

**ST. PAUL, ROME**  
**FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY**  
**OCTOBER 26, 2008**

On December 22, 1931 Bishop Daniel Curley announced that the diocese had purchased an entire city block, 20 building lots, in a new section north of Rome known as The Huntington Subdivision. The seller was Jeremiah Carroll. This property would be the site for a new church, rectory and school. At that time Rome already had four churches and three schools.

### **That was 1931!**

Then...we had a war and a depression. By 1953 - it was obvious that St. Peter's was overcrowded. Sunday Masses at 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, 11:00, with the exception of the first celebration were filled to capacity. It was still the "church" in which Father did it all - but there were 5 Fathers at St. Peter's - Msgr. Buttiner, Jim Larkin, Bob Collins, Bill Vickers and Bob Breed. On January 20, 1954 the new parish was established. On March 17, 1955 it was incorporated as St. Paul's Church so called that Rome, New York might replicate the four Major Basilicas in Rome, Italy: St. Peter's, St. Mary Major, St. John Lateran, and St. Paul Outside the Walls. In fact the façade of this building, the carvings, the four pillars are patterned after St. Paul Outside the Walls.

The first trustees were Jim O'Shea and Jim Kelly, so they were among the incorporators. St. Peter's parishioners who lived North of Linden and Laurel streets were considered members of the new St. Paul's - along with anyone else who cared to join.

There was of course a campaign to raise funds - over a 30 month pledge period. There was a not-so-subtle suggestion that one day's pay (wage) each month for the 30 month period would be an appropriate minimum contribution. Ground was broken on May 12, 1957. The Cornerstone was placed on November 17, 1957. The first Masses in the new church were celebrated on June 29, 1958, The Feast of SS. Peter and Paul - a Sunday that year. The 8:00 Mass was offered by Msgr. Buttiner, the nine by Jim Larkin, 10:00 - Bob Collins, 11:00 Bill Vickers. On Monday June 30<sup>th</sup> (the Feast of St. Paul) Fr. Breed celebrated a 7:30 morning Mass. All of the Masses were offered in what was euphemistically styled "The Lower Church" - the basement which was cleaned each week, set up with folding chairs and a temporary altar. From that first Sunday Ambie McBeth and his son Mike sold Sunday papers in the Church Hall.

On the Feast of Christ the King, October 26, 1958 (fifty years ago today) the upper church was dedicated. Bishop Foery presided. Monsignor Buttiner celebrated the Mass, Fr. Larkin was Deacon, Fr. Vickers, Subdeacon, Fr. Collins directed a men's choir and Fr. Willenburg was Master of Ceremonies. The preacher, Bishop Daniel Feeney of Portland, Maine, was a personal friend and traveling companion of Msgr. Buttiner - from seminary days I believe. For reasons unknown to me, people had been encouraged to receive communion at earlier Masses. This is the only time in the entire fifty years, I suspect, that Eucharist was not distributed at a Eucharistic celebration!

The total cost including furnishings was \$700,000.00. The debt was \$533,000.00. My office in those times was opposite Bishop Walter A. Foery at the Chancery. One November day the Bishop came into my office saying "your pastor was coming in today. I don't know which pastorate he prefers - St. Peter or Paul." After the better part of an hour Bishop Foery returned saying "I still don't know what he wants." So - Monsignor stayed at St. Peter's.

In February 1959, Fr. Ambrose (Jake) Ruppert was named pastor with Bob Breed his Assistant. Debt reduction was clearly the order of the day - the first priority. In April the first social event was held. It was a card party - 200 tables in play (800 people), even though participants had to bring their own furniture. In November of that year the first Bazaar netted over \$7,500. Fr. Ruppert knew you sometimes have to spend a buck to make a buck. Rome Cable was renovating its cafeteria so St. Paul's bought all their kitchen equipment, which was installed at the church by Fr. Ruppert and his army of volunteers. He loved to show off the finished product and it was used in support of and in conjunction with all kinds of fund raisers: bake sales, card parties, bazaars, antique shows, pitch parties, heirloom teas, suppers, dances, raffles, fashion shows, summer festivals. With the Rome Cable equipment came a donut machine, much used, and subject to frequent breakdowns; but if Frank Canaan was not making the donuts he was only a phone call away. Every Saturday night six or eight volunteers would appear, and the machine would spew out 80 to 90 dozens of doughnuts - which were generally sold out before the 11 a.m. Mass.

By the end of 1959 \$15,000 of principal was paid and \$17,000 interest. But when Fr. Ruppert left the end of 1969 the \$533,000 debt was down to \$218,000. Five years later when Fr. Kelly arrived that amount was only \$70,000.00. And the debt was retired in 1982 and the mortgage was burned - on May 16th - which happened to be Bill's 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination.

Of course you can't stand prosperity. By 1988 you was in debt again...\$235,000, this time for a Parish Center. But that was retired by 2001. And in the meantime there were other significant enhancements to the worship center -

- the 1500 pipe Cassavant organ - a gift of Dorothy Griffin in memory of Jim (1981)
- Dansiger glass windows installed for the silver jubilee of the parish (1983), the gift of several families who were parishioners.

But St. Paul's is not buildings, or debts, or fundraisers. Ultimately St. Paul's is people - hundreds/thousands of people over these 50 years. You are the church - some of you anonymously and others are more public.

Among the pioneers were names like O'Shea, Kelly, Harper, Smith, Pascucci, Donahue, Willenburg, Grogan, Ellinger, LeRow, Farnsworth, Mumpton, McLaughlin, Fuller.

There was a constant flow of assistants and so many priests who were on the faculty at Rome Catholic High.

Ruppert, Bishop. Holihan, and the "Rock of St. Paul's" as the Observer Dispatch called Msgr. Kelly when he retired after twenty three years of devoted, caring perceptive leadership. He was a tad ahead of the curve. Then there was Fr. Queen followed by yet another Kelly.

And the behind the scene "powers" like Ella Card and Rose Marek. You may not recognize the names. They were the housekeepers - they created a culture. There were staffers like Sr. Winifred Behan who introduced you to social ministry, Ed Doyle and Nick Rosher your deacons, and Sr. Marie Wilson who celebrates 65 years as a CSJ this year 35 of which were here directing religious education and ministering to parishioners.

And what have all these people...what have you been about these many years? **BEING CHURCH:** announcing the Good News, telling the story of Jesus, sometimes verbally...but more by your witness. **BEING COMMUNITY:** satisfying our need for relationships, trust, togetherness. **MODELING FAMILY LIFE:** the intimacy of marriage, the fulfillment of parenting, the satisfaction of sharing. **PRAYING TOGETHER:** making God present in the breaking of the bread, celebrating the sacraments. **SERVING THE NEEDY AND POWERLESS.** Showing compassion to the poor, the hungry, the sick and aged, not from dutiful tolerance but from loving concern. **TEACHING** the young and old alike, teaching the truth - always the same - ever new. **BEING SHEPHERDS** comfortable with your own humanness, and sensitive to the incompleteness of others. **BEING LEADERS,** evoking the giftedness of others. **BEING MINISTERS,** courageous enough to dare, credible enough to inspire.

For 50 years you have been about the work of the Church, the work of the Lord - proclaimed by His word, enlivened by His spirit, sustained by His promise: **I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS.**

For what has been these first fifty years, our prayer today is "Deo Gratias - thanks be to God.: For what yet will be, our prayer today is "Yes, Amen, So be it." We are the Church....ALL OF US. And I am proud to be associated with you.

Most Reverend Thomas J. Costello