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ST THERESA PARISH, SOUTH LAKE TAHOE Vacation Parish that Liturgy Unifies

By Sr Carol Anne O'Marie, printed in the September 9, 1976 issue of the *Catholic Herald*

Saint Theresa's, South Lake Tahoe, is a simple structure nestled peacefully among the pines of a mountain community. But, its simple, peaceful setting belies the real complexity of the parish.

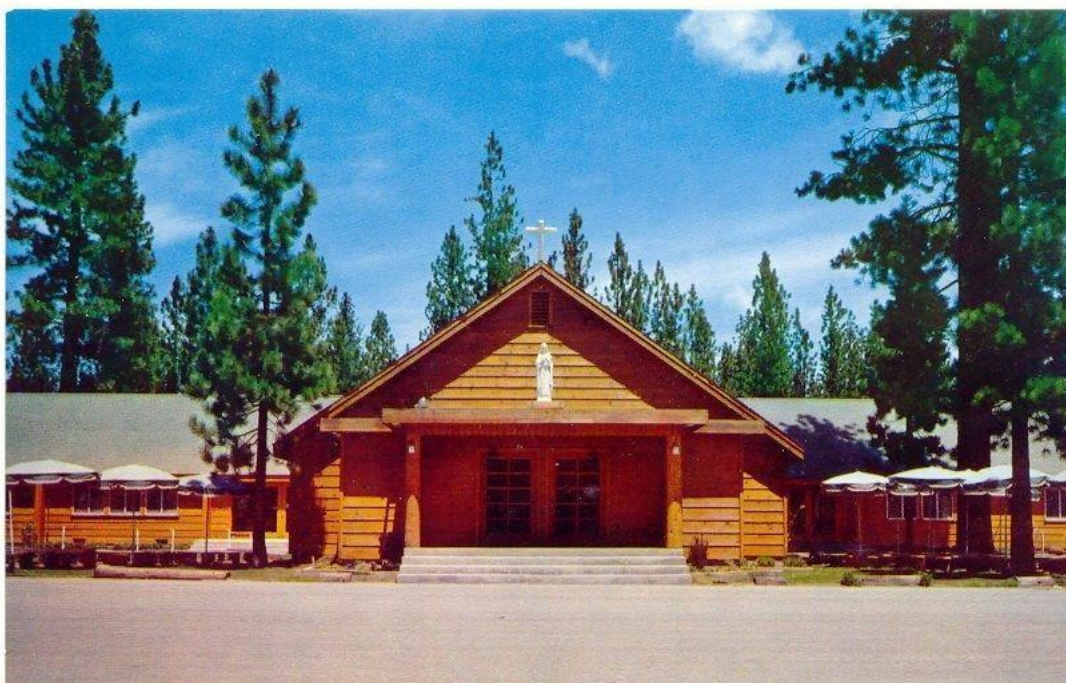


Photo from St Theresa Parish Archives

The Original St Theresa Church

The composition of Saint Theresa's congregation changes seasonally, according to Father John Grace, pastor. Summer brings families; fall invites older, retired people. The skiers come in winter and spring sees cabin owners refurbishing for the summer.

The population of the total area is fluid. It swells from 20,000 people year round to 70,000 or 80,000 during the summers, necessitating 13 Sunday Masses. "However, this is really an easy place to work," says Father Grace. "You are dealing with people on vacation and they are receptive." And, according to Father Grace, regardless of what season they vacation, nearly everyone gambles.

Sunday envelopes at Saint Theresa's may be labelled "slot loot" or a lucky gambler may ring the rectory doorbell to donate five percent of his winnings to the church. "We see some unlucky ones, too," says Father Grace, "good, honest people who have lost everything."

He relates a story of three young mothers whose husbands had sent them to Tahoe to enjoy a weekend. When it was time to return home, each thought the other had money. When they discovered they were all without funds, they found that no one in South Lake Tahoe would cash a personal check. Three embarrassed ladies presented themselves to the rectory where Father gave them enough to get home.

Meshing gamblers, vacationers, and year-round parishioners into a community is a difficult order. Yet, all are welcome and each group contributes to the building of the parish community. What is it that provides the unifying force in this mountain parish? "The liturgy is the center," says Father Grace. "People come here from all over the world," he says, "and they often tell us they are looking forward to coming again."

The year-round parishioners of Saint Theresa's have put a whole-hearted effort into improving their liturgy. They bought an organ; organized a choir; hired an organist and sent her to liturgical music workshops. They have initiated team lectors; established a folk group and are working hard at planning thematic liturgies. Above all, they have made a genuine effort to make all who come feel welcome.

"The money we have spent on liturgy is well-spent," says Father Grace. "Isn't celebrating the liturgy what the whole thing is about?" he asks. If liturgy is the summit of church activities, it is, at the same time, the fountain from which all power flows. The power of the liturgy has run over into the many and varied activities of Saint Theresa parish.

The CCD program, under the direction of Mrs. Pat Whitney has 400 students and 25 teachers. Mrs. Mary Rose works diligently on a Parent-Education program. "For the most part it's a matter of updating the parents' vocabulary," she says.



Photo by the Catholic Herald

The CYO and Women's Guild are active. The Saint Theresa Guild Helpers, a new organization under the chairmanship of Helen Hug, delivers food to shut-ins, makes "telephone" visits and brings gifts to new-born babies. "We are isolated up here," says Father Grace, "all the locals have to help make community."

Father Grace has been leading "the locals" for 20 of the parish's 25 years. "He was the parish repairman long before you could get one up here," says Mrs. Whitney, "and once he fell off the roof and broke his leg."

During the winter, Father Grace, operates the snow-mobile, "for relaxation," he says. A native of County Tipperary, Ireland, he claims the snow has never bothered him. "I remember when Bishop McGucken first came up here," Father reminisces, "He was glad I was going to do the driving. We were the fourth car and the three ahead of us slid off the road into the embankment."



Photo by the Catholic Herald

Father John Grace Clears the Snow from the Parish Parking Lot with the Snow Removal Mobile "For Relaxation"

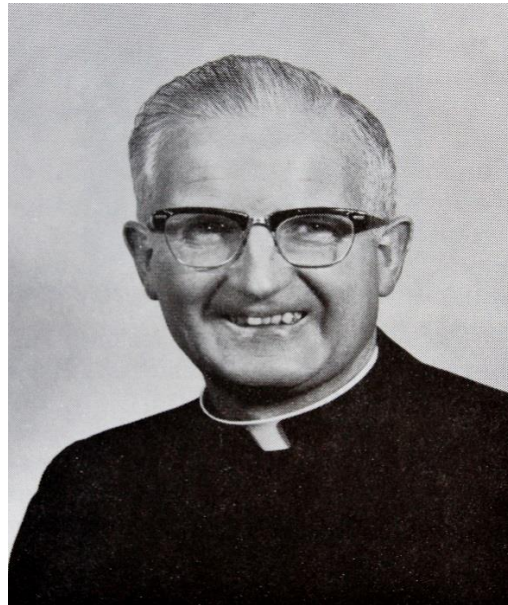
Last May, Saint Theresa Parish celebrated its 25th anniversary. Its commemorative booklet states that Father Grace "has become prepared to expect the unexpected." "He has seen a quiet, peaceful, rural community turn into a thriving city torn between the demands of an over-increasing population and the desire to preserve the environment which brought them here."

Father Grace and the parishioners of Saint Theresa's mountain parish seem equal to meet the challenge.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

The New Saint Theresa Church



Father John J Grace