

Gate of Heaven recalls 25 years since dedication

Parishioners and friends of Gate of Heaven gathered last Thursday evening for a concelebrated Mass to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the formal dedication of the parish.

Bishop J. Carroll McCormick was chief celebrant, assisted by the Rev. Thomas Jordan, pastor, Gate of Heaven; the Rev. Stephen McGough, asst. pastor; the Rev. Joseph Sammons, pastor, St. Therese's, Shavertown; the Rev. Patrick Healey, pastor, Our Lady of Victory, Harveys Lake; and Msgr. Francis Kane, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, West Pittston, who was pastor of Gate of Heaven for 19 years.

More than 400 were present to hear the homily delivered by Msgr. Kane which traced the history of Gate of Heaven to the very foundation.

Music for the Mass was provided by the adult choir of the parish and the Shalom Folk group of the parish. The most inspirational renditions were the "Pansis Angelicus" by the adult choir with Mrs. David Wojciechowski and Mrs. David Hurst providing violin accompaniment.

Mrs. Theodore Veremeychik was flutist. The folk singers then followed with the prayer of St. Francis, in song.

Mrs. Walter Weir was chairman of the reception which followed in the school auditorium, and a deep sense of accomplishment prevailed.

A history of Gate of Heaven was prepared by Dr. Rudolf J. Schleich, a resident of Oak Hill, (excerpts from history are as follows).

According to available

records, the seed of the Catholic Community of the Back Mountain region was sown during the mid-nineteenth century when the Myron Williams, Nellie Shultz and the Kern families settled in the Loyalville area at Harveys Lake, the Peter Straub and Peter Youngblood families erected homesteads at Chase.

Other persons of the same persuasion followed during the period of the Civil War, seeking refuge, we are told from the turmoil of that conflict.

One could hardly overestimate, the communications difficulties which attended the service of the scattered, primarily rural communicants of this sprawling parish which embraced Trucksville, Shavertown, Fernbrook, Carverton, Demunds, Dallas Borough and Township, Lake and Lehman Townships, Laketon, Noxen, Loyalville and Kingston Township. Bishop Hoban responded in September, 1926 to the need of Fr. O'Leary and his parishioners in the Trucksville, Shavertown and Dallas areas by providing for a feasibility study of alternate parochial sites which would be more readily accessible to these persons.

Among the desirable locations identified was one on which St. Therese's Church was later erected. Although, almost two years intervened -- a period during which services were held for approximately 60 families at the Hillside Recreation Hall (the later Bulford Farm Machinery Store) -- an enthusiastic response by the Catholic residents provided the material and moral

support which contributed to the commencement, in June, 1929, of the construction of the new church and rectory. Unfurnished and with scaffolding still in place, Mass was sung for the first time in the church on Christmas Eve of that same year.

Not even the torrential downpour of Nov. 4, 1929 could dampen the spirits of the hundreds of parishioners and friends of Fr. O'Leary who attended the solemn dedicatory festivities at which Bishop O'Reilly presided. Although the weather obliged the cancellation of a prospectively impressive procession, a special choir of selected voices from the leading choral groups of the Wyoming Valley performed during the High Mass that morning, and Fr. Francis P. Duffy, chaplain of the renowned Sixty-ninth ("Fighting Irish") Regiment of the New York State National Guard delivered the dedicatory sermon. Also in attendance were many of Fr. O'Leary's comrades from the period of his own distinguished service in the Armed Forces.

With the establishment of St. Therese's Church, Our Lady of Victory became a mission of that parish. Throughout the following decade, Catholic residents at Harveys Lake would attend religious services at the Chapel, or, in the case of the residents at Laketon, at the Sandy Beach amusement hall--an arrangement which was generously tendered by Thomas Pugh, the proprietor, and continued by his successor Samuel Slomowitz.

During the winter months a number of these families would hire a bus to transport them to Shavertown on Sundays and other feast days. Sisters Borromeo and Rosaire of College Misericordia had organized a Sunday School at St. Therese's and therefore, these trips became extended outings with each family providing themselves with a pre-packed "brunch" to tide them through the post-Mass religious instruction sessions for the youngsters.

By the late 1930's, thanks to the generosity of John Hanson, it was possible for Harveys Lake parishioners to attend services during the winter months at the



ANNIVERSARY MASS--More than 400 persons attended the Concelebrated Mass commemorating the 25th anniversary of Gate of Heaven Church. Bishop J. Carroll McCormick was chief concelebrant. Left to right, above,

are Msgr. Francis Kane, Rev. Stephen McGough, Bishop McCormick, Rev. Thomas Jordan, Rev. Patrick Healey, Rev. Joseph Sammons. (Photo by Alex Rebar.)

former's lake-side restaurant. Here also the religious instruction of the children was entrusted to the dedicated Sisters of Mercy. And, when a heating plant was finally installed in Our Lady of Victory Chapel in 1940 it provided a comfortable facility for services during every season of the year.

In the meantime, progress had also been made in refurbishing St. Therese's Church. This was a very gradual process since a great effort had been expended by a relatively small number of parishioners in funding the construction of this ruggedly handsome edifice.

At first, Mass was read at a small portable altar which had been used for many summers at the Sandy Beach services. In 1930 stationary altars and pews were installed and a basement auditorium was added two years later. The furnishings of the latter would, in the interest of economy, take a good number of additional years.

During the era of economic growth following the Second World War, modern highways were constructed and this led to a significant increase in the number of full time Back Mountain residents. The greatest number of new Catholics were centered in the area between Shavertown and Harveys Lake.

Father O'Leary anticipated the spiritual and educational needs of residents and gained permission to purchase property at the corner of Machell Ave. and Spring

Street, where the he envisioned a new school.

Construction was entrusted to the firm of Harry G. Pethick, and Fr. Francis A. Kane, then administrator of St. Mark's Parish, Inkerman, was assigned the responsibility of supervising the project.

Through countless delays Father Kane would not be discouraged and in September of 1951 Gate of Heaven commenced its first academic year, with 168 students (grades one through sixth) with a faculty of six sisters of Mercy, one lay teacher, Mrs. Joseph Polacky, of Huntsville Road, and Sister

Mary Ignatius, RSM, principal.

It was then decided a new parish should be centered in this edifice, and the Church of Our Lady, Gate of Heaven with a nucleus of 20 families, was dedicated on a cold Nov. 18, 1951.

The years brought continued growth, and on Nov. 17, 1957, an additional two story wing, which housed eight additional classrooms and a multi-purpose cafeteria-auditorium and gym, were dedicated.

Father Kane, who is now Monsignor Kane, served his beloved Gate of Heaven for 19 years and was

succeeded by the Rev. Thomas M. Jordan, an equally devoted man, who is currently pastor.

Some 950 families now belong to Gate of Heaven. And 336 children attend the eight grades of the school.

If indeed, there is a central theme in the relatively brief history of Gate of Heaven Parish, it is to be found in the increasingly heroic commitment of its ministers and people to the formation of an authentically Christian ethos of individual and social dimensions, and, in particular, its application to the education of the young.

Although the mode and rhythm of liturgical expression, under the influence of the Second Vatican Council, manifested a changing, adaptable idiom, this central objective remained constant, i.e., to cultivate in all communicants a maturing, caring association in the larger human community under

the fatherhood of God. One can only speculate about the interior aspects of this formation; however, it is clear that the life of the parish has been focused to a great extent, on this educational mission.

And this concentration of effort shows dedication on the part of its pastors, Fr. (later Monsignor) Kane, and Fr. Jordan, of their associate priests--Fathers Joseph J. Ferrara, Louis S. Grabacik, Edward P. Nolan, Richard J. Frank, Michael J. Rafferty, Leo P. Cummings, P. Lawrence Homer, John A. Bergamo, Thomas A. Flynn, Thomas V. Banick and Stephen McGough--and of the school's lay and religious faculty, especially the devoted Sisters of Mercy, those surrogate mothers who soothed many a bruised heart and skinned knee sustained in the youngster's rough and tumble journey towards adolescence and adulthood.

St. Therese's holds birthday tea

St. Therese's Church, Shavertown, held its annual birthday tea, Sunday, Nov. 14. Mrs. Rosario Vecchio, was chairman assisted by Mrs. Chester Molley, co-chairman. Honorary chairman was Mrs. Joseph Bren, president.

Nellie Sipple, Marty Dille, Judy Dick, Betty Andrasco, Anna Fannick, Emily Steltz, Mary Wilkes, Ruth Evans and Jean Franklin.

Committee chairmen were tickets and programs, Mrs. John T. Luke, Mrs. Joseph Banks, Mrs. Jerry Paxton; kitchen, Mrs. Thomas Glenn, Mrs. Harry Jarrett; punch table, Mrs. Robert Zukosky, Mrs. Dorothy Cebrick; second time around table, Mrs. Walter Koziel; publicity, Mrs. Walter Williams.

Hostesses of the beautifully arranged tables were January, Mrs. John T. Luke, Mrs. Joseph Banks; February, Mrs. Joseph Bren; March, Mrs. Joseph Youngblood; April, Mrs. Gustave Walgren, Mrs. Chester Molley; May, Mrs. Edwin Yanchick; June, Mrs. Walter Williams, Mrs. Jerry Paxton; July, Mrs. Daniel Wisnieski, Mrs. Bernard Luksic, Mrs. Fred Mihal; August, Mrs. James Reinert, Mrs. Raymond Durkin; September, Mrs. Robert Dominick, Miss Joan Dominick; October, Mrs. Peter George; November, Mrs. Anthony Fannick; December, Mrs. Nicholas Konek, Mrs. Alfred Hudak; spring, Mrs. John Rogus, Mrs. Frank Wallace; summer, Mrs. Michael Olinatz, Mrs. John Carey; autumn, Mrs. Raymond Markiewicz, Mrs. Ann Mackiewicz; winter, Mrs. Tony Hudak, Mrs. John Berti, Mrs. Daniel Parsons.

Prize winners were Mrs. Marie Yatsko, June Gavenonis, Jennie Gocok,

'The Family' special on TV here

The television special, "The Family...and other living things," combines drama, music and humor to give a panoramic view of amily life. Scheduled for WDAU-TV Nov. 27, from 8 to 9 p.m. "The Family" was produced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons).

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