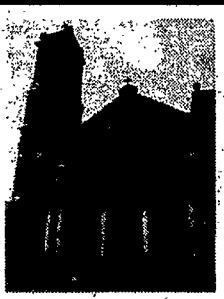


PARISH PROFILE

Rainbow of people make up Rochester parish

Parish Profile

Our Lady of Perpetual Help



By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

ROCHESTER — At Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish's "Fun Day" June 17, parishioners let their pastor, Father Neil R. Miller, know what they really think about his homilies — which are often sprinkled with the priest's favorite exclamation: "Wow!"

At a booth staffed by parishioners Kathy Schum and Steven Plane, you could pay 50 cents to toss toilet paper rolls into buckets topped by toilet seats with the letters "W" or "O." If your rolls landed properly in three tries to spell "WOW," you won a bag of potato chips.

Being a family newspaper, the *Catholic Courier* will forgo the various comments that this booth elicited. Suffice to say, Perpetual Help parishioners proved that their sense of humor is generous, and Father Miller seemed to show no sense of offended dignity.

On a more serious note, Perpetual Help parishioners say their good times together are rooted in a camaraderie that brings them through the bad times as well.

Schum, for example, said Father Miller and the parish's pastoral associate, Sister Livia Ann Ruocco, RSM, supported her and her family faithfully when her father died in 1994, coming over to her house and putting together a moving funeral liturgy. Schum, who has attended the church for 20 years, along with her mother, Loraine, and her sister, Oralee, said Perpetual Help's members are not just nodding acquaintances.

"So many churches you go to you barely acknowledge each other when Mass is over, and then you run off," she said. "Here, people talk to you, and everybody pulls together to help you out."

Plane echoed her comments, noting that he and his wife Catherine attend the parish because it combines fraternity with a sense of mission to the surrounding community.

"In order to live your faith, it goes much further than Sunday Mass," said Plane, an usher at the church. "We believe this parish has a much higher sense of mission than a lot of parishes have."

Two parishioners who have benefited from that sense of mission are Russell Masetta and Oscar Garcia. Both participated in the parish's Farbridge House program, located in a home on nearby Farbridge Street that was donated to the church. The program assists men who are in recovery from addiction. Both Masetta and Garcia, who lived at the house, said their participation led to them becoming part of the parish.

"I just needed a place where I could take care of myself," Masetta said. Now in his own apartment, and working a steady job, he said he enjoys being a part of the Perpetual Help community.

"It's different here," he said. "It's a place where you can go up and tell jokes to a priest."

Founded in 1904, Perpetual Help has ministered to succeeding waves of ethnic communities, from the mainly German Catholics who founded it to the Hispanics, Laotians and African-Americans who now worship with the white parishioners. The church offers a variety of programs, including religious education for children and adults, and a variety of liturgies as well.

In addition to its three English Masses on weekends, the parish offers a Spanish Mass at 6:30 p.m. Saturday that draws



John Powell/Photo intern
Oscar Garcia, left, and Charles Earlsy were just two of the people helping cook during Our Lady of Perpetual Help's "Fun Day" in Rochester on June 17. Parishioners and local families came out to enjoy food, games and a raffle for prizes.



Sister Livia Ann Ruocco demonstrates the toilet game at the parish's "Fun Day." The object of the game was to spell the word WOW and win a bag of WOW potato chips.

SNAPSHOT

Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help
1089 Joseph Ave.
Rochester, N.Y. 14621
Phone: 716/467-2725

Ministerial Staff:
Pastor: Father Neil R. Miller
Pastoral associate:
Sister Livia Ann Ruocco, RSM
Parish secretary: Tina Ortiz
Custodian: Rogelio Delgado
Trustees:
Edward Kraft, Joseph Perrotta
Organist/Heavenly Angels choir director: Sam Pizzo
Sonlights Choir directors:
Michael & Regina Civiletti
Parish Council directors:
Diane Wesgate, Edward Kraft

about 100 people and a black gospel music Mass at 1 p.m. on Sundays that draws between 40 and 50. Many who come to the gospel Mass also frequent the House of Mercy, an outreach center on nearby Hudson Avenue operated by the Sisters of Mercy and run by Father Miller's sibling, Sister Grace Miller, RSM. The parish raises funds for the House of Mercy, and cooperates with it on many projects like Farbridge House.

The parish has also occasionally hosted services for a small community of Laotians, according to Matthew Xaisanasy, 23, who came to the United States from Laos with his parents and 10 brothers and sisters when he was 6.

"Each parish member welcomed us like they knew us," Xaisanasy said. "I guess kindness kept us there."

Eduardo Crespo, a native of Puerto Rico, has attended Perpetual Help with his wife, Paula, and eight children for 15 years. He, too, spoke highly of the parish's ability to bring together people of different back-

grounds.

"I like everyone the same, Spanish and English," he said. "So far, we don't have any problems."

The ethnic diversity of the parish's 430 families keeps ministry interesting, according to Father Miller.

"I enjoy working in the city," he said. "I like the different cultures, the variety of people, the different challenges."

Dick Laux, who ran the sausage and hot dog booth at "Fun Day" with his wife, Sarah, grew up in the neighborhood. He noted he was playing German music at the festival in honor of the church's original members. A lector and eucharistic minis-

ter, he said he had also learned a lot about the delights of Spanish food from the Hispanics at the church and is also studying Spanish. The couple, who have three grown children, live in Irondequoit but have been attending Perpetual Help since 1990 because they like the different groups of people they can meet there.

"Working with the people here is not a job, it's fun," said Sarah, who participates in prayer and study groups at the parish. "It's people you really want to be with."

Diane Wesgate, co-director with Edward Kraft of the 20-member parish council, also commented on the good-naturedness of the parishioners. She noted that not a birthday passes in the parish without Father Miller acknowledging it from the pulpit.

"It's a small enough community where everybody knows you," she said of the parish. "Coming to church is like going home to family."

For those who are homebound or in the hospital and can't make it to church, the parish provides a "Ministry of Caring," according to Sister Ruocco. She and eight volunteers from the parish visit more than 80 nursing homes and other sites on a regular basis.

Adult education is also an important ministry at the parish, according to Gloria Marlett, who has attended the church since 1975. Marlett participates in a prayer and book discussion group at Perpetual Help that has studied such texts as the Catechism of the Catholic Church. A community organizer for the neighborhood advocacy organization Group 14621 (named for the zip code), Marlett said her participation in the parish study group has bolstered her ability to deal with the sometimes defeatist attitude of the neighbors she invites to join block clubs.

"They're afraid that no good can come of their acts," she said, noting that the neighbors can become depressed by their area's crime rate and drug-dealing activity. However, through her parish group, Marlett has found the faith to overcome being discouraged.

"It's very helpful to have the support of your fellow parishioners in talking about the things that you encounter at work."

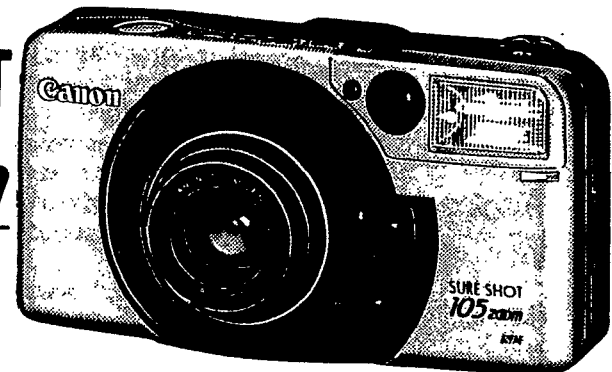
Norma Bruni, a mother of three children and grandmother to eight, summed up the feelings of several parishioners like Marlett when asked to comment on why she keeps coming back to church at Perpetual Help each Sunday.

"Here, anybody that comes in is acknowledged," she said. "You feel totally fulfilled after a Mass."

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