

St. William Parish

Building A Parish Community

1958/2000

Written by Jean Kiepper

Dedicated to the many men and women who worked so hard to establish St. William Parish and to those who have kept the Holy Spirit alive and well through their generous use of the time and talent and especially to my husband, Jack, who has been my inspiration and guidance for so many years. -Jean

This is a story of the building of our church; but the building of the church community is much more interesting. The many stories that came out of my interviews with the people who were the builders were so much more. Stories like the one that Kay Sexton told of Father Picard, who came to dinner and took care of the kids while she prepared the meal. And of Monsignor Reagan, who loved leftovers and of Father Zwick, for whom she often cooked fried potatoes and coleslaw.

John Cyphert tells of Monsignor Reagan, who, when told of their son's accident, arrived at St. Elizabeth Hospital before they did. And of how Monsignor's mother asked them to stay at her home in Youngstown rather than travel back and forth to be with their hospitalized son.

These are only a few of the stories that brought out the close relationship that developed among the people who put their time, their money and their efforts into what we enjoy today, not only as a place to worship every Sunday, but as a place we can go to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and the friendship of those around us. As Father Picard told me, "WE ARE THE CHURCH...WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD."

In 1993 the eighth pastor of St. William Parish, Father Michael Smar, told the story of a young man who was looking for God. In his search he wandered into a beautiful cathedral looking for God in the beauty of the surroundings. Feeling the closeness of God, he closed his eyes to experience the feeling more deeply. A few moments later a woman tapped him on the shoulder asking him if he was hungry and offering to buy him a meal. The young man, realizing the love and concern of the woman for her fellow human beings, left the cathedral knowing that he had found God in more than one way.

This story can be related to the history of St. William Parish. In the beauty of the stained glass and the always changing decorations and through the love and concern of its parishioners we, too, experience the compassion of a loving God. With Jesus the risen Christ in the mosaic above the altar, we can listen to his teachings and hear the music that reveals his desire for us to come to him with our needs and concerns.

In 1958 these needs and concerns were uppermost in the minds of seven men who gathered together to ask God's blessing on their idea of establishing a Catholic Church in the Champion area. These men were Ray Logan, Leonard Kalman, John Cyphert, Herman Sekol, Jim Gradishar, Al Stasiak, and Joe Janus. Their meeting in the basement of the Logan home resulted in the decision to approach Bishop Emmet Walsh and Monsignor William Dunn, of St. Mary's, Warren, for whom St. William Parish was named. Both men approved the idea and permission was given to push ahead with their plans.

The diocese had already purchased 75 acres of farmland on Rt. 45 from the Difford family at the cost of approximately \$7,500. Now the serious work of building a church community began. Father Mark Zwick, from St. Mary's, Warren was named as the first Mission Priest and was soon joined by Father William Picard.

Crews of two and three people canvassed the townships of Champion, Southington, Bristolville, West Farmington, Parkman and North Bloomfield to see if there were enough Catholics who would support a new church. These crews (from the Legion of Mary) were made up of people who are, to this day, active members of St. William. They included Dorothy and Bill Sauer, Leonard and Lillian Kalman, Fran Stuber, Mary Zella and others. The process of canvassing, registering and getting information together took about a year and a half and in February of 1961, St. William Mission was born under the guidance of Monsignor Dunn. There were 450 families registered. Mass was held in the cafeteria of Champion Central School where, for the first time in the diocese of Youngstown, the Mass was celebrated with the priest facing the congregation. Chairs had to be set up and taken down each week and was done in record time by the faithful men and women of the new parish mission. Music was provided on a small keyboard played by Michael Kiepper Davies. A group of men took the role of ushers with John Waxminski as head usher. The coach's office served as the sacristy and the altar clothes,

candles, wine, vestments, etc. were carried each week from the St. William room of Ray Logan's home, where Marguerite Logan cared for them. The couple sat down at their kitchen table, where, along with Florence Cyphert and other volunteers, they counted the collections, made out bank deposits and kept records. At this time the collections averaged about \$1 per family.

Leonard Kalman had to clean his garage every week so that it could be used as a confessional. The first festival (a white elephant sale) was held in the front yard of Steve and Faye Millik on Oak Hill Dr. The Women's Guild and Men's Club were formed, with Marguerite Logan as the first president of the Woman's Guild and Herman Sekol elected president of the Men's Club.

By this time Hank Saxon and Don White (of Hunter, Howard and Saxon, Architects) were busy drawing plans for the new building that was going to be the gathering place for the faithful of St. William.

CCD classes were started on Saturday morning (at Central Elementary) with Dorothy Sauer acting as the first principal of the elementary grades. She had to first drive into Warren to pick up the Nuns (the Sisters of Notre Dame) who taught the classes. On Sunday morning the procedure was repeated, with Rose Spizak taking her turn in the capacity of high school principal. In May of 1962 the first class of 78 second graders made their first Holy Communion.

In September of 1962 construction began on the all-purpose building which consisted of classrooms, a kitchen and the sacristy. On May 31, 1963, Bishop Walsh established St. William Parish and appointed Father Joseph Werner as the first Pastor. A mobile home was purchased and moved onto the property to be used as the first rectory. The new building was dedicated in June but because the chairs had not arrived, Mass was once again held in the school. Mario Ricci built the Altar and the cross that hung about it, the wood coming from the land of Steve Millik. John Waxminski donated the statue of Christ that was put on the cross. The Altar and cross are still in our church today.

September of 1963 saw the people of St. William working together to put on the first festival that was to become a yearly event and continues today. Booths were fashioned from tubing that was donated by Van Huffel Tube and put together by Joe Gulosh, Norman Flavell, Leonard Kalman and others. The festival featured an ox roast that was prepared amid snow flurries. The profit for their efforts was approximately \$3500.00

The first child (Gary DeCapito) was baptized, the first wedding (Kathleen Loutzenhiser and Edward Fialko) was performed and the first funeral (Joseph Romanski) was held.

The year 1964 was the year that Msgr. Donald Reagan was appointed as the administrator. The Friday Night Family Party (Bingo) was started with Ed Howe at the helm. Bingo continued to be a source of financial support for many years and aided in the early retirement of the parish

debt. This year also saw the purchase of the house and acreage fronting on Rt. 45. The house, with some remodeling, became the present day rectory.

By 1965 Bishop James Malone had taken his place as Bishop of Youngstown and it was he who confirmed 54 students and 19 adults for the first time at St. William. In September he named Msgr. Donald Reagan as Pastor after he had held the position of administrator for a year and a half. Father Gerald Curran was appointed pastor in July of 1966. It was well known that Father Curran loved the children and would often take a group of them on interesting journeys. In his first year he decided that he would be the chairman of the festival. A few days before it was scheduled to open he called Frank Fordeley to take over because he was so ill. It was then discovered that nothing had been done. Frank organized a large group of parishioners who got the ball rolling and put on a profitable festival. This was the first year that fireworks and searchlights were used.

Pews were finally installed in 1966. Maxine Mears was hired as a part time secretary. She took over office duties that were previously done by volunteers. The first parish directory was published with the names and addresses of 494 families. By this time many organizations had been established, evidenced by the pictures in that book. It shows a picture of the first choir. Some of the longtime members who are pictured are Paul Hughes, Bill Nexbeth, Jim and Mary Harvey, Mary Wilson, Bob Nelson, Francis Spizak with Frank Krups the Director. Pictured also are commentators and Lectors, including Hank Saxon, Frank Fordeley and Tom Kiepper. The scouting program was given a big boost with the leadership of Herman Sekol. The Christian Family Movement (CFM) was lead by Jim and Mary Harvey. CCD was being taught by many lay teachers.

The Year of 1967 was a big sports year. The Green Giants sports teams, sponsored by the Men's club and headed up by Rudy Zakrajsek, competed in basketball and baseball. Trophies began to pile up so much that special cases were built to hold them all.

Years 1968, 1969 and 1970 were rather quiet, with three noteworthy events. Father John Murray was first appointed as administrator and then as pastor, Robert Kaylor became our first deacon and Sister Jean Desort was appointed as the first Director of Religious Education.

In November of 1971 festivities were held to celebrate the liquidation of the parish debt. This was made possible by many spirit filled people, who believed in what they were doing, working together to accomplish their goal.

By March of 1972 there were 573 families registered consisting of 2580 people. September saw the church being renovated; the altar was moved to the side, new carpeting was installed and stained glass windows and new chairs were added. The chairs were arranged in a semi-circle so that the people of God could be closer to the table of the Eucharist.

Camping at a Diocesan owned camp (Father Kane's camp) proved to be very successful and went on for several years. Many stories can be told of interesting things that happened there. Mass was held around the campfire or in the chapel that many of the children of the parish helped to clean and prepare.

In 1973 Bishop Malone named our fifth pastor. He was Father Thomas McCarthy and under his reign the renovations were completed. Father Jude Molnar and soon to be Father Tom Eisweirth, along with song leader Mary Kalish, joined the pastoral team and Lay Ministers of the Eucharist were installed.

January of 1975 ushered in the new Parish Council installation. Dennis Polatis was elected as the first president. We now have 618 families on the roster. The Green Giants continue their winning ways by taking the Church League softball championship. The men of the parish went to Cleveland in November to train for the "Christ Renews His Parish" weekend and were followed by the women, who trained in February of 1976. This program was a very spiritual time of renewal and continued to be successful for many years bringing more and more people to the desire to serve Christ through serving others. People were drawn together once again in a common bond of service. David Lucanski was hired as the custodian and Mary Anne Ughrin was hired to serve as organist.

July of 1977 brought Father Charles Crumbley as our next pastor. The Champion unit of the Knights of Columbus was formed in 1979. As the years pass by, there are more changes in the making. Sister Yvonne Horning, O.P. is appointed as Director of Religious Education and Father Timothy O'Neill is assigned to St. William for Sunday Liturgy celebrations. McCarthy and Associates, Inc. are hired to conduct a major fund raising campaign for a building fund to be used for a new worship area and social-recreational area.

This plan was well received by the parishioners and Father Crumbley and Hank Saxon met with the Bishop to discuss the plans in 1981.

The parish continues to grow as 1982 sees 792 families registered. The first R.C.I.A. class (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) was started under the direction of Teresa (Harmon) Bryan. New secretaries were hired to carry the office load. Carolyn Dudenhoeffer was hired for full time and Louise Crump as part-time secretaries. Al Leko, a second year theology student, spent 10 weeks at St. William as part of the first training of seminarians in parishes.

A groundbreaking ceremony for the new worship area was held on October 2, 1983 and the first Sunday Liturgy was celebrated in the new sanctuary on July 14-15 of 1984. The new folk group, formed under the direction of Dennis Durno, had been practicing since May and was ready to aid the congregation in their celebration of the Eucharist and the dedication of our new church building by Bishop Malone. Director Peigi Tracey and Chairperson Mary Saxon

worked to form the Person to Person ministry. Father Richard Murphy was assigned to St. William for Sunday Liturgy and the catering service was started with Rose and John Makosky in charge. They continue in that position today, by providing wedding receptions, graduation, anniversary and Christmas parties as well as overseeing our first Friday of the month and Lenten Fish Fries. The Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service continued to be well attended by the faithful of all denominations. Summer Church School, also begun as an ecumenical project, continued.

The Dean of Trumbull County, Father John Turk, installed Father Samuel DiCioccio as the seventh pastor of St. William in 1986. As always, a reception followed. The “Renew” program, which brought people together for an evening of prayer and study was begun under the direction of Diane Durno.

The Quilters Group, started in the home of Mary Pazitka under her direction, moved first to the third floor of the rectory and then to the church in 1987. This organization, now under the direction of Janice Ventling, has made many beautiful quilts every year which are raffled off at the festival, bringing in large amounts of money for use within the parish. The quilters have also made beautiful quilts to mark special occasions of the church.

Two new traditions were started in 1987. The first annual Winterfest Craft Show (whose proceeds go to make improvements to the festival) with Becky Bucco and Lorraine Timko as co-chairpersons was held and the first annual Giving Tree (used to help those children who are less fortunate) was set up in the church sanctuary. Also that year, Marcia Kane was hired as secretary of the parish and our first annual blood drive was held.

TWENTY FIVE YEARS – 1988 – A SPECIAL CELEBRATION

Our 25th Anniversary celebration began in June at our festival, with Don and Lorraine Timko as chairpersons leading the way. Special tee shirts were worn by all the workers. There was a special Liturgy in October, with Bishop Benedict Franzetta as celebrant and homilist. A dinner with dancing followed. On October 30 of that year, Father Michael Smar was formally installed as the eighth pastor of St. William.

The Children’s Christmas Liturgy tradition begun under the leadership of Sharon O’Donnell continued, with Linda Black leading the children in a depiction of the Nativity. Diane Durno led the Senior High Group. C.C.D. teachers went through a six week training session to prepare them for teaching duties.

A Small Group Core team began preparing to lead the congregation in forming their small group. This team consisted of Dave and Nancy Lucanski, Ted and Ann Chulik, Jim and Verna McNeill, Jerry Switter and Felicia Mooney. These meetings instilled a deeper sense of the Holy

Spirit in all who participated. Children's Liturgy of the Word was begun. The Proclaimers of the Word put in many hours of preparation to be able to inspire the children. Sharon Gargano, Betsy Overholt, and Joanne Hynes obviously did a good job as the children look forward to learning about the scriptures through the Liturgy of the Word.

1991 was the year that America was on the brink of war with Iraq and involved in the Desert Storm operation based in Saudi Arabia. Mass was celebrated every Monday evening for peace. God once again answered our prayer with a peaceful ending to the stand off.

Sister Yvonne celebrated 30 Years as a religious with a reception given by the Women's Guild. Our Mother Hubbard Cupboard which provides baskets of food for needy families in the area at Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas was established.

When Sister Yvonne left to pursue other duties, Sister Mary Cora Scrivan was hired, first as Pastoral Assistant and then as the Director of Religious Education. After 8 weeks of study the Caregivers program to aid those who need help due to illness was started, with 10 parishioners taking part and Sister Mary Cora leading the way.

Over the years, the work of the parish council committees has led to many great programs that have benefitted not only our parishioners, but the entire community as well. The Mamovan was often parked in our parking lot for the entire community to take advantage of its services and the Red Cross Blood Drive continues each year.

Our children's choir directed by Andrea Kochunas, made their debut at the Lessons and Carols. Margaret McCarthy uses her talent as discussion leader of the Adult Education classes. Once again we joined the churches of the area to be a part of the Easter Musical. The choirs each perform one song and the finale is a combined choir, which raises the roof of St. William with their voices uplifted in Praise of the Risen Christ. The Golden Agers, a social program for the every-enlarging group of Senior Citizens, was started with Mary Pytlik leading the way.

A signature quilt was made by the Quilters Group and presented to Fr. Mike in 1994 at the Mass and reception following which marked his 25th anniversary to the priesthood.

In 1996 the Christian Formation Committee of Parish Council (Theresa White, chairperson) led the parish in the Mission, presented by Father Wally Hyclak. The Mission was very well received by our children and our adults. From the Mission our Parish prayer and symbol were adopted.

George Schuster designed and built our new Baptismal font in memory of his wife, Evelyn. Our Memory Garden, which is a beautiful addition to our landscape, was started, thanks to the efforts of Barb Allen, Chris Cooney and Ann Sprague, and the work of Dan O'Shaughnessy.

Bishop Tobin was installed as our fourth Bishop in 1996. In 1997 a new sign was installed in the front of the church and Pat Maciejewski was hired as our Music Director and organist. Pat replaced organist Mary Ann Ugrin, who had given many years of services to our needs.

This brings us up to the year 1999. An Ad Hoc committee lead by Dan Plant is in the process of assessing our needs in regard to a new building and the maintenance requirements of the current facility. Father Mike celebrated 30 years as a priest. Bob and Karen Hardman served as Festival co-chairmen for the fifth year in a row. The Quilters Group presented a beautiful pillow quilt to Anton D'Mitrashkin, a child from Rechicsa, Belarus, Russia who was visiting at the home of Jim and Denise McNeill with their sons Patrick and Ryan. The Women's Guild purchased a Grand Piano to enhance our community celebration of the Mass.

As we head in the new Millennium, the Church is making plans for the time when there may not be enough priests to cover all the churches. A survey in 1991 showed that there were 196 priests in the Youngstown diocese in 1980 and predicts there will be only 98 priests in the year 2000. The commissioning of Lay Leaders of Prayer will help ease the shortage of priests. Their main duties are to lead the prayer at funeral homes, perform prayer services for Lenten and Advent devotions and to cover prayer services in the absence of the priest. St. William prepared for the shortage of priests by commissioning Sr. Mary Cora, Nancy Lucanski, John Makosky and Jack and Jean Kiepper to this ministry. We are very fortunate, also, to have as Deacon, Jim Harvey, who was ordained in 1995 and Bart DuBois, who will be ordained a Deacon in January of 2000. They will be able to take care of additional duties.

I want to apologize to the many people who were instrumental in the progress and success of St. William Parish who might not have been mentioned in this article. Some activities were not documented as to when they were begun and have been left out. Lay Ministry Workshops begun by Brian and Tina McCue, our Parish Picnic with Rudy Zakrajsek taking the lead, and the N.A.I.M. Club are just a few that come to mind. In addition, it has taken many people, working for the good of all, to keep the established programs alive for today's parishioners to enjoy. Each and every activity that centers on God and His house is important. Each and every person, working together, sharing their God given gifts, is helping to build and maintain His...and our...CHURCH COMMUNITY OF ST. WILLIAM PARISH.