

# Church says goodbye with feeling

## Priest leaves West Side parish amid music of drums

By Sonya C. Vann  
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Rev. Matt Foley ended his five-year service as associate pastor of Chicago's St. Agatha Parish Sunday amid the rhythms of African drums and gourds.

It was a scene he might never have encountered had it not been for the predominantly African-American parish in North Lawndale.

"Everybody has a different expression of faith," said Foley, 31, who spent his summers in New Orleans earning a master's degree in black studies from Xavier University.

"I do believe the African-American celebration is a kindred celebration for all people. And many times, when my friends come in from the suburbs to celebrate mass here, they wish their own parishes were more like this one."

Foley, originally from Libertyville, founded the St. Agatha Family Empowerment (SAFE) program that offers children and teenagers alternatives to gangs in the West Side neighborhood.

The program employs adults and teenagers from the community where nearly half the population is under age 19.

"The community's extremely young. The average age is 22. A lot of people don't see opportunities in Lawndale. They see bad



Tribune photo by Nancee E. Lewis

After five years at St. Agatha Parish, Rev. Matt Foley is leaving the West Side church for a post in Mexico. He says his experience at St. Agatha has helped prepare him to embrace another culture.

things. I see a lot of talent, and we're finding ways to put it to good use," Foley said.

Foley is learning Spanish for his next assignment at Santiago Apostol in Guerrero, Mexico. He believes the years at St. Agatha have prepared him to learn to embrace another culture.

"You go to the people. ... You have to know your communities to work in them," he said.

"It's not the great white father going into the continent of Africa or to Mexico and showing them what to do. Everybody knows what to do. We just have to come together and do it," he said.