

# ***A PARISH HISTORY***

## ***Holy Infant Church***

### ***York Haven, PA***

#### ***Preface***

Holy Infant Church has been a self-sustaining parish since May 4, 1972; we are enjoying good spiritual health as a Catholic community.

Our physical boundaries encompass the townships of Newberry, Conewago, and East Manchester. Within those boundaries are the boroughs of Manchester, Mt. Wolf, York Haven, Goldsboro, and Lewisberry. Interspersed among the boroughs are other population centers such as Valley Green-Etters area, Newberrytown, Yocumtown, Strinestown, Saginaw, Conewago Heights, Starview, Pleasant Grove, Steffe's Corner, and a host of mobile home parks and housing developments. Growth continues strongly in both the northern and southern ends of the parish.

Geographically, the parish is bisected west to east by the Conewago Creek, and north to south by Interstate Highway Number 83.

Our parish family is composed of some 400 families, many of whom are only recently moved into the area. Our children are taught in the West shore and Northeastern School Districts, as well as Trinity and York Catholic High Schools, and a number of parochial elementary schools sponsored by neighboring parishes.

The occasion of an anniversary celebration offers us an opportunity to look back to see our origins and appreciate the works and sacrifices of those who preceded us. Perhaps, as we are inspired to pass along the faith to our children and grandchildren as they did to us, we might be as successful as they were.

Our parish history can be divided into three parts, almost equal in time. The very first phase of Catholic life and history in this area runs from 1923 to 1947, and was concentrated in St. Joseph's Chapel in Saginaw. In the second phase, Catholic activity was moved to York Haven, and the mission was renamed Holy Infant church. It existed as a mission from Immaculate Conception church in York, until May, 1972, when it became a self-sustaining parish with a resident pastor.

#### ***St. Josephs Chapel, Saginaw***

In March of 1923, Frank Drashner asked Rt. Rev. Msgr. George J. Breckel of Immaculate Conception Church in York to bury his three year old son. As Monsignor inquired about the circumstances, he discovered that some sixty Catholics lived and worked in Saginaw, a small river town a few miles north of York. Rev. Joseph Schweich, the assistant priest at St. Mary's buried young Antony August Drashner, and then began pastoral visits to the Saginaw area. There he found more than sixty families who worked in Fisheries, a lumber center, cigar factories and in the Union Quarry. Most of the families were from

Eastern and Southern Europe, and had recently moved into the area because of the available work. Many families had relatives in the Harrisburg-Steelton area. Among the original families were the Drashners, Hendricks, Lehman's Acchaj's, Bosicks, Kuliziches, Procopecs, Kupres, Drazelth's, Krout's Maley's, Tobin's, O'Brien's and Drazeck's. Some of their descendants still live among us.

Monsignor Breckel informed Bishop Philip McDevitt of the spiritual need in the area, and obtained permission for a chapel to be built and placed unto the patronage of St. Joseph the Worker. John E. Baker, the chief employer of the area, was approached and donated the ground on which to build a chapel. Mr. Frank Wagaman began to build the chapel, and it was completed by December 21, 1924. Mass was celebrated on the second floor of the Drashner Boarding House until the chapel was completed. On that Sunday, the chapel was blessed and dedicated by Bishop McDevitt, and Father Schweich sang a High Mass, accompanied by members of St. Mary's Choir. Father Antony, OFM, of the Jednota Home in Middletown, PA preached in Slovak, and Father Joseph Schmidt, of the Diocesan Mission Board preached in English. The chalice was donated by Barbara Wohlhieter of Milton, PA, and St. Mary's Church donated a used pump organ. Miss Catherine Hilbert was the parish organist and later taught parish children the hymns to be used at Mass.

Lillie Acchaj was the first person baptized on March 16, 1923. Antony August Drashner was the first person buried on March 18, 1923. John Watters and Helen Manderewicz were the first couple to be married at St. Joseph Chapel on September 22, 1932. Nine children were in the First Holy Communion class of May 19, 1924, and on May 22, 1927, Bishop McDevitt confirmed nineteen young men and women in the first Confirmation class.

The assistant priests from Immaculate Conception Church continued to be responsible for the growth of Catholic life and worship at the new mission when he was succeeded by Rev. Carl Brady. Father Brady gathered twenty-four members of the parish and established the Sodality of the Blessed Mother on February 5, 1933, and was responsible for the installation of a new roof and furnace, and the repainting of both the interior and exterior of the chapel.

All during this time, many Catholics in the York Haven area worked at the York Haven Paper Company, or at the York Haven Water and Power Company which still operates at its original site. When the Union Quarry closed during this period, many of the inhabitants of Saginaw moved elsewhere to look for work. In an effort to regroup, and better serve the Catholics who remained scattered through the townships, it was decided to locate a chapel in the York Haven area.

### ***Holy Infant Mission, York Haven***

On March 31, 1944, Bishop George L. Leech granted permission to move the mission chapel to York Haven. By June of that year, Monsignor Breckel purchased .7 of an acre of land on the corner of Lansdale Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. The new church was placed under the patronage of the Holy Infant, Jesus. Bernard Starr of Harrisburg was designated the architect, and Lewis M. Klunk of York received the general contract.

Monsignor Breckel broke ground for the new church building on the feast of the Most Holy Rosary, October 7, 1948. On May 1, 1949, the first administrator of the mission, and by now a relate himself, Monsignor Joseph Schweich laid the cornerstone of the present building.

For the next twenty-five years, Holy Infant Mission Church served the Catholics of the area in a limited way, because there was no pastor residing here. The assistant priests of Immaculate Conception church in York continued to provide Mass and the sacraments for the small, but growing, congregation. It was the resident parishioners who provided community activities for Holy Infant Mission through such groups as the Holy Name Society and the Council of Catholic Women. Various parishioners saw the advantage of having a resident pastor, and they worked hard at trying to make Holy Infant a viable parish. Records indicate that both income and activity would have to increase substantially in order to meet the additional necessary expenses. Over the years, the debt of the building was paid off, and a slow increase in parish population was noted. From 1923 to 1972, there were 51 deaths, 68 marriages, and 339 baptisms. The parish census showed 215 families composed of 672 individuals.

Efforts to persuade the Bishop to establish a parish in York Haven were spearheaded by Mr. Roman Shuman, Mrs. Eleanor Skeldon, Mrs. Irene Teeter and many others.

On May 4, 1972, Bishop Joseph Daley made this announcement: "I hereby declare that Holy Infant Mission Church, on this date, be established as an independent parish of its own, and thus attain full parish status under the direction of its new pastor, Father Edward Gerrity."

A proud day for Holy Infant Parish!

### ***Holy Infant Church, York Haven***

Since its inception, Holy Infant Parish has had six pastors. Father Edward Gerrity brought a wealth of pastoral experience with him when he first arrived in York Haven. Father Gerrity was born in Centralia, PA on February 2, 1916; he studied at St. Charles Seminary in Overbrook, PA and was ordained in 1945. He had served in a number of parishes in the diocese, both as an assistant pastor, and pastor before he was appointed to Holy Infant parish.

He was an energetic organizer of committees and societies which helped to put the spiritual life of the parish into high motion. Property diagonally across the street from the church was rented as a rectory: a new electronic organ was purchased (at the cost of \$3,145.00!); and necessary repairs and maintenance were done on the church building. Many social and fund-raising activities not only helped to pay bills, but they also helped to bring parishioners into a closer community.

Exactly three years later, Father Gerrity was assigned to another parish, and was replaced as pastor by Father Robert Strome.

Father Strome was born in Wilkes-Barre, PA on March 30, 1925. After attending local schools, he served in the U.S. Navy from 1943 to 1946. He then attended St. Jerome's College in Kitchner, Ontario, Canada and Mt. St. Marys Seminary in Emmittsburg, MD. From the time of his ordination in Harrisburg in 1955, Father Strome served in a number of assignments, one of which being Secretary to Bishop Lawrence Schott, then Auxiliary Bishop of Harrisburg.

Father Strome arrived at Holy Infant parish in May 1975, and this was his first assignment as a pastor. He immediately began planning to bring both the sanctuary and the church into conformity with the liturgical changes recommended by Vatican Council II and the Bishops Office. Reception of Holy Communion in the hand was initiated in November 1977, and a year later, the marble altar was moved to its present position and the tabernacle was placed on the Blessed Mother side of the sanctuary. After some negotiation, Father Strome was able to move to the present rectory building on July 29, 1977.

Special liturgies were conducted for the deaths of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul I. A particular remembrance was made for Father Gerrity who died in an automobile accident in November 1981.

It was toward the later years of Father Strome's pastorate that the population of the parish began to grow, and space became precious. When Father Strome left Holy Infant parish in late 1982, Father William O'Donnell, principal of York Catholic High School, served the parish until the arrival of the next pastor, Monsignor Joseph Kealy on April 21, 1983.

Monsignor Kealy was born on September 18, 1917, in Mt. Carmel Junction, PA. His parents had moved there from County Cook, Ireland, and Monsignor grew up with both Irish and coal-region values and work ethic. He had attended both Mt. St. Mary's College in Emmittsburg, MD and St. Charles Seminary in Overbrook, PA. He was ordained by Bishop George L. Leech in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Harrisburg on

June 3, 1944. Within two years he was assigned as principal of Lebanon Catholic High School, and then served as principal at York Catholic High School from 1948 to 1954. He then served as pastor in four parishes before he was assigned to Holy Infant Parish.

Monsignor Kealy was designated as the original director of the Legion of Mary in the Harrisburg Diocese, as well as being the first director of the Cursillo Movement. These two assignments took him to all areas of the diocese and many parishes benefited from his apostolic zeal and experience. He also served as a Diocesan Councultor for Bishops Leech, Daley, and Keeler. His service was duly recognized when he was honored as Right Reverend Monsignor on May 27, 1970.

Monsignor Kealy has the reputation of knowing all the parishioners in every parish in which he served, and even now, ten years after his retirement, he maintains contact with many former parishioners. This charism also blessed the homes of Holy Infant Parish early in his tenure as pastor. As he found and visited the scattered flock, and saw the growth of housing developments happen within parish boundaries, he saw the need to construct an education building. The church basement became entirely too small for the numbers of children to be instructed each year. Ground was broken for the new building on July 29, 1985. By 1987, the St. Joseph Education Center was completed and dedicated, and the foyer of the building was named in honor of Monsignor Kealy. Shortly after, Monsignor was allowed to retire to Arizona.

On August 16, 1987, Father Bernard Quinn became the new pastor of Holy Infant Church. He brought a new dimension of ministry not only to the parish, but to the diocese as well. His background and experience as a missionary with Glenmary Missions was appreciated by then Bishop Keeler who invited Father Quinn to become a priest of the diocese. The plan was to provide special training for diocesan seminarians, and also to begin a diocesan order of religious Sisters.

Father Quinn was born on July 18, 1928 in Kansas City, MO and attended Rockhurst College there. He then schooled at St. Louis Preparatory Seminary, St. Louis, MO, and then, Glenmary Seminary in Cincinnati, OH. He was ordained a Glenmary Missionary on May 17, 1953. While he served as the Director of the Glenmary Pastoral Program for newly ordained priests from 1962 to 1965, he earned a Doctorate in Missiology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He had served parishes in West Virginia and Georgia. His teaching career included being the Adjunct Professor of Pastoral Theology and Sociology at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., from 1967 to 1983. He was a Visiting Professor at Georgetown University, and taught as well at St. Louis University, St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, Michigan State University, and Emory University.

With that background and experience, Father Quinn brought new changes and fresh enthusiasm to this quiet, country parish. During this time, many new families became parishioners and the average age began to lower because of the great numbers of children to be baptized and instructed. The parish was introduced to the computer age, and a great deal of organization generated the need for assistance.

Deacon Michael Bahn was appointed to assist Father Quinn in August 1988. Holy Infant parish also served as a pastoral training ground for a number of seminarians who helped to bring the census information up to date and assisted in the validation of a number of marriages. When Deacon Bahn was transferred, and the seminarians were to continue their pastoral training elsewhere, the need for assistance was filled by Miss Pamela Lombardo who was designated as the Pastoral Minister.

The parish population continued to increase, and parishioners happily responded to the programs that Father Quinn and Ms. Lombardo introduced. The Religion Education Program was recognized as one of the best in the diocese.

In September of 1993, Father Quinn was assigned as pastor of St. Vincents Church in Hanover, PA, and Monsignor Francis Hudak became the pastor of Holy Infant Parish. He was born in Wilkes-Barre, PA on January 11, 1930. After completing his ecclesiastical training in St. Marys Seminary, Baltimore, MD, he was ordained in May 1955, as a classmate of Father Stromes. He served as assistant pastor and pastor of a number of parishes in the diocese, prior to his assignment to Holy Infant Parish.

During his time at Holy Infant parish, a Grotto Fund was established for the purpose of obtaining a marble statue of the Blessed Mother to be placed in an outdoor shrine. Brother Caesar Belchez, a native of the Philippine Islands, used Holy Infant parish as his adopted home, and at the completion of his seminary studies, and his ordination on May 20, 1995, celebrated his First Mass here, the first in the history of Holy Infant Mission or Church.

Mrs. Pamela Lombardo Kole resigned her position as Pastoral Minister in order to move to Carlisle and raise a family. Ms. Becky Papa took on a dual role of Pastoral Minister and secretary. Monsignor Hudak procured the services of Rich Nare in order to promote full liturgical music in the parish and establish a parish choir. Just as his own plans and visions for the parish were beginning to form, Monsignor Hudak was appointed pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in New Oxford, PA, and Father Clarence A. Olszewski was installed as the new pastor of Holy Infant Parish.

Father Olszewski was born August 12, 1931 in Ranshaw, PA. He attended St. Charles College in Catonsville, MD, and St. Charles Seminary in Overbrook, PA. After ordination in St. Patricks Cathedral, Harrisburg, he served as an assistant in two parishes and as a prison chaplain in Camp Hill Correctional Institution before beginning service in the U.S. Army. During his time of service, 1964 to 1973, Father Olszewski had assignments overseas and service schools. While attending the Career Officers course at Fort Hamilton, NY, he earned a Masters Degree in Sociology. Upon his return to the diocese, Father Olszewski was assigned as pastor of several parishes before being assigned as pastor of Holy Infant Parish on June 1, 1995.

Since he arrived, Father Olszewski has been able to repaint the inside of the church and also bless and dedicate the Grotto statue which now serves as a gathering point for special Marian devotions. A Love of Neighbor fund has been established to provide assistance to parish families who find themselves in need. Currently, parish census information is being updated, and parishioners homes blessed in order to get an accurate picture of the size and needs of the parish.

Through these years, many activities and projects happened which are not recorded here. They do appear on various historical records such as sacrament registry books and past parish bulletins and newspaper clippings. To list them all here would be to at least double the size of this booklet. This is testimony to the life which is engendered here at Holy Infant parish.

Father Olszewski now resides at the Priests' Retirement Residence in Harrisburg. In the Spring of 2004, Holy Infant welcomed Father Edward C. Malesic, JCL as Parish Administrator. Father Malesic divides his time between the duties here at Holy Infant Parish and as a Diocesan Judicial Vicar. He was officially installed as Pastor in February 2005 and serves the parish to date.

The future of Holy Infant Parish is a bright one at this point because of the continued growth in the area, the willingness of parishioners to step forward and do whatever jobs are needed to secure that community life, and the continued pastoral ministry of the pastors assigned here. Whether the facilities will be large enough to accommodate all parish activities is a decision which parishioners must make in cooperation with the Bishop. But as all during the history of Catholic presence in this area, the People of God will respond positively to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

While Holy Infant Parish, York Haven, is listed last on the diocesan alphabetical listing of parishes, it is the FIRST parish in the hearts of its parishioners.