

Teen aims to be 'not the problem, but the solution'

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In Maricruz Ruiz's opinion, there's a lot more to inner-city life than meets the eye.

Particularly the eyes of those people who base their opinions of the city on news reports.

"This person gets killed on the street. But then there are youth delivering food to the poor, and you don't see that (reported). And that's what makes me mad," said Maricruz, 15.

"Older people think we will never achieve anything, but I don't think that's true because I can name over 25 people who are working hard to achieve their goals," she added.

The people Maricruz refers to can mostly be found in the youth group to which she belongs at Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Church. They perform activities such as visiting nursing homes and hospitals, and helping to prepare spaghetti dinners. In addition, the Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier youth group occasionally joins in on projects with youth members at the Community of Hope cluster's other two churches: St. Michael's and Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Maricruz is one of the more visible young people at St. Francis Xavier/Holy Redeemer due to her role as a Sunday lector. About once a month, she and her father, Kike, perform these duties during the church's Spanish Sunday Mass. In addition, with some assistance from her father, Maricruz gives reflections on that week's readings.

One particular homily she gave carries deep personal meaning, Maricruz acknowledged.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
In addition to being active in her youth group and parish, Maricruz Ruiz — a parishioner at Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Church — volunteers her time in the community.

"Jesus said that no matter how bad a person you are, he will always love you. There's a person I know who has done some bad things, but I always tried to be there for him," she said. "He always told me I was like a guide for him."

Along with her extensive parish involvement, Maricruz volunteers on a weekly basis at the pediatrics unit of Rochester General Hospital and someday hopes to become a pediatrician.

By performing such a wide array of activities, Maricruz is living out the objective she sets for all people in her age range.

"What we as youths have to do is show older people that we are not the problem, but we are the solution," commented Maricruz, a sophomore at Bishop Kearney High School, 125 Kings Hwy S.

Angel Alicea, who serves as the Community of Hope's youth-group coordinator, pointed out that these ideals are attainable — but not without support from adult parishioners.

"The community has been involved, but they need to get more involved if (youths) are to be the solution," said Alicea, who oversees approximately 60 youth-group members in the cluster.

Alicea added that increased adult participation would help create more programs for youths "so we can get them out of the streets." This is crucial in inner-city Rochester, he noted, where "every day is tough — you're just trying to survive."

Based on Alicea's observations, the ideal equation can be found right in this cluster's adage: More community generates more hope.

As well as more youths such as Maricruz.

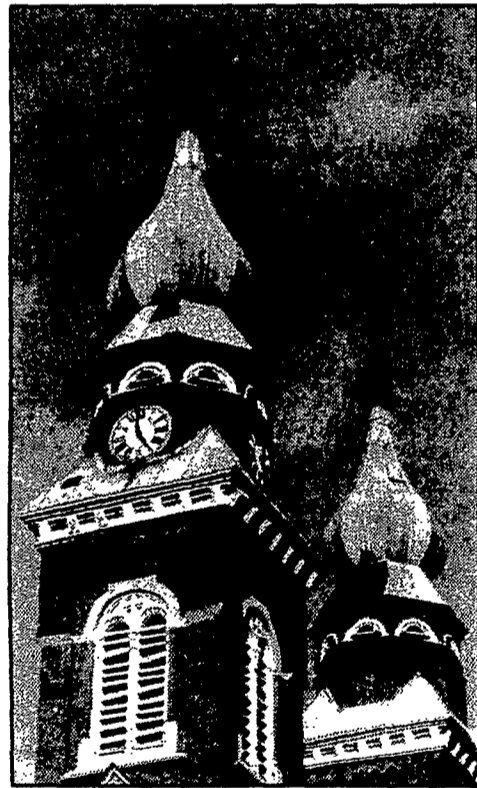
Illustrious history transpires under Holy Redeemer's onion domes

By Father Robert F. McNamara
Guest contributor

In spite of their relative poverty, our Catholic immigrant forebears insisted on glorifying God by erecting the finest churches possible. In our day, population shifts have often drained the old neighborhoods of parishioners and left the fine old buildings depopulated and crumbling. What is to become of them?

Holy Redeemer Church, located at the corner of Hudson and Clifford Avenues, is a case in point.

Like most of our local German-language parishes, Holy Redeemer owes its origin to the German Redemptorist Fathers who organized the city's first German Catholic parish — St. Joseph's — in 1835. In 1863 the Redemptorists bought a large farm tract on Hudson Avenue in what was then Irondequoit as the site of a projected German Catholic orphanage. By 1865, however, the neighborhood had become so heavily populated with German Catholic immigrants that it was deemed more important to build a parish plant on the property. The first Holy Redeemer Church, a two-story brick structure incorporating both a church and a school, was dedicated in 1867.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
The 'onion domes' and four-faced clock are among Holy Redeemer Church's most notable exterior features.

Priests from St. Joseph's administered this daughter-church as a mission until 1869. Installed in 1868 as the first bishop of Rochester, Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid in 1869 appointed Father Fidelis Oberholzer, a Swiss-born secular priest, as full-fledged pastor. Father Oberholzer would occupy this post until his death in 1902. He became the great builder of the parochial plant.

By 1876 the parish population had grown so large that the pastor had to begin setting work on a permanent church. He broke ground for the second and last Holy Redeemer Church in May, 1876. Bishop McQuaid was able to dedicate it solemnly on Oct. 18, 1877. The building cost some \$50,000 to erect. The peal of three bells was hung in the south tower in 1879. A year later the four-faced clock was installed in the same tower's spire.

Christian Knebel, a German-born Rochester architect, had designed an impressive building. Romanesque in reference, and constructed in red brick with limestone trim, it was 160 feet long and 98 feet wide at the transepts, and would accommodate 1,000 worshippers.

Its most notable interior feature was the total absence of columns to deflect

the sound or impede the sight. The most notable exterior features were, of course, the "onion domes" that crowned the 196-foot twin towers. Pear-shaped or "tear drop" domes had become popular in the Baroque architecture of the German Tyrol, hence their aptness in a German-American Catholic parish church (although German architects had borrowed them from Russia).

Up to World War II the parish remained large (4,000 parishioners) and intensely active. By the mid-1980s, however, as a result of the flight to the suburbs, Sunday attendance had dwindled to as few as 150.

Because the parochial unit could no longer support itself, Bishop Matthew H. Clark decided in 1985 to combine Holy Redeemer and St. Francis Xavier parishes.

What to do, then, with the handsome church, so long an eye-catcher on the Rochester horizon? It faced the same wrenching dilemma of many a retired edifice: transformation or demolition.

During a rather heated debate in early 1988, demolition was thwarted by the granting of a citizen petition to designate the church as a landmark. But with the Landmark Society of Western New York acting as a catalyst, the diocese was then able to sell the whole property to a vibrant local black congregation, the non-denominational Northside Church of Christ. Remodeling of the building, begun in 1988, is now almost complete.

The "church of the onion spires" will therefore soon resume its role as a house of Christian worship. It remains a monument to its original builders.

Father McNamara, diocesan archivist, lives at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Irondequoit.

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