

## PARISH HISTORY OF ST. PETER'S

As the present parishioners of St. Peter's Church commemorate the Centennial Anniversary, we are grateful to Almighty God and our Lithuanian forefathers, who as immigrants, came to America and established this parish on July 30, 1903.

In the year 1898, two groups of immigrants, one Lithuanian and one Polish, met to form the St. Casimir's Roman Catholic Lithuanian-Polish Benevolent Society and were granted a state charter in the fall of 1898. Both groups grew rapidly and each wanted to retain their own group, and on March 8, 1900, the group took the name of St. Peter's Catholic Lithuanian Benevolent Society, with Mass and meetings held at St. George's Catholic Church.

A meeting of incorporation was held on July 30, 1903 by more than one hundred Lithuanians who formed the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish with services held alternately between St. George and St. Casimir Churches. About a year later, the name was changed to St. Peter's Parish. Even if the third generation of American-Lithuanians may not be able to speak the language, they are proud of the heritage brought by their grandparents and kept active by their own parents!

An opportunity arose to purchase a layout of buildings for a church, school, convent, and rectory from Frieden's Lutheran Congregation, located on 51st St. between 7th and 8th Avenue, on April 21, 1908 for \$24,500. The first holy Mass was celebrated April 26, and the parish was then assigned its first permanent priest, the newly ordained Rev. Jos. Klonauskas. St. Francis 3rd Order Society was organized on Feb. 6, 1923, and originally donated the huge mission crucifix, about the main altar in the present church. The Marian Fathers of St. Casimir Province of Chicago, IL, began their administration at St. Peter's with Rev. L. Draugelis, M.I.C. in 1926.

The **Golden Jubilee** was celebrated on Sunday, May 24, 1953 with a 9:30 .am. Solemn High Mass of Thanksgiving presided by Auxiliary Bishop Roman Atkielski, Celebrant Rev. Anthony Miciunas, MIC, with Rev. Jos. Pauliukonis, MIC and Rev. Peter Grabauskas, priest son of parish, and homily by Rev. M. Urbonavicius, MIC. "Exultate Deo" Mass was sung by St. Peter's choir directed by Frank Bujan. A 5 p.m. Banquet, Program and Dance was held at Polonia Hall (corner of 50th St. and 7th Ave.)

In July 1953, an unheard of event on old parish grounds was taken by a Catholic Church to raise funds. Included was "carnival" with rides and "games of chance" (by a traveling company). With parishioners in charge of ticket sales for rides and booths, it was a huge success, but a grueling 5 days work! This was the beginning of our **Annual Parish Summer Festival**. Our summer festival has been very successful in providing income for our parish, as well as providing enjoyment and memories for those who attend the festivities. The festival is popularly known for the Polka Mass and the Lithuanian food, such as Kugelis (grated potato bake), Virtnei (dumplings), Kilbasa (sausage), and Kopustai (sauerkraut).

St. Peter's parishioners were always generous with donations to meet the maintenance and repair needs of the buildings. The first campaign for a financial needs appeal of \$60,000 was made in 1955 under Fr. Anthony Miciunas. The money was used to meet the quota of \$24,200 to build St. Joseph's High School and to help with parish needs. St. Peter's was the first parish to pay its quota!

Fr. Michael Urbonavicius, pastor, called a parish meeting on March 27, 1960 to vote whether to remain at the old location and to build additions to the old buildings; these plans were rejected by the majority.

The new pastor, Fr. Anthony Miciunas, who served from 1960-63, sent questionnaires to each parishioner regarding the future status of our parish as to the **relocations of St. Peter's Parish**. Future plans for growth led the relocation project. Serving as pastor at the old and new parish (1963-66), Rev. Vincent Andriuska announced the start of a \$5 monthly collection on each first Sunday for a "special building fund."

Organizations were asked to sponsor projects to raise funds. Committees were organized to formulate plans necessary to conduct the building and financial campaign. In 1964, parish visits were made to raise \$150,000 in pledges Memorials for stained glass windows (\$800), church pews (\$200), station of the cross (\$40) and participation in a "Fair Share Plan." Special prayers were offered to the Infant of Prague, that we still have on the altar today, to assist us with our financial difficulties.

Plans to build were approved in June 1964 by Archbishop Cousins for the cost of \$550,000. Groundbreaking took place on Sunday, August 30th at 4:00 p.m. with Bishop Vincent Brizgys officiating followed by Benediction Services and reception at the old hall. The cost totaled more than \$635,000! Henry Slaby of Milwaukee was the architect with construction by Ray Camosy Company.

On Sunday, October 31, 1965 at 3:00 p.m. the Blessing of the Cornerstone with Benediction Services took place, followed by an "Open House" of the parish building and reception. The dedication of St. Peter's buildings took place on April 24, 1966; with a 12:05 p.m. Mass followed by a banquet presided by Archbishop Cousins.

Those who came along to the new church felt very comfortable in seeing that the beautiful altars, statues, and organ were transferred from the old church. We had joined ranks with the new parishioners to work together as a truly Christian family in the growth of St. Peter's Parish.

The first wedding in the new parish took place on Oct. 10, 1965 at 11:00 a.m. The first Confirmation took place on May 22, 1966 at 2:00 p.m. in the new church.

In February 1966 the parish debt stood at \$469,000, and in 1967 it was \$450,000.

The 1969 June Parish Festival and October Annual Bazaar could not be held due to a "citizen's complaint filed for having a raffle." The parish was in debt \$400,000. The parishioners rallied by donating the anticipated sales of the raffle books!

The Saturday November 8, 1969 evening mass began to fulfill the Sunday obligation at St. Peter's.

The parish celebrated the 30th Ordination Anniversary of Fr. Stanley Saplis, MIC, on Sunday, August 4, 1974 with a 4:00 p.m. Mass and a dinner at Maplecrest Country Club.

For the deaf and hearing impaired in our city, Sr. Frances, OSF, started a Mass in sign language in 1976.

The **Diamond Jubilee** celebration began on Saturday, April 22, 1978 began with a dinner-dance at the Eagles Grand Ballroom. Archbishop Rembert Weakland celebrated a 3:00 p.m. mass on Sunday, April 23rd to commemorate the Jubilee. Rev. Stanley Saplis, and Fr. Jerome Zalonis, along with former pastors, concelebrated the Mass.

**Parish History 1978-2003.** The foundation of the events and activities of the past seventy-five years is our faith, high ideals, and commitment to Catholic values. All of which have been amply demonstrated by the many changes through the active parishioner's decisions and events since the 75th commemoration and history of St. Peter's Parish.

The former Parish Committee was replaced by a **Parish Council** and its committees in November 1979. The Parish Committee was instituted standing committees. They were Prayer and Worship, Christian Formation, Human Concerns and Administrative/Finance Services. Each of these committees has a chairperson and a representative from the Council at their meetings.

Michael Witkauskas was ordained a permanent Deacon for St. Peter's on June 13, 1981 at the Cathedral.

Our 100-year-old organ began to fail and many dollars were spent in trying to repair and maintain it. When it stopped several times during Mass in 1985, it was time to consider a replacement. Starting in July 1985, work began to develop a plan for the replacement of our organ. After many months of discussions a campaign for the Organ Fund began. Representative of St. Peter's Parish began to visit parishes and organ companies in Illinois and Wisconsin to determine what types of organ would be best for our church. On September 29, 1987, Rev. Anthony Miciunas, MIC, arrived as our new pastor. The following month Fr. Anthony was presented with our plans for a new organ. An **Organ Fund Steering Committee** was formed and soon a letter of appeal for donations was sent to all parishioners and organizations, as well as contact being made with local businesses and industries.

On August 31, 1990, Rev. Daniel Cambra, MIC, was installed as pastor by Bishop Brust with a beautiful ceremony at a 9:30 a.m. Mass. Also that year, Father Dan announced that we had 656 registered families with 58 new families welcomed.

For many years, **Prayer and Worship Committee** was known as the **Liturgy Committee**. This group is very active in the parish organizing and planning a liturgical calendar, planning many parish celebrations, and organizing our church decorations.

**The Engagement Enrichment Program** is conducted 1-3 times a year at St. Peter's. The attendance is generally 30-40 couples. The presentations address common issues, which married couples face such as in-laws, two career marriages, raising children, and budgeting.

In 1980, parishes began to meet to discuss how to implement the **Renew Program**. In November Bishop Richard Sklba, from the Archdiocese, came to speak on "Vision for the Church of the Eighties." The southeastern Wisconsin section of Renew held an evening of prayer at St. George to organize small Renew groups within St. Peter's parish. By August 1982, 9 small groups totaling 95 people signed up to participate for six weeks. As part of Renew group meeting, a charity was chosen to support by our parish. The

**Soup Kitchen**, which first met at the German American Home on 52nd St, was chosen, and St. Peter's parishioners prepared food and delivered it to those who came to the home. With the need to expand the project in 1983, interfaith churches slowly began to volunteer in preparing and serving food to the needy at Deming School (17th Ave. and 62nd St.). A few years ago, the building was renovated and renamed the "**Shalom Center**." St. Peter's continues to support the Shalom Center today with volunteers and donations. Renew was reintroduced in 1997 as the **Renew 2000** series for spiritual study groups. It is designed as a vehicle to learn and share our faith and to discuss how these sessions influence our lives.

**Magnificently Mature** group was formed in April 1987. The group currently meets on the second Monday of each month with lunch being served, bingo or cards are played, and socializing, or listening to an informative program/speaker enjoys the afternoon. Current attendance is around 35 to 40.

**The Scrip Program** began in 1994. The program acts as a fund raising effort for our parish through the purchasing of pre-paid store certificates. This successful program, run by volunteers, has generated significant donations for our church and school.

**The Human Concerns Committee** was organized in 1981 and continues to serve the parish and local community. Visiting sick parishioners at home and in nursing homes, organizing prayer groups for special intentions; gathering and distributing food for the needy, are some of the works of this group. Recently during the Christmas and Easter seasons, flower plants were delivered to nursing homes and shut-ins from our parish. Grocery donations and the "**Sharing Tree**" gifts were given to needy families during the holiday season. Groceries donated in the church lobby's cart are delivered to the Shalom Center. The committee raises income from the sale of coffee, donuts, and sweet rolls on Sunday after Masses, known for years as the "**Koffee Klatch**." **The Inns Project** was started about 10 years ago with several volunteers representing St. Peter's. Inns are held every night of the week at different churches, and provide shelter for the homeless. The volunteers set up the bedding mats, help with cleansing articles and serve food.

The **Holy Name Society's** began in 1930, and was formed by the men of St. Peter's parish to support the church and its activities. The name was changed to **St. Peter's Men's Club** on September 20, 1970. This club was outstanding in maintaining remodeling the parish buildings and was most generous through its sponsored parish activities and financial aid. It dissolved about 1987. **St. Peter's Catholic Women's League** was organized on September 26, 1945. Its aim was to help the clergy and nuns with the church and school work. Through fund raising efforts the Women's League purchased the oak "sedelia" in 1950 and the Christmas Manger in 1972. Continuing fundraising events help support our parish today. Currently, there are 96 members.

Undoubtedly, one of the greatest of God's Blessings showered upon St. Peter's parish is its parochial school. In spite of its limited number of parishioners and resources, St. Peter's parish managed to start its school early and it has progressed ever since. **St. Peter's school** was opened in September 1915 with six grades, and the first graduating class came out in 1917. Because of the shortage of Lithuanian nuns, the first teachers at St. Peter's were the School Sisters of Notre Dame. The Sisters of St. Francis came to St. Peter's in 1945. **St. Peter's Home and School Association** was organized on November 17, 1949 and continues today as a supporting group for the school and its teachers. Through the efforts of its members money is raised to offset the costs associated with educating the children at St. Peter's School.

The school term (1965-66), at the new building, opened with five nuns, and two lay-teachers.

Sr. Assumpta, O.S.F., who spent ten consecutive years at St. Peter's, took catechism class registration for public school children. By 1969, a request for lay teachers to volunteer to teach CCD classes, school enrollment was 174 compared to 226 the previous year.

A letter from Sr. Irene, OSF, was sent in 1978 to begin looking for lay teachers, as the nuns would be leaving St. Peter's shortly.

Two hundred and nine pupils were enrolled in the school in March 1975. With the 77-78 school year, tuition for one child was \$175; \$250 two children; \$300 three children; and the book fee were \$ 35. Lunchroom supervision was \$10. In 1987 there were 165 students with nine teachers. In 1991 we had 62 students. In 1997, 85 pupils were enrolled.

**St. Peter's Scouting** was first organized at St. Peter's in May 1952 with Girl Scout Troop 82 being formed, and followed by the Boy Scout Troop 14 formed in January 1953. Scouting programs continue today through the efforts of dedicated leaders.

The first **St. Peter's Church Choir** of 19 members was organized in 1907. Over the years this group has inspired us during mass and conducted many other functions such as Lithuanian Song Festivals and Concerts presented throughout Illinois and Wisconsin.

On March 27, 1966, it was announced that "all orations in the Mass will be in English," hymnals to be used and parishioners encouraged the use of the English language in church services, the Church Choir disbanded. In July of 1981, an adult choir was organized and sang at the 11:00 a.m. Mass. This choir consisted of 22 members and started wearing choir robes donated by an anonymous parishioner.

Sign Singers for the hearing impaired began on February 2, 1981 at our Church, and a Children's Choir was formed in September 1984. A favorite went during our parish festival, the first Polka Mass was held on Saturday, August 2, 1997, and continues today.

Many improvements were made to our parish in recent years, such as the installation of the wheelchair lift in 1991, construction of the south parking lot in 1995-96, and the church renovation in 1997 with the removal of the altar and pews from "old" St. Peter's being replaced by donated altar and pews from St. Lucy's, as well as the installation of carpeting in the church. Most recent improvements include replacing the garage for \$10,500 by D&D Construction Co. ('97) and re-roofing of all the buildings with added ventilators (1998) costing over \$200,000. The new church roof included a steeple and a donated cross. To help pay for the cost of the new roof, a special "**Raise the Roof Raffle**" was held and \$35,000 was raised through the efforts of our parishioners. In the spring of 2002, Carillon bells were purchased and installed through a generous donation. A new sign for the church was installed in 2003.

Rev. Daniel Cambra, MIC, had a God-given talent for beautiful spiritual homilies and an infectious laugh that put one at ease. A "shaker and mover" for eleven years as pastor at St. Peter's, it was announced in November 2000, that Fr. Dan was appointed Vocation Director for the Marian Fathers Order, and would be leaving St. Peter's.

Fr. Bill Hayward was appointed the new pastor at St. Peter's January 1, 2001.

Rev. Bill Hayward, pastor, reported at the September 9, 2002 Parish council's Annual Meeting this parish status: Registered parishioners - 2751 in 955 households; 98 new families registered