

History of St. Paul

“It is not possible to grow in faith, without the support of the Christian Community. It is here that you will learn to build a better world.”

~Pope John-Paul II June 1985

The Catholic community in New Bern has a long faith-filled history. From it's beginnings in 1821 through the Civil War, the Great Depression, fires, World Wars and cultural upheavals, we find ourselves in the midst of growth and change once again. This community has come together in this new millennium to follow the example of those who have gone before, by learning to build a better world. We have much to celebrate and quite a legacy of service and care for the community to pass on.

The history of our Catholic Community has deep roots. New Bern has been called the birthplace of Catholicism in North Carolina. In our parish record is a six page detailed history written by Fr. Charles J. Croghan in the 1850's. It begins in 1774, when New Bern was the most populous town in the province,



William Gaston

with the story of the Sharpe family. Two English gentlemen, Gerard and Joseph Sharpe were involved in business here. In that year, their sister Margaret, who was a devout Catholic, visited them. The following year she was married to Dr. Alexander Gaston, a noted physician and gentleman. Her brothers died soon after. Margaret Sharpe Gaston was widowed in 1781. The “Tories” shot Dr. Gaston while he tried to escape in a canoe across the Trent River to his home in the Brice's Creek area. She was left to raise her son, William and infant daughter, Jane. “The education and proper training of her son became the grand object of her existence; and whatever good there was in him, must under God be ascribed to the affectionate tuition and admonition of maternal solicitude.” She sent him to Georgetown to the Jesuit University, but due to illness he returned. She then sent him to Princeton

“where he graduated in 1796 with the first honors of the institution.”

William Gaston was an important figure in the history of North Carolina as well as being a founder of St. Paul's. He was a lawyer, a judge, a four-term State Senator, served seven terms in the House of Commons, was a presidential elector in 1808, and served in the U.S. Congress from 1813 to 1817. One of his most storied accomplishments was his arguments before the State Supreme Court in regard to article 32 of the State Constitution which forbade any person who should “deny the Truth of the Protestant religion,” to hold a civil office in the State. His argument was instrumental in having the word “Protestant” changed to “Christian”. He even wrote the North Carolina State Song “Old North State”.

After hearing of a small community of Catholics, the Bishop of Charleston, (which was composed of NC, SC and GA) Bishop John England visited New Bern in 1821.

“Observing that there were at least two dozen Catholics in the area (this number included both slaves and free blacks), Bishop England stayed for eight days, celebrated Mass in the courthouse and in Mr. Gaston's home each day.” He made New Bern into an ecclesial district and promised to send a priest as soon as possible. “On this occasion he received four converts, baptized eight and confirmed eleven.”

He visited again in 1823.

During his visit in February 1824, he appointed Rev. Francis O'Donoghue as missionary for the State of North Carolina to take charge of the congregation and make New Bern his residence. He gathered the vestry (leaders) of the congregation, William Gaston, Benjamin Good, Peter Broughman and Francis Lamotte. In June of that same year, they began raising the funds needed to build a church. A total of \$2000.00 was raised to purchase lot #106 on Middle Street. The vestry rented a home that served as the pastoral residence and chapel, until they were able to build the church. “The following Reverend gentlemen were succes-

sively stationed on this mission, John Barry, Andrew Byrne, R.L. Baker, Peter Whelan, R. L. Baker (a second time), John Fielding, Philip Gillick, Francis Feral, Thomas Murphy, Andrew Doyle, Thomas Muloney, and Edward Quigley.”

Fifteen years elapsed and the congregation had grown due to immigration and conversions when Bishop England returned to



Old St. Paul's in 1863

New Bern. He called the vestry together, (now composed of Hon. Wm Gaston, John Miller, Matthias Manley and Francis Lamotte) “and submitted to them a plan of a wooden building 52 feet long, thirty six feet wide and 24 feet in height which was unanimously approved. It was then resolved that the church wardens be authorized to have the building erected as soon as possible, provided the expenditure did not exceed \$4000.00. The Hon. Wm. Gaston submitted the following account to the vestry: Balance from the former subscription made in 1824, \$500; received from the executor of Dr. Keys’ estate, \$1,100; for a total of \$1600. This Protestant gentleman sympathizing with the small number of Catholics who were making efforts to build at Newbern an edifice to the God of truth, charitably willed the sum of \$1,100 for that object.” \$1500 contributions from Gaston, Manley and Bishop England together were added for a total of \$3100.

In 1840 Gaston contracted with Hardy B. Lane to build the church to the specifications drawn and approved by England. The total cost was \$3784.34. The building was completed in 1841, however, due to the death of Bishop England the building was not blessed until the fall of 1844, by the Right Rev. Dr. Reynolds on his first trip to this portion of his diocese.

Fr. Croghan notes that in the 1850’s the church was “fully organized, numbering 30 souls. The greater portion of these were converts or the children of converts. The founders of this congregation are all dead and

their children, with one exception have all left the place.” His final note was to state that there was a pastoral residence built on the lot for \$480.

During the time of the Civil war the church was used as such for the Union soldiers. To protect the sacramental records the books were moved to a home out of the city but were updated when they were returned at the end of the War. There was another Catholic presence in New Bern during this time. Seven Sisters of Mercy of New York and a chaplain were sent to care for wounded soldiers in Beaufort and in 1862 ended up in New Bern caring for the wounded and sick. They were housed in the John Wright-Stanley House. By the time the War was over, 16 sisters had served in New Bern.

In 1860 there were seven Catholic congregations in the state with 350 members. By 1868 St. Paul’s had 110 members.

From 1887 until 1896, Fr. Thomas F. Price, the first native-born North Carolinian ordained to the diocesan priesthood and co-founder of the Maryknoll missionaries, was assigned here in New Bern. For any priest, being assigned to a parish during that time meant that the parish was his main residence, but not the only place he was to minister. Fr. Price ministered throughout eastern Carolina to sixteen different chapels taking care of sacramental needs as well as reaching out to those in need. In 1887, with the help of lay teachers, he began St. Joseph School, for the “colored” children in a rented home

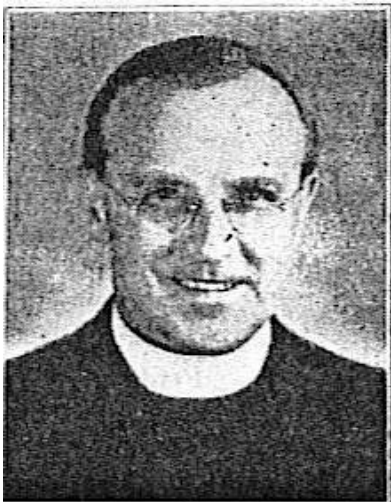


Altar , Old St. Paul's, about 1890

on Queen Street. Mr. James E. O’Hara and Mr. Thomas J. McCarthy purchased the property on Bern Street, which would become the site of St. Joseph Church and School, in 1891 for Bishop Haid. “Diocesan priests staffed the parish until Fr. Charles

Hannigan of the Josephite Fathers arrived in 1924. In 1926 he secured the help of four Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary from Scranton PA for the school”.

On June 1, 1928, the Passionist priests came to staff St. Joseph. In his 30 years of service, Fr. Julian Endler, C.P. was responsible for the remarkable growth of this community. His tireless work and sacrifice made possible the building of the church, the elementary school, as well as a high school. The 47 active members of the church when he arrived grew to almost 300 through his leadership and spiritual guidance. He was faced with tragedy more than once. In April of 1943 a fire began in the Church sacristy and gutted the interior of both the church and school. He immediately began to rebuild. On Dec. 7, 1943 the new church and school were dedicated. A convent, for the Sisters was built as well. In 1955 Egan Hall (the auditorium) burned down, but the foundation for a new hall was laid two months later. The building was dedicated in six months. Fr. Endler had many associates during his tenure in New Bern, but none are so regarded and loved as he is. As



Fr. Julian Endler, C.P.

was the practice of the period after the Civil War until the mid 1960’s, the “white” church (St. Paul) and the “colored” church (St. Joseph) were separately run.

In 1896 the steeple was added to St. Paul’s church.

In the early 1900’s, there was a small immigration of Lebanese families. Though traditionally of the Maronite rite of the Catholic Church, they helped support and build Latin rite churches. For many years, Fr. Elia Zaytoun (Maronite) helped to fulfill the sacramental needs of Lebanese families in the state.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters staffed St. Paul School in 1929. Classes were held in the convent. Due to the growth of the school, the original rectory was torn down in the early 1950’s to make room for the school building. A residence for the priests was built

on the other side of the Church building. In 1944 the Sisters of St. Joseph of Newark, NJ bought St. Luke’s Hospital on the corner of Broad St. and George St. built in 1915 by local physicians, to serve as a 40-bed hospital. It was enlarged and renovated in 1946 to accommodate up to 75 beds. It was in use until Craven hospital was built. The building was sold to the county.



St. Joseph’s Church, 1951

Fire was also a constant threat to the buildings on Middle Street. The North Carolina Catholic reported on April 27, 1947:

“The courage of Father Philip O’Mara and Father Frederick Koch saved the Blessed Sacrament on March 28th when fire ravaged St. Paul’s Church in New Bern causing an estimated \$15,000 damage.

The fire was discovered by Sister Imelda, superior of St. Paul’s School. She immediately phoned Msgr. Michael Irwin, pastor of the church, and the fire department. As the fire raged, Fathers O’Mara and Koch made the rescue of the Blessed Sacrament. Father O’Mara crawled on his hands and knees through the dense smoke and fire, while Fr. Koch assisted. A stream of water was played on Fr. O’Mara as he made the rescue to keep the flames from setting fire to his clothing.

The excellent work of the local fire department confined the flames to the sacristy and sanctuary and saved the entire structure.

The fire apparently started at about midnight from defective wiring in the basement and it quickly spread to the ceiling of the basement and from there to the main structure of the church.

St. Paul’s is the oldest Catholic Church in North Carolina. Until repairs are completed, services will be held in Egan Hall of St. Joseph’s parish in New Bern.

Msgr. Irwin is already making plans for the repair of the damage.”

Fr. Michael A. Irwin became the pastor of St. Paul's in 1928. Born in 1864 in Norfolk Virginia, he is considered to be one of the pioneers of the Catholic Church in North Carolina. He came to New Bern after spending 24 years as Pastor of St. Mark in Newton Grove. Little did he know at the time, that his pastorate in New Bern would be just as long. Known for his oratory, his knowledge of Scripture and music, he was a colorful man, unafraid of sharing his opinion and advises, even to Bishop Haid who ordained him. He was nominated for the title of Monsignor in 1940. His Golden Jubilee was celebrated in 1950 and passed away on January 6, 1952. He is buried in front of the



Msgr. Michael A. Irwin

In 1965, New Bern's two Catholic Congregations were combined into one parish. Of course, New Bern was not the only community to be given this challenge. Bishop Waters had been a leader in the integration of the Church beginning in 1953. The priest he had chosen to accomplish this was Fr. Thomas P. Hadden. Fr. Hadden is the first African American diocesan priest to be ordained in this Diocese. Despite many incidents of racism, Fr. Hadden combined the communities and he remained as pastor for ten years. St. Joseph's Church was designated as a chapel and the members became part of St. Paul's. The two grammar schools were integrated as well. Kindergarten through 4th Grade classes were held in the Bern St. buildings; 5th through 8th were held in the Middle St. buildings. St. Joseph High School became William Gaston Catholic High School and was sponsored by the parishes in New Bern Havelock and Jacksonville. The

priest's residence on Middle St. (now the regional office for Catholic Social Ministries). In his years as Pastor, he was beloved and respected. Though some thought he was unreasonably rigid, he felt that he was being faithful to the principles of the Church, as he had been taught. Our local chapter of the Catholic Daughters of America is named for him.

High School was closed in 1969.

Despite the difficulties of the first years of the combined parish, in time, the community outgrew the original church and held Masses in the school's gymnasium for years.

Father James R. Jones was appointed pastor of St. Paul's in 1979. He was called upon to build



Msgr. Thomas P. Hadden

a much-needed Church and continue the efforts to bring about a more unified parish. In 1980, the land on Country Club Road was acquired and plans were proposed to the parish to build a new Church, a new school; (where all grades would be on the same property), a convent, and a multi-purpose building. The community came together to meet the need. The Church, which would seat 500, was dedicated on April 10 1983. The school was opened in 1991 and convent was finished and opened in 1994. The Family Life Center was dedicated in April of 1997.

With the influx of retirees from the North and many young professionals with families moving to New Bern, the Catholic population continued to grow. Sta-



Groundbreaking for the first Church on Country Club Road, 1981

tics show that the parish grew from 825 families in 1986 to over 1700 families in 1996. In the spring of 1998 Fr. Ernest J. Ruede, who was appointed pastor in July of 1997, solicited volunteers in the parish bulletin to form a committee to study the feasibility of a church expansion. Bill Fraser, who had overseen the construction of the recently completed Convent and Family Life Center, was appointed chair of this new Expansion Committee.

those who joined this committee, which held it's first

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St. Paul's Altar, Easter 1997

meeting on July 9, 1998, brought with them life times of experience and expertise in such fields as HVAC, architecture, structural engineering and construction, demographics, and public relations. New parishioners with special gifts were asked to join the committee as well. Over the years the following

parishioners served on this committee in one capacity or another: Sr. Susan Armbruster, IHM, Bryan Brown, Yvonne Borquez, Steve Damico, Bud Danehy, Jim Dunham, Tom Fitzpatrick, Liz Hirschkind, Jerry Hobbins, Harry Killian, Rod LaPorte, Catherine Lawrence, Al Merino, Edith Merino, Linda Morris, Fr. Dan Oschwald, Nancy Stewart, Dennis Taylor, Bob Walsh, and John White.

The architectural firm of Stevens and Francis, AIA was hired as architects, Charles Francis and Diane Filopowicz represented the firm throughout the project. Farior and Sons of Farmville, NC was awarded the construction contract. The last Mass was celebrated in the "old but soon to be expanded" church on January 12, 2003. With great joy and thanksgiving, mass was celebrated for the first time in the new church on September 18, 2004.

What would the Honorable William Gaston think of the community whose journey he helped begin? Let us hope that in 183 years, the parishioners of St. Paul's will be as grateful for our sacrifices to build the of the Kingdom of God, as we are of those made for us!

While the dedication of this Church might seem to be about the building only, it is more so about the community that has built it. We, the community of St. Paul, on the occasion of the dedication of our new Church building wish to express our thankfulness for our many blessings. We reaffirm the Church's teachings and will strive to practice them in our daily lives. We will be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances

and will be guided by our Christian beliefs in our actions and responses to life experiences. We do so promise God.

Sources of information for the History:

North Carolina Catholic, Parish records of St. Joseph and St. Paul parishes, previously printed histories of the parishes, Msgr. Gerald Lewis, Fr. Stephen Worsley, and Msgr. James Jones, Fr. Ernest Ruede, Tar Heel Catholics, William Powers



Parish Ministries

At present there are 84 different ministries serving the needs of the Catholic Community as well as the community at large.

Administration and Finance These groups help in the day-to-day operation of the parish and are the underlying support of all the parish ministries: Pastoral Council, Finance Committee, Cemetery Committee, Bishop's Annual Appeal.

Worship and Spiritual Life These groups provide for the worship and spiritual needs of the parish with policies and practices consistent with the norms of the diocese and the universal church: Liturgy Committee, Stewardship Ministry, Eucharistic Ministers at Mass, Eucharistic Ministers to the Sick, Lectors, Altar Servers, Ministers of Hospitality, Folk Choir, Gospel Choir, Adult Choir, 11:30am Mass Music Ministry, Funeral Ministry, Sanctuary Support, Offertory Counters, Eucharistic Adoration, Charismatic prayer Group, Mary's People, Family Chalice Program for Vocations, Chaplet of Divine Mercy, Order of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Order of St. Luke, St. Paul Rosary Makers.

Faith Formation provides opportunities for all parishioners to grow in their Catholic faith through catechesis and worship that is nurturing and supportive to their mission. Faith Formation program, St. Paul Education Center, S.P.E.C. Home School Association, Parish baseball teams, St. Paul Youth Ministry, Come Home Ministry, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Scripture Study, Marriage Preparation Forums, Declaration of nullity for failed marriages, Adult Education

Series, Lay Ministry Formation, adult Faith Enrichment Program, L.A.R.C. program.

Human Concerns addresses the issues of peace and justice as well as the human needs of people in our local community and beyond. Respect Life Committee, Social Justice Committee, Catholic Social Ministries, Parish Resource Book, Volunteer Parish Visitors, Earthen Vessels Ministry, Low Flying Angels, Parish Nurse Ministry, Loan Cupboard, Eastern Pregnancy Care Center, Religious Community Services, Prison Ministry, St. Paul Women's Craven County Jail Ministry, After Care, MERCI Clinic, Senior Pharmacy Program, Crop Walk, Operation Exodus.

Parish Life groups are about building parish community through religious and social events and participating in various organizational activities. Welcoming Ministry, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Junior Catholic Daughters, Hispanic Ministry, St. Joseph Altar Rosary Society, African Ancestry Ministry and Evangelization Network, Neighborhood Faith Communities, St. Paul Supper Clubs, Epistle Newsletter, Church Bulletin Staff, S.P.E.C. Athletic Program, St. Paul Playgroup, Sunday Co-op Nursery, Grief Support, Survivors of Loved Ones, St. Paul's Singles Club.

Inside the Church Building

Baptismal Font: As you enter the church you will notice the Baptismal Font. It was designed for use in infant baptism as well as adult immersion baptism. It is placed at the entrance because we have come into our faith through the Sacrament of Baptism and are reminded of that each time we come into the worship space. It has flowing water to remind us that we are to become living water, dynamic in our faith, not still and stagnant. Christ's love will flow out of us to positively affect the community. There are three steps down into the bottom pool representing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through whom we are cleansed in the waters of Baptism. Notice the three bowls, which are also representative of the Holy Trinity, as the source of all life.

Corpus: The Corpus on the cross behind the altar is 8 ½ feet tall and weighs 300 pounds. This representation of the ultimate sacrifice of Christ is hand-carved and hand-painted linden wood.

Statues: The statues of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph are joined by St. Paul the patron saint of our parish. St. Joseph and St. Paul stand together to represent the joining of the two parishes to make one community in Christ. The Statues are made of linden wood, and were hand-painted and hand-carved in the Dolomite Mountains in Italy. Each stands five feet tall.

Stations of the Cross: The fourteen stations are hand-painted and hand-carved linden wood. Each depicting the agony Christ endured for our salvation.

Stained glass: Associated Crafts of Arizona created the windows across the front of the church. They were custom designed and assembled on site. The smaller vignettes were originally in a church in New Jersey that was closed. From left to right the scenes are the Nativity, Transfiguration, Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes, Jesus Teaching His Disciples, Jesus Condemned, Resurrection, Triptych of the Last Supper, Ascension, Crucifixion, Entry into Jerusalem, Miracle of the Raising of the Widow's Son, Jesus with the Children, and The Baptism of Jesus. To the right of the Tabernacle in the niche, is Jesus, The Good Shepherd.

Four of the six stained glass in the side windows are representative of the four Gospel writers (Evangelists) Matthew, Mark Luke and John. Matthew is depicted as a man, Mark as a lion, Luke as an ox, and John as an eagle, each holds a book. The left side center window pattern is of grapes while the right side has a sheaf of wheat signifying the bread and wine used for the Eucharist.



Stained glass vignettes pictured in the church where they were installed originally.



“Last Supper”



The Good Shepherd



The Baptism of the Lord



The Ascension

Cover Photo taken by Bill Fraser. Back cover photo taken by Bill Rust.



“But the people answered Joshua , ‘We will still serve the Lord.’ Joshua therefore said to the people, ‘You are your own witnesses that you have chosen to serve the Lord.’ They replied, ‘We are, indeed!’ ‘Now, therefore, put away the strange gods that are among you and turn your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.’ Then the people promised Joshua, ‘We will serve the Lord, our God, and obey his voice.’”

Joshua 24:21-24