

Celebration Of Dedication

March 6, 1977

ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH
Cypress Gardens, Florida





“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in the heavens.”

— Matthew 5:16

THE JOY OF SHARING ST. MATTHEW'S

The history of our parish is a short one, in terms of years, but as we endeavor to transcribe it briefly today, we realize that much has been accomplished in this short time.

The growth of the Catholic Community in the Cypress Gardens area of Winter Haven brought the announcement on August the 25th, 1973, from Bishop William Borders, of the appointment of Father William Keane, pastor of St. John Vianney Parrish, Orlando, to found the new parish to be known as St. Matthew's. Father Keane purchased a house located at 728 Lake Ned Road, to be the parish rectory, and this is still in use. St. Matthew's was especially fortunate to have five acres donated as a site for the new church, soon to be built. This property was made available through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Pope, Sr., of Cypress Gardens. Sunday Masses were held in three different locations: Holy Cross Episcopal Church, Cypress Gardens Sheraton and the Ranch House Motel. These locations were made available to us gratuitously, and St. Matthew's will always be supremely grateful to Father Rayburn of Holy Cross, to Dave Trueblood of the Ranch House and to the Management of the Cypress Gardens Sheraton.

On February 23, 1974, Father Gerard Granahan, Associate Pastor of Divine Mercy Parish, Merritt Island, was appointed Pastor of St. Matthew's, to replace the transferred Father Keane. Father Keane endeared himself to the people of St. Matthew's in the difficult work that he accomplished so successfully, in founding the parish.

On the completion of our parish census, a campaign was launched under the general chairmanship of Tito Sebastiani, to solicit pledges toward the building of a new church. Over 90 volunteers spearheaded a pledge drive which was an overwhelming success. Less than two hundred families pledged more than \$200,000 to be paid in a three year period. A truly sacrificial response.





On a bleak, cold December day, Bishop Thomas Grady was welcomed to our parish for the first time, as he turned the first shovel of dirt for the official groundbreaking ceremony. From then on, St. Matthew's parishioners eager-

ly watched the transformation of the new church site, and the coming into being of the beautiful structure, that they had waited so long to see. And now, on March the 6th, 1977, all our hopes and endeavors will be fulfilled, when

Bishop Thomas J. Grady, pastor of the Orlando Diocese, will visit the parish for a second time to officially dedicate St. Matthew's Church.

Our joy is a shared joy. Our prayer today is that God will bless the homes and the lives of our Founding Families, and that the memories of our struggles and successes, which helped bind us together in Your Spirit, will always be engraved within our hearts, as indeed they must be in the very walls of this new church, — Your dwelling place among us.

When this joyful occasion has ended and we settle down to parish life, let us not forget the many people who so generously gave of their time and talents to the building of our church. Without this extraordinary generosity, what we enjoy today may not have been so enjoyable.



March 6, 1977



My dear Parishioners,

At our Mass of Dedication today, the vestments which Bishop Grady will be wearing, were presented to St. Matthew's in memory of a man named Matthew.

Matthew Smith lived in Winter Haven, when the nearest Catholic Church was in Tampa. His Sunday would begin at 3:00 a.m., when he would walk five miles to Auburndale, and catch a train to attend Mass in Tampa. Today, along with our neighbors in St. Joseph's Parish, we endeavor to serve the ever-growing Catholic population of Winter Haven. I am sure that Matthew Smith must share in the great joy that is ours today, as we join with Bishop Grady in the dedication of our new church, under the patronage of St. Matthew.

When we first set out to build our parish, I think we felt a bit like St. Paul when he remarked, "we did not choose the work; the work has chosen us." The dedication of our new church today is a memorable day for the members of St. Matthew Parish, friends of other Faiths and non-parishioners who shared in at-

taining the fulfillment of a three year dream. We are grateful today, for the spirit of sacrifice and service which have been the foundation of our efforts. Our new church is God's house in our midst. God lives here in this building. It will be filled in a special way with His presence. It has been our hope that this new church would truly be a worthy dwelling place of the Lord.

Today, let us also rededicate ourselves to each other, that we will continue to share the gifts of love, friendship, hospitality and time, and that we will share the oneness which comes to those who respond to the fact of God's presence. St. Matthew's is a parish community blessed with wonderful people, a blessedness that seems to stem from the Gospel promise that it is more blessed to give than to receive. You have been a wonderfully responsive people, dedicated to your God and to each other. On this, the dedication day of our new church, let us resolve and strive never to outgrow our need to be a servant people.

We are sincerely grateful to Bishop Thomas Grady for being with us, and dedicating our new church.

To the priests, sisters and laity who have come to share our joy, a special thank-you.

May God bless you all, and reward you for your efforts.

Sincerely yours,

F. Gerard Granahan

Father Gerard Granahan,
Pastor