

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Brighton parish reaches out to 'sister'

By Father Lee P. Chase  
Guest contributor

Mission statements can creep up on you. As pastor of St. Thomas More Church on East Avenue in Brighton, I had not paid much attention to the mission statement our Parish Pastoral Council had adopted five or six years prior to my arrival in 1998.

Part of that statement reads, "...to be Christ's presence in the world..." Lately, we've taken this seriously. Over the last two years, our parish community has entered into sister parish relationships with St. Andrew's Church in the city of Rochester and Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Novgorod.

Novgorod is one of 10 Sister Cities of Rochester. From Aug. 20 to the 31, I accompanied Mayor Bill Johnson and some 30 other Rochesterians on a trip to Novgorod in honor of the 10th anniversary of Rochester's Sister City relationship.

Novgorod is an ancient city, the first capital of Russia. While a very industrial city, Novgorod has a great commitment to the arts and to celebrating the cultural history of the country.

With encouragement from members of Linkages, a Rochester group established to strengthen ties between the two cities, we as a parish had been invited to explore the possibility of a sister parish relationship.

Our Parish Pastoral Council had recently discerned that one of our pastoral priorities would be outreach ministry: ministry to broaden our knowledge and awareness of what it means to be church and how we can serve others in need. Reaching out to this Russian parish seemed to be one path where we were being led.

After so many years of praying for the conversion of Russia and a return to religious freedom for the people of Russia — and in the joy of that actually happening — it is time as American Catholics, I thought, to take the next step.

Our delegation spent a few days touring Moscow at the beginning of the trip and St. Petersburg at the end. The bulk of our stay was in Novgorod. My hosts were Father Miroslav Korsak, the pastor of Ss. Peter and Paul, and the newly ordained parochial vicar, Father Konstantin Periedery, along with two Franciscan Sisters of Mary: Sister Bozana and Sister Marie (I never learned their last names!).

During five days with them, I learned much about the state of the Roman Catholic Church in Russia. The country contains four dioceses with Moscow being the archdiocese. There are no native Russian pastors. From the 1917 Bolshevik revolution through the Soviet era, clergy and religious were either imprisoned or sent to labor camps; most priests, nuns and monks were executed.

It has only been five years that, with the assistance of American Catholics through the annual collection for Eastern Europe and the generous assistance of Cardinal Maida of Detroit, the Archdiocese of Moscow has been able to conduct its seminary in St. Petersburg.

I enjoyed a lunch with the faculty of this seminary, all of them priests and religious from other countries. The rector, a priest from Monaco, explained to me that going to seminary for a Russian student is quite a commitment. Beyond the primitive conditions he must live in and the ever-constant threat of forced military duty, he must also be academically fluent in another language such as English, French or German. Very few Roman Catholic theology books are written or translated into the Russian language.

As I toured the seminary building (all of it under construction), I learned that the Soviet government had confiscated the seminary building, like most religious edifices, in the 1920s and 1930s. They turned most of the building into a warehouse and the chapel into a bank.

Most church buildings were demolished. Those that remained were converted to warehouses, movie theaters (as in the case



Photo courtesy Father Chase

(Front, from left) Father Konstantin Periedery, Sister Marie, FMM; (back, from left) Father Lee Chase, Sister Bozana, FMM, and Father Miroslav Korsak.

of Ss. Peter and Paul in Novgorod) or to the ultimate insult — museums of atheism — as in the case of the Orthodox Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan in St. Petersburg. Yet the faith of these people remained strong. Most Russian Christians are Russian Orthodox; yet, there is a small and very strong presence of Roman Catholicism.

Ss. Peter and Paul Church, a parish founded more than 100 years ago, was reconstituted as a parish seven years ago. Its church building was reclaimed from the government in 1995. This community gathers daily in good numbers to celebrate Mass, host retreats, but mostly to proudly celebrate their faith freely and without fear.

I gained another perspective of our universal church as I concelebrated the Mass with the parish (in Russian!). You can imagine my horror when I was asked to preach during their Sunday celebration. I gave the homily both in English and French with simultaneous translation into Russian. Parishioners there were from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Poland, the Ukraine, France and Spain.

How moving it was during the Lord's Prayer when that common prayer of our church was recited in all the languages of these countries in addition to being chanted in both Russian and English.

In the midst of not only religious persecution but also extreme poverty, the Catholics of Russia have remained committed to the core Gospel values of hospitality and joy. A typical Sunday collection for Ss. Peter and Paul Church would amount to only five American dollars. The

priests of the parish make no salary. They live completely on the stipends they receive from Mass intentions (the usual offering amounting to only a few cents in our currency) and the generosity of others.

Visiting the apartments of the priests and women religious who serve the parish, I realized their apartments could fit into the average suburban living room with room to spare. Parishioners, priests and religious all insisted on hosting meals for me. It is a very humbling experience to know someone has spent a month's salary on one meal where you are the honored guest.

"...to be Christ's presence in our world..." carries a whole new meaning for us now on East Avenue. Our perspective has changed and we are even more committed to learning about and becoming closer with our sister parish. Beyond financial assistance we can offer, it is our hope to learn more about these people — to break down the walls that have barred communication for so many years. We hope to establish an endowment in the future and raise money to not only assist them; but, hopefully, to enable people from both communities to meet each other and grow together as church.

Over the front door of the seminary I attended, St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, there is an inscription: Go Teach All Nations. Little did I know that when I met the archbishop of Moscow there in 1993 that seven years later I would be in his diocese learning in another way what it means to be a priest.

Indeed, mission statements are funny — they creep up on you.

### Recognizing

Mary Ellen Lopata, who co-directs Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry for the Diocese of Rochester with her husband, Casey, was elected president of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries at its national conference Sept. 7-10 in Oakland, Calif. Tom Ferrarese, a parishioner at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Rochester, was elected the organization's treasurer.

Father Kevin E. McKenna, chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester, was elected vice president of the Canon Law Society of America during its Oct. 2-5 convention in Arlington, Va. He will become president of the society in October 2001. Father McKenna has written two books on canon law, *The Ministry of Law in the Church Today* in 1998, and *A Concise Guide to Canon Law*, published this year.

## Party hearty for charity



Tickets are still available for a young-adult charity Halloween party to be held Friday, Oct. 27. The party is open to the general public, to people in their 20s and 30s.

The party will take place from 8 p.m. midnight at the Webster Knights of Columbus, 70 Barrett Drive (off Route 404 between Holt Road and Route 250). This second annual event is co-sponsored by the *Catholic Courier* and Odyssey, the diocesan young-adult (20s-30s) network.

Admission is \$12 per person. Advance registration is preferred, but not required. All proceeds will go to the *Catholic Courier*/Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal, which helps families and individuals facing financial emergencies. Additional donations will be welcomed.

Djames Tunes disc-jockey service will provide dance music. Pizza and snacks will be provided, and a cash bar will be available. Costumes are optional, but prizes will be awarded for the best ones. In addition, there will be a prize awarded for the best-carved pumpkin brought to the party.

Further information is available through Odyssey at 716/328-3228, ext. 375, or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 375. Or, call the *Courier* at 716/328-4340 or 1-800-600-3628.

Sponsors are Djames Tunes; the Knights of Columbus; Monroe's Restaurant, Rochester; Gates Automobile; Pickle Nick's Old Fashioned Subs; Gates; Lamplighter Restaurant; Greece; Spring House Restaurant, Brighton; Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra; and diocesan Catholic Charities.

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