

St. Philip Neri Church closes

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier



Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

Bishop Matthew H. Clark celebrates the Aug. 16 closing Mass at Rochester's St. Phillip Neri Church.

The doors of Rochester's St. Philip Neri Church opened to worshippers one last time Aug. 16, with parishioners past and present filling the church for a closing Mass celebrated by Bishop Matthew H. Clark.

"As we celebrate the Eucharist here for the last time at St. Philip Neri Church, we celebrate the 74 years of ministry here in the Diocese of Rochester," Bishop Clark remarked. He also praised parishioners for the "faithful, honest, responsible and courageous" way they faced the closing of their parish.

Some church closings in recent years have been met with protests, hostility and sharp divisions within the community, the bishop noted. Although St. Philip Neri parishioners mourned the closing of their church, he said most accepted it as a necessary adaptation to a changing society.

"To me, that says something very powerful about the faith of this community," Bishop Clark said.

The bishop acknowledged the attachment parishioners feel to their church, but encouraged them to move forward into new parishes with open hearts and minds.

"It is very likely you will find out new things about yourself and your faith and be enriched by that," Bishop Clark said.

After the dismissal, the wooden statue of St. Philip Neri was carried out in procession behind the crucifix, and parishioners were invited to gather in the parking lot, where a farewell picnic was being held. According to Father Mike Mayer, pastor of St. Philip Neri and its sister parish, St. Andrew, the statue will be placed in a prominent area at St. Andrew, most likely in the gathering space.

Father Mayer added that an official welcoming ceremony will be held at St. Andrew for former St. Philip Neri parishioners who wish to join the parish. He acknowledged the St. Philip Neri parishioners' pain, but compared their situation to a death, confident that a resurrection of faith and new life will follow.

"It's the people who are the church, and if their faith is strong, they will take it wherever they go. Ultimately the church is going to continue to thrive and grow," Father Mayer said.

The story of St. Philip Neri Parish is itself one of resurrection and growth. The church was established in 1929 as a mission of St. Francis Xavier Parish, becoming a sepa-

rately incorporated parish in 1959 under then-pastor Father George J. Weinmann. A rectory and convent were gradually added, as well as a school operated under the direction of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

In 1967 a fire broke out in the church, and Father Weinmann entered the building to rescue the Blessed Sacrament, followed by Sister Lilian Marie McLaughlin, SSND. Both died, becoming martyrs among parishioners of St. Philip Neri. The parish carried on, and the current building was erected in 1969.

Wayne George, who served as lector for the closing Mass, has been a parishioner for 12 years. He is related to the Weinmann family on his mother's side, and says he has always felt a special connection to St. Philip Neri Parish. It's the parish he came back to after being away from the church for 20 years, the parish where he was married and the parish where he became involved in the church, he said.

Parishioner Jean Blum, who was the parish's folk-group director in the 1980s, opened the Mass with a song that has been special to the parish since 1978. That year, a missionary gave a special prayer to the then-pastor, who in turn asked if anyone could put it into music. Blum helped do so, and the song became special to the parish.

Blum, whose children Kelly, 10, and Tom, 12, were altar servers during the closing Mass, said she had belonged to the parish as a child and attended the parish school from first through eighth grades. She moved away after she got married, but eventually returned to her roots at St. Philip Neri.

"Over the course of my life, this

was my main parish. It's going to be very difficult to choose (a new parish) only because I don't want to go through this again. It's such a hurtful thing," Blum said.

After Mass, many parishioners gathered to reminisce about the earlier days of the parish and community. Many members said they had witnessed the fire and the construction of the new church, while others talked about family members who had been "married, buried and everything in between" there. Some present were no longer parishioners, but still traveled a long distance to attend the last Mass.

Former parishioner Renee Casano Lampila, who moved from Rochester in 1989, drove from Albany with her family so she could attend the closing.

"My mother is still a member here. It's a tremendous loss to the people of my parents' generation because this was their whole life," Lampila said. "Building the church, the school and the convent building were all dreams of theirs. This is a very working-class neighborhood, and they sacrificed financially and physically. This was their connection to their spiritual community."

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SISTERS APOLOGIZE FOR IRISH GIRLS' TREATMENT

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. branch of the Sisters of Mercy, based in Silver Spring, Md., has issued an apology for how some members of their order in Ireland treated young women and girls entrusted to them in what were called "Magdalene laundries."

The laundries were so named because many of the young women were sent to live at convents to wash and iron laundry as a penance for sins real or imagined — such as giving birth out of wedlock or acting flirtatiously — with the laundry work analogous to Mary Magdalene's tears washing Jesus' feet. The Magdalene laundries flourished in Ireland throughout the 1900s; the last was closed in 1996. It was "a time in the history of the Catholic Church and religious orders of which we are not proud," said the apology.

AUXILIARY BISHOPS INSTALLED IN DETROIT

DETROIT (CNS) — Three priests of the Archdiocese of Detroit — Msgr. Walter A. Hurley, Msgr. John M. Quinn and Father Francis R. Reiss — were ordained as auxiliary bishops to serve the archdiocese Aug. 12.

Their episcopal ordinations were the first to be held in the renovated Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

"On this glorious and joyous day our church of Detroit gives thanks to God and to our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, for the blessing of our three new auxiliary bishops," Cardinal Adam J. Maida of Detroit said in his homily before serving as their principal consecrator.

BISHOPS' FILM OFFICE HAS NEW CLASSIFICATION

WASHINGTON (CNS) — In November, the U.S. bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting will change its A-IV — adults, with reservations — classification to a new "L" classification, designating films for a "limited adult audience" whose "problematic content many adults would find troubling."

Geri Pare, director of the office, said the change reflects how more films are featuring disturbing elements that would limit the appeal to the mass audience despite the presence of other positive aspects.