

Manchester parish marches on

By Father Michael Roach

Special to the Review

St. Bartholomew Church, which celebrated the 150th anniversary of its founding Aug. 24 with a jubilee Mass celebrated by Archbishop William E. Lori, began as a mission parish in the darkling days of the Civil War.

It was one of a string of Redemptorist missions throughout Central and Western Maryland reaching over the Mason-Dixon Line. They generally served German-speaking immigrants. These early missionaries would visit once a month, traveling by train from Baltimore to Hampstead, then by horse and buggy the remaining miles to Manchester. Fathers Van Blargen and Kleineiden (a great friend of Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos) were among the early priests who would come up monthly from St. Alphonsus or St. Michael on Wolfe Street.

There were very few congregants even after the building of a handsome brick church with Jacobean arches that had been dedicated by the newly appointed Archbishop Martin John Spalding in spring 1865. A member of the Shriver family, the pre-eminent Catholics of Carroll County, wrote relatives that the spring had been so damp that some roads were impassable when they had tried to attend the dedication.

A unique occurrence, mentioned in all the parish histories, is the Christmas Masses at which the local Lutheran Church would supply the choir and the German Reformed Church would supply the instrumentalists. This was in an era not particularly noted for ecumenism!

Church life waxed and waned for some decades, including being closed for years at a time. St. Bartholomew would be served by Sacred Heart, Glyndon, or St. John, Westminster, on occasion.

After the Second World War, the portion of Carroll County served by St. Bartholomew began to experience a good deal of growth. The wise priests of

Westminster bought three small farms on Hanover Pike, some 35 acres, just south of the town of Manchester, with an eye to future expansion. Another mission church was established at Hampstead for a while under the patronage of St. Frances Cabrini. As the church celebrated its centennial in 1965, it became a parish with a resident pastor, Father Patrick Begley, a particularly well-loved Irishman who had served earlier in the African missions. He was succeeded by Father John Kelmartin, who had been a Sulpician, teaching in Catonsville and Hawaii. He said that the hardest day of his life was when he had to leave the good people of St. Bartholomew. The new young pastor, Father Marty Demek, now pastor of Corpus Christi in Baltimore, took on the challenge of raising the funds for the new church. This dream came to fruition in December 2006 when the handsome new church was dedicated by Wilmington Bishop Fran Malooly, then auxiliary bishop of Baltimore.

When St. Bartholomew attained parish status in 1965, there were fewer than 100 registered families; today there are just slight of 1,500. Some 375 young people are involved in religious education and the youth group.

The Lord has given us much to celebrate. We still have some senior parishioners who can remember when there would be perhaps 20 people at Sunday Mass here. "The Lord gives the increase!"

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Father Michael Roach is pastor of St. Bartholomew in Manchester.