

FEATURE

Friendliness comes first at Rochester parish

Parish Profile

Church of the
Annunciation,
Rochester



By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Prior to a recent Sunday Mass at Church of the Annunciation, a noticeable buzz accompanied organist Jennifer Kremer's music.

No need for a new sound system, however. The buzz was coming from parishioners' mouths, not the speakers.

"Everyone sits around and chats when they come into church," remarked Father Robert O'Neill, pastor at Annunciation.

This spirit of friendliness is evident in other parts of Annunciation's liturgies as well: Worshipers turn to greet each other as Mass begins, and they also join hands across the aisles during the Lord's Prayer.

Such warmth was not lost upon Dave Callahan when he joined the parish last year.

"People come and talk to you like they've known you for years," Callahan remarked. He added that the Annunciation community doesn't "just want you to be here on Sundays," explaining that parishioners promote inclusion through many clubs and ministries.

Lifelong Annunciation parishioner Sandy Nasca — planning to marry Callahan next June — credits Father O'Neill with fueling widespread lay participation. Nasca recently attended a breakfast with the pastor, who arrives at his guest list for this monthly event by pulling names out of the collection basket.

"When I left there, I realized that it was the first time I had ever sat down or done anything with a priest," Nasca remarked.

Two other upcoming social events will involve the entire parish community: On Saturday evening, July 19, Annunciation's annual fiesta will take place on parish grounds. And, on Sept. 28, the parish will hold a celebration honoring Father O'Neill's 35 years as a priest and 10 years at Annunciation.

Along with its focus on lighthearted festivity, Annunciation's social awareness extends to more weighty issues. The parish operates its own food shelf and offers its church hall for several community 12-step programs. In addition, the social ministry committee does volunteer work for the House of Mercy and St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, and conducts letter-writing campaigns for social justice causes.

Norm Dunn, parish minister, remarked that Annunciation backs up its beliefs with visible actions.

"We just completed a drive for Problem Pregnancy Help Center. We go beyond the 'abortion is wrong' kind of thing," Dunn commented.

Father O'Neill noted that more than half the members of the 980-family parish are over the age of 65. Many people in this large segment are served through a visitation committee and a social group for the widowed. Senior citizens also gather



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Father Robert O'Neill shares some leftovers with his dog Phantom at Church of the Annunciation's social ministry picnic June 11.



regularly for the weekday 8:15 a.m. Mass, Cay Goodman said.

"It's an exceptionally lovely group," remarked Goodman, an Annunciation parishioner since 1940.

The parish's younger population is active through Annunciation's religious education and youth ministry programs. Brandon Raven, youth-group president, noted that his contingent stands for "more than just fun," visiting homeless shelters and nursing homes and volunteering at parish events.

"I'm booked for the next couple of months," reported Brandon, 14.

Church of the Annunciation was founded in 1917 to serve a growing Italian-American population in the city's northeast corner. The original building was converted into a parish hall following the opening of Annunciation's new church in 1967. The current building is noted for its amphitheater-style architecture, with floors sloping downward in a semicircle toward the altar.

Though the church building is rela-

tively new, Father O'Neill pointed out that Annunciation's population — not unlike other neighboring parishes — is aging and dwindling. Through the diocesan strategic planning process, these churches will begin working this summer toward pooling their resources. Annunciation is grouped with St. Andrew's, St. Philip Neri, St. Stanislaus and St. George's parishes.

Currently, Father O'Neill splits sacramental duties with another pastor — Father Timothy Horan of St. Andrew's — at St. Philip Neri, where there is no resident priest. Father O'Neill said he frequently tells his parishioners that such examples of consolidation are likely to increase in upcoming years.

"We know that something's coming. Nobody has complained," remarked Sally Prince, an Annunciation parishioner for 45 years.

Mary Lynch, parish strategic planning coordinator and pastoral council chairperson, puts a positive spin on the area parishes' combined efforts.

SNAPSHOT

Church of the Annunciation
1754 Norton St.
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716/544-1050

Ministerial staff:

Pastor:

Father Robert F. O'Neill

Deacon:

Vic Yanaitis

Parish minister:

Norman Dunn

Music director:

Jennifer Kremer

Strategic planning coordinator/
parish pastoral council

chairperson:

Mary Lynch

Religious education coordinator/
youth minister:

Gerri Grandi

Business manager:

Roberta Tantalo

"I think it's going to be exciting to work with other people. I can't wait to get my feet wet," Lynch said.

By planning in conjunction with St. Stanislaus, for instance, "you'd have the Italians and the Polish. You'd have some really good dinners," Lynch joked.

Despite this state of transition, Father O'Neill said that Annunciation's buoyant spirit will remain a constant.

"We're certainly down in numbers, and we have many more funerals and less baptisms," Father O'Neill said. "But the ones who are here are so friendly."

Best wishes to the Church of Annunciation from the following businesses

Children's World Day Care
Nursery, Inc.
1733 Norton St., Rochester
716-339-7928

Falvo Funeral Home, Inc.
1395 N. Goodman St., Rochester
716-467-2200

Jamie's Showroom Collision
1740 N. Goodman St., Rochester
716-266-6070

Pudgie's Pizza
1753 N. Goodman St., Rochester
716-266-6605