

BELIEFS & Values

Brother Rice honored in Rome, Bloomfield Township

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

St. Peter's Square in Rome was filled with pomp and circumstance when cardinals, bishops, priests, lay brothers and pilgrims from around the world gathered for the beatification of Brother Edmund Rice by Pope John Paul II.

The portraits of Irish-born Rice and three other exemplary Christians from Poland, Spain and the Ukraine remained veiled at the Oct. 6 ceremony until the moment each was declared blessed by the Pope.

"The most emotional point in the ceremony was to see the shroud lowered," said Brother Arthur Arndt, one of three Bloomfield Township residents to take his seat in front of the steps to the Basilica.

"It was really inspiring for me," said Brother Robert Beckstrom, fingering the kelly-green pilgrim scarf he wore to gain admission to the celebration in Rome. "It was a renewal of the realization of our congregation as a global community."

Arndt, Beckstrom and Brother William Dogan, the new principal of Brother Rice High School, formed the small Oakland County contingency that witnessed the Roman Catholic Church's official beatification of the founder of their international religious order, The Congregation of Christian Brothers.

On Sunday, Jan. 26, the Brother Rice community of Bloomfield Township will host a celebration of its own in the high school gym at 7101 Lahser Road, with an expected crowd of 800 meeting for a 1 p.m. Mass of Thanksgiving and Celebration with Adam Cardinal Maidsa presiding. The Mass will be co-celebrated by 10 area priests, and will include a boys choir and classical music selections by Ann Arbor-based Brassworks. A reception follows.

"We decided it was better to have the celebration in the building named after this man," said Dogan, who was inspired

by the crowd of 12,000 that gathered in Rome. "This is the main opportunity for us to give it meaning. It's almost like passing the flame."

A specially commissioned six foot by eight foot medieval tapestry of Rice surrounded by students in his birthplace of Waterford will be the focal point of the liturgical space created in the gym.

Nationally recognized wildlife painter Lynn Duffy of Birmingham painted the work of art, which will be blessed by Maidsa on Jan. 26.

It will then be mounted in the school chapel as a permanent reminder of both the Rome and Bloomfield Township events.

"It's a consciousness-raising of what Brother Rice should mean as a father, husband, teacher and philanthropist," said Arndt, of the local event. "This is something that can touch us all."

The beatification solemnly recognizes Rice's holiness to those most closely affiliated with him.

The next step to sainthood is canonization, which is recognition by the universal church. Rice's feast day in May 5. Edmund Rice was the son of a tenant farmer, who initially made his living in the shipping industry.

Widowed after only two years of marriage and left to care for his premature, disabled daughter, Rice worked through his grief by caring for the poor. In 1802, nearly three decades before the Catholic Emancipation in Ireland, Rice began secretly educating street boys in the Christian faith.

He opened St. Sion school in his birthplace of Waterford, staffing it with teachers from the diocesan-based order he founded, called the Brothers of Presentation.

"It was a very difficult process," said Dogan, of his wealthy predecessor.

"Because at this time, people thought he was crazy, distributing his money to ensure educa-



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZOLNITZ

Blessed tribute: Bloomfield Township Brothers Arthur Arndt, William Dogan and Robert Beckstrom traveled to Rome to witness the official beatification of Brother Edmund Rice, founder of the Congregation of Christian Brothers.

tion and faith development."

Two decades later, Rice's vision took on an international flair through the founding of the Congregation of Christian Brothers, which today has a contingency of 3,000 who teach in 560 institutions in 25 countries.

It was this second order of lay teachers that made its way to Oakland County in 1960, establishing Brother Rice High School with the help of pastors from St. Bede in Southfield, St. Hugo of the Hills in Bloomfield Hills, St. Columban and Holy Name in Birmingham, and Our Lady Queen of Martyrs in Beverly Hills.

Arndt and Dogan are Chicago natives, once schooled by the Christian Brothers, who continue Rice's work at Brother Rice High School, where six lay alumni serve with them on the

faculty staff.

"The brothers have a great sense of justice, and it's constantly enforced," said Arndt, who chairs the school's English department.

"I hope each student who leaves here can take with him a sense of justice that he's not to use his intelligence as a club for other people."

California-born Beckstrom, who chairs the high school social studies department, was drawn to the brotherhood during his college years, when he felt a call to religious life.

"The clerical thing was about being a father," said Beckstrom. "The brothers were about being

a friend."

Rice's continued popularity and possible rise to sainthood does not surprise the Bloomfield Township brothers.

"This is the age of the layman. Edmund was married with a child. He was a full Catholic layman experiencing a family life and a business life," said Arndt.

"Ninety-nine percent of the kids here are going to be married lay people, and here you have a shining example of that."

"A sense of God in their lives," added Dogan, "is the most important thing we can leave them with."

It's a week of prayer for Christian unity

FOCUS ON THEOLOGY



REV. TIMOTHY F. BABCOCK

During the third week of January each year, churches across the United States join in a common observance of a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Through this observance, we seek to focus on the importance of growing toward a common awareness of our calling and purpose as faith communities. It is our confident hope that this is beneficial not only to us personally, but to the contribution the Christian Church as a whole makes to the society in which we live.

One of the blessings of the current era has been the growth of the ecumenical movement. This effort on the part of many churches seeks to emphasize what we have in common, and to seek ways that we can unite in common effort, service and witness. In many communities, united efforts by churches helps to offer services for the poor and needy that no one church could offer by itself. Our own area of north Oakland reflects this common effort and purpose. Many churches unite to support, and

even to enable, efforts and services such as the Baldwin Center, the Pontiac Mission, Light-house, Haven, Neighborhood House in Rochester, the St. Vincent de Paul Food Depot, South Oakland Shelter, clothes closets and other services.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity does not ignore the fact that we come from different historical and theological traditions. It does not pretend that we all agree on everything. It does emphasize that, by seeking those things we hold in common, we can more effectively serve those who come to us seeking the caring and compassionate ministry of the church.

The theme for the 1997 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is "Be Reconciled to God" based on a text from 2 Corinthians 5. The Scriptures are clear that, for a world racked with divisions and pain, Christians are called to be ministers of reconciliation. This teaching is repeated numerous times in the Christian Scriptures we call the New Testament. We trust and hope that as we grow more deeply into the love of God we can grow closer to one another as members of one body. We hope and pray that our common efforts to serve, in the name of

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