# Greece parish home to thousands of believers

**Our Mother** of Sorrows, Greece



By Rob Cullivan Staff writer

GREECE - The current mix of politicians with presidential aspirations might want to consider visiting Our Mother of Sorrows before next year's election.

At least one politician who did so went on to be elected president of the United States for four consecutive terms.

That's right. Former New York Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt – and yes, he was accompanied by his wife Eleanor - traveled to Mother of Sorrows back in 1930 to help the Greece parish celebrate its

Today's ministerial staff members pointed out that neither current Gov. George Pataki nor any of the announced presidential candidates have made similar plans. It might behoove the New York governor or any presidential candidate to do so, however, considering the number of potential votes a politician could garner from one of this diocese's largest worshiping communities.

Father Thomas R. Statt, pastor since 1981, said the Greece church can accommodate up to 1,000 worshipers at any of the parish's four weekend liturgies.

According to Sister Mary Doran, SSJ, pastoral associate, while some parishes struggle with declining numbers, the 2,900-family parish actually draws 12 to 15 new registrants a month.

The Greece church sponsors a gathering for new parishioners once a month during which they are introduced to the parish's impressive array of programs and activities, she said.

And those activities involve significant numbers of parishioners, staff members emphasized. About 300 parishioners, for example, volunteer each year for the parish festival held during the second week of June, Father Statt said.

"It's always been the first festival of the season in Greece," the pastor said, adding that the church raised \$82,000 during this year's fest.

The priest and woman religious concurred with Jim Hart, chairman of the liturgy committee and former parish council president, when he asserted that volunteers are the lifeblood of Mother of Sorrows.

"Oh, there's hundreds of people that are actively involved," Father Statt said. "I

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S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Cantor Anna Damelio leads the congregation during the 11 a.m. Mass at Our Mother of Sorrows Church July 23.

# **SNAPSHOTS**

**Our Mother of Sorrows Church** at Paddy Hill 5000 Mt. Read Blvd., Greece Phone: 716/663-5432 Ministerial staff: Pastor: Father Thomas R. Statt Parochial Vicar:

Father Mitchell Zygadlo

Father Raymond G. Heisel Parish Deacon:

Deacon Thomas H. Beck Pastoral Associate: Sister Mary Doran, SSJ

Youth Coordinator: Joan Grass School Principal:

Rebecca E. Maloney **Religious Education Coordinator:** Claudia Adams

do think that the commitment of the people in terms of their volunteerism is second to none."

Staff members noted, for example, that 150 people serve as eucharistic ministers, while another 40 parishioners regularly serve as lectors.

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Father Statt added.

According to parish records, Our Mother of Sorrows Church received its name in 1860, but its history extends all the way back to 1829 when a small Irish community began constructing the church at Paddy Hill. Dedicated to St. Ambrose on Feb. 5, 1832, Mother of Sorrows was the first rural Catholic church in New York state. The growing congregation eventually outgrew the corner church, however, leading to the current church's construction and dedication in 1968. The old church is now leased as a library building to the Town of Greece.

Located in Rochester's largest suburban town, Mother of Sorrows could be described as a middle-of-the-road parish, Sister Doran commented.

"We're not far out on either end," she commented.

Father Statt noted that Mother of Sorrows, which offers 16 Catholic Youth Organization sports teams for boys and girls in soccer, basketball, softball and cheerleading, is an ideal parish in which young families may raise their children.

"If they have children, I underline the school," Father Statt said of Mother of Sorrows' kindergarten-to-eighth-grade program. "It's an excellent school."

Nearly 450 children attend the Catholic school, he added, pointing out

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that families whose children attend public school can enroll in the parish's vast religious-education program, staffed by 120 volunteers.

According to Claudia Adams, religious education coordinator, about 1,000 students from pre-school age to eighth grade receive their catechesis at Mother of Sorrows. The program also offers a feature not often seen in parish religious education - a special-education compo-

Twenty-five children participate in special-education classes, Adams said, adding that other parishes send students with special learning needs to Mother of Sorrows because they are unable to meet those needs.

Lifelong religious education, or faith formation, was selected as the number one diocesan Synod priority in 1993, and Mother of Sorrows is striving to meet that goal, Father Statt emphasized. He noted that this fall the parish plans to host "St. Bernard's on the Road," an education lecture series conducted by professors from St. Bernard's Institute.

According to Rob Weigel, chairman of the parish's synod planning team, the Synod also produced a number of other changes in the parish.

Mother of Sorrows hired a part-time youth minister, Joan Grass, after discussions revealed a strong need for such a position at the parish, Weigel said.

The Greece church has also extended its hand to parishioners who are homebound or elderly, the pastor and Sister Doran said, noting the establishment of a ministry to the homebound.

In fact, to help area residents learn more about how to care for the elderly, the parish recently hosted a six-week series sponsored by the Mercy Center with the Aging, a project of the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester. Father Statt noted that 61 people attended each session.

If Mother of Sorrows parishioners seem to have a lot to do, it's because the parish encourages involvement. Hart noted that one reason he has remained involved in the parish is the active role assigned to the parish council, chaired by Roger Delthony. The council's 20-odd members are a serious voice to whom Father Statt listens, Hart explained.

"The parish council is one of the most active in the diocese," Hart asserted. "It's really the focal point for activities in the parish ... There's really very little of anything of any substance that Father Statt doesn't run by the parish council."

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