



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Father Benedict A. Ehmann, marking his 90th birthday, was the main celebrant at St. Michael's Church for a Jan. 8 'Homecoming Christmas Mass.' The liturgy was preceded by walking tours of the historical Rochester church.

Diverse cluster offers hope to city residents

Parish Profile
Community of Hope,
Rochester



By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — It can take no more than five seconds to recognize the diverse components within the *Comunidad de Esperanza* — or Community of Hope.

As parishioners departed from the 10:15 a.m. Mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church this past Sunday, Jan. 7, another wave of people was on its way in for the 11:30 Mass. Friendly chatter enveloped both groups, yet one major difference existed: Those on their way out spoke English, and those entering the building communicated in Spanish.

While Mount Carmel still draws heavily from its Italian origins, the church has also experienced a large influx of Puerto Ricans over the past 30 years. Such is the case at the other two churches within the Community of Hope cluster — St. Michael's and Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier — which both own strong German heritages yet are now mostly Puerto Rican.

This combination can be a challenge for the many parishioners who are not bilingual, noted Father Laurence C. Tracy, parochial vicar.

"We struggle with that — what we do separately, what we do together. We frequently start off an activity by asking what language should be spoken," said Father Tracy.

According to Father Tracy and Father Dennis J. Shaw, the cluster's pastor, Puerto Ricans comprise 60 to 80 percent of

the 800 to 850 people who attend weekend Masses in the Community of Hope, which became a cluster in 1993. Masses are celebrated in both English and Spanish at all three churches.

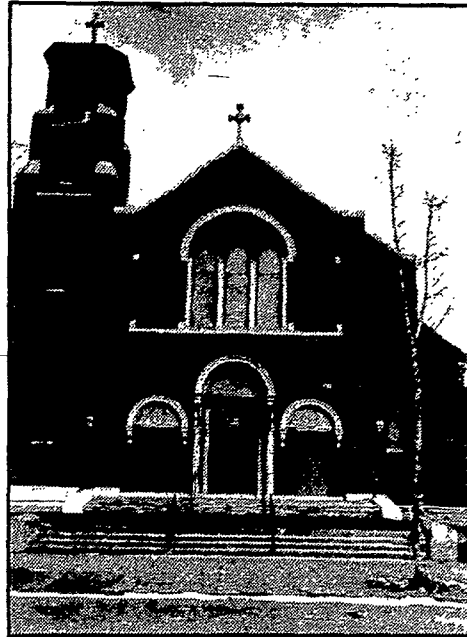
Each church in the Community of Hope has its own rich history, including one building which is no longer in operation. Holy Redeemer Church, located at the corner of Hudson and Clifford avenues, began in 1867 due to the quickly growing German Catholic population in that area. The current building was dedicated in 1877 but ceased operation in 1985 when Holy Redeemer parishioners became merged with the St. Francis Xavier parish (see accompanying story).

St. Michael's Parish was established in 1873, and the spacious church at the corner of Clifford and North Clinton avenues has existed since 1890. Serving in this parish is especially meaningful for Father Tracy, whose family ties to the St. Michael's neighborhood go all the way back to the parish's beginning.

St. Francis Xavier was founded in 1888 as a German parish. In the 1930s this church got an early taste of ethnic blending when Our Lady of Sorrows Church, a mostly Italian parish formerly located at the corner of Niagara and Dake streets, closed down and its parishioners came over to St. Francis Xavier at the corner of Bay and Teresa streets. The current St. Francis Xavier structure was dedicated in 1915.

The Community of Hope's newest church is Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which was formed in 1904. The current Mt. Carmel edifice, built in 1929, is located on Ontario Street.

By the 1950s the German and Italian residents in this part of the city had begun moving to the Rochester suburbs, and Puerto Ricans and blacks took their places. Today, only a small percentage of non-Puerto Rican parishioners actually live within parish boundaries.



Our Lady of Mt. Carmel



Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier

Further change took place in June of 1993, when Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier, St. Michael's and Our Lady of Mount Carmel all became clustered due largely to the declining number of available clergy.

Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier worshippers Ray and Harriet Warth, who had attended Holy Redeemer until that church closed, believe that the clustering approach is a much less painful downsizing option than what they experienced 10 years ago.

"We were happy to find out they weren't going to close one of the three (Community of Hope) churches," Ray remarked. "We never believed (Holy Redeemer) would close down."

"Oh gosh, it was terrible," Harriet recalled about Holy Redeemer's closing. "It was quite a thing."

Ray Perez, who has attended Our Lady of Mount Carmel since 1978, noted that clustering has also helped bridge the communication gap between English- and Spanish-speaking parishioners.

"Of late, we've been working more closely together," said Perez. "We've also been trying to centralize our administrative efforts."

SNAPSHOTS

Community of Hope Cluster:
St. Michael's Church, 869 Clinton Ave. N.

Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Church, 34 Teresa St.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, 53 Ontario St.

Ministerial Staff:

Pastor: Father Dennis J. Shaw.

Parochial Vicar: Father Laurence C. Tracy.

Pastoral Associates: Sister Kay Schwenzer, RSM (St. Michael's); Sister Zita Toto Tenorio, OLC (Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier); Sister Julia Norton, RSM, and Sister Mary Regis Straughn, RSM (Our Lady of Mount Carmel).

Deacons: John Erb, Agenol Rodriguez, Juan Lebron (Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier); Felix Medero, Nemesio Martinez (Our Lady of Mount Carmel).

Youth-Ministry Coordinator: Angel Alica.

Religious-Education Coordinators: Martha Montes and Bernard Grizard.

Parish Visitor: Maria Milagros Potter (Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier and St. Michael's).

Secretaries: Raquel Rodriguez (St. Michael's); Elizabeth Munoz (Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier); Alicia Ostolaza (Our Lady of Mount Carmel).

"Under God there is only one church and we both have the same faith. Even though the (language) barrier is there, the faith is still the same," noted Perez, who serves as a lector and *comite* (Hispanic parish council) member at Mount Carmel.

In addition to cultural differences, another challenge that parishioners face — especially those who live near the churches — is the large-scale poverty and crime plaguing much of the area.

Hence, the title "Community of Hope" has extremely deep meaning in these parts.

"It describes a value in a part of the city where there isn't a lot of hope," said Father Tracy. "It's so easy for people in this neighborhood to lose hope, but I think that virtue, more than any other, distinguishes these people."

"The violence is a very small part of what goes on in this part of the city," Father Shaw said. "The vast majority of these people are caring and loving, just like anywhere else."

Father Shaw noted that four priorities used in the Community of Hope are "faith, family, friends and food."

"That's why, even with poverty, people are able to celebrate life," he said.



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