

SOLEMN CEREMONY THE REV. PAUL EDWARDS IS INSTALLED AS PASTOR AT FAST- GROWING ST. KATHARINE DREXEL

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Pastors who plant new churches usually struggle for several years to build up a functioning congregation.

That has not been the case for Father Paul Edwards of Weston who has seen the St. Katharine Drexel church that the archdiocese started a year ago balloon to 1,200 people attending Mass every Sunday.

“The people in Weston were just waiting for a church to open,” Edwards explained. “They used to attend Saint Bonaventure church in Davie.”

Edwards said that churches are typically begun in small communities where an influx of people is just beginning. He said that he did not know why the archdiocese had not started a Roman Catholic church in the 20 year old community earlier.

“They have needed a new church around here for a long time,” confirmed the church’s secretary/administrative assistant Edith Clifford who is also a member of the congregation. “The growth here is really interesting, it’s amazing.”

“We are definitely a bilingual, multicultural church,” Edwards said. “We have people from all over South America who are attending, with the largest groups coming from Colombia, Venezuela and Argentina.”

“We are very diverse,” said Clifford. “We also have Italians and Chinese among our membership.”

Weston’s population of Spanish-speaking Latin Americans is around 40-50% according to church member Joe Preite. “And, of those, 90% are Catholic,” he affirmed.

“We feel like pioneers here,” Preite exclaimed. “Most of the residents are from somewhere else where there are already a lot of churches. We are like pilgrims here.”

Land issues are one of the challenges facing the new church that Edwards has started. “We have a piece of land, but it is tied up in issues with the South Florida Water Management District,” he said.

Currently the parish is meeting in 10,000 square feet of the Weston Community Center. Edwards said that the church has constructed office space, a 550 seat chapel and a religious education center in the facility.

“Our religious education program has grown from 230 kids last year to 450 this year,” the priest said.

“One of our strengths is our family atmosphere,” said Clifford. “We are enjoying just being together and not just showing up for mass on Sunday.”

Clifford said that while Weston exhibits a good community spirit, many residents do not have other family members living in the area. “The church is family for many of them,” she said, explaining that often other churches do not provide that sort of community spirit.

The church sponsors regular feast days in a local park to bring the entire congregation together for a picnic and to get to know each other. “It helps to bring our Hispanic and English-speaking members together,” Clifford explained. The church holds separate English and Spanish services each weekend.

Edwards, who grew up in Hialeah and has served as the pastor of churches in both Miami-Dade and Broward counties for the past 20 years, said that the new congregation has provided new opportunities for him. “Not many priests have the chance to start a new parish,” he said.

The priest described the past year as one of new challenges. “It has been a year of helping people to pull together and form a new community,” he said. “We have also had the opportunity to set a vision for the congregation, establish a program and develop our religious education activities.”

Describing ministry in an already established church as jumping on a rolling train, Edwards said that this experience has been more like “adding new cars as you go.”

Edwards said that the residents of Weston have been very warm and responsive to his ministry and he looks forward to an expanding ministry with the church.

“Fr. Edwards and the church are a perfect match,” said Priete, who serves on the church’s Pastoral Council. “He is a super person, very spiritual. We need him.”

The priest was formally installed as the pastor of Saint Katharine Drexel church on October 7. “A priest is normally appointed as a Priest Administrator of a church during its first year,” Edward’s explained. Only later is he formally installed as the congregation’s permanent priest.

Saint Katharine Drexler Roman Catholic Church
Weston Community Center
2700 Glades Circle, Suite 200
954-389-5003

Weekend Masses:
5:30 p.m., Saturday –English

10 a.m., Sunday—English
12:30 p.m. Sunday—Spanish

Adult Chatecism classes:
7:30 p.m. Tuesday—Spanish
7:30 p.m. Thursday—English

Religious Education Classes:
Monday and Tuesday afternoon—call for registration

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