

South Washington County pastorate celebrates 'Pentecost in the Park'

HAGERSTOWN – The three parishes of South Washington County grew closer June 9, with a community Mass and picnic.

More than 400 parishioners and community members from St. Augustine in Williamsport, St. James in Boonsboro and St. Joseph in Hagerstown gathered at the bandshell in Hagerstown City Park for "Pentecost in the Park."

To the relief of Father John Jicha, pastor, rain in the forecast did not come to fruition, as an unexpectedly sunny day brightened the first joint Mass for the pastorate of the Catholic Parishes of South Washington County, which was formed in 2017.

"It's one of the first times all three parishes have come together for a social event," Father Jicha said of the fellowship that followed. "We thought Pentecost, when we celebrate the birth of the church and the coming of Holy Spirit, was a good day to do that. It's another opportunity for us to grow together."

Mass was concelebrated in English and Spanish by Father Jicha, Father Juan Garcia Menbreño and retired Monsignor Richard Murphy. Deacon Paul Nicholas assisted. The procession included the Color Corps of the Knights of Columbus Pangborn Council 1365.

Father Jicha said the idea for Pentecost in the Park came during a pastoral council meeting, inspired by a tradition of St. James Parish, of celebrating an annual outdoor Mass commemorating the parish's founding in 1868.

The historic Hagerstown City Park was a natural location for the inaugural event, he said.

"We know a lot of people use the park on weekends and we want to be seen," Father Jicha said. "We feel this is a possible place for people to find out about the Catholic Church and for us to evangelize."

The Prayers of the Faithful were offered in multiple languages. Raymond J. Bielicki, a parishioner of St. Augustine, organized those readers. He emphasized the symbolism of offering prayers in the languages spoken in the pastorate.

“When the Holy Spirit came down to inspire the Apostles, the people said we’re from all different countries, yet we’re hearing them speak in our own language,” Bielicki said. “Our people come from all different countries. What we have in our pastorate is represented here by our speakers today.”

Linda Baer, faith formation administrator and a parishioner of St. Joseph, said it was exciting to be together with the members of the pastorate and to have the opportunity to meet new people during the picnic.

“It’s amazing,” she said. “It’s just a great sense of community.”

Christa Jones of St. Joseph, and her husband, Tim, brought their family.

“I think the collaboration of all the parishes and the diversity of all our cultures blended nicely together,” she said. “The fellowship afterward is really fun, too.”

Mathew Henderson of St. James served as grill master for the picnic lunch after Mass. A long line wearing t-shirts in Pentecost red stretched from the lunch pavilion back to the bandshell.

“This is the biggest event yet with the tri-parish (pastorate),” Henderson said. “When you get them all here, it’s a big spread.”

Father Jicha was pleased with the event, and the growing sense of community in the pastorate it represented.

“We’ve wanted to do this up in a big way to emphasize our presence in Washington County,” he said. “It’s been a nice success.”