

Mass to kick off 50th anniversary of St. Thomas Church in Bloomfield

By CARYL R. LUCAS

A Mass inaugurating a year-long celebration of the 50th anniversary of St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Bloomfield will be held Sunday.

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph A. Francis, of the Newark Archdiocese, will be the keynote speaker at the noon liturgy.

Rev. Charles Noble, a parochial vicar at St. Thomas, called the 50th anniversary a "milestone event" in the church's history as a Catholic community serving parishioners in Bloomfield, Glen Ridge, Nutley and other parts of Essex County. The church pastor is Msgr. Franklyn M. Casale.

"The theme is thanksgiving," Noble said. "We are looking back over 50 years and looking into the present and future.

"We are presently engaged in restructuring our pastoral council," he added. "We hope to accomplish a more effective ministry."

Noting there are more than 3,500 families that belong to the church, the priest added the predominantly Irish- and Italian-American parish includes a growing number of Asians.

Established on Jan. 26, 1939, by Archbishop Thomas J. Walsh, the church started out with 300 families in the Brookdale section of the township. Rev. Thomas J. Herron, St. Thomas' first pastor, celebrated the parish's

first Mass on June 25, 1939, in a 60- by 100-foot tent on the site of the church parking lot.

One of the highlights of the anniversary, Noble said, is a special liturgy to be held June 11 in a tent to pay tribute to those first parishioners affectionately known as "tenters." Newark Archbishop Theodore McCarrick will be on hand to celebrate that outdoor Mass of thanksgiving.

On the first Thursday of each month during the anniversary year, a prayer service will be held, the priest said. "It will provide our parishioners with an opportunity for spiritual growth. That is the reason for the Thursday night prayers."

J. Martin Comey, chairman of St. Thomas' 50th anniversary committee, said the church has invited priests who formerly served at St. Thomas to take part in the 7:45 p.m. prayer services.

"Our main theme is to thank God for our blessings," said Comey, who joined the parish 22 years ago. "We have an excellent parish and a lot of spirit has been maintained here. Our thrust is bringing people together."

Throughout its history, he said, the church "has been bringing people closer to God."

He said the church has also tried to provide parishioners with a solid Catholic education, noting that St. Thomas the Apostle School first opened

its doors in September, 1940.

Today, the school has more than 386 students in grades kindergarten through eight.

"One of the reasons I'm so involved with my parish is because of our children," said Comey, a vice president at Schering-Plough Corp. in Madison. "It has been the social center of our life because we have had kids here for the past 20 years. We evolved our social life around the parish."

He said his youngest daughter, Margaret, is a sixth-grader and the eighth family member to attend the school.

"They have all gotten a good basic education that has put them in good standards," said Comey. "So far, the first five have gone on to college. This is a very family-oriented church."

Bloomfield Councilman Jim Gasparini, who has been a member of the church since 1954, said, "It's been a part of my life sharing and doing for other people in and out of the parish. When our kids went to school there, we used to take turns with other members cleaning the school and even washing the floors.

In observance of the anniversary, Gasparini introduced a resolution at the council's regular meeting earlier this week recognizing the church's contribution to spiritual growth in the township.