

Now a parish with a pastor, St. James feels fulfilled

The worshippers of St. James Mission in Boonsboro couldn't believe what Father Stephen E. Hook said.

Daria Kaas, a member since 1994, described a reaction as comparable to an audible gasp. After 140 years as a mission, Father Hook told parishioners, St. James was officially a parish. There would be no waiting, either, as the new status was effective Sept. 21.

"It brought tears of joy to my eyes," said Betty Thacker, a member of 20 years. "I still get chills thinking about it."

There was more. Father Hook, who has served as administrator for both St. James and St. Augustine Parish in Williamsport, had been named pastor of both churches.

"That was just the icing on the cake," Mrs. Kaas said. "Father Steve is close to each and every one of the parish members. He's like a family member."

The Archdiocese of Baltimore sent out official notice of the change Sept. 19, after the elevation was approved by Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien.

Father Hook, who was ordained in 2003, said St. James has endured an arduous journey to attain parish status.

Small population numbers led to temporary closings over the years. A former church building was condemned in 1969, when its walls were found to be unsound.

Father Hook, who served as an associate pastor of The Catholic Community of South Baltimore, which consists of Our Lady of Good Counsel, St. Mary Star of the Sea and Holy Cross churches, is now in his second year at St. James. It became a mission of St. Augustine in 2001, and now the St. James parish roll of 300 families is actually bigger than St. Augustine's 230.

"It's a very exciting time for the people who have been here," Father Hook said.

“They’ve always had a desire to be a parish. They are truly grateful to the archbishop.”

Father Hook said serving as pastor for two parishes will be a challenge. Each has its own needs, he added, as families move from the Washington, D.C. area to Washington County.

“This is another reason for people to pray for vocations,” Father Hook said.