

# Pylesville parish celebrates 'day of great gratitude'

They filled every pew and spilled into the vestibule – but still fit into a photograph taken in front of their new parish center.

The parishioners of St. Mary, Pylesville, packed the church to celebrate the dedication of the parish center and help their pastor, Father Henry Kunkel, celebrate his 40th anniversary as a priest. Father Kunkel has been the pastor at St. Mary since 1993.

The festivities began with a Mass at 4 p.m. on June 12 concelebrated by Bishop Denis J. Madden, Father Henry Kunkel and Father Paul J. Henry. Deacons Phil Seneschal and Gary Dumer Jr. assisted.

The Mass was followed by a group photo of everyone present, taken, with much laughter, to replicate one from years ago when the parish was smaller.

"Twenty years from now, they can look at us and say, 'Didn't they dress funny in those days?'" Father Kunkel said.

Bishop Madden dedicated the new parish center, a substantial addition that allows for modern classrooms, offices and a youth room, and the parish enjoyed a dinner honoring both the facility and the pastor who helped make it possible. The parish raised money for the addition, including a geothermal heating and cooling system, with a capital campaign.

In his homily, Bishop Madden said that he began his day by attending the ordination of Father Gregory Rapisarda.

"I thought to myself, as I sat at the ordination this morning, how fitting it is we're celebrating the 40th anniversary of someone who has devoted 40 years of service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ," Bishop Madden said.

He pointed out that in the Sermon on the Mount, "Christ is asking us to go beyond

ourselves – that’s why we have pastors, to lead us in the Gospel life ... This is the work of a pastor ... to try as best he can to give a living witness to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.”

Pastors, he said, are called upon to invite people to branch out, to go beyond where they are now spiritually.

“Each of us, each morning, we must awaken to the spirit – where it is that God will lead us this day,” Bishop Madden said. “Every day of our lives, led by our pastor, we can move ahead and live our lives that Gospel way.”

Bishop Madden concluded by saying, “It is a day of great gratitude – it’s wonderful we gather here and bless this new hall, and every time you see that hall be mindful of the great pastor God has blessed us with.”

Father Kunkel said, as the Mass concluded, “Today, as I celebrate my 40th anniversary, I just want to say my own personal thank you to all of you who worked so hard to bring us to this moment – I cannot thank you enough.”

His parish rose and gave him a prolonged standing ovation, and then Bishop Madden gave him a blessing.

“We love Father Kunkel,” said Melissa Krechel, who joined the parish seven years ago. As a retired Navy family, she said, “We love this church. It’s one of those things that’s hard to find when you keep moving.”

Her son Noah Krechel, an altar server, said, “Father Kunkel is the best,” adding he liked how Father Kunkel joked with him.

Vida Hedrick, who has been a parishioner for 40 years, says, “I love it here. It’s such a friendly church. I love [Father Kunkel]; he’s just lovely.”

“It’s a wonderful, very small-town rural family parish,” said Susie Oursler. “It’s family-centered, it’s uncomplicated and devoted.”

Parishioner Roy Steele summed up his pastor in one word: “Awesome.”