

HISTORY OF ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION CHURCH OSWEGO, NEW YORK

On August 18, 1850 the first St. Mary's Church was dedicated by Bishop McCloskey of Albany. The city of Oswego was at that time part of the Albany Diocese. The pastor was Father F. C. Foltier, a French priest. St. Mary's School was organized by Father Foltier in 1850 in the basement of the church and for several years it was staffed solely by the Misses Halligan and Gilmore

In 1851 Father Foltier was assigned as pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Church in New Orleans. He was succeeded by Father James Keveny, an Irish priest. In 1852 Father Keveny was assigned to St. Peter's Church in Troy. Father Keveny was succeeded by Father Joseph Guerdet, a native of France. Through the generosity of several families Father Guerdet purchased the tower bell which has been preserved to this day in the present Church. The bell, which weighs 2,400 pounds, was cast by the Menelly Bell Foundry in West Troy for \$1114.00 and was received by the parish September 22, 1852. Tradition dictates that every bell, once cast, must be named. "Patrick is my name" was engraved on the bell and this caused serious dissension between the French and Irish parishioners. The name of the person who ordered the inscription was the best kept secret in Oswego.

In 1858 several Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet left their Mother House in South St. Louis to take charge of St. Mary's School. The Sisters arrived at the train depot on West First and Utica Streets. Due to a delay in their arrival time no one was at the depot to meet them. They asked some children how to get to St. Mary's and the children gave them directions. The Sisters of St. Joseph have served at St. Mary's School for 142 years. Their dedicated and devoted service has had a tremendous influence on our parish and school.

Tragedy visited the parish in 1859. On March 9 a large crowd of men, women and children assembled in the church early in the evening in order to find seats for a popular Mission being conducted by the Redemptorist priests. Seats, aisles and the gallery were filled. Under the enormous weight, fifteen square feet of flooring next to the sanctuary gave way. In the panic that followed one man and four women were trampled and died. It was a tragic event.

Father Joseph Guerdet, a native of France, was the third pastor of St. Mary's following Father F. C. Foltier and Father James Keveny. Father Guerdet had been pastor at the time the church bell arrived from Troy with the inscription, "Holiness to the Lord - Patrick is my name." He was also pastor during the arrival of the first Sisters of Carondelet in 1858 and the collapse of the floor in the old church in 1859 when five people died.

During his pastorate, Father Guerdet completed the original St. Mary's Church. In 1867, Father Guerdet was transferred to St. John the Evangelist Church in Syracuse and his assistant, Rev. Louis Griffa, was named as the fourth pastor of St. Mary's.

Dissension caused by the increased immigration of French Canadians and the expansion of the German and English speaking population following the Civil War led to the formation in 1863 of St. Peter's German Parish, in 1869 of St. John the Evangelist Church on Erie Street and in 1871 St. Louis' French Church.

Previous to this, two separate services were held on Sundays at St. Mary's, one in English and one in

French. The Trustees of St. Mary's Church approved the purchase of Mead's Hall on the corner of East Fourth and Bridge at a cost of \$7,000.00 so that the French speaking people could have their own church. The Trustees of St. Mary's also donated \$500.00 to renovate it as a church. With the departure of the French to St. Louis' Church, St. Mary's was now an all English speaking, mainly Irish, congregation. The Rev. M. J. Fournier succeeded Rev. Louis Griffa as pastor of St. Mary's in 1885. Father Fournier thus became the fifth pastor of St. Mary's Church. During his administration the steeple, a victim of years of Oswego weather, was taken down. The church was also renovated within and electric lights, a rarity in those times, were installed.

In 1886 the Diocese of Syracuse was established. The care of St. Mary's Church was transferred from the Diocese of Albany to the new Diocese and Rt. Rev. Patrick A. Ludden was installed as its first Bishop.

Following Father Fournier's untimely death in December, 1901, Rev. Joseph A. Hopkins, who, for five years had been the Assistant Pastor at St. John the Evangelist Church, Oswego, was appointed as the pastor of St. Mary's.

One of Father Hopkins' early projects was to provide a new school for the children and a new home for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet who taught in the school. The Sisters had been living on the third floor of a building which housed both the convent and the school. The building was badly in need of repair. In the early spring of 1905 the old school was demolished and on April 9 a new school was begun on its site. While the construction was in progress, the students sat on kneeling benches in the church and wrote their lessons on the seats. Moving into the new school in 1906, they found more comfortable seating. On November 16, 1909, the Sisters of St. Joseph moved into their new home at 72 West Sixth Street. In addition they were provided a summer cottage, named Nazareth, in the Oswego Town beach area and near the cottage was the Holy Family Chapel for the convenience of the Sisters and parishioners.

In 1925 this glorious Church was nearly completed at a cost of \$350,000.00 and the copper plated cross above the steeple was placed by tinsmith John M. Fanning of the parish while the school children assembled below and Father Hopkins prayed for his safety. On March 17, 1925, Father Hopkins announced at evening Lenten services that the object of the congregation's prayers had been answered. Restraining his emotions with difficulty, he informed them that Mrs. Olive D. King had generously donated the \$21,000 organ, which had already been ordered from Cassavant Freres of St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, as a memorial to her husband. Father Hopkins' words brought an audible gasp from his audience, and men and women alike wept.

Months before his joyous announcement, Father Hopkins had accepted a generous offer of services from master organist Professor Charles M. Courboin of Scranton, PA., formerly of St. Paul's parish, Oswego, who had indicated a willingness to help design the new instrument. Professor Courboin had carefully selected pipes and stops from the old organ which for their superior tone could not be reproduced, and had incorporated them into the new organ. Professor Courboin expected that the new instrument would be one of the finest church organs in the world.

September 1925 saw a week of ceremonies with the joint commemoration of the 75th or Diamond Anniversary of the parish and the Consecration of the new St. Mary's Church. On Tuesday, September 8, the Feast of the Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the new Church was consecrated

by Rt. Rev. Daniel J. Curley, Bishop of Syracuse.

The Side Altars were consecrated on the following Sunday September 13 followed by a Solemn Pontifical Mass celebrated by Most Rev. Edward Hanna, Archbishop of San Francisco. The Sermon was masterful discourse given by Archbishop Austin Dowling, Archbishop of St. Paul. Occupying the throne was Patrick Cardinal Hayes, Archbishop of New York. Present in the Sanctuary was The Archbishop of Toronto, the Bishop of St. Augustine, Florida, and six other bishops along with many priests. The Mass was offered for the Deceased Members of the parish and the late John T. Comes, from Pittsburgh, the architect of the Church. Cardinal Hayes and Archbishops Dowling and Hanna had been college classmates of the Pastor, Father Hopkins, at Manhattan College.

Father Joseph Hopkins continued to serve his congregation for three years beyond the completion of the church. The years of extreme devotion and hard work had taxed his great heart. On Friday, November 2, 1928, he died at the age of 64. An entire city mourned this great priest who had served parish and community alike. Flags flew at half staff and places of business closed during the Funeral Mass on November 7.

Appointed to take the place of Father Hopkins was Father William Dwyer who came from St. Mary's in Clinton. Father Dwyer desired to return to Clinton which was near his family. Father Dwyer asked the new pastor of St. Mary's in Clinton, Father William Moore, if he would be willing to serve in Oswego so that he could return to Clinton. The Bishop reluctantly approved the arrangement. Father Dwyer remained Pastor in Oswego but served as Administrator in Clinton. Father William Moore remained as Pastor in Clinton but served as Administrator of St. Mary's, Oswego from 1930 until 1935. This unusual arrangement remained until Father Dwyer died in 1935. Father Moore was then assigned to be the Pastor of St. Agnes Church in Utica.

Father Edward Quaid, who had been an Assistant Pastor to Father Hopkins for several years, returned as the new Pastor of St. Mary's from 1935 until 1964. In 1948, a Solemn Centennial Mass was celebrated at St. Mary's by Bishop Walter A. Forey, Bishop of Syracuse. Several priest-sons assisted in the celebration. St. Mary's is renowned for her great number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. On June 8, 1950, a singular honor came to the parish. Msgr. David F. Cunningham was consecrated Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Syracuse. He would later serve as the Bishop of the Diocese from 1970 to 1975. It was during Msgr. Quaid's pastorate that the Legion of Mary was started at St. Mary's which has now served our parish for over fifty years.

In 1952, Father Quaid's outstanding qualities of priestly devotion were recognized by Pope Pius XII in a solemn investiture ceremony on April 20, 1952, at the Cathedral in Syracuse he was elevated to the rank of Domestic Prelate with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor.

From 1920 until 1971, a span of 51 years, the choirmaster and organist at St. Mary's was Professor James H. Lally. St. Mary's Men's Choir, under his direction, became acclaimed as one of the finest choirs anywhere.

In April 1949, there came to assist Father Quaid, a young priest from St. Vincent dePaul Parish in Syracuse. The Rev. Robert E. Hall remained at St. Mary's for many years serving as Chaplain at the Newman Center and Associate Pastor at St. Mary's. Msgr. Quaid retired due to ill health in 1964 and Father Hall was appointed as Pastor. He served as the Pastor from 1964 until 1991 when Father David

J. Baehr, an Oswego native and priest-son of St. John's, was appointed as the Pastor.