

# Parish thrives on parishioners' volunteer spirit

## Parish Profile

St.  
Theodore's,  
Gates



By Lee Strong  
Senior staff writer

GATES — Mary Blind can remember nights years ago when she could hear from her front door cows mooing on the many surrounding dairy farms in this Rochester suburb.

"It was real country in 1948," Blind said of the time when she and her family moved to Gates and became members of St. Theodore's Church.

But as fellow parishioners and former milkman Ray Eisenhower quipped, "Gates was noted for dairy farms, but now there's not a cow in Gates."

While the cows have "moo-ved" on to other pastures, the Rochester suburb's population has ballooned in the past 40-something years.

And growing right along with the town has been St. Theodore's Church.

From its modest beginnings in 1925 as a mostly rural parish, St. Theodore's has evolved into a parish with a physical plant spread out over several acres and with more than 1,500 registered families. Some of the parish's acreage was also donated to the state in 1970 for senior housing, and the result was Dunn Towers, named after Father Gerald E. Dunn, the parish's pastor from 1968-92.

And the 70-year old parish shows signs of ongoing life and growth.

In the past year, the parish has launched Kingdom Kids, an after-school



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

In addition to about 100 St. Theodore's parishioners who regularly attend daily Mass, numerous other members hold perpetual adoration in the Gates parish's chapel.

program; converted part of the former parish school building into a parish life center with libraries of books and videotaped material; and created a Capital Maintenance Fund that has raised some \$90,000 to help pay for roof repairs along with the creation of the parish life center.

In addition to forming a hospitality committee to help meet the needs of new parishioners, the parish is looking to the future by establishing a single parents group. On Sept. 10, the parish will also hold its first parish picnic in many years.

Meanwhile, the active Rosary Society sponsors such annual activities as a spaghetti supper; an arts and crafts sale; a Christmas dinner; and an extensive St. Joseph's Table. The religious education program last year had some 35 teachers and 440 students, and a four-year old perpetual adoration group has developed a strong core of people to keep up prayer in the former convent chapel.

The list goes on. "It's quite a parish," Eisenhower said. "It's grown along with the times."

"We've made an effort to say there's more to ministry than having a school or the sacraments," observed Father Daniel

F. Holland, St. Theodore's pastor since 1992.

Fortunately, involvement in various ministries seems to be a characteristic of his parishioners.

"I think there's a strong sense of volunteerism," Father Holland said. "If there is a task to be done, they come out to get it done."

The parish is a reflection of the largely working-class suburb in which it is located, its former pastor acknowledged.

"It's not a rich parish," Father Dunn said. The people, however, were always cooperative and generous, he added, noting, "We never really had to run any (fundraising) drive. When you needed it, they always came through."

"The church was built by people who were either immigrants or children of immigrants" Blind observed. "They were hardworking people, and the church was their core. This was carried through their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

Those parish founders created the parish in 1925 from territory originally served by Holy Family Parish. The name of the new parish was taken from the first name of Holy Family's former pastor, Father Theodore Laurenzis.

Many of those original parishioners were Irish and German. Beginning in the 1950s, an influx of Italians from Rochester gave the parish a strongly Italian character. Now the parish's face is be-

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