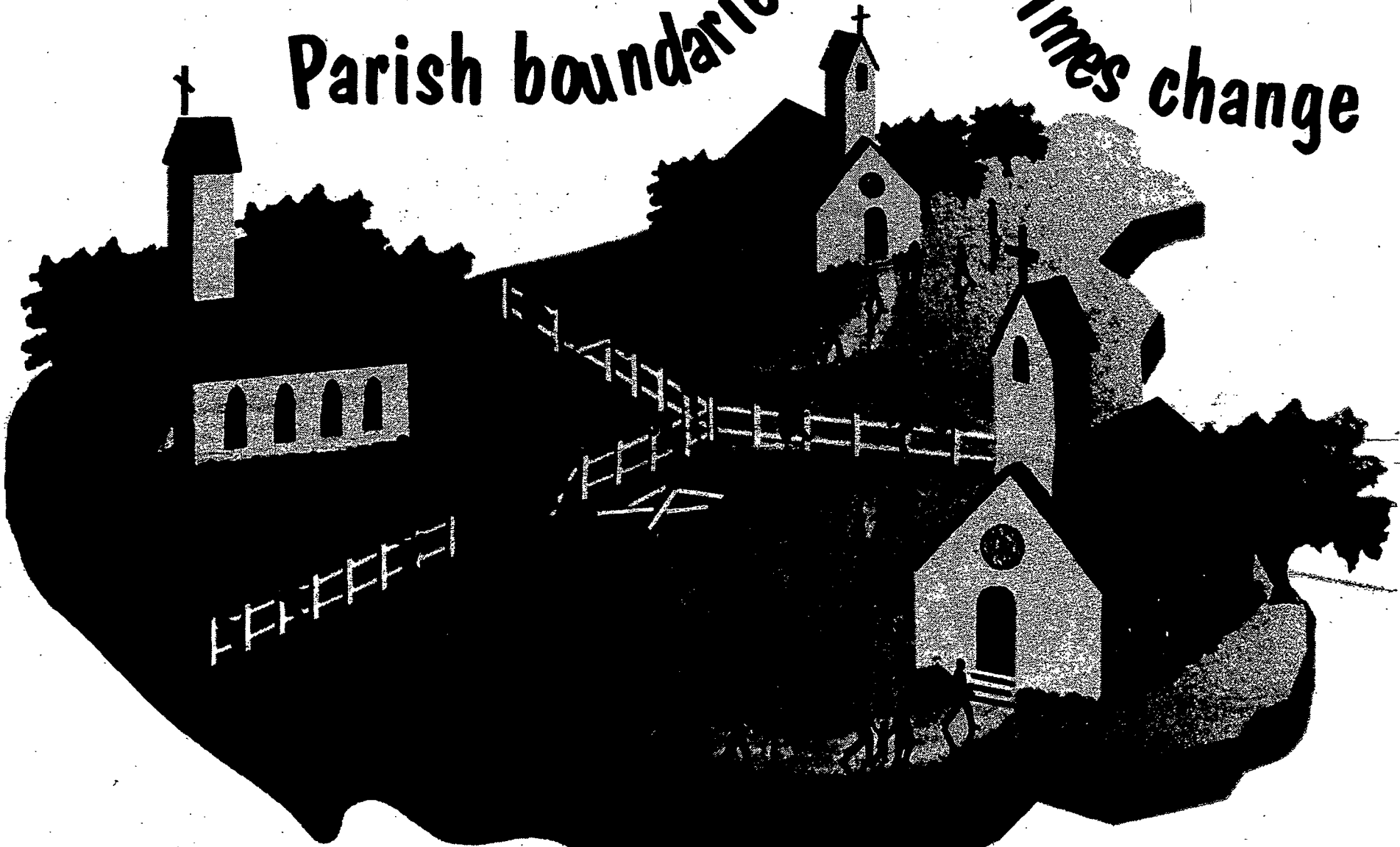




# Catholic Courier

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## Parish boundaries: How times change



In 1959, Mary Kent's family moved from a neighborhood in southeast Rochester and joined a Catholic parish, Holy Rosary, on the city's northwest side.

"Holy Rosary had its school there, and we got the children enrolled and signed up right away," Kent recalled.

Kent noted that she never had second thoughts about breaking formal ties with Blessed Sacrament Parish on Monroe Avenue and Oxford Street.

"Not at all. Once you moved into another parish, that was your parish," said Kent, 72, who still lives in the Holy Rosary neighborhood and remains an active parishioner.

At the time, most Catholics shared Kent's belief: Families attended the parish whose boundaries encompassed their residence.

But Kent couldn't have foreseen that four decades later, many Holy Rosary parishioners would be living outside the parish's boundaries; many Catholics who lived *within* the boundaries would attend other parishes; more than 75 percent of Holy Rosary School's student body would be non-parishioners; and Holy Rosary would be entering into plans to consolidate staff members, priests and Mass schedules with neighboring parishes as part of the diocesan Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium process.

"It's very strange now," Kent remarked.

The Second Vatican Council's focus on more expansive church communities has indeed gradually altered former perceptions of parishes and/or parishioners, said Father Kevin McKenna, diocesan chancellor.

While the Code of Canon Law continues to promote geographic boundaries, Father McKenna said that today's emphasis also encourages Catholics to be in parishes where they feel most comfortable.

"Community is something new — people coming together and having a commonality. This leads into the phenomenon of people no longer being bound by territorial prescription," Father McKenna said.

### Changed perceptions

Of the many parishes established in the Rochester Diocese in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Father McKenna noted that most were either rural parishes or in city neighborhoods occupied by a particular ethnic group. As a result, boundaries were routinely — and often strictly — observed.

William Pickett, diocesan director of planning, said that this trend extended to other dioceses as well.

"My experience growing up was, if you lived within the boundaries of that parish, then you went to that parish," said Pickett, a native of Kansas City, Mo.

"There was a time when you showed up and gave your address, and a priest might say 'You don't belong here. Go next door,'" said Father Peter Clifford, pastor of St. Michael's Church in Newark and the former diocesan director of Parish Support Ministries.

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