



Merged parish sees new life in community outreach

By Elizabeth Fisher

The lights were on and the sanctuary was filled to standing room only Wednesday night, Oct. 8, at Our Lady of Fatima Church, the former Bensalem parish that recently merged with nearby St. Charles Borromeo Parish.

The occasion was the dedication of the site as the Fatima Catholic Outreach Center, where Catholic Social Services of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and St. Mary Medical Center will work hand in hand to provide for the needs of the surrounding communities in Bucks County.

The hour-long prayer service was led by Auxiliary Bishop John McIntyre, who told the congregation that the center, which will tend to the needs of the people including many of whom are Latino, was a sign of God's care for his people.

"As we bless this center — this place that has found new life — let us pray that God will bless all those who serve you," Bishop McIntyre told the 500 worshippers who packed the church. "This is a sign of God's hand in the community."

Several priests and religious sisters from the surrounding parishes turned out to show support for the center's new mission, made possible through a partnership with St. Mary Medical Center.

The liturgy reflected the unity of the people with prayers and hymns offered in both English and Spanish. Other speakers included Greg Wozniak, chief executive officer of St. Mary Medical Center; Joseph Sweeney Jr., secretary for Catholic Human Services of the archdiocese; Bensalem Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo and Msgr. Edward Deliman, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo.

Although the center offers many programs, Wozniak said that the staff is already mapping out plans for the future that include offering services to senior citizens and, by next spring, planting a community garden.

DiGirolamo told the congregation that the center would

be another venue to bring the people together and help each other.

"This is what America is about, when we can bring people together for the same purpose: having a better life," the mayor said. "What a great opportunity you have."

Catholic Social Services has been ministering to the needy for more than 200 years, and will continue to "go where the need is," Sweeney said.



Bishop John McIntyre hangs a crucifix by the door of the Fatima Catholic Outreach Center, which he blessed during its dedication ceremony Oct. 8 in Bensalem. (Sarah Webb)

The center will offer such services as a food pantry, English classes, document assistance, pre-teen leadership program, cooking lessons, after-school tutoring and recreation sessions, a diaper bank and a prenatal support group for expectant mothers.

Toward the end of the service, Bishop McIntyre blessed a wooden crucifix and hung it on the wall of the hallway just outside the sanctuary, signaling that the center was officially open.

At a reception following the ceremony, the congregation filled the hallway to feast on Spanish food and socialize. Levittown resident Ernesto Aguilar, his wife Imelda and their children Stephen, 14; Valentin, 11; Esteban, 13 and Marco, 6, enjoyed the food and picked up brochures that outlined available assistance.

Ernesto, who belonged to the former Our Lady of Fatima Parish before moving from Bensalem, expressed his belief in the importance of instilling the faith in the young. He learned his Catholic faith in his home country of Guatemala and he wants to continue the tradition in this country.

It was good, he said, to see Our Lady of Fatima reopen to a new life.

Msgr. Deliman credited "many hands" working together to make the center possible.

"My fear was that, had the church been shut up, it would have meant abandonment of the Latino community. This is not only a spirited center but a center for human needs," he said.

NEWS BRIEF

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Ladies first – Daughters of Charity mark 200 years in city

The Daughters of Charity chose to celebrate Oct. 4 as the 200th anniversary of their arrival in Philadelphia as the very first congregation of women religious to minister in the city.

Archbishop Charles Chaput was the celebrant and homilist of the anniversary Mass at the Miraculous Medal Shrine in the city's Germantown section, where the sisters still minister.

The Daughters of Charity in Philadelphia trace directly back to the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph founded in 1809 in Baltimore by St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Her first postulant was Cecilia O'Conway, a Philadelphian.

In 1810 after the sisters moved to Emmitsburg, Md., with assistance from the Sulpician Fathers, Mother Seton adopted a modified form of the rule of the French Daughters of Charity, co-founded by St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac in 17th-century France, for her new order.

In 1814, at the request of Augustinian Father Michael Hurley, pastor of St. Augustine Church, Mother Seton sent three Sisters to Philadelphia to take charge of a small orphanage, the St. Joseph Orphan Asylum. The orphanage, with 13 children of both sexes, was the first organized Catholic social outreach program in what is now the Archdiocese Philadelphia.

Because the trustees were dissatisfied with the level of care supplied by the hired staff the request was made to Mother Seton. Mother Rose White and Sisters Teresa Conroy and Susan Clossy left Emmitsburg Sept. 29, 1814.

In spite of initial difficulties the sis-

ters persevered. As the institution grew it was split into separate homes for girls and boys through several locations until 1984 when St. Joseph's Hall for Girls closed. Other schools and hospitals followed in the early years.

Over the two centuries more than 1,000 Daughters of Charity have served in the archdiocese but as in virtually all religious congregations recently, they are in greatly reduced numbers with 10 sisters missioned to Philadelphia at this time.

Currently Daughters of Charity serving in Philadelphia, with Sister Mary Frances Martin as their local superior, work for the most part in the Germantown area, as do their spiritual brothers, the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers.

Sisters minister at De Paul Catholic School, St. Vincent de Paul Center for Youth and Young Adults, St. Vincent's Seminary, Dawn's Place (a shelter for sexually trafficked women) and De Paul House USA (a temporary shelter for homeless men).

Black Catholics' traditional home in archdiocese to close

St. Peter Claver Center for Evangelization at 12th and Lombard Streets in Philadelphia will close effective Oct. 31.

The center, which provides for the spiritual, pastoral and temporal needs of black Catholics in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, opened in 1985 at the site of St. Peter Claver Church at the time that the parish itself was closed.

It offered Mass, retreats and regular community services, but in recent years use of the center dwindled, according to an archdiocesan news release. Attendance at the monthly Masses was less than 15, with other programs sparsely attended as

many of the liturgies and programs it offered were taken up by parishes in the archdiocese with African-American populations and immigrants from Africa.

According to an archdiocesan news release no jobs will be impacted by the closing, but it is envisioned the property will be marketed for sale in the near future. Net proceeds from a possible sale would be designated to support ongoing ministry to black Catholics in many other ways.

With the closing of the Center, the Office for Black Catholics, which is headed by Deacon William Bradley, will continue to fulfill its mission by working closely with parishes as they minister locally to black Catholics throughout the region.

Additionally it will continue to support vocations to the priesthood, collaborate in the work of the Ministry to African-American Catholics Certificate Program, as well as the Institute for Black Catholic Studies; oversee the Kujenga retreat program for youth and maintain relations with the Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary along with the St. Martin de Porres Foundation.

The center was able to support its programs through a grant from the Washington-based Black and Indian Missions Office, but this did not cover funding for the deferred maintenance of the buildings, which include St. Peter Claver Church and the adjacent four-story building that houses the programs.

The archdiocese, because it is still in the process of restoring its fiscal foundation, is not able to guarantee funds for the care of the center.

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