

# **New era begins for St. Mary's Spiritual Center and Historical Site**

Father John C. Kemper, S.S. can't help but feel humbled when he works as the director of the St. Mary's Spiritual Center and Historic Site on Paca Street in downtown Baltimore.

Now, he must bring that love to the masses.

Father Kemper oversaw the groundbreaking of the site's new visitor center, June 15, attended by Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski, eastern vicar, Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar and Father Ronald D. Witherup, provincial superior of the Society of the Sulpice.

"For me it was just such a blending of people and interests," Father Kemper said of the groundbreaking, which had more than 100 invitees. "I think the event was a microcosm of the reality of the church today and it was great in that it showed the diversity of the peoples and interests. It was just such a wonderful experience."

The site was home to a seminary founded by the Society of the Sulpice in 1791. In 1808, a chapel became the centerpiece of the site when it was dedicated on June 15, the same day St. Elizabeth Ann Seton arrived at an adjoining house to begin her ministry.

Two hundred years to the day, Father Kemper watched as the site began a new chapter with the groundbreaking of the visitor center.

"So many people worked to pull it all off," Father Kemper said.

While the seminary ceased operations in 1969, the chapel and the home of St. Elizabeth remains a place of interest for Catholics around the country, even if it is relatively undiscovered locally.

Just as the Sulpicians opened their doors to St. Elizabeth so that she could educate African-Americans in the French Quarter district of Baltimore, the mission continues

today at the site.

“This notion of offering hospitality is the hallmark of why we need the visitor center,” Father Kemper said.

The visitor center will have a room to hold up to 50 people and will serve as an entry way to the St. Mary’s Spiritual Center and Historic Site, which hosted some of America’s Catholic founders

“In retelling the stories, we can recapture the faith,” Father Kemper said. “People reconnect with the stories and they don’t forget. It’s so crucial that we not lose sight of the past.”