



Father Jerome Naduvathaniyil and Father Edwin Thome, strangers when they met three days before assuming their duties of serving St. John's and St. Gabriel's in Prairie du Chien and Sacred Heart in Wauzeka, find that they make a good team.

## New priests intent on serving PdC, Wauzeka parishes

By Sandy Vold

*This is the first of a series of articles about how the ministries of some area churches have changed to meet the needs of the people they serve as well as cope with a shortage of priests or ministers.*

Father Edwin Thome and Father Jerome Naduvathaniyil are, on the surface, a study in contrasts: one is American-

born, the other from India; one a diocesan priest, the other a Benedictine; one is a young man, with only three years experience as a priest; the other, a life-long priest who came out of retirement to accept his position. They met only three days before they assumed their duties serving St. John's and St. Gabriels parishes in Prairie du Chien and Sacred Heart in Wauzeka.

Happily, despite all their

differences, these men who are 50 years apart in age found they share the same attitudes toward their work and the parishes they serve. "We found we are very much on the same wave length," said Father Thome.

Father Thome is no stranger to Prairie du Chien. He served as pastor at St. John's for seven years, leaving the post 17

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years ago. He celebrated his 25th anniversary as a priest during that time. After serving as pastor at nine different parishes, he retired at age 70, but continued to assist at other churches for several years. Then, he said, it seemed as if no one needed him, and he moved into a retirement facility. "Everything was being done for me," he explained, "and it was boring. Then the bishop asked if I could come here and I said yes. I'm rejuvenated."

Father Jerome comes to the diocese by way of India. A monk of the Order of St. Benedict (OSB), he was ordained to the priesthood on Nov. 23, 2005. He has done extensive study in philosophy and theology, and in addition has diplomas in journalism and human resources management. He speaks five Indian languages in addition to English—which he speaks fluently and rapidly. Bishop Listeki of the La Crosse Diocese had visited India to recruit priests, who are in very short supply, and Fr. Jerome's superior sent him to the U.S.

Although he is relatively new to the priesthood, he is not without experience. Most recently, he was assistant principal at a Catholic high school in Bangalore South while serving as assistant priest at the parish church. He says, "I really appreciate the kindness and concern and warm welcome of parishioners of St. Gabriel,

St. John and Sacred Heart. It is really heart-touching and inspiring. As I begin my ministry here, I humbly ask the prayers and blessings of all of you."

They are replacing Fr. Hubert Boschert and Father Jim Warosh, the last of the Jesuits who had served in Prairie du Chien since 1875. They are also taking over for Father John Gialbert, who was transferred elsewhere.

The two priests have been able to continue the weekday masses and usual church schedules in Prairie du Chien, but have had to make some adjustments in order to serve Wauzeka as well. The Saturday night service there has been eliminated, and the weekday Masses have been cut back to Thursday evening. Jessie Bird, an active member of Sacred Heart, said that, despite the cutbacks, the congregation is impressed with the enthusiasm and helpfulness of both Fr. Jerome and Fr. Thome, who alternate in saying Mass there. "It's a big change, but people are dealing with it," she said.

Thome and Father Jerome emphasize they have no intention of making big changes in any of the parishes, and they want it clearly understood that they have no intention of either closing or combining the Catholic schools. What they really want to do is enlarge them—not in the sense of building size, but in enroll-

ment. They pointed out there are empty classrooms in both schools, and "we want to fill them," said Father Thome. The schools, he said, do an excellent job in the areas of both religion and education.

They also have a vision. They'd like to build the gymnasium for which a fund was created years ago. Father Thome estimated that about \$300,000 had been set aside in a special fund, including \$1,000 which he had personally contributed. At that time, no decision had been made about where the gym would be built. In the intervening years, the cost of building the gymnasium has increased considerably, so they are hoping to encourage some generous person or persons to contribute enough to accomplish the task. "We are hoping someone will come forward," said Fr. Jerome.

Lana Gratace, office manager at the rectory, said she is delighted to have the two in residence. Father Thome hired her in 1981, and it is good to have him back. Father Jerome she finds to be a man of incredible energy. "He says he is on call 24-7, which is good in this kind of business," she laughs.

Fr. Thome perhaps best summed up the driving force in their partnership: "We want the best for our children and our adults; we want them to be devoted to the Lord and their community."