

Providence provides

(This is the second article in a two-part series.)

The glory of St. Barnabas/St. Catherine/St. Pius /Charles Hall School lies in its countless students and alumni whose lives have given undeniable proof of truly academic and Catholic training. The former students have entered all phases of professional as well as religious life. One student of St. Pius, Oblate Sister of Providence Mary Annette Beecham, became the 18th superior general of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. Other students who became Oblate Sisters are Sisters Roberta Holland, M. Assisi Jackson, M. Albina Neal and Juanita Ward. Father Lowell Case, also a former student, is now a Josephite priest, the order which presently staffs the parish. Father Paul Smith, also a former student, went on to become a priest and principal of the largest black Catholic school in Chicago - Holy Angels. Deacon Thomas A. Wilson Sr., father of the current director of the office of African American Catholic Ministries was also a student of St. Pius V.

While the number of parishioners has diminished, the vibrant spirit of St. Pius V remains. Presently there are regular parishioners representing three and four generations of families who walked to St. Pius V on the memorial day of July 12, 1931. One of the first kindergarten students at St. Pius School on Harlem Ave continues as a present-day parishioner.

St. Pius V Parish represents vitality, toughness and commitment to the church and community concerns. Despite relocation, outward migration from the city, social and economic factors, the parish continues to flourish. The Highway (U.S. 40) caused the dispersal of the black community, and a number of parishioners left the parish. Nevertheless, St. Pius V remained a vital part of the Harlem Park Community.

The ministries of St. Pius V Parish in the Harlem Park Community were centered on housing, food and tutorial programs. Through the housing program, 15 houses were purchased and renovated either for sale or rent for low and moderate income families. Students from George Street Elementary School were tutored once a week in writing, reading and arithmetic by pupils from Notre Dame Preparatory School under the direction of Oblate Sister of Providence Michael Grant. St. Pius V Food

Co-op was run at minimal cost and served 150 families. Members of the church conducted a weekly Sunday Prayer Service at the Murphy Home Projects. The oldest AA Group in Baltimore was established at St. Pius V and continued for 50-plus years.

In 2006, the St. Pius building was sold and the congregation moved to the St. Peter Claver facility. Although scheduled at different times, both parishes share the same building for worship services. Josephite priest Father Ray Bamberger is the pastor of both congregations. Both parishes are still served by the Josephite fathers.

The glorious history of the present-day St. Pius V is 102 years old. The parish has stood the test of time and hardship. But interspersed with the hardships were experiences of joy, happiness and dedication in serving the black population of West Baltimore.

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