

## The Story of St. Rita's Canonical Establishment

A First Person Account  
as Witnessed by  
Theresa (Terry) Johnson

Because I am very interested in local history and happenings, I am writing this personal account of the canonical establishment of St. Rita's Parish at Clarklake, Michigan. Having recently researched all facets of local history for the book "'Round the Square," written for Brooklyn's sesquicentennial, I am aware of the difficulties of providing accurate, detailed information for historical publications. So it is my hope that this may prove useful some time in the future for other local "historians."

May 17, 1982

Yesterday, May 16, 1982, was an important day for the parishioners of St. Rita's.

After sixty-six years of being a mission church, the canonical establishment of the church as a parish was ceremonialized by Bishop Kenneth Povish of the Diocese of Lansing.

We arrived at church forty-five minutes early to get a front row seat. Yours truly recorded the event and took pictures for the Exponent, our local newspaper.

As we arrived, Barb and Dan Noble and sons and Scott and Joe Flake were directing cars for parking. Undoubtedly all members of the church had been praying that morning for sunshine. It had rained during the night and a few rain drops sprinkled through the morning. By 10:30 a.m. the skies were clear and the sun was shining.

A tent had been set up on the south side of the church beside the sliding glass doors to accommodate the overflow expected for the 11 a.m. Mass. Another tent was set up at the northwest corner of the church for refreshments following Mass.

Porta-potties dotted the grounds, and Father Jim (James Prentice, O.S.F.S.) was chided about all the extra confessionals.

Inside, the Columbia eighth grade girls choir was gathering to provide music for the celebration. Their director was Lee Brower.

The altar was beautifully decorated with yellow and white chrysanthemums. The altar cloths and the nine vestments for the celebration were a cream and chocolate brown combination made by Virginia Yancey. The stolls were made by Bernadine Hoffman.

Sixteen ministers of the eucharist were given instructions by Father Jim on how to handle their duties.

There was a feeling of joy and excitement in the air. Smiles were abundant and a lot of handshakes and hugs were passed around to those priests and nuns who had previously served the parish and were on hand for the occasion.

I can't describe adequately what it meant to me to be included in the processional as a minister of the eucharist. I was supposed to be taking pictures for the Exponent, but my husband Dale temporarily assumed those duties.

The music started and down the aisle we walked, two by two, to kneel at the altar of Our Lord.

Bishop Povish conferred the establishment at the beginning of Mass by presenting Father Jim and Bud Kennedy with the formal declaration describing the parish territory. A standing ovation followed the presentation.

Following that he conferred Father Jim as pastor of St. Rita's.

Mass was held and Bishop Povish gave the homily, noting that he was especially proud and pleased with the love and caring attitudes our church represented.

Father Jim remarked, "You people think I've been tough before; you ain't seen nothing yet." (He's really not as tough as he sounds. He's doing a wonderful job of helping our parish family to love one another as God loves us.)

After Mass cookies, coffee, and punch were served. Ladies of the parish made and donated the cookies.

Visiting guests who had previously shepherded the flock at St. Rita's included Fr. John O'Neill, Sr. Paula Cooney, and Fr. Sylvester Fedewa. Fr. Andrew Dunne of Our Lady of Fatima, our mother church, was also present.

Later that evening all the clergy from Jackson, Lenawee, and Hillsdale counties were treated to dinner in the parish hall.

Prior to this day an appreciation dinner had been held for all parishioners who performed volunteer tasks at the church. Over 200 people were invited to that.

A luncheon had been held for all the senior citizens of the parish with Fiddlin' Jamie for entertainment and dancing.

On May 23 the entire surrounding community was invited to share in our celebration with a free ice cream social.