

PARISH PROFILE

St. Boniface endures as thriving neighborhood parish



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — On a recent Sunday in the St. Boniface School basement, Joyce Foley and her 8-year-old daughter, Katie, served coffee and tea to parishioners after 10:30 p.m. Mass.

Foley, who also has two sons, noted that it was important for her children to participate in church activities.

"It helps to teach my children to be part of the community, and to feel like you're contributing," she said.

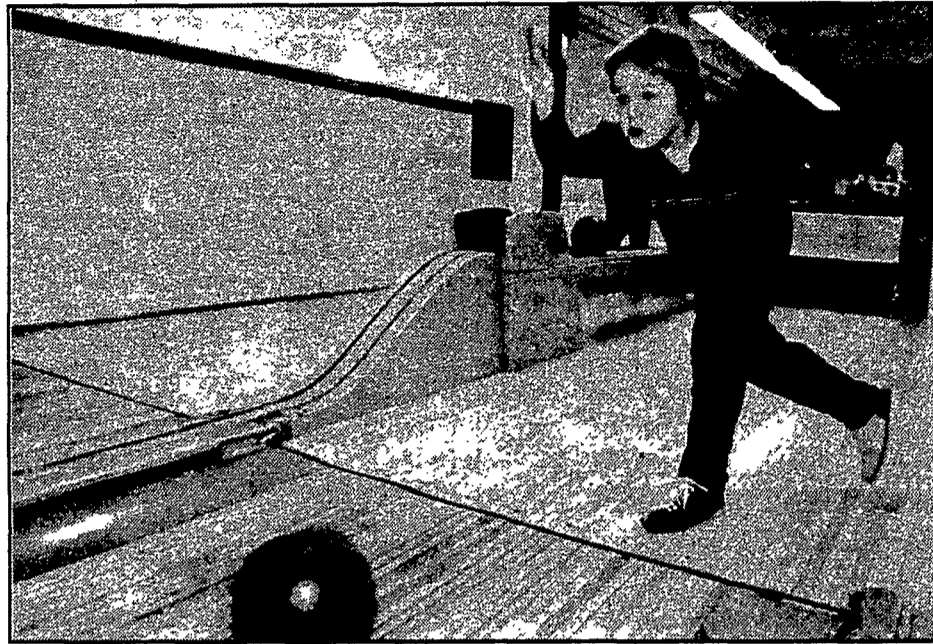
Katie, however, had far more compelling reasons to work the coffee hour: "It's fun," she said. "I like drinking hot chocolate."

Various motives may likewise exist for belonging to St. Boniface, but two things tie the parish together — a sense of belonging and a sense of roots.

The sense of belonging comes from the parish's pattern of tapping into the talents of its members, according to Joanne M. Brownyard. Brownyard volunteers for such activities as decorating the church, serving as parish cantor and co-chairing — with her husband, Robert — St. Boniface's annual Diocesan Thanks Giving Appeal effort.

"You really feel needed and wanted," she said.

The sense of roots comes from the parish's families, according to Father R. Richard Brickler, pastor.



Mike Mergov/Photo intern

David Foley, of the St. Boniface Junior Bowling Program, spends his Saturday afternoon bowling in the basement of the school, Oct. 23.

"Unlike many of the parishes in the city, most of our parishioners live here," Father Brickler said, referring to the neighborhoods within the parish's boundaries.

Rita Kramer, parish secretary, added that several families have been belonged to the parish for three or four generations.

Kathy Englerth, religious-education administrator, is among those with strong family ties to the parish. All of her four grown children and three grandchildren still belong to St. Boniface, she said. She also noted that even people who've moved out of parish boundaries still attend church functions and liturgies.

"So many families have a vested interest here, so they come back here," she said.

Her husband, Craig, a former St. Boniface School basketball coach, agreed.



Emanuel Colon grasps a bowling ball during the Oct. 23 Junior Bowling Program.

"With the number of changes society has gone through, the stability of the parish has stayed the same," he said. "My kids went to school here, and the Catholic education brought stability to their lives ... through the 1960s and '70s as society went through all its changes."

The parish's vitality also attracts newcomers. Among them are the Gartland family — Ted, Liz and 2-year-old daughter, Olivia — who joined the parish recently.

"We were looking for a good neighborhood parish and church," said Ted Gartland, who has begun singing in the parish choir. "(St. Boniface) seems very alive. It's a beautiful place."

Named for the "Apostle of Germany," St. Boniface was founded in 1860 by German parishioners from the now-defunct St. Joseph's Church in downtown Rochester. A parish school was erected in 1922, and in its place today a diocesan school on parish grounds educates 177 students in grades pre-kindergarten through sixth.

Meanwhile, 688 registered family "units" call St. Boniface their parish today, Father Brickler said, adding that some of those units consist of a widow or widower living alone.

While primarily a parish of senior citizens, St. Boniface also attracts a number of young families who join the parish for a few years before making a move to Rochester's suburbs, he said.

He added that many Catholics — both parishioners and those not registered at St. Boniface — receive the church's services because they live in senior residences and nursing homes in the area. In fact, the pastor estimated, at least 65 percent of his weekly schedule is devoted to ministering to shut-ins and those living in institutions.

"They like to feel like they're still part of the parish," he said.

That point was seconded by Kramer, who has visited elderly homebound people in the area on behalf of the church.

"When you go there and tell them you have Communion, these people light up like it's Christmas," she said.

Bill Muar, who coordinates the parish's

SNAPSHOT

St. Boniface Church
330 Gregory St.
Rochester, N.Y. 14620
Phone: 716/473-4271

Ministerial Staff:

Pastor:

Father R. Richard Brickler

School principal:

Sister Mary Smith, SSND

Parish Visitor:

Sister Bryan Ford, RSM

Parish council president:

Thomas Nicolay

Seniors/volunteers coordinator:

Bill Muar

Organist, director of music:

Paula Kirchgessner

Business manager:

Edward Sloan

Parish secretary:

Rita Kramer

ministry to seniors as well as a number of other parish volunteer-oriented activities, said that St. Boniface's outreach to the homebound includes bringing them bulletins and transporting them to church events. He added that many of the program's beneficiaries simply enjoy seeing one of the 50 senior-outreach volunteers on a regular basis.

"It's unfortunate that we don't have as much time to spend with people as we want to," he said of such visits.

At the other end of the age spectrum, Kathy Brugger oversees activities for infants to 7-year-olds in the church nursery during weekend Masses. And Muar pointed out that the parish's Men's Club hosts a junior bowling league on Saturdays for 90 kids ages 5 through 16. There are four alleys in the school basement, and a number of non-Catholic neighborhood kids participate in the league as well.

In addition to offering activities for kids, the church hosts several suppers and other events to bring the community together, staff members said. The parish also participates in its neighborhood life by supporting such area outreach programs for the needy as St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, a Rochester Catholic Worker center on nearby South Avenue, Father Brickler said.

On another neighborly note, as diocesan parishes undergo the process called "Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium," St. Boniface has combined forces with its neighboring parishes to deal with the effects of the priest shortage, Father Brickler said.

He pointed out that the diocese has already accepted a pastoral plan drawn up by his parish along with Blessed Sacrament, St. Mary's and Our Lady of Victory churches. The plan projects that within five years, the four parishes will be served by three pastors — down from the current four — and calls for collaboration in such ministries as helping the homeless and needy, he said.

St. Boniface itself is an interesting mix of low-, middle- and high-income people, Father Brickler said, but the parish hasn't experienced financial problems for years, thanks to its sacrificial giving or tithing program. Edward J. Sloan, the parish's business manager, said parishioners give 5 percent of their income to the church and 5 percent to the charities of their choice on a regular basis.

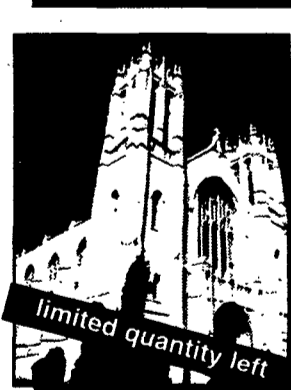
"You're giving because of the fact that you have been blessed and you should share some the blessings," Sloan remarked.

In this spirit, Barbara Sharer, a lector and parish volunteer, said St. Boniface will always be known for its strong sense of giving and connectedness to the community that surrounds it.

"We all know our neighbors in the city," she said. "We know everything going on on our street."

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