

PARISH PROFILE

Parish shines its light during sesquicentennial year

Parish Profile

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Brockport



By Mike Latona
Staff writer

BROCKPORT — Here's a parish that has observed its 150th anniversary, quite literally, all year long.

During a midnight prayer service last New Year's Eve, a gas lamp was lit in the steeple at Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The lamp has burned continuously in accordance with the parish's sesquicentennial theme, taken from Luke 8:16: "No one lights a lamp and hides it under a jar ... rather, it is put on a lamp stand so that those who enter may see the light."

Church of the Nativity's 150 years were highlighted at an 11:30 a.m. anniversary Mass Oct. 25. Concelebrants were Father Roy Kiggins, Nativity's pastor; retired Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey; Father William Amann, pastor emeritus at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Hamlin; and Father Ivan Trujillo, a priest from the Buffalo Diocese who works with the Brockport area's Hispanic community.

Father Kiggins noted that the parish's original ethnic base was Irish. While planning the sesquicentennial, he said, he has reflected on Nativity's humble beginnings in the late 1840s when immigrants would meet for Sunday Mass in the village hall.

SNAPSHOT

Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
152 Main St.

Brockport, N.Y. 14420

Phone: 716/637-4500

Registered households: 1,300

Ministerial staff:

Pastor: Father Roy Kiggins

Pastoral associate: Irene Goodwin

Music director: Lita Gillette

Parish secretary: Barbara Graf

Business manager: Cathy Cerame

Youth ministry coordinator:

Robert Layer

Christian formation coordinator:

Joan Tannous

Parish pastoral council president:

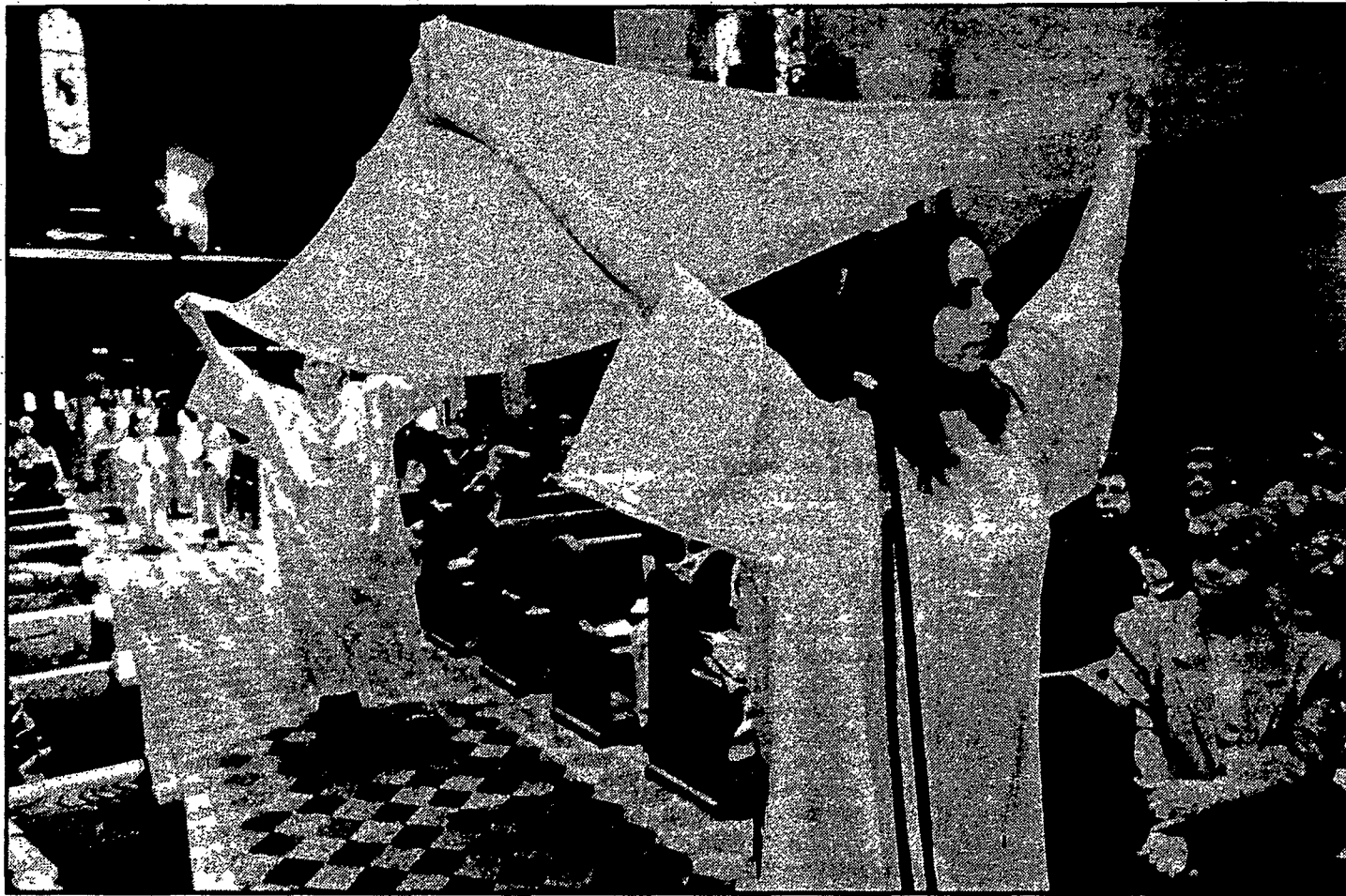
Terry Breslawski

Interdiocesan migrant ministry:

Macrina Cardenas

Nativity School principal:

Frances Barr



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Dena Barrett, right, carries the altar cloth to the altar during presentation of the gifts at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church's 150th anniversary Mass Oct. 25 in Brockport. Barrett is a performer in the parish's Ministers of Movement and Gesture group, which performs at special Masses.

"It makes me feel appreciative. That little group of newcomers — what they did took root and has grown," Father Kiggins remarked.

Elizabeth O'Brien, 91, said her Irish immigrant grandparents were among the early parishioners at Nativity. She added that the parish has been an important part of her life, and the lives of her six siblings.

"We all made our first Communion and confirmation there," O'Brien said. In addition, she noted, several family members were married at Nativity.

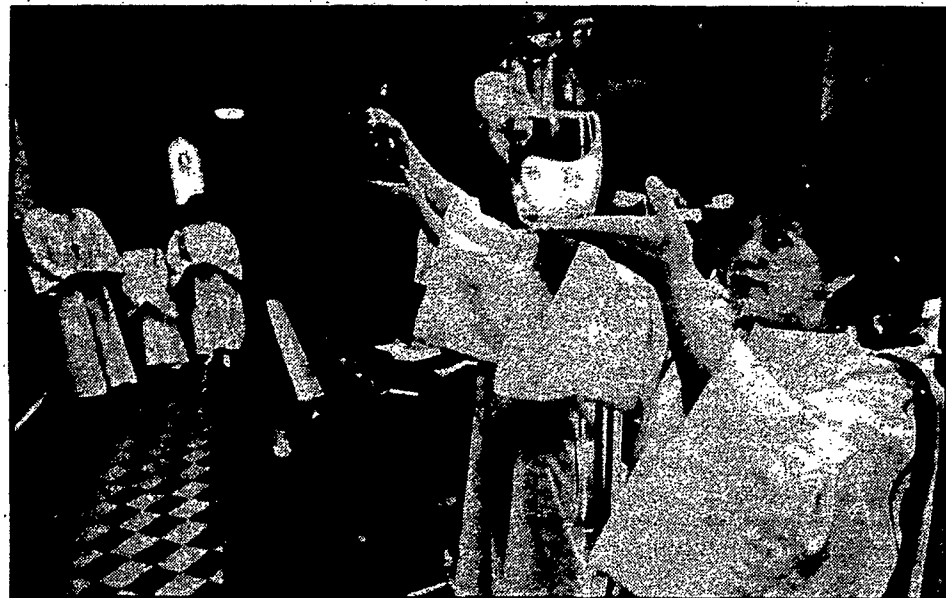
The current church, dedicated in 1927, is located at 152 Main St. And Nativity School, founded in 1874 and located at the corner of Holley and Utica streets, "is probably one of the longest continually operated Catholic schools in the diocese," Father Kiggins said.

"We still have our school. We're very fortunate there," said Noel Myers, who is among four generations of family members to attend the school. Myers also serves as president of Nativity of Our Lady Court 93 of the Catholic Daughters of America — the same position her mother once held.

O'Brien and Myers, 74, are lifelong Nativity parishioners. So is Marilyn Losee, who will turn 75 years old Nov. 6.

"Quite a few have been here a long time," Losee remarked.

Myers and Losee recalled that while they were growing up in the parish, the



Sonia Diaz, right, carries the water to the altar Oct. 25 during the Brockport parish's sesquicentennial liturgy. Retired Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey concelebrated the Mass with Father Roy Kiggins.

practice of pew rental was still in effect.

"Each family had their own pew," Losee said.

Even after this policy faded out, Myers said she continued to sit in the same pew for several years due to force of habit.

"But then they took it out," she said with a laugh.

Father Kiggins, pastor of the 1,300-family parish, noted that Nativity once covered a substantial portion of northwest Monroe County. That territory has decreased with the formation of the Newman Community at SUNY Brockport and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Hamlin, which were founded in 1968 and 1982, respectively.

Then again, Father Kiggins said, the Western Monroe-Orleans County Hispanic Ministry — which is based at Nativity — now stretches into the Diocese of Buffalo.

"There's a certain amount of 'back to the future,'" Father Kiggins said. "This was an immigrant church, with an immigrant congregation. Before, it was European people. Now, it's Mexican-American."

The Hispanic migrant ministry began in the late 1970s. Under the guidance of Sister Mary Jane Mitchell, SSJ, outgoing director, it expanded in 1991 to include a large part of Orleans County.

A 1:30 p.m. Spanish Mass is held every Sunday at Nativity. Father Kiggins said he also designs parish events to be inclusive for both the English- and Spanish-speaking

communities; for instance, many portions of the Oct. 25 anniversary Mass were spoken in both languages.

Father Kiggins added he will request a Spanish-speaking pastor to be appointed as his successor. He is due to leave Nativity in June 1999 because he will have reached the diocesan limit of 12 years at one parish.

Lina Hill said that Father Kiggins has helped further social interaction in the parish by encouraging worshipers to introduce themselves to each other at the beginning of every Sunday Mass.

"I think we've become a very welcoming parish, and Father Roy has contributed a lot to that," commented Hill, who chairs the parish's liturgy committee.

Hill added that Nativity's Renew program has also spurred vitality by being "instrumental in building small Christian communities. We have in place 14 small groups and one teen small group."

Renew participants, according to Hill, have gone to faith-sharing sessions and also become involved in such social ministry projects as volunteering at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality in Rochester.

"(Renew) gave the parish a shot in the arm," remarked Carol Stevens, who serves as vice-chair of the parish pastoral council. "People have gotten more involved. We're doing something as a community, and also for others."

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