NEW IBERIA

When St. Peter Parish in New Iberia was formally established in 1838, the pastors ministered to Catholics over a wide territory and as far down the Bayou Teche as Patterson. Over the years, many other church parishes have been established in this area with St. Peter still the "mother" church of this section.

Msgr. John H. Disch, who has been pastor here since 1973, is a true native son. He was born in the parish, baptized, made his first Communion, confirmed, ordained to the priesthood and has been established in this area with St. Peter's.

"It has all been very gratifying," he says. "The people are very cooperative and responsive. But I wasn't anxious to come to New Iberia. I had spent 20 good years in Franklin and I hated to leave there.

St. Peter Parish in New Iberia has been a part of the New Iberia community for almost 150 years. Our goal is to continue and to better the activities that we have been doing," Msgr. Disch said.

"The inter-parish cooperation is a good sign of progress, according to Rita Musemeche, who has headed the social service program for the parish for almost 25 years. Msgr. Disch is quite proud of the large weekday Mass attendance, and says even with other churches in the city, the weekend Mass attendance is about 4,000. Conveniently located in downtown New Iberia, the noonday Mass finds the church three-quarters full.

One of the most satisfying activities, he points out, is the Catholic information and evangelization program under the direction of permanent deacon Ken Waguseppack. It is attended by people who want a refresher course in Catholicism, or are interested in becoming Catholics. There were 10 converts received last year. Registration is now underway for the course beginning in September. A baby-sitting service is provided by the parish youth council. The converts are baptized at the Easter vigil service or on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord after Christmas. To facilitate the congregation's participation in this the baptistery was recently moved up to the front of the church in front of the Blessed Virgin's altar. The former baptistry near the front door of the church has been converted to a sacristy for visiting.

Msgr. Disch attended the parish renewal retreat conducted by Father Chuck Gallagher, S.J. and plans to institute this renewal program in the parish.

About 275 persons participated in recommissioning ceremonies held on Pentecost Sunday when those participating in various ministries were recognized. These included the altar boys, choir members, lay ministers of Communion, adult altar servers, lectors, and ministers of hospitality (also known as ushers). The only group not included was teachers of religion who have their own ceremony at another time.

To facilitate religious education classes for public school children, the parish has recently completed construction of Loflin Hall No. 2, located back of Dodson school, where additional space was recently acquired for a future parking area.

The summer "glad days" program was enjoyed this year by about a hundred children.

There are 160 boys from St. Peter Parish at Catholic High, and about the same number of girls from the parish at Mount Carmel.

Msgr. Disch says a monthly meeting of the St. Peter Parish Council has been held for the past two years to encourage cooperation and sharing of resources. All the pastors minister to Catholics over a wide territory and as far down the Bayou Teche as Patterson. Over the years, many other church parishes have been established in this area with St. Peter still the "mother" church of this section.

St. Peter Parish expanding facilities

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with pastors of other Catholic parishes in New Iberia has proved useful for a discussion of mutual interests and the unity policy of the diocese.

"There is good cooperation between parishes," he says, and cites the twice-a-year communal penance service held at St. Peter with all the church parishes joining in.

Priests and people from surrounding towns, Coteau, Loreauville, Lydia and Rynella, are also invited.

Another community project is the Social Service Center which ministers to the poor and needy in a variety of ways. Supported by both Catholic and Protestant churches of New Iberia, the center also administers the Milk Fund in cooperation with the Daily Iberian, daily newspaper.

"The people are very generous," he pointed out, reporting that a total of $1,820 in cash and groceries was donated for the center during a special Ash Wednesday collection.

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Don Lester, chairman of the liturgy commission and former parish council president, praised the spirit of cooperation in the parish. "People are waiting to be asked to do something," he says, and feels the changes since Vatican II have been handled well in the parish. Lester likes the variety of liturgy in the weekend Masses.

"There is a well-trained adult choir, and at other masses there is congestion," he says. "We have a lot of opportunities for people to serve and participate in the liturgy."

St. Peter Parish expanding facilities

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