

PARISH HISTORY - THE PAST

As the Catholic population grew, Our Lady of the Lake Mission was established from the existing parish of St. Thomas of Aquin in the Ogdensburg community in 1929. After rejecting property below the Lake Mohawk dam, the present site was selected and purchased by Fr. Corr, then pastor of the Immaculate Conception parish in Franklin. The church was built in 1935, and the first Mass was celebrated May 31, 1936. It



was determined in 1940 that Our Lady of the Lake was to become a Mission under the existing parish of St. Thomas of Aquin. Our Lady of the Lake Mission became a parish in 1949. Rev. George A. Brown served at St. Thomas until 1949. When Our Lady of the Lake, was made a parish, Rev. George A. Brown became the first pastor of this church.

The economy was booming in 1949, four years after the Second World War. Harry Truman was in his second term as President. Network TV was just introduced and Pope Pius XII was in his eleventh as Pope of the Catholic Church, and the world population was two and half billion. The Yankees won the World Series and Broderick Crawford and Olivia de Havilland won the Oscar for best actor and actress. Returning veterans of the war were marrying and having children and spurring on the economic boom as their families grew. New homes were being built at a record rate. But Sparta was still pretty much a summer place with a year round population of three thousand people. Our Lady of the Lake mission was served by the pastor of Ogdensburg since it has been built in 1935. But in 1949, Fr. George Brown, pastor of Ogdensburg, was named by Bishop Boland the first pastor of the new parish of Our Lady of the Lake. Sparta had grown somewhat following the War, but Father Brown must have sensed a continuing growth in the vision he brought to the new parish.



The first confirmation class of Our Lady of the Lake Church, at Lake Mohawk, N.J.

In 1953, the need for a parish school became evident. A school always meant a convent for the nuns who teach in the school. A drive for the funds to build the convent and school got under way. Fr. Brown died just a few months before the school was to open. Fr. McKenna was assigned to Our Lady of the Lake, as the new pastor. The new parish school was named Rev. George Brown Memorial School, in honor of the work Fr. Brown had done. The school opened on September 20, 1954. Over 200 children, not only from Our Lady of the Lake, but also from the neighboring parishes of Franklin, Sussex,

Ogdensburg, Newton, Branchville, and Milton were registered for their first year of Catholic education under the care and guidance of four Sisters of the Order of St. Benedict. The new school graduated its first class in 1956.

The election of Pope John XIII in 1959 would significantly affect the people of Our Lady of the Lake. Shortly after his election, the Pope called a worldwide council of the Catholic Church. It was to be the first to be held since 1871 and the 22nd since the first century in Jerusalem. Its purpose was to address the laws to be followed by new converts to the Catholic faith.

It was the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) that brought more significant changes to the traditions of the Catholic Church. The Council authorized the use of the vernacular, or mother-tongue, not only for parts of the Mass, but also for the administration of every sacrament. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Mass was said in Latin, with the priest having his back to the people. After the priest read the Scriptures in Latin they would be read in English



for all to understand, depending on the parish. The Council brought English to all US Masses at every parish. Communion was distributed to those who knelt at the Communion Rail.

It was a lively debate amongst the Cardinals and Bishops of the world that gathered in Rome; but the final goal was to involve the parishioners more actively in their Mass. This goal was reached at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council and in the years to come.

A second school was started by the diocese in Sparta when Bishop McNulty founded Our Lady of the Lake High School and appointed Fr. McKenna as the first director in 1956. In 1964, following the death of Pope John XXIII, Bishop Navagh changed the name of the high school to Pope John XXIII.



The first in a long line of parish carnivals was held in 1962. Mike Moran, a former parish trustee stayed on as chairman for the carnival for 20 years. Construction in the parish continued in the early sixties, inciting great enthusiasm for the changes to come, yet this time had its difficulties as well. In a period of less than four years, the parish was to have four different pastors. Increased ecumenical activity followed the Vatican Council and the Sparta Ecumenical Council was formed in 1968 with membership from

the Sparta Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, St. Mary's Episcopal, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church and Our Lady of the Lake.

In the parish, Fr. Cassidy served the people with a love and concern for all, especially the sick. It was noted that this concern may have been fostered by his service as a medic in the military.

As the seventies started, the impact of the Vatican Council was seen in many different ways. The liturgy continued to change with the introduction of new hymns that enriched the existing selection. The position of the altar was to be changed which became a major expense for many churches. This major renovation took place for Our Lady of the Lake in 1973. Where possible, the high altar was to be placed in such a way that Mass may be offered by the priest facing the people; the altar was to stand away from the wall of the sanctuary, so that room is left to allow the priest to move around it. The Blessed Sacrament needed be reserved in a strong tabernacle, placed at the center of the high altar; but it could be placed upon a side altar, if that side altar is dignified and easily seen. Again, the tabernacle may be placed on the altar at which Mass is said facing the people; in this case the tabernacle should be small.



The cross and candlesticks will be placed upon the altar in the customary way; in certain circumstances, however, the bishop may allow them to be placed alongside the altar. The sedilia, or seats for the celebrant and sacred ministers, had to be easily seen by the faithful, and the celebrant's sedile should be so placed as to show that he is presiding over the Mass as the assembly of the People of God. There should be an ambo (lectern or reading-desk) -- clearly visible to the faithful; from which the readings from Scripture are to be made. The words spoken by the priest when giving Holy Communion have been shortened to "Corpus Christ" -- "The Body of Christ;" the person communicating says "Amen" before receiving Holy Communion; and the priest no longer makes the sign of the Cross with the host. At all Masses attended by the faithful on Sundays and Holydays, the Gospel is to be followed by a homily, or explanation reading from the Scriptures. This homily may be based upon some other text of the Mass, taking account of the feast or mystery which is being celebrated. It is to help the faithful understand the readings. After the Creed, provision was made for what is called the "community prayer" sometimes called the "prayer of the faithful." In some countries this prayer became customary; in most places, however, it has not as yet been introduced. Another important change concerns the Eucharistic Fast. Until recent years, this Fast was from midnight. Then it was reduced to three hours. Finally it was altered to a fast of one hour prior to receiving the host.

As the nation celebrated its 200th birthday in 1976 changes in Catholic Church continued on both the local and worldwide arena. Pope Paul VI, following the death of Bishop Casey, named Msgr. Rodimer, who had been administrator of our parish, as Bishop of the Paterson Diocese in 1977. Pope John Paul II, became the first non-Italian Pope of the Church in almost 500 years following

the one month reign of his predecessor, John Paul I. in 1978. A year later he was in New York celebrating Mass in Yankee Stadium on one of his many trips that has caused him to be known as the most travelled pope in the history of the Church. During the same year, Fr. Kiernan McHugh left the parish and went on to assume a leadership role at Pope John for many years to come.

The eighties were to be a time of continued growth for Sparta and the parish. A major change occurred in 1988 with the creation of a second parish in Sparta. What had been one large family was now split in two. The creation of the new parish of Blessed Kateri was due to the growth of Catholic families moving into Sparta. Throughout the decade and well into the next one, the parish would be under the leadership of Fr. Cassidy. Fr. Cassidy maintained his spiritual ministry for 24 years, during which time there were continued improvements to the parish facilities. Fr. Cassidy sought help in the parish from priests from Italy and Poland and gave them an opportunity to experience life in a US parish. Many remained in the US and served parishes of their own. Pope John Paul named Fr. Cassidy a monsignor in 1993. Fr. Cassidy had to take special care of his health since having a serious heart attack in 1994. Due to those health reasons, in 1995, Msgr. Cassidy retired as pastor of Our Lady of the Lake.



Msgr. Paul Knauer succeeded him. Msgr. Knauer was a good addition for he brought much humor to his homilies and to the parish. Msgr. Knauer with the help of Fr. Michael Rodin, who came to Our Lady of the Lake in 2007, stayed with the parish until June of 2009. The Bishop of the Diocese of Paterson was under the leadership of Bishop Arthur Joseph Serratelli.

During his tenure at Our Lady of the Lake, Fr. Michael was very involved in the “Right to Life” movement. He attended the 37th annual “March for Life” in Washington DC with many of our students. Before the March, many from the Paterson Diocese attended a Mass celebrated by Father Michael Rodak, parochial vicar of Our Lady of the Lake Parish, Sparta, at St. Peter Church here near the March route. In his homily, he reminded the participants, "We need to stand up for God and stand up for doing what is right. Jesus came into this world out of love for you and me. He came to serve and not to be served. He came out of love and unfortunately, that love was not found 37 years ago today just a few blocks away from here."

With many young people at the Mass in attendance from Pope John XXIII High School in Sparta, Villa Walsh Academy and Delbarton School, both in Morristown, and St. Anthony Church's youth ministry in Passaic, Father Rodak addressed them and said, "Young people: value your morals and grow in greater understanding of God's love for you."

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