

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES PARISH: A HISTORICAL SKETCH

Fonts of Memory

The history the Catholic community of the Salisbury area as an independent parish under the title of St. Francis de Sales begins in April of 1910 with the arrival of the first resident pastor, Father Louis Jacquier, O.S.F.S. The life of our community, however, reaches back at least fifty years earlier. We owe most of what we know of those very early years to a typed manuscript dating from 1950, found in the parish files. It is thought to have been written by Louise White (1902-2004), nee Nock, the wife of Hubert Ruark White who was a prominent local contractor for many years. Until age began taking its toll in the late 1990s, Mrs. White was fond of recounting her childhood memory of visits by priests in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Salisbury *Daily Times* of January 30, 1999, carried an account by Mrs. White of the origins of our parish community. Whether because of misunderstandings by the newspaper or because of Mrs. White's advanced age at the time of writing, that account is, regrettably, not a trustworthy source of information.

Some additional resources consulted are:

- *Historic Salisbury Updated* by Charles J. Truitt, published by Historical Books, Inc., Salisbury, 1982;
- *The Postcard History Series: Salisbury, Maryland* by John E. Jacob, published by Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, S.C., 1998;
- *Catholic Priests of the Diocese of Wilmington* by Rev. Thomas J. Peterman, published by William T. Cooke Publishing, Devon, Pa., 2000;
- *Catholics in Early U.S. Delmarva* by Rev. Thomas J. Peterman, published by William T. Cooke Publishing, Devon, Pa., 2006;
- *View from the Archives, Diocese of Wilmington* by John J. Prentzel, 1980;
- *Images of America: The Diocese of Wilmington* by Jim Parks, published by Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, S.C., 2001;
- Early sacramental records of St. Francis de Sales parish;
- A 1963 one-page "History of the Guilds of St. Francis de Sales Parish" by Louise White, preserved and graciously given to the parish archives with several other valuable original documents by long-time parishioner Marge Stewart.
- A historical sketch contained in the 2004 parish pictorial directory;
- Newspaper clippings relating to the dedication of the present church, as well as many from the mid-1970s, mostly obituaries of Monsignor Stout and pieces relating to the Jackson Mansion controversy, kept in the parish files;
- Innumerable conversations over three decades of friendship with long-time parishioners, as well as personal experiences.

The Early Days: 1860-1890

Before the railroad from Philadelphia and Wilmington came to Salisbury in 1860, the town's location at the head of navigation on the Wicomico River governed its development, and it was entirely oriented to the Chesapeake Bay. A key factor in the establishment of our Diocese of Wilmington in 1868 was the extension of rail service to Crisfield in 1866, with the immediate prospect of further extension to the Pocomoke River opposite what is now Pocomoke City. A branch eastward to the developing Ocean City resort was also envisioned. The new diocese comprised the fourteen counties of the Delmarva Peninsula. Previously the nine Maryland counties had belonged to the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the three Delaware counties to the Diocese of Philadelphia, and the two Virginia counties to the Diocese of Richmond. (A nationwide reorganization of dioceses in 1974 returned the Virginia counties to the Diocese of Richmond.)

What may be the first documentary evidence of a Catholic community in Salisbury appeared in a letter cited in the manuscript referenced above, from Bishop Alfred Curtis, Ordinary of the Diocese of Wilmington from 1886 to 1896, to Father (later Monsignor) Edward Mickle, a pioneer Catholic missionary of southern Delmarva. Bishop Curtis is said to have stated that in the spring of 1860 Archbishop Martin John Spalding of Baltimore, responding to complaints of visitors to the Eastern Shore about pastoral neglect of the region, sent a Redemptorist priest, whose name Bishop Curtis does not mention, to investigate. The priest found a ready welcome and lodging at the hotel of a Catholic resident of Salisbury named John Tracy. Mr. Tracy arranged for the priest to preach in a public hall the next day, and the day after that Mr. Tracy's daughter Katie made her First Communion. At that time only two or three Catholic families were known to live in the Salisbury area.

Father Thomas J. Peterman, on pages 534 and 535 of his *Catholics in Early U.S. Delmarva* and related footnotes, states that Redemptorist Father Joseph Henning reported to Archbishop Spalding in a letter from Salisbury dated June 16, 1865, on his mission to reconnoiter the state of Catholicism on the Lower Eastern Shore. Baptisms by Father Henning are documented in Snow Hill on June 18 of that year, and in Princess Anne on June 20. He may have been attending descendants of Acadian Catholics exiled from Canada in 1755, who had settled in present-day Worcester and Somerset Counties eight or nine decades before his visit.

In 1867, the year that Salisbury became the seat of the newly formed Wicomico County, John Tracy deeded to the Archdiocese a parcel of land behind his hotel, on Church Street about two-thirds of the way from St. Peter's Episcopal Church to the Wicomico River. On it stood a small, unpretentious frame building he had built at his own expense and largely with his own labor, to serve as a chapel. In September of the following year Bishop Thomas Becker, in his first recorded act as first Ordinary of the new Diocese of Wilmington, officiated at its dedication under the title of St. Mary. The Salisbury congregation was made a mission of Holy Cross Parish in Dover, Delaware, and remained so until 1890. The site of that first church now lies under Business Route 50 or the adjacent parking area to the south of it, across High Street from the west end of the Parsons Home property.

In 1878 an overheated heating stove caused a fire that destroyed the original structure. Katie Tracy, our community's first recorded First Communicant, is said to have saved the Blessed Sacrament from the flames at considerable risk to herself. The chapel been insured for its full value and was promptly rebuilt on the same spot. In 1886 lightning started a fire that

destroyed nearly the entire town of Salisbury, including the second St. Mary's Chapel, from which Katie Tracy once again saved the Blessed Sacrament. After that catastrophe the Tracy family, long a mainstay of the Catholic community, moved back to Philadelphia. For the next six years the remaining Catholics celebrated the Eucharist and other Sacraments in their homes when priests came from Dover on monthly or bi-monthly visits. Bishop Curtis, a Somerset County native who surely had a special feeling for the Lower Shore, came frequently to attend the Catholics of Salisbury himself, extending his stay when he could in order to serve outlying mission stations at Snow Hill, Westover and Crisfield. The congregation was often fewer than half a dozen people.

Monsignor Mickle: 1890-1910

In 1884 the railroad reached Cape Charles, Virginia, near the southern extremity of the Delmarva Peninsula, and the town became the key transfer point in a relatively rapid rail link from northern cities to Norfolk via a short steamboat trip across the Chesapeake Bay. Rapid development followed, and shortly after his accession to the See of Wilmington in 1886 Bishop Curtis began to concern himself about the erection of a Catholic church here. In 1890 he appointed Father (later Monsignor) Edward G. Mickle, newly ordained at age 32, as the first resident pastor of the Cape Charles parish, which consisted of the Virginia Eastern Shore counties of Accomack and Northampton and the Maryland counties of Somerset, Worcester and our own Wicomico. In constant travel by rail, on horseback, or on a bicycle, Father Mickle gave singularly zealous and effective missionary service until his death forty years later, refusing every offer of promotion or preferment.

Among many other projects throughout his huge mission field Father Mickle saw to the construction of a new chapel in Salisbury, 95 miles north of his base in Cape Charles, in 1892. The establishment in the previous year of a relatively direct rail and steamer connection to Baltimore through Vienna, Hurlock, Easton and a transfer point at the bayside town of Claiborne in Talbot County was undoubtedly fostering growth and diversity in the population of the Salisbury area at that time.

Pursuant to an agreement he had negotiated with Rome as a condition of accepting his appointment, Bishop Curtis resigned the See of Wilmington in 1896 after ten years in office, and took up service in Baltimore as Auxiliary to Cardinal Gibbons. Bishop John J. Monaghan succeeded Bishop Curtis the following year and served our Diocese until 1925. In 1906 Bishop Monaghan invited Bishop Curtis, then 75 years old, to officiate at the dedication of St. Elizabeth Church at Westover. It was still one of Father Mickle's extensive chain of missions and would remain the sole institutional presence of the Catholic Church in Bishop Curtis's native county of Somerset for many years to come.

In 1903 Bishop Monaghan had invited the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales (O.S.F.S.) to serve in the Diocese of Wilmington, only 28 years after Father Louis Brisson had founded the congregation in France. In 1907 Father Louis Jacquier of the Oblate community began to serve the Salisbury mission, alternating with Father Mickle who continued the long train ride up from Cape Charles as he had each month for seventeen years. By that time about fifteen or twenty persons were attending Mass and other services. The 1950 manuscript gives a vivid picture of some challenges of church life in Salisbury as the twentieth century began, perhaps from living memory:

For Benediction, the lamps had to be attended to and to light them required some acrobatic feat. You had to stand astride of two pews and try to keep a precarious balance. The rules of liturgy were not always strictly obeyed in some instances.... There was no choir or organist. To obviate this, a little organ was placed in the sanctuary and after the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, the celebrant left his cope in the chair and cumulated the functions of choir and organist.

The Oblates and Father Dougherty: 1910-1938

In the fall of 1909 Bishop Monaghan undertook negotiations, working clandestinely through a layman in Wilmington for fear of local opposition, for the purchase of a church building and social hall on the corner of Bond and Calvert Streets, together with an adjoining house that had come on the market at the same time. The church and hall had been the home of the Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, South, until they built and occupied the stone structure that we know today as Trinity United Methodist Church, at the northwest corner of Division St. and Business Route 50. In the intervening years the facility was occupied by a commercial training institute known as the Eastern Shore College. The purchase was concluded in January 1910 and the church and house were ready for use by Holy Week in April of that year, when Father Jacquier and Father J. B. Borel, O.S.F.S., took up residence. The newly acquired church was dedicated for Catholic worship under the title of St. Francis de Sales. According to the manuscript history the church would hold about two hundred people, far more than the usual Sunday congregation at the time, so when the weather turned cold in the early years, services were held in the social hall.

The “Bond Street church”, as many of our long-time parishioners fondly refer to it, served our community for more than fifty-four years, until our present church was built in 1964. The eighteen-year-old building it replaced was sold and put to other uses and was still standing in 1950. Bond Street was obliterated in urban renewal projects of the 1960s, as was the portion of Calvert Street at which the old church stood. Calvert Street was about where the walkway between the old county courthouse and the city administrative building runs east from Division Street, while the walkway between the rear of the administrative building and the newest section of the courthouse approximates the line of Bond Street; so, the southwest corner of the church would have been more or less just inside the southwest corner of the present courthouse.

At the time of its establishment St. Francis de Sales parish extended from Seaford, Delaware to the Virginia line and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Nanticoke River and Crisfield. Its clergy were responsible for the mission churches of St. Mary Star of the Sea in Ocean City, St. Elizabeth in Westover and St. Agnes in Snow Hill. Bishop Curtis had established St. Agnes around 1890 but it never had enough congregants to maintain it properly and eventually was sold to become the present-day Purnell Museum. In addition, the priests journeyed to Crisfield, where a lot had been purchased in hopes of building a church, to officiate in borrowed homes or rented halls. Their work got a mixed reception on the Lower Shore, as deep-seated anti-Catholic prejudice contended with an ingrained spirit of hospitality and an optimistic progressive spirit shared by many, especially through the “roaring 20s.”

When the Great War in Europe broke out in 1914, it seemed remote enough from Salisbury. However, the French Republic did not exempt clergy from its military draft, so in that year Father Jacquier received the call to the colors of his native country. While Father Jacquier

tended to wounded and sick soldiers in France, Father Walter Knight, O.S.F.S., became the second resident pastor of our parish. Nine years later Father Knight was transferred to serve as rector of the Oblate house of studies at Catholic University in Washington and Father F. S. Mahoney, O.S.F.S., became Pastor until 1927 when the Oblates turned the parish over to the Diocese.

Bishop Edmond J. Fitzmaurice, who had become Ordinary of the Diocese two years earlier, appointed Father Edward A. Dougherty to St. Francis de Sales. Under the care of the Oblates the identified Catholic community in the Salisbury area had grown from around fifteen people to well over a hundred. By 1938, when Father Dougherty was transferred to St. Helena's in suburban Wilmington, that number had doubled. Despite the economic ravages of the Great Depression, the parish buildings had been refinished and furnished with modern conveniences. While priests of the Oblate, Salvatorian, Norbertine and Dominican religious orders helped meet the spiritual needs of the scattered Catholic population of the Lower Shore with weekend ministry, Father Dougherty bore alone the burden of eleven years of their day-to-day pastoral care.

Monsignor Stout: 1938-1967

The Catholic community on the Lower Shore entered upon a new era on August 18, 1938, when Father Eugene Travers Stout came to Salisbury as the fifth Pastor of St. Francis de Sales. Born in 1895 in West Virginia, he was brought up in the Baptist tradition of his family but became a Catholic at age 21 while serving in the U. S. Army. Leaving the Army, he entered the Maryknoll missionary society and was ordained priest in June of 1926. After teaching for two years at the Maryknoll seminary he decided that his call was to parish work. Bishop Fitzmaurice accepted him as a priest of the Diocese of Wilmington and he served in parish and diocesan ministries in the Wilmington area for ten years before coming to Salisbury. Father Eugene T. Biggins became the first of dozens of diocesan priests who have assisted Father (later Monsignor) Stout and the six pastors who have succeeded him. Monsignor Stout was a skilled musician, and the role of officiating many significant parish events was left to others while he played the organ and directed a choir, and often enough a small orchestra, in the gallery.

Monsignor Stout's ministry was nothing if not energetic. At Delmar he instituted a weekly Mass in a rented building in the fall of 1939 to serve a community consisting largely of Italian-American railroad workers and farmers. The following year saw the purchase of a property at Chestnut Street and Bi-State Boulevard for a future church. In 1945 the establishment of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Seaford reduced the area of pastoral responsibility as the northern boundary of the parish moved south roughly to the line of Delaware highway 24, but the need in the Delmar area still existed. World War II impeded construction of the projected facility there, but on May 22, 1949, Bishop Fitzmaurice dedicated the Church of the Holy Redeemer, built with substantial help from the Catholic Church Extension Society and many friends of Monsignor Stout and the Catholic community.

The war created a demand for service to an Army post near Westover, and later to a camp for German prisoners of war there. That facility became a migrant labor camp in later years, and still exists. Our parish began providing Catholic services at the Pocomoke Armory in 1943, at first to serve personnel from the Naval Air Station at Chincoteague but continuing after the war to serve an increasing population in the Pocomoke City area. The Church of the Holy Name of

Jesus on the Old Virginia Road was built in 1951 and the mission became an independent parish the following year, encompassing the western part of Worcester County, and all of Somerset County including the mission church of St. Elizabeth at Westover. Mass at Crisfield had been discontinued in Father Dougherty's time, with the people journeying to Westover for services. In 1946, however, Sunday Mass was initiated once again in the Armory there. In 1950 negotiations were in progress for a suitable piece of land, the plot purchased in Bishop Curtis's time being considered poorly located and too small. Nothing ever came of that, however, and services at Crisfield were eventually discontinued once again.

The population of Ocean City, both seasonal and year-round, increased steadily. Monsignor Stout saw to the expansion of the sixty-year-old St. Mary Star of the Sea Church shortly after his arrival in 1938, and to its steady improvement over several following years. In 1949 it became necessary to rent the high school auditorium to accommodate the increasing summer crowds at Sunday Mass. By 1950 a priest assigned to Salisbury was living at St. Mary Star of the Sea throughout the year. In 1954 the Church of the Holy Savior at 17th Street and Philadelphia Avenue was completed. Ocean City remained a mission of Salisbury until 1967. Monsignor Stout was never shy about reminding his summer parishioners there that their contributions were supporting a year-round missionary effort on the Lower Shore.

Shortly before the outbreak of World War II Monsignor Stout acquired a property at 500 Camden Avenue in Salisbury consisting of the imposing former residence of Congressman William H. Jackson, and seven acres of land. Shortly thereafter an adjoining three-acre lot was purchased, all with the thought of establishing a parish school on the site. Once the war began, however, building became impossible, so the parish gave the use of the house to the USO as a social center for military personnel. Shortly after it was turned back to the parish at the end of the war, fire gutted the unoccupied house and it was deemed best to tear down what remained of it. A brick stable at the rear of the property was transformed into a parish hall, since several expansions of the Bond Street church had made use of that location difficult for parish social events. Finally on June 20, 1949, ground was broken for St. Francis de Sales Catholic School, which opened on September 6 of the following year with 106 students in grades one through six in the care of four Sisters of Mercy. The building was expanded to its present size in 1951.

The decade of the 1950s was a time of prosperity and growth for the Catholic Church in most parts of our country, and our parish was no exception. Father Stout had been named a monsignor on October 17, 1949. In 1952 the Chesapeake Bay Bridge provided the first direct land link from the Eastern Shore to the rest of Maryland, furthering growth and diversity. That same year saw the St. Francis de Sales Knights of Columbus Council #3489 chartered on March 2 in the St. Francis de Sales School hall. They continued meeting there until they built the Council home on Emerson Avenue in 1957. A small Ukrainian Catholic community settled in eastern Wicomico County and a Ukrainian Rite priest began coming once a month to celebrate the Divine Liturgy with them, a service that would last for more than three decades.

In the first half of the twentieth century most parishes including our own had a Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary that functioned as the means for women to become involved in the work of the Church. For whatever reason, by the late 1950s our Sodality was perceived as dying away. A brief history of the guilds written by Louise White in 1983 describes their beginning:

About 25 years ago [around 1958], Mrs. John Morris, a convert to Catholicism, saw the need in St. Francis de Sales for some type of religious group which would bring our

church women together. Mrs. Morris approached Monsignor Stout, who was very enthusiastic about the idea, and with his permission and cooperation, assembled four other women - Mrs. Hugh McLaughlin, Mrs. W.W. Perry, (now living in Baltimore), Mrs. J. Marshall Stewart and Mrs. Hubert White. These women laid out plans and instituted a set of by-laws for operation of Guilds. Each Guild chose a name and was given the by-laws as guidelines. There was, in addition, an executive planning committee to meet at least three times a year to make plans and fulfill requests for the yearly activities of the Guilds.

In the beginning, each Guild had a small membership which grew as women began to understand their camaraderie [*sic*] and function. ... The number of women in each group varies, and as many as eighteen can be counted in one or two of them. One of these Guilds is a Delmar group.

These groups are called upon to be hostesses for many social functions held throughout the year and are very successful with the annual Bazaar. They each take turns managing the Carriage House (thrift shop) holding bake sales and visiting the newcomers in the parish. The Joseph House is a special project for at least one of these groups. In addition, they participate in other church activities during the year. All in all, since the event of these Guilds, much has been accomplished and they continue to function as a great asset to St. Francis de Sales parish.

At their peak there were six guilds: St Anthony, St. Francis de Sales, Our Lady of the Rosary, Holy Redeemer, Sister Mary Clare, and St. Mary Martha. Each guild would meet monthly in a member's home. They prayed together, occasionally welcomed guest speakers, hosted parish social gatherings, were key players in an annual parish bazaar, and had a welcoming program for new parishioners. The last couple of decades have seen a dramatic diminishment in the guilds. The Sister Mary Clare and St. Mary Martha guilds have a few surviving members and continue to be responsible for the Carriage House used-clothing outreach to our less-well-off neighbors, but the others have died away entirely. Changing patterns of employment and family life often made it difficult for many women to socialize and participate in the work of the parish beyond the involvement of their children in the parish school or religious education programs. The movement toward collaboration and co-responsibility for the life and work of the parish community, through groups more directly integrated into our organizational structures, is surely another factor. Still, we must never forget the debt of gratitude we owe these valiant women for the half-century of hard and effective work they have given to promote the life and mission of our parish community.

Through the 1950s Sisters of Mercy continued their faithful ministry at St. Francis de Sales School, augmenting the faculty with an ever-increasing number of lay teachers beginning with the legendary Mrs. Gene McGuirk. The number of parishioners continued to increase to the point where the Bond Street church could no longer be expanded to accommodate them, and in 1958 a building committee was formed to plan and execute a new church building. In 1960, to bring the parish clergy nearer the parish school and projected new church, the parish purchased the mansion at the corner of Camden Avenue and Wicomico Street adjoining the school property, to serve as the rectory. It had for many years been the home of William Purnell Jackson, son of Congressman William H. Jackson. William P. Jackson had served as U.S. Senator on an interim appointment from 1912 to 1914 and was prominent for decades in national Republican politics.

The high point of Monsignor Stout's service certainly had to be the construction and dedication of our magnificent worship space. The land on which it stands was a gift of John E. Morris, whose family remains prominent in our parish life to this day. Ground was broken in 1963 and the church was dedicated by Bishop Michael Hyle on May 31, 1964. Preaching at the occasion was the Very Rev. Canon J. Francis Tucker, O.S.F.S., who is said to have preached the first parish mission at the Bond Street church, decades earlier. Sadly, Mr. Morris had passed away the week before, and his funeral was the first to be held in the church he had done so much to make a reality.

In 1967 it was decided to establish the Ocean City churches as a separate parish. Our parish then took on the geographical form it has had for the last four decades: an area of more than 500 square miles consisting of Wicomico County plus the southwest corner of Sussex County, Delaware, roughly defined by highway 24 east from the state line to its intersection with highway 26, and highway 26 south from there to the state line north of Pittsville. Monsignor Stout's long service to St. Francis de Sales Parish came to an end on June 9 of that year when he was named the first resident Pastor of the new Ocean City parish.

A Time of Growth: 1967 to the present

Many were the adjustments to be made after Monsignor Stout left us. Vatican II, the twentieth Ecumenical Council in the almost 2000-year history of our Church, called for updating and renewal of a scope far beyond what most Catholics in this country, clerical and lay, had expected, or had even realized were necessary. Locally there were other, more material adjustments to be made as well. Our parish had long been accustomed to the income produced by summer visitors to the Ocean City churches, as well frequent assists by Monsignor Stout's many friends outside the Catholic community. Father John Farrington, who succeeded Monsignor Stout as Pastor from 1967 to 1969, and Father Paul Fink who served one year in 1969 and 1970, faced major challenges in maintaining both essential parish programs and the extensive physical plant. The high-maintenance mansion that housed the parish rectory and office stood at the end of the line when it came to upkeep and repairs, and serious deterioration soon set in.

Father Alex Gorski, who had served as associate pastor for about fifteen months from October 1944 until January 1946, returned to become the eighth Pastor of St. Francis de Sales in June of 1970. He quietly began planning to replace the old Jackson mansion with a more manageable rectory facility. As word of these plans began to spread, an increasingly passionate public controversy arose around the prospective destruction of what some deemed the finest Victorian structure in Salisbury, whose association with Senator Jackson clothed it with historical significance as well. Construction of the new facility, whose front porch came within ten feet of the rear of the old mansion, began in January 1976 amid the height of the civic storm. In April 1976 the parish offered the old mansion at \$1.00 to anyone who would move it elsewhere, but the couple who had expressed interest in doing that move, with the backing of the local Historical Society, deemed that the offer carried unacceptable conditions and it was declined.

Father Gorski became Pastor of St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish in Wilmington in June 1976 and was succeeded by Father William E. Irwin. The exterior and floors of the new rectory with its adjoining chapel were finished at that point and Father Irwin saw the project to its completion.

in October. The old rectory was brought down on November 2, 1976, much to the regret of many. Honest differences about how well that matter was handled, still sometimes expressed in bitter feelings, will probably exist until the end of time.

Amid all this Monsignor Stout retired from the care of the Ocean City parish in 1974 because of serious health problems, returning to lead a quiet life in Salisbury in a little house on Route 50 west of downtown. He died at Peninsula Regional Medical Center on February 23, 1977 and was buried in his native West Virginia.

With distraction of the rectory controversy behind him, Father Irwin began putting his considerable organizational skills and pastoral insight, honed on several years of supervising catechetical ministry for our diocese, into making the vision of Vatican II real in our parish. The employment of Carroll O'Donnell as our first professional director of religious education in 1978 signaled a serious effort to bring our parish religious education program, which was even then responsible for the Christian formation of more than half of our children and nearly all our high-school youth, up to contemporary standards. Also in 1978, a modular building was erected just to the west of the school to serve as a classroom. For about twenty-five years it served our kindergarten students, and then our older students until June 2006. The building was recently moved to the south side of the St. Francis de Sales church parking lot to serve as a meeting facility, and renamed the "Mercy House" to honor the long service of the Sisters of Mercy in our parish community.

In the late 1970s the parish engaged Linus Ellis as our first full-time director of music, and installed the Allen organ still in use. The music ministry that eventually became known as One Spirit began to flourish, and still accompanies the 9:00 a.m. Mass each Sunday. Many people took ownership of their faith through the Cursillo and Marriage Encounter movements. A growing Filipino community also began to make its mark on parish life.

No history of our parish would be complete without a word about Sister Mary Elizabeth Gintling and the Little Sisters of Jesus and Mary. In Baltimore in the 1960s Mae Gintling, as she was then known, had founded the Joseph House as an outreach to the poor. A 1972 conversation with Mother Teresa of Calcutta convinced her that she should gather a religious community to give stability to her outreach, so she and a companion, Sister Pat Guidera, founded the Little Sisters of Jesus and Mary in 1974. They came to the Eastern Shore because they had reached the conclusion that there were others to care for the poor of Baltimore, while virtually no one was doing so here at that time. The two-sister community took up residence in a mobile home in West Ocean City. In 1978 they came to Salisbury and other sisters began to gather around them. Within two years the Little Sisters opened the local Joseph House outreach, which has only increased and multiplied since, involving hundreds of volunteers including a great many of our parishioners. Sister Mary Elizabeth died on October 27, 2004. Although she had formally resigned leadership responsibilities a year or so before, she was in charge to the end; she and the other Sisters had spent the evening before her death planning a gala observance of her 90th birthday, two months away, as a fund-raising opportunity. The entire city took note of her passing, even getting the Route 50 drawbridge raised to assure safe passage of her funeral cortege from our church to her resting place in Parsons Cemetery.

As was the case everywhere in the 1970s, the number of religious sisters available for schoolwork dramatically diminished. The parish purchased the house right behind St. Francis de Sales church as a home for the two Sisters of Mercy who remained to us. The indomitable Sister

Maura McCartan, R.S.M., who has served our parish community since 1977 as school principal, pastoral associate and spiritual director, accompanied by Sister Agnes Oman, an Irish Brigittine Sister who served as associate diocesan director of Hispanic Ministry. The former convent facility atop the original school structure facing Camden Ave. was converted to educational use.

When Father Irwin had completed the ten-year term standard at that time, in June of 1986, he was transferred to Holy Family Parish in Newark, Delaware. Father Charles L. Brown III succeeded him. In his time a social hall was built at Holy Redeemer in Delmar, both churches were made accessible to those with mobility impairments, and major improvements were made to the St. Francis de Sales parish hall in the basement of the church building. The present roof of the school building was constructed over the original flat one, ending years of leaks.

Organized ministry with the influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants began in 1992 with Mass celebrated by visiting clergy in the community room of the Leonard Apartments. The following year a weekly Saturday evening Mass in Spanish was instituted in the chapel attached to the rectory building and two years later moved to St. Francis de Sales church. Also, in 1992 we undertook a sister-parish relationship with the parish of Nuestra Señora de La Merced (Our Lady of Mercy) in Managua, Nicaragua. The ongoing work of our Sister Parish committee fosters our mutual support in prayer and good works, as well as pastoral visits back and forth in alternate years, and our parishioners give generously to a monthly collection for the work of the La Merced parish community.

In Father Brown's time the parish employed Joe Ferrara as our first Youth Minister, and engaged a part-time coordinator for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process, Stephanie Zanich. In 1995 the parish purchased the house nearest the rectory on Wicomico Street for the use of the Christian formation staff. It has recently been renamed the Monsignor Stout House. The apartments behind the rectory were also acquired that year. One of the three units was occupied by one of the priests and another by "La Casita", a pastoral center for Spanish-speaking people. The structure was renovated into three apartments over a six-year period and was completed in 2015, with the priests now residents. The building we know as the Carriage House came with the apartments, and the purchase did much to make our property one coherent campus.

Ye Olde Carriage House, a thrift store that has served the community since 1958, is staffed by volunteers from the parish and the St. Mary Martha and the Sister Mary Claire Guilds. In 2013 a second building was erected next to the existing building to provide a space for sorting and organizing donations as well as a maintenance shop. The store continues to grow in popularity and staffing.

At the end of his second six-year term in June of 1998 Father Brown was transferred to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Bear, Delaware. Father Edward M. Aigner, Jr., succeeded him, continuing a long ministry on the Lower Eastern Shore that began in 1982 when he became Pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Pocomoke City and had continued through his appointment in 1990 as Chaplain at the state prison near Westover. Just at the time of Father Aigner's appointment the last house on our side of Wicomico Street came on the market and the parish acquired it as his residence. In addition to the Director of Religious Education and Youth Minister already on board, the parish established the position of Director of Adult Faith Formation to facilitate ongoing religious education of adult parishioners as well as the process of

Christian Initiation for adults seeking to join the Catholic Church. Michele Harris was the first director, having served the parish in other educational ministries.

The time came to build the long-projected parish center with a large assembly and athletic space equipped with a proper kitchen, offices for the Christian formation staff, and permanent classrooms to house the classes that were meeting in the portable facilities in the schoolyard. Several years of planning and two fund raising campaigns made the construction possible. With a large naming donation by the Philip and Barbara Long family, the first phase was completed and dedicated by Bishop Saltarelli in 2009.

The 100th anniversary of St. Francis de Sales parish, and the 150th of our life as an identified Catholic community, we began our Centennial celebration by placing a plaque in the spot of our first church that was located on Bond Street. The street no longer exists and has been replaced with a courthouse. The celebration continued with prayer, proclamations, a black-tie event and our first ever carnival, all chaired and coordinated by our associate pastor, Fr. Raymond Weisman.

Fr. Aigner retired in 2014 and Fr. Christopher LaBarge, who was assigned as our associate pastor in 2009, was given the responsibility of pastor, having already served as pastor in Marydel at Immaculate Conception 1995-2007 and Ocean City at St. Luke's/St. Andrew's in 2007-2008.

The second capital campaign that provided the funds to complete the parish center was overseen by Fr. Aigner with Fr. LaBarge completing the planning and opening of the second phase of the parish center that included classrooms and offices. Through the generosity of many in the parish, the second phase was opened in 2015.

Our parish community, having its first celebration with about 200 people on Easter Sunday of 1910, has grown into a parish of 2,314 families. Our parish celebrates our Eucharistic Liturgies in English, Spanish, Korean and Malayalam. The diversity of our community heralds from Filipeans, Latin America, Korea, India and Africa. We are two churches, many cultures, one in faith.

For all that has been, Thanks.
For all that will be, Yes.

Rev. Michael Burton Roark
June, 2007
Updated by Michele Harris
February 27, 2017