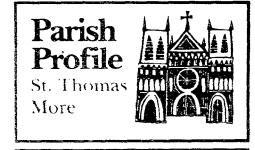
# PARISH PROFILE

Revitalization spells growth for Brighton parish



#### By Mike Latona Staff Writer

BRIGHTON – Lately, Father Lee Chase noted, he's seen a growing number of parishioners walking their dogs, collerblading, learning to drive a car and even hitting golf balls on the beautifully kept property of St. Thomas More Parish.

And the pastor doesn't mind this activity one bit.

"This is their church, their parish," Father Chase commented.

Father Chase's openness reflects his ongoing desire to see parishioners incorporate St. Thomas More into their daily lives. So far so good, said Sue Morrison, parish secretary since 1979.

"The people have come together more, and gotten more involved," she said.

Father Chase, who became administrator of St. Thomas More in 1998 and its pastor in 1999, is moving ahead with numerous initiatives.

Among Father Chase's goals are to develop a parish health-care ministry and deepen St. Thomas More's commitment to city parishes. An example of the latter is the Father Andrew Partnership Fund, begun by the parish, to benefit St. Stanislaus Church in Rochester. The fund is named after the late Father Andrew Grzela, former pastor of both St. Stanislaus and St. Thomas More. In addition, St. Thomas More Parish is developing an "urban-suburban" relationship with St. Andrew's in Rochester.

"This is more than just throwing monev at an inner-city parish from a suburban parish," Father Chase remarked, saying that parish volunteers will be actively involved in St. Andrew's ministries.

Parishioners also helped construct a recently completed Habitat for Humanity house in Rochester. The project was done in conjunction with eight other Brighton churches, including Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady Queen of Peace.

Within the parish, Father Chase has sought to increase the number of liturgical ministers and make these roles available to a wide age range. Music programs are on the rise as well: Jan Dougherty, the first-year choir director, said she plans to add a bell choir and children's choir in the upcoming year. Dougherty also noted that the existing adult and teen choirs merged their talents during this year's Triduum.



Elise Janciuras receives her first holy Communion from Deacon Steve Carroll at St. Thomas More Church on May 21.

ments from the congregation."

The revitalization efforts seem to have helped swell church attendance at the 775-family parish. Father Chase said the parish has increased from fewer than 500 weekend worshipers to more than 900 over the past two years. Young adults, especially, are growing in numbers.

"At the 10:30 Mass, all you see are young people and babies," said Father Chase, who also serves as sacramental minister at Nazareth College.

The change is apparent to Joanne Mongeau, who joined St. Thomas More after attending Mass there with family members over the years.

"I've noticed a huge difference. Many younger people are moving into the area or coming from other parishes," said Mongeau, who has been a parishioner for 1½ years along with her husband, Steve, and son, Benjamin, an altar server.

Lorilyn Geiger said she looks forward to attending the 10:30 Mass with her husband and three children, and seeing other young families they've befriended.

"Very few people use the crying room

# **SNAPSHOT**

St. Thomas More Church 2617 East Ave. Rochester, N.Y. 14610-3199 Phone: (716) 381-4200 Fax: (716) 381-6327

Ministerial staff: Pastor:

Father Lee P. Chase Sacramental minister: Father George Okoth (until June 30) In residence:

Father Richard Orlando Pastoral associate: Sister Ellen Galvin, SSJ

Faith formation director: Deacon Stephen Carroll

Coordinator of youth ministry: Johan Engstrom Choir director: Jan Dougherty

Organist: John Lootens Secretary/bookkeeper:

#### mented.

"It was a parish really hurting. It was in tremendous grief, wondering about their future – if they were going to have another priest, if they would cluster or shut down," Father Chase said.

Parishioner Joanne Doebrich said that the parish was hit especially hard when Father Grzela passed on.

"Father Andy had certainly touched us deeper than any of us had expected," Doebrich said. She credited Father Chase for helping guide the parish through its grieving process.

"He brought us back together and we're stronger," Doebrich commented.

Persevering through difficult times was a characteristic of this parish in its early years, also. Though St. Thomas More was founded in 1953, the church was not completed until 1958 due to legal squabbles over the sale of the East Avenue property to the parish. Masses during those years were held at St. John Fisher College.

"It didn't come easy to us," remarked Joan Tierney, who, along with her hushand. Art, are charter parishioners.

"This Easter was the first time they sang together. It was very nice," Dougherty said. "We've heard so many nice comIt's a family Mass; it's not like you're locked in a room in the back of a church," Geiger said.

The inclusion of numerous age groups is a positive step in the eyes of Joan Ryan.

## Bates-Rich Beginnings Child Care Center Inc.

Accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs

Announces the addition of our

## **FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN**

Great for young 5's and children who are ready for a longer day. Now accepting enrollment for the 2000-01 school year.

#### Also enrolling: Nursery School 3-5 AMs • Pre-Kindergarten 5 AMs 244-3650 • 473-3709

Susan Morrison Parish pastoral council chair: Jim Ryan Jr. Siena Catholic Academy principal: Father Joseph Grasso, CPpS

She and her husband, Jim, have belonged to the parish since 1963 and volunteered in a variety of capacities – but now she feels comfortable in cutting back, she said.

"I'm hoping to leave that up to the younger people. I really do feel we need more of them in the parish, and (Father Chase) is trying to get them involved in things," said Ryan, who son Jim Jr. is the newly appointed parish pastoral council chair.

This revitalization comes on the heels of arguably the most difficult era in St. Thomas More's 47-year history. It began with the January 1998 death of Father John Whalen, a retired diocesan priest who had resided at St. Thomas More. One month later, Father Robert Collins, the pastor from 1985 to 1996, died. Three months after that, Father Grzela died after less than a year as pastor.

"It was a terrible year," Morrison com-

. . . . . . . . . .

ound, mu, are entried partometer

Tierney recalled that she and her husband were actively involved in parish fundraising activities throughout the early years. "We were all very enthusiastic. Like any new project, you put your heart and soul into it," she said.

She noted that the late Father Francis Pegnam, St. Thomas More's founding pastor, strove to establish a school along with a church on the parish property.

"The school was very, very important to him," said Tierney, whose four children all graduated from St. Thomas More School. Today the school building is known as Siena Catholic Academy, a diocesan school for grades 7-8.

Father Pegnam remained as St. Thomas More's pastor until his 1982 retirement. His replacement was the late Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, who served as pastor until Father Collins' arrival in 1985.

Although she and her husband no longer live within parish boundaries, Tierney said she wouldn't think of ending her affiliation with St. Thomas More.

"You went through the hard times and saw the good times, and did everything you could to help it along. It's like our second home," she remarked.