

# Priest has hands full with rural parish

By Faith Bremner/Gazette-Journal

MINDEN — It's a long way from New York City to Douglas County and it's a long way from the pinstriped world of an IBM executive to the priesthood.

But that's exactly what Father John Corona gave up for God and the Carson Valley 13 years ago, and he hasn't looked back since.

Sometimes Corona thinks back fondly on his previous life.

"But there's such a tremendous diversity in being the pastor of a parish," Corona said. "I am walking the journey of life with so many people and it brings me into so many areas I've never been before."

Still, the shortage of Catholic priests

is hitting Nevada hard, especially Douglas County, and the days can be long when there are 400 families' spiritual needs to be looked after.

"There are times when you feel you're shoveling against the tide because the scope of everything is so large today," Corona said. "It seems the more you do, the more you have to do to respond to the needs of people."

Corona entered the seminary late in life, in 1967 when he was 34 years old. He had been to college, joined the Army, traveled the world of finances and had almost married twice before he took the ecclesiastical plunge. The son of Italian immigrants, he was raised in a small town north of New York City.

"I had gone through parochial school and Catholic college and I would think about (the priesthood) but not seriously," he said. "As I grew older I had the nudge in me and it came to the point where I really wanted to find out if it was the right thing to do."

"So I entered the seminary and nobody kicked me out."

Upon his ordination at Pope John XXIII Seminary at Weston, Mass., in 1971, he went to St. Christophe's Church in North Las Vegas.

Thirteen years ago, he agreed to come to St. Gall's Church in Gardnerville, the only Catholic parish

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**FATHER CORONA:** The priest and his parish designed their new church in Gardnerville.

## Growing parish keeps priest busy

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son Valley.

At the time, there were 200 families crammed into the quaint but tiny brick church on Highway 395.

Since his stay, the congregation has doubled in size and in 1984 the church dedicated its modern building on Centerville Lane that was designed brick-for-brick by its members.

Last year, the Nevada Society of Architects awarded the church building its Merit for Excellence in Architecture. Unlike most church buildings, its sanctuary is surrounded by windows that look out onto the mountains and skylights that let the sunshine in.

"We like it open to bring the outside in," he said.

But helping design a building and getting it built was only one of his jobs. Besides tending to the

church's building program, Corona also looks after the church's finances and building maintenance program.

The parish also has a small school of religious instruction for everyone from preschoolers to adults. There are social activities to be organized, the sick to be visited, the dead to be buried and the young to be married.

Then there are the aerobic exercise classes held three times a week at the parish hall. Father Corona is out there grunting with the rest of them.

"Some nights I leave the church at a quarter to 10," he said. "The average person doesn't realize how much you do."

"They just see you at church on Sunday and figure that's all you do."

Although Douglas County is growing and the church popula-

tion right along with it, Carson Valley historically has had only one priest.

"I think we're really going to feel the impact in about 10 years because the average age of the Roman Catholic clergy is in the mid-50s," he said. "And since Nevada is increasing its population, it's really going to feel it."

Corona says the answer to the priest squeeze is to be creative and to use more lay people, and not just to plug holes.

"It can't be business as usual; we'll have to do some restructuring to make the church responsive to a modern society."

And who knows, maybe someday women will be allowed to join the priesthood, he said.

"I never say never to women priests because never is a long time."