

DIOCESAN NEWS

Urban, rural parishes celebrate milestone year

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Two diocesan communities are marking significant anniversaries this month: St. Patrick's in Savannah and Blessed Sacrament in Rochester.

St. Patrick's will mark its 125th anniversary with a Mass at 11 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 18. Bishop Matthew H. Clark will preside at the Mass, which will be followed by a reception in the parish hall.

More than 40 families currently attend St. Patrick's, which was founded as a mission church of St. John the Evangelist Church in nearby Clyde. From 1903 to 1911, St. Patrick's was a mission of the now-defunct St. Michael's Church in Montezuma, before being reassigned as a mission of St. John's, a relationship that continues today.

The first St. Patrick's Church was built south of Savannah, and in 1966 was replaced by a building in the center of Savannah. Its current pastor is Father James E. Hewes, who is also pastor of St. John's.

"St. Patrick's is a very quaint little parish," said Gloria Garofano, parish secretary for the last seven years. "The people there are very, very nice. They're very accommodating to anyone who would come there."

Raymond Markowski, the parish's pastoral council president, said he's seeing more and more new faces at the parish in the past few years as new families move into Savannah.



Karin von Voigtlander/Photo Intern

Katie Ruberti, 6, sings with other parish children at Blessed Sacrament's 100th-anniversary Mass Nov. 4.

"The church is getting pretty full now, compared to a few years back," he said.

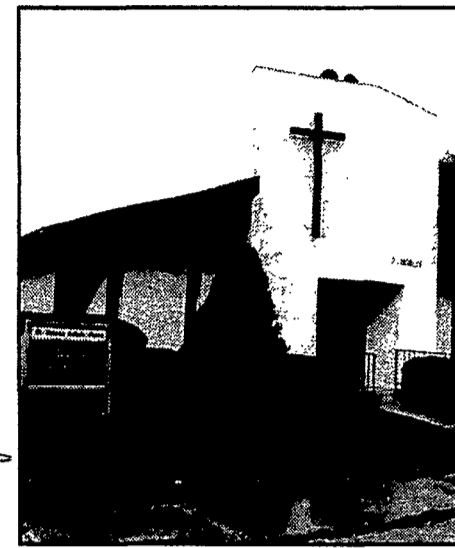
Markowski's wife, Virginia, is one of 15 people, including Father Hewes, who are on the anniversary celebration planning committee. Markowski, who also serves as a collector at Sunday Masses, said St. Patrick's is a parish where everyone helps out. For example, he said, various volunteers have spent the last year fixing up the church and improving the parish

grounds.

"Everybody works together," he said.

Meanwhile, Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish is marking its 100th anniversary this month.

On Nov. 4, Bishop Clark celebrated a centennial Mass, attended by about 800 people, which was followed by a reception and tours of the church. In a bulletin article, Father Robert J. Kennedy, pastor, noted that 170 people assisted with the



St. Patrick's, Savannah

Mass and celebration. He credited the 13-member Centennial Committee for its two years of work in planning the successful celebration. In additional comments, Father Kennedy said the celebration was a "crash course in the spirit of the parish" for him since he was appointed pastor a year and half ago.

"I have come to know a parish of strong faith and deeply generous service," he said.

As a culmination of the parish's celebration, this Saturday, Nov. 17, Blessed Sacrament will host a 100th anniversary dinner-dance at 6:30 p.m. in the Rochester Riverside Convention Center.

Technology team works to keep churches in information loop

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in an occasional series of articles on how Thanks Giving Appeal funds are used to help parishes.

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Up until about two years ago, Carolyn Gommel, one of two secretaries/bookkeepers at St. Pius Tenth Church in Chili, said she received a weekly "pound-pack" from the Diocese of Rochester.

This bulky mailing was known as "Centralized Mail," a packet of documents the diocese sent to parishes and related agencies. These days, however, Centralized Mail has been replaced by a computer network which allows parishes to access diocesan information.

Gommel, who has worked at St. Pius since 1977, said computers have made her life and those of other parish office workers much easier.

"I wouldn't do the job I've done without a computer," she said.

Computers have allowed St. Pius to do a more efficient job of purchasing various goods and services; provide reports to its various committees; keep parish records updated; and even create birthday cards for its 7,000 members, she said.

Computerization of parish offices like that of St. Pius has been a major diocesan goal for the past three years, according to Mark D. Darling, one of diocesan Information Technology's three parish computer coordinators who work regularly with parishes. A fourth employee, James Bevacqua, works with parishes as well as schools.

As part of the strategic planning that has taken place in the diocese since the late 1990s, the Pastoral Center has worked to ensure that each parish has at least one good computer, and that parishes get the support they need to use those computers to their full potential, Darling said. The diocese has reached its goal and then some, Darling said, pointing out that 90 percent of diocesan parishes have more than one computer, and 70 percent have fast Internet service. He noted that computers have helped to unite a 12-county diocese that covers a huge geo-

the following FUNDS

graphic area.

"The people in some of the outside areas have always talked about being outside the (diocesan) information loop, and that feeling seems to be a little less now," he said.

Information Technology is funded, in part, by the Thanks Giving Appeal, which this year is projected to provide \$392,000 to the department and the diocese's Mail/Copy Center. TGA funds cover such costs as salaries for the eight employees in IT and two in the Mail/Copy Center, and also covers such costs as computer maintenance, software licensing, employee training and other activities, according to Joan A. Zaia, IT director.

As of Nov. 9, this year's TGA had received donor pledges equal to almost \$3 million from 32,000 donors, according to Dan Healy, director of the diocesan Office of Stewardship and Development. This year's goal is \$4.931 million.

The IT office offers a variety of services to help parishes better use their computers. If a parish staff person is having computer problems, for example, he or she can get help handling those problems by calling Joyce Crooks, IT's technical support specialist. Crooks handles many of the computer questions experienced by parish

staff members, Catholic-school personnel or members of the diocese's various Catholic Charities agencies.

"I tell people over and over again there's no stupid question because I want them to feel comfortable to ask anything they might feel curious about," Crooks said.

Like Darling, Maureen Easterly is a parish computer coordinator. She specializes in helping parishes use the Parish Information Program, which helps parishes keep track of such things as their census data. After meeting with parish staff members from throughout the diocese in the past year, she has updated the program so that parishes can keep parishioners' e-mail addresses and birthdates on file, she said.

Fred Stringer is the third parish computer coordinator in the IT office, and his job combines several duties, including teaching computer courses in a classroom located at the Pastoral Center and helping parishes use accounting software. In the past four years, he said, parishes have moved from old-fashioned systems to computerized accounting.

"All of the parishes were formerly on a manual system," he said of their accounting practices. "Now they can print all their checks on computers and print their financial statements on a computer."

Using computers for parish accounting has enabled parishes to accomplish the same amount of work with fewer employees, and has also helped them access financial data more quickly, he said.

As part of the parish support team, Darling said he fields 35 to 40 calls a week regarding various problems parishes encounter, and spends a significant portion

of his week on the road, helping parishes upgrade their computers or install computer networks in their offices. When asked what advice he would give to parishes regarding their computers, Darling offered the following tips:

- Keep virus defenses up-to-date.
- Pay attention to security measures that are part of your computer programs.
- Make regular backups.
- Budget to replace at least two computers every year. Computers generally have a three-year life, he said.

Darling speaks with great enthusiasm about his job, noting that he enjoys working with people who see computers as a way to better carry out their service to the church.

"Of the groups of users I've worked with in the past, the people in the parishes are the most cooperative, the most willing to learn," he said.

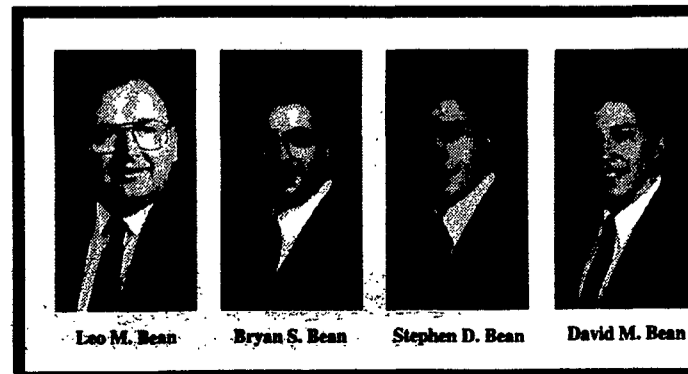
Gommel said she felt the same way about the IT staff.

"They just run a real wonderful program, keeping us informed," she said.

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