

## FEATURE

## City parish blends commitment, congeniality

## Parish Profile

Most Precious Blood,  
RochesterBy Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — As far as Edward DeMario can tell, worshipers at Church of the Most Precious Blood aren't the type to run for the exits when Mass ends.

"When I left church today (Dec. 14), I saw people from the Men's Club and Sacred Heart League sitting at tables. People were selling fruit and were at the (Christmas) Giving Tree. It was mass confusion," remarked DeMario, who serves as Men's Club president at Most Precious Blood.

"For a small parish without a school in the city, it's doing very well for itself," he added.

Such energy is par for the course at Most Precious Blood, according to its pastor, Father William Graf.

"One thing I pick up most often from visitors is that the warmth of the people is very apparent. It's really fascinating; at the end of Mass, people are always standing around talking," said Father Graf, who is in his 11th year as pastor.

Vitality has been important at Most Precious Blood since the days of the Great Depression, when it was founded as a mission church on the city's north-west side in 1930.

"Those were hard times. But we all loved God and we wanted our parish," said Jean Arioli, 77, an original Most Precious Blood parishioner. "We all gave as much as we could."

Another parishioner, Annette DeCarolis, described this perseverance "as the old Italian working-class mentality" among the many Italian families who were founding members.

Over the years, Ginny Bianchi noted, the parish has helped support itself by holding such pleasant fundraisers as chicken dinners, fashion shows and card parties.

"You name it, we had it," said Bianchi, 67, who in 1930 was the second person ever baptized at Most Precious Blood.

For its first several decades, the parish was staffed by priests in the Society of the Precious Blood. In fact, Arioli's brother-in-law Nick — who died in 1992 — was ordained into that order out of the parish.

Father Sebastian Contegiacomo,

## SNAPSHOT

**Church of the Most Precious Blood**  
219 Stenson St.  
Rochester, N.Y. 14606  
716/458-6079

**Parish staff:**

**Pastor:**

**Father William Graf**

**Priest intern/religious ed coordinator:**

**Father Frank Fusare**

**Deacon:**

**John Giugno**

**Pastoral minister:**

**Sister Maura Wilson, SSJ**

**Secretary:**

**Marge Brankline**

**Music director:**

**Marisa DeMario**

**Parish pastoral council chairman:**

**Bob Reichart**



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Santa visits with Jacob Shepard, 15 months, and Grandmother Bernardine Gordon during the Most Precious Blood Parish family Christmas potluck dinner Dec. 6. Below, seeing-eye dog Parnell Blair wore festive antlers for the dinner, held at the church. Parnell is a guide dog for Most Precious Blood parishioner Cindy Blair.



CPpS, is still fondly remembered as the longest-serving priest in parish history. He became pastor in 1937 and remained at Most Precious Blood until his death in 1982. During his tenure, a school was founded in 1955 (it closed in 1995), and the current church building was dedicated in 1970.

"Father Sebastian was really the greatest guy going. He was very close with everybody in the parish," Bianchi said.

"He used to drive the school bus," Arioli recalled. "He'd go and pick up children who weren't close to the school."

The Precious Blood priests staffed the parish until 1987, when a lack of available priests forced the order to discontinue its association with Most Precious Blood. Father Graf then became the parish's first pastor from the Rochester Diocese.

Today, the 550-family parish still consists of many worshipers who descend from the earliest families in the parish. Several, such as Arioli — who lives across the street from the church — have remained in the neighborhood.

"I just love it here," she stated.

Others, such as Bianchi and her husband Ray, have moved to the suburbs but continue attending Most Precious Blood.

"We were both born and brought up there, and there was no way we were going to change," Bianchi commented.

"I wouldn't think of going anywhere else. This is home," added Marisa DeMario, wife of Edward. Both the Bianchis and DeMarios reside in the town of Greece.

Marisa DeMario has been music director at Most Precious Blood for the past 10 years. She noted that her members range in age from 14 to 81, and that the music program offers a wide variety of songs.

"We blend traditional with contemporary music, so we have something for everyone," DeMario remarked.

"They all have beautiful voices. Oh, it's

incredible," exclaimed DeCarolis, who has sung in the choir for 42 years.

As the parish works hard at maintaining its traditions, Most Precious Blood also eyes the future as the diocesan strategic planning process moves forward. Most Precious Blood has met this past year with the two parishes in its grouping, Sacred Heart Cathedral and Holy Rosary. Recommendations on how to best utilize combined parish staff and re-

sources will be submitted to diocesan officials around the end of this month, Father Graf said.

All three churches, the pastor remarked, are striving to provide quality programs for their own parishes as well as the community at large.

"We really are all interested in maintaining our own identity. But we're also very interested in reaching out into the neighborhood," Father Graf said.

Upcoming  
Supplements

## RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS

Publication Date: Jan. 15

Deadline: Dec. 30

Pegged to coincide with National Vocations Awareness Week, this supplement will highlight the call to service in the Catholic Church of priests, men and women religious, and permanent deacons. We will meet some of these people, who will share the joys they experience in their ministries. We will also look at the challenges and opportunities they and the church face in the years ahead.

## MARRIAGE

Publication Date: Jan. 29

Deadline: Jan. 13

(Bonus distribution at Marriage Preparation Programs)

The Catholic Church has been at the forefront of defending marriage as a sacrament and a vital part of society. This supplement will explore marriage preparation programs, offer tips on ways to strengthen marriages and look at the role faith can play in ensuring marital happiness and success.

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