

## FEATURE

## Parish's dedicated membership is its 'cutting edge'

## Parish Profile

St. Philip Neri, Rochester

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Six women sat around a table in the rectory of St. Philip Neri Church June 25 displaying the quilt they'd started nine months before. Each square on it symbolized a woman from the Bible. For example, a square with the scales of justice represented Deborah, a judge and prophetess in ancient Israel, they explained. They added that the quilt will hang in the church beside a statue of St. Philip Neri.

"It'll make people stop," said Clara Antonucci. "I think it's good that way."

Along with Antonucci and Diane Knittle, parish life coordinator, the women — Josephine Leone, Sophie LaRosa, Jean Borzilleri and Josephine Pullara — had been researching female scriptural figures for several months as part of their Bible Study and Quilting Circle group. As they pieced the quilt, they studied the stories of the women it symbolized.

The women have been creating the quilt at the same time that St. Philip Neri has been creating its future. Home to 460 families, many of whom are of Italian descent, the parish faces many challenges. But it has dealt with great challenges before, including the closing of its school in 1989 and a major fire in 1967.

Last February, the parish celebrated a Mass commemorating the 30th anniversary of the fire. The blaze destroyed the old church and took the lives of Father George Weinmann and Sister Lillian Marie McLaughlin, SSND, a schoolteacher. The commemorative Mass meant much to parishioners like Kay Lambiase, who well remembered the fire.

"We lost two wonderful people," she said. "We lost a beautiful young nun and the pastor of the church."

One year ago, Knittle said, St. Philip Neri suffered the loss of another pastor under far different circumstances when Father Richard J. Schatzel became a parochial vicar at Our Mother of Sorrows at Paddy Hill in Greece. Father Schatzel's departure coincided with the elimination of four staff positions, she said.

She added that the parish currently has a temporary administrator, Father Timothy E. Horan, pastor of neighboring St. Andrew's Church. Another pastor, Father Robert F. O'Neil of Church of the Annunciation, serves as a sacramental assistant. Weekday Masses are said by Father Joseph R. Catanise, priest-in-residence who is chaplain at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

While she acknowledged that it would be more convenient for parishioners if they had a full-time pastor, the parishioners have nonetheless done a great job of accepting their situation, she said.

"I think the people are really appreciative of the work we're doing," she said of and Father Horan and herself. "They've been really supportive."



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Josephine Leone, Sophie LaRosa and Diane Knittle (left to right) share personal and biblical stories while working on a quilt symbolizing biblical women. Jean Borzilleri (below) quilts a square representing Esther.

To help parishioners through the year of transition, Ross Lanzafame, chairman of the parish council, has been giving monthly reports on the parish from the pulpit at Sunday Masses.

"Because we've had no priest in our church anymore, we thought it was important to connect verbally with the parish," he said of the council's reports.

A core team of parish leaders, including Knittle and Lanzafame, began meeting last week to discuss implementing the goals of the diocese's strategic planning process. Details of the process were released in mid-June. Team members told the *Catholic Courier* they foresee more cooperation in such areas as sacramental preparation with neighboring parishes, cooperation that is already taking place with Annunciation and St. Andrew's, they said.

Last Easter symbolized that cooperation, Knittle said. Parishioners from Annunciation and St. Andrew's brought containers of holy water, and relayed fire from their churches via candles held by parishioners who lined the streets leading from each church to St. Philip Neri. The holy water was poured into St. Philip Neri's baptismal font and holy water receptacle, and the fire was used to light the church's Easter candle.

Knittle added that St. Philip Neri has seen a number of promising developments over the last year. She noted, for example, the parish owed \$30,000 last year in subsidy payments for the Monroe County Catholic schools, but fundraisers by such groups as the Women's Club and the Knights of Columbus have knocked that figure down to \$4,000.

Meanwhile, by renting out part of its former school building to a Protestant congregation, the parish has managed to stay afloat financially, according to Jim Iannuzio, head of the parish's finance committee and a lector.

And, despite its decline in membership



over the past several years, the parish still draws a considerable amount of its membership from former neighborhood residents. Such ex-residents prefer to continue attending St. Philip Neri, according to Frank Riesenberger, who oversees the parish's implementation of the diocese's Synod goals.

"Forty-six percent of our parishioners live outside the parish boundaries," he said. "We're doing something right."

Penfield resident and longtime parishioner Frances Rodemeyer would agree with that statement.

"I prefer to come here where I'm well-acquainted with everyone," she said. "It's very inspirational to have a church that you love, and the people that are in it are very helpful."

Another such parishioner is Joseph Petronio, vice president of the parish council, who lives in the city but outside St. Philip Neri's boundaries. When his moth-

## SNAPSHOTS

St. Philip Neri Church  
1782 Clifford Avenue  
Rochester, N.Y. 14609  
716/482-2400

Founded: 1929

Ministerial Staff:

Temporary administrator:

Father Timothy Horan

Sacramental assistance:

Father Robert O'Neil

In residence:

Father Joseph Catanise

Rectory secretaries:

Sue Enes, Mary Ellen Forte

Parish life coordinator:

Diane Knittle

Maintenance:

Laurence T. Zumchak

er-in-law, Mary D'Annunzio, a St. Philip's parishioner, passed away last August, the reception Petronio and his wife Emily received following the funeral Mass at St. Philip's impressed them greatly, he said, and they joined the parish at that time.

"The way we were accepted with the parishioners was just something I couldn't imagine," he said. "They just took care of us."

Taking spiritual care of parishioners who are hospitalized is the job of Joan Staffieri, the parish's lector coordinator and eucharistic minister, and Ann Buff, also a eucharistic minister.

"It's so satisfying to see people's faces light up when you come in," Buff said.

With such dedicated lay members, St. Philip's has a good shot at successfully shouldering the burden of meeting a future with fewer available priests, Knittle noted.

"We're on the cutting edge," she said.

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