convention, because 12 of them will be sitting together wearing buttons," Father Loftus remarked.

The 7:30 p.m. Sunday Mass, he added, is made up mostly of non-parishioners who simply haven't been able to get to an earlier weekend service. Many more who attend Mass can't manage their own



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

The inside of St. Joseph's Church was destroyed in a 1974 fire, but its shell still remains on Rochester's Franklin Street. The surrounding area has been developed into a small city park.



Mary Kelly, a 10-year member of the Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph Church choir, sings during the 10:30 a.m. Mass Nov. 20.

SNAPSHOTS

Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph Parish

210 Pleasant St., Rochester

Ministerial staff:

Pastor: Father Thomas B. Loftus, CSsR

Parochial Vicar: Father Leo Dunn, CSsR

Parochial Vicar: Father James J. Cannon, CSsR

Parish Council President: Joanne Lang

Music Director: Judy Echaniz

Parish Secretary: Susan Olszewski

transportation but are able to ride a bus line to Our Lady of Victory.

"It's certainly a church of convenience, in one sense," Father Loftus said.

Despite its diversity, the parish remains stable and united in many ways — beginning with its buildings.

Both the Our Lady of Victory and St. Joseph structures should remain popular fixtures in downtown Rochester for many years to come. Our Lady of Victory, constructed in 1848 and popularly known as "The Little French Church," was made a city landmark in 1970. This designation prevents the edifice from being demolished, as plans to widen Pleasant Street just a few years prior to 1970 had stipulated.

Meanwhile, even though St. Joseph's Church was never rebuilt, its exterior survived the 1974 fire and still stands proudly on Franklin Street. A small park has been built around the structure.

Stability is also reflected in the parish community. Parishioners at Sunday-morning Masses are close-knit even though they travel from a wide geographic area, maintained Joanne Lang.

"It's the same people that come to Mass, so (the distance factor) is not a problem," said Lang, who serves as parish council president.

Perhaps the most telling example of parish support occurred two years ago when Father Loftus one Sunday asked for contributions toward a \$10,000 project to repair Our Lady of Victory Church's roof.

"The amazing thing is, that was the only announcement I made and we got \$12,000 in 10 days," Father Loftus said.

Edward M. Page
President

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