

PARISH PROFILE

Charlotte church as inviting as its surroundings

Parish Profile

Holy Cross,
Rochester



By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — With its beach, pier and historic lighthouse, Charlotte (pronounced Sha-LOT) has attracted countless waves of visitors dating back to the 1800s.

Equally as popular, historic and charming is Holy Cross Church, one of the most visible landmarks in this section of Rochester.

Located within view of the point where the Genesee River meets Lake Ontario, Holy Cross is a proud part of the Charlotte legacy.

"Even though we're in the city of Rochester, we don't consider ourselves part of the city. We identify ourselves as Holy Cross in Charlotte," remarked Father Thomas H. Wheeland, who is in his 14th year as the Holy Cross pastor. "It's like a little town."

Holy Cross has been a prominent part of the Charlotte area since 1863, when it was founded as a mission of Our Mother of Sorrows Church in Greece. The parish was incorporated as Holy Cross in 1873.

The church building has existed in its present location since 1882. A major renovation was completed in 1985, and parish-council members are currently exploring the possibility of adding a new parish center onto the church. According to Lisa Raetz, president of the 22-member parish council, this space is needed to accommodate the parish's extensive number of programs and activities.

These programs are strengthened by a high level of volunteerism in this 2,130-family parish. Sister Kathleen M. O'Connell, RSM, pastoral associate at Holy Cross, estimated that 600 parishioners are involved in active ministry, supporting programs such as bereavement ministry and the synod committee.

"There's so much participation and support that it's not a lot of work in rallying volunteers," noted Joe Sturnick, the parish synod coordinator.

"We wouldn't be so vibrant if it wasn't for the people sharing their gifts in different ways," Sister O'Connell observed.

In addition, opportunities for the youth of Holy Cross are abundant:

- The Catholic school located at Holy Cross has an enrollment of 532 students in grades pre-kindergarten through eight. Father Wheeland noted that approximately 85 percent of these youths are Holy Cross parishioners.

- Approximately 300 youths are enrolled in the Holy Cross religious education program, said its coordinator, Karen Henrichs.

- Sports such as soccer, softball and basketball are popular draws for the younger set. For example, parish sports coordinator Anne Horn noted that nearly 200 youths are currently involved in Catholic Youth Organization basketball and cheerleading.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Father Frederick Eisemann, weekend assistant, distributes Communion at the 10 a.m. Mass Jan. 7 at Charlotte's Holy Cross Church.



Nick Weidenbach portrays the North Star during the children's Liturgy of the Word Jan. 7.

- Youth group consists of 30 to 35 members. In 1993, the Holy Cross contingent was instrumental in launching Teens for Peace, a Rochester-based youth organization dedicated to raising awareness about violence.

Interestingly, despite the parish's long list of programs and participants, liturgies at Holy Cross consistently lend themselves to intimacy and cohesiveness among the parishioners.

"People don't feel like they're there to observe Mass. They're there to participate,"

SNAPSHOTS

Holy Cross Church
4492 Lake Ave.
Rochester
Phone: 716/663-2244
Incorporated: 1873

Ministerial staff:

Pastor:

Father Thomas H. Wheeland

Priest Intern:

Father Kip F. Corriveau

Weekend Assistant:

Father Frederick F. Eisemann

Secretary: **Barb Clavette**

Pastoral Associate:

Sister Kathleen M. O'Connell,

RSM

Parish Visitor:

Sister Rita Biel, RSM

Parish Council President:

Lisa Raetz

Religious Education Coordinator:

Karen Henrichs

Youth Minister: **Joe DiVincenzo**

Music Director: **John Gaspar**

Synod Coordinator:

Joseph Sturnick

Social Ministry Coordinator:

Joan Powers

Liturgy Coordinator: **Jack Foy**

School Principal:

Sister Carolyn Knipper, RSM

youth minister Joe DiVincenzo said.

"When a child would cry, you wouldn't get cold stares. You'd get a smile and someone saying, 'Isn't she cute,'" Sturnick recalled from the time he joined the parish in the 1980s.

Raetz pointed out that the Holy Cross interior — considerably smaller than many city churches — helps promote these close bonds.

"It's kind of cozy, like a house," she observed.

Jack Foy, director of the parish liturgy committee, said Holy Cross makes a strong effort to blend modern and traditional Catholic customs.

"We have liturgies that satisfy a variety of tastes," said Foy, 70, a lifelong Holy Cross parishioner. "I think we've adapted very well."

"It's a people's church. That's the way it's always been, and that's the way the people want it," Father Wheeland stated.

The parish's strong adherence to community spirit, Father Wheeland added, enables committees and staff members to reach decisions with minimal friction.

"We don't have in-fighting," Father Wheeland commented. "Everybody kind of gives people room to do their thing."

"We're blessed. We really are," Sturnick concluded.

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