

A CLERGYMAN'S DAY...Rev. Marschner of St. Bridget's

By HELEN BINGHAM

REV. ALOYSIUS J. MARSCHNER (or Aloys, as he prefers) came to St. Louis a year and a half ago to help rebuild the old parish of St. Bridget's, and immediately found himself with many problems on his hands. One of St. Louis' oldest parishes and once one of its proudest, it had fallen victim to encroaching slums in recent years. Parishioners moved out, and those that remained were too poor to support the church.

Now new life has poured into the parish because of the Pruitt Housing Project, and church, school and other facilities are insufficient to handle new church members and converts.

Father Marschner has sole responsibility for running his booming parish. In addition to his regular duties, he superintends building of a new school, convent and rectory adjacent to St. Bridget's Church. "This place is a madhouse," he says of his temporary quarters in the old school building at 2615 Stoddard. He rarely finishes breakfast before telephone calls begin.

A typically hectic day begins for Father Marschner with reading his offices, saying Mass and eating a hurried breakfast. After that, his schedule is necessarily flexible, but it includes visits to the school and hospitals and counseling anyone who

comes for help. He must finish lunch by noon so the sisters at the school can eat. Father Marschner tries to reserve some afternoon time for home visits to the sick, although he often takes communion to them in the morning.

For relaxation, the busy priest likes to listen to his extensive record collection. He is now tape recording it a bit at a time. He also loves to take an occasional drive into the country. Father Marschner came here from a country parish and still misses the clear air and unobstructed view of sky and trees.

The fact that St. Bridget's is a downtown parish in a mixed neighborhood has brought some problems in school integration, and the huge influx of converts has necessitated extensive classes in instruction.

Financial difficulties are ever-present, and counseling sessions are likely to arise at any time of day or night. But Father Marschner welcomes the challenge of his busy parish. A man who thrives on hard work, he says he has never regretted a day of his stay at St. Bridget's.

When he finds time, he thinks nostalgically of more peaceful days in his country parish, but he has learned to appreciate a city sunset and to become immune to city noises.



RARE PEACEFUL MOMENT is snatched for prayer as Father Marschner kneels in old St. Bridget's Church. Statue of the Irish saint is behind him. St. Bridget's was once an Irish parish Church.



SCHOOL CHILDREN gather around priest in school yard, with housing project in background. Cochran Gardens and Pruitt Homes give new life to downtown parishes.

Photography by Bruce Bacon