

PARISH PROFILE

Rochester parish celebrates a century of outreach

Parish Profile
Blessed
Sacrament,
Rochester



By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In 1901, Father Thomas F. Connors became the first pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish — a title the future monsignor would hold for 62 years. His grandniece, Betty Dorety, the only surviving family member who still attends Blessed Sacrament, said his influence continues today.

"You just mention Blessed Sacrament and people say, 'Oh, Father Connors,'" she remarked.

Dorety is also happy to note that Blessed Sacrament has thrived in the decades following her great-uncle's pastorate.

For instance, the 1,000-family parish, located on the city's southeast side, has the longest running parish-based young adult ministry in the Rochester Diocese. Christopher Hood, pastoral associate, said nearly 50 percent of the worshippers at 12:15 p.m. Sunday Mass are in their 20s and 30s.

"There are a great many young people



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Carol Lubisella cooks pasta for a supper program held in the Blessed Sacrament Church basement Sept. 20. Lubisella, a professional chef and a parishioner of Blessed Sacrament, volunteers every Thursday to cook for the homeless and working poor who come to the soup kitchen.

and it's nice to see," Dorety remarked.

"They come with a lot of enthusiasm," said Father Robert Kennedy, Blessed Sacrament's second-year pastor, who noted that young adults frequently volunteer in the parish.

Blessed Sacrament as a whole, he added, is noted for such outreach as its eucharistic ministry at adult-care facilities, and its supper program that serves up to 100 meals per night.

"We have 300-plus volunteers and at least half are in the parish," Father Kennedy said of the supper program.

Blessed Sacrament will celebrate its proud heritage Sunday, Nov. 4, when Bishop Matthew H. Clark presides at an 11 a.m. centennial Mass. A reception in the church hall, and tours of the church, with its stunning wood carvings and stained-glass windows, will follow. A 100th-anniversary banquet will take place Nov. 17 at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center; tickets are available by contacting the parish office.

The parish held a centennial kickoff event in June, and has followed up with monthly coffee hours and a summer picnic. Contents of the church's cornerstone will be displayed during the Nov. 4 festivities, and a time capsule is being prepared to add to the cornerstone's archives.

History buffs will also appreciate the handsome, 82-page parish history that was recently released; this book is also available through the parish. Edited by Peggy Rosenthal, a Blessed Sacrament parishioner, the

book features numerous anecdotes and photographs from the parish's early days up through the present.

The parish was founded to serve a heavily Irish Catholic population. A combined church/school was dedicated in 1902, followed by the current church building in 1912 and a new school building in 1928. The school operated until 1990. Later in 1990 Corpus Christi Parish acquired the site; it became a diocesan school that is known today as Corpus Christi at Blessed Sacrament.

Darlene Simmons, centennial chair and parish pastoral council chair, said her committee spent "hundreds of hours" conducting interviews and sifting through photographs to put in the parish history book.

"We'd have people sitting at the (rectory's) dining-room table and every photo would set off six memories," Father Kennedy said.

More volunteers are coming on board as the centennial celebration reaches its peak, Simmons said: "Things are heating up and people are very excited."

This enthusiasm has extended to other Blessed Sacrament ministries, such as the overnight shelter for men, which began in 1982. The shelter's dedicated cook, Doris Williams, was a driving force behind the shelter's success, her daughter Ann Marie said.

"My mom couldn't see someone being hungry when there was food left over," said Ann Marie, a centennial-committee member and eucharistic minister at Blessed Sacrament. Her mother died in 1991.

Working in conjunction with St. Brid-

get's Parish, the shelter operated until 1991 when a permanent facility, Francis Center, was opened on the city's east side.

In place of the shelter, Blessed Sacrament began its supper program in 1992. Open most weeknights during the year, the program is located in the church basement. Its current director is MaryJo Lightholder.

Father Kennedy said that Blessed Sacrament provides most of the supper program's financial support, remarking, "The parish takes kind of a corporate generosity." Other strongly supported parish events are its annual Christmas Tree Sale and biannual Next-to-New Sale. The latter event, which will take place Oct. 3-6, offers used items in good condition as well as baked goods. Under the direction of Rose Foley, the sale raises several thousand dollars for the parish.

John Lynd said Blessed Sacrament's spirit of giving can be traced to the influence of Msgr. Connors, who was named pastor emeritus in 1963 and died three years later on his 96th birthday.

"I remember him once saying 'I don't want to live to hear we didn't make that quota.' We went so far over," recalled Lynd, the parish's gardener, who is also a well-traveled eucharistic minister.

Father Kennedy said that Lynd and many other parishioners go out into the community, bringing Eucharist to residents of both Catholic and non-Catholic institutions. "The parish has a wonderful tradition of eucharistic ministry," Father Kennedy said.

Care for the sick was also a top priority for Father Bruce Ammering, Blessed Sacrament's pastor from 1983-2000.

"If he didn't see an older person at (Sunday) Mass, he'd stop at the home during the week and sometimes be there all night," Williams said.

It was during Father Ammering's tenure that Blessed Sacrament began its annual "Blue Mass" for local police. In addition, the young-adult ministry began in the early 1980s and continues to thrive. Hood said that Monroe Avenue is heavily populated with young adults, commenting, "We're the only parish across the street from a tattoo parlor."

Hood invites young adults from all over Monroe County to join activities. Blessed Sacrament's ministry to young adults is important, Hood said, because they're at a crucial juncture for remaining involved in the Catholic Church.

"If they have a positive experience here, when they move to Greece, Boston, wherever, they'll have a greater involvement in their parish. But if they have a bad experience here, that could be it," Hood said.

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EDITORS' NOTE: This marks the final installment of the Courier's Parish Profile series, which began all the way back in October 1993. Yes, every single parish in the Rochester Diocese has now been profiled. We'd like your comments about the series and will rely on that feedback to develop future parish-related features. Contact us by mail, e-mail or phone at the addresses or numbers listed on our Opinion page.

SNAPSHOT

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E-mail: rblessed@dor.org

Ministerial staff:

Pastor:

Father Robert J. Kennedy

In residence:

Father George Norton

Faith formation director:

(position open)

Pastoral associate:

Christopher Hood

Director of liturgy/RCIA:

Beverly LaBelle

Business manager:

Marjorie Handel

Director of supper program:

MaryJo Lightholder

Pastoral minister and sacristan:

Sister Margaret Rose, SSJ

Assistant receptionist/secretary:

Virginia Appleby

Organist/choral director:

Howard J. Kilbury Jr.

Parish council chair:

Darlene Simmons

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