

# FROM THE PASTOR'S



## Our Lord Jesus, Christ the King B November 22, 2009

### CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS AS A CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY

The Fiftieth Year of Jubilee for the Israelites was a time of joy and a year of pardon and forgiveness. Above all, it was a time of great rejoicing. The word jubilee comes from the Hebrew word *yôvêl* meaning “a ram’s horn.” From this instrument—the ram’s horn—which for us today would be likened to the trumpet blast, the year of great rejoicing was announced and proclaimed.

In the Book of Leviticus, the people were instructed: “This fiftieth year you shall make sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all its inhabitants.”

Back in 1959-60, our country was inspired to enter the “Space Race.” Many people moved from all over the country to Brevard County to work and fulfill President Kennedy’s challenge to land on the moon. Since then, we have not only landed on the moon but have also launched probes to other planets, sent the Hubble telescope to explore “where no one has ever gone before,” and partnered with other nations in building the International Space Station. Many Ascension parishioners were, and still are, part of this amazing adventure.

Here at Ascension for the past fifty years, we have been involved in an even more exciting adventure. We have been responding to the call Jesus issued on the day he *ascended into heaven*: “Go forth, make disciples of all nations.” In this part of God’s creation, dedicated priests, deacons, sisters and lay faithful have been responding to the Lord’s call.

Week after week, year after year, we seek to respond to God’s call through retreats, faith formation programs, celebration of the sacraments, and outreach to the poor at home and abroad.

#### A Brief History of the Parish

In 1959, Ascension parish had about 300 families – nearly all of whom had young children and mortgages. (The average house cost about \$10,000 - \$15,000.)

These young families, led by our founding Pastor, Fr. Martin Power (from Kilkenny, Ireland), came together and sacrificed to build our first church. Ascension Church was dedicated in March 1961 which seated about 600 people. Fr. Edward Condren

(also from Kilkenny) succeeded as our second Pastor (1968-1973).

In September 1961, Ascension’s school was opened and dedicated. Student enrollment for the six grades (K through 5<sup>th</sup>) was 344. Two years later, enrolment grew to 670. At the invitation of Fr. Power, three Sisters of Mercy from Ardee, Ireland, came to assume a leadership role in our new school: Sr. Monica Ryan (first Principal), Sr. Immaculata Knox and Sr. Assumpta Finn. In 1971, Sr. Joseph Barden became Principal of the school, a role she held for 30 years. Upon retiring as school principal, Sr. Joseph became our Director of Development. For several years during the 1970s, we had eight Irish Sisters of Mercy teaching in our school.

Our first church is now the Parish Hall, and our first school building is now the Ministry Center. We owe a tremendous gratitude to our *Founding Families* for the sacrifices they made to give us our first church and school. During our early decades, we also had a very active Council of Catholic Women and an active Holy Name Men’s Club, which contributed hugely to build the communal life of the parish and raise much needed funds. Many parishioners volunteered to teach our Catholic faith to the children who attended public school.

#### A New Church

Fr. Val Sheedy (Clare, Ireland) served as our third Pastor from 1973 until 1989. During Fr. Val’s time, the parish continued to grow spiritually and in numbers, so much so that there was a need to build a much larger worship space. With the sacrifice of mostly working families, a new church with a seating capacity of about 1,200 was built at a cost of \$1.5 million. In 1980, a parish rectory was built. The priests lived on the second floor, and offices occupied the first floor. Among the many pastoral blessings that Fr. Val brought to the parish was his gift for preaching and teaching God’s word.

In 1978, Eddie Berrios joined our parish staff as head of maintenance. Eddie has faithfully served our parish for 31 years and has also coached many Ascension basketball teams. In 1984, Flo Downey became our parish receptionist, a position she held until October 2009. For the many people who visited our parish between 1984-2009, Flo met them with smiles, a listening ear and a helping hand. In 1991, Maria Sittig joined our staff as parish secretary. In

1985, Richard Storum became our first Permanent Deacon.

### **A New School**

In 1989, Fr. Frank Smith (Philadelphia, PA) became our fourth Pastor and served until 2001. Under Fr. Frank's leadership, a brand new and modern two-story school was built to accommodate 550 students. In 1986 and 2003, our school was recognized as a U.S. Department of Education School of Excellence. In August 2007, Doug Workman became our school Principal. This year, we have over 500 students enrolled in our school.

During Fr. Frank's pastorate, the ministries of the parish were greatly expanded, especially our outreach to the poor through our Social Concerns office and Thrift Store. In 1990, Michael McElwee, who was ordained a Permanent Deacon in 1993, joined our parish staff. Under his leadership, many faith-formation programs have been established for the adults of our parish.

In 1997, the *Christ Renews His Parish* (CRHP) retreat experience for men and women was introduced to our parish. Since then, we have had over 50 retreat weekends. The CRHP experience has been a huge spiritual blessing to our parish, empowering hundreds of parishioners to become actively engaged in one or more of our ministries. In 1995, Fr. Frank and a committee of active parishioners, in partnership with HUD, built *Ascension Manor* which presently has 80 residents.

In 2001, under the leadership of Sr. Joseph, our school's Development Director, the people of Ascension sacrificed once again to build a brand-new school gymnasium. In 1996, Fr. Dan Freitas retired from the Diocese of Fall River to join our parish, and has since been a great blessing to us. In 1995, Hallie Laneville joined our maintenance staff full-time, followed by her husband, Hank, in 1999.

In 2000, Deacon Sergio Colon joined our parish, and in 2004, Tom Stauffacher was ordained a Permanent Deacon. In addition to presiding at Eucharist, baptisms, marriages and vigils for the deceased, our deacons bless our parish with involvement in many other ministries.

### **Present Era**

In September 2001, I (also from Kilkenny, Ireland) became Ascension's fifth Pastor. On my first weekend at the parish, I expressed my desire to have an *Adoration Chapel*. A chapel was opened and dedicated in July 2002. We now have over 500 parishioners involved in this devotion, helping us to have prayer 24/7 on campus. Around the same time, we began having a *Food Pantry* collection once a

month. We also started to set aside a portion of our parish offertory income for outreach to the poor at home and abroad. This year, 8% of our offertory income (\$128,000) will be used to act on Jesus' command to feed the hungry and to reach out to our less fortunate brothers and sisters. In addition, our Thrift Store this year will raise about \$400,000 to help those in need.

In 2003, Mary Birmingham joined our parish staff as Director of Music and Liturgy. Since Mary's arrival, the quality of our liturgies has been greatly enhanced. We especially witness this during the big seasons of our Church year. Mary is also the Director of our RCIA program. In 2004, Ashley Breaux joined our parish bringing to us the wonderful new sound of contemporary Christian Music. In June 2004, Mary Russo became our parish bookkeeper, and Fr. Mike DiRenzo started to help out with weekend liturgies. In August 2006 after teaching in our school for 45 years, Sr. Immaculata became a Pastoral Associate, mainly visiting the sick and the hurting people of our parish. Anne Dorros joined our staff in 2005, and is now our assistant bookkeeper. In 2007, Matt Spence joined our staff as Youth Director. In 2008, Betsy Glasenapp was appointed Director of Religious Education, and Rebecca Breaux became an assistant to both Betsy and Mary Birmingham. In October 2009, Theresa Romano became our parish receptionist.

In recent years, our many ministries—too numerous to mention—continue to flourish, and new ministries have started, e.g., Men's Fellowship, JustFaith and Knights of Columbus – Msgr. Martin B. Power Council 14573, named in honor of our founding Pastor. In 2004, we conducted a *Faith in our Future Capital Campaign* for the purpose of updating and beautifying some of our parish facilities. Currently, our parish, together with the other 90 parishes of our diocese, is participating in the diocesan *Alive in Christ* campaign aimed at helping to strengthen our school academically, build up our school endowment fund, expand our Ministry Center, and beautify and maintain our parish campus.

As we celebrate our Golden Jubilee, we can look back with much gratitude for the multitude of ways that our parish has been blessed by the men and women who have contributed a generous spirit of stewardship of *time, treasure and talent* to build our many facilities and our vibrant faith community.

Have a blessed week,

