

A FIVE YEAR REFLECTION

Msgr. Donald F. Staib

It has been a momentous five years since our church was dedicated by the newly named Bishop Ned Shlesinger on July 15, 2017. I have retired, Father Chris Koehn has become pastor, Bishop Luis Rafael Zarama has become bishop of the Diocese of Raleigh, and Covid has dominated our lives for more than two of the five years.

Since October 9, 2016 our weekly bulletin has been posted on our website as the weekly E-News. Before this electronic record of history, beginning in September 1999, each year I made bound copies of the weekly paper bulletin. Perhaps someone will want to write a history of our parish a hundred years from now. Our bulletins record our parish activities week to week.

One of the items not on our website is the Rite of Dedication we used on that day in July 2017. There are some paper copies still available, but they will not last forever. That Dedication booklet will now be added to the website.

And I will take this opportunity to add the sermon I gave on Dedication Day. The sermon will join another sermon on the website that explains our statue of Jonah.

There is another reason to post the Dedication booklet: the paper edition does not have the complete and correct description of the relics inside our altar. Here is that story:

I wanted relics in the altar to express our American history of Saints. We have: St. Damien who served as missionary among the lepers of Molokai in Hawaii; and we have St. Kateri Tekakwitha a member of the Iroquois Native American tribe.

One of the members of our parish donated a relic of St. Martin de Porres who ministered to the slaves in Lima, Peru.

I also wanted to add a relic of St. Marianne Cope who also ministered to the lepers in Molokai.

Relics are obtained in Rome and in early 2017 I asked Msgr. John Wall to go to the appropriate office while he was travelling to Italy. He called me from Rome at some very early hour in the morning to tell me that the office did not have any relics of St Marianne – but they did have relics of St Maria Goretti. I said that was not what I was looking for and thanked him for his efforts.

On the day of Dedication I was startled when Msgr. David Brockman, Vicar General, handed me the container with a relic of St Maria Goretti. Relics are sent only to the office of the local Bishop. I did not know Msgr. Wall had asked them to be sent. Not knowing what else to do, I added her relic to the other relics and we placed them inside the altar during the Mass of Dedication.

St. Damien, St. Marianne, St. Kateri, St. Martin de Porres, St. Maria Goretti all led heroic lives. They are models for us, even though we do not face the demanding circumstances of their lives.

I write these words in May, 2022. Recent days have been scary. War rages in Ukraine. More than 1 million Americans have lost their lives to Covid. For some that means they have lost mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers.

In the years to come there will be other fears and challenges. I pray the lives of the saints whose relics are in our parish altar give us courage, insight, and grace to respond with faith in ourselves and charity for all people we encounter.

And I pray for more happy days like the one we celebrated together 5 years ago.

DEDICATION MASS SERMON

In a letter dated July 8, 1997, twenty years and one week ago, Bishop Joseph Gossman wrote the letter that established St. Mary Magdalene Parish. Seven years ago, when I became a certain age, I reached the conclusion that a new church dedication would not happen in my tenure as pastor, and I was trying to figure out what to do with the rest of my life.

In the Old Testament Proverbs 16.9 we read: *'The human heart plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps.'* The 1400's spiritual writer Thomas a Kempis wrote: *'Man proposes, God disposes.'*

It is only by some unexplainable grace of God that we all are here today. We as a parish, along with visitors, express our gratitude in celebrating today's Eucharist. I am grateful - and some of my remarks today will express both parish and personal gratitude.

Thanks to Bishop Joseph Gossman for giving me 2 sabbaticals that turned my life and ministry in directions I never could have imagined. My first sabbatical was serving in the Boat People refugee camp in the Philippines. My second was a year teaching in Nha Trang seminary in Vietnam. Bishop Gossman is the one I asked in 1997 for this assignment in SouthWest Wake County which became St Mary Magdalene.

Thanks to Bishop Burbidge, who on 2 occasions said to me *'I hope you are not going to retire.'* In doing that he broke the rules of the Diocese, but I will not report him to our new bishop Luis Rafel Zarama. Bishop Burbidge called this morning to offer good wishes.

To almost Bishop Ned Sheslenger for coming today. On the day it was announced he would be auxiliary bishop of Atlanta I watched the news conference.

Bishop, I heard you say: in June you were waiting for a new assignment in Raleigh, you were going to a couple of First Masses, go fishing in Colorado, and then you had nothing to do. Are you not glad I asked you to come today and saved you from a boring summer?

When you meet with Bishops of the Province about major church decisions, please assure them that we at St. Mary Magdalene have no pretensions to become the Cathedral Church of the Archdiocese of Apex.

I heard you say in the press conference that in going to Atlanta you would lose the pastoral experience you once knew in Newton Grove. You are blessed to discern that loss and to seek to remember it. And the Archdiocese of Atlanta will be blessed with your ministry.

OTHER ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge those who have had major roles in bringing about this new church. In the Program we tried our best to make as large and complete a list as we could.

Cannon Architects and Clancy and Theys Construction Company. And subcontractors. And all the workers who came to build on this site.

This is the 4th construction project we have done with these two firms. They have been a wonderful group to work with and we are always grateful for the thorough follow-up they have done for us over the years. Our Tuesday morning construction meetings for the past 18 months were always productive and many times enjoyable.

Our Diocese of Raleigh and those who serve at the Catholic Center

With their help we are now the #1 parish in the Diocese of Raleigh. Among the 100 or so parishes we have received the largest loan ever given to a parish. We're No. 1.

My Priest Friends

4 pm is a very unhelpful time for a Dedication when so many priests have Saturday Masses; I am grateful you have come today. I was hoping that we would be able to provide some diocesan events in our church for all the clergy, but we all know, we are going to be up-staged in a couple weeks when the new Cathedral is dedicated.

Until now I have always sat in that section for church dedications. Pastors usually tell people '*not to talk in church,*' but we clergy do talk. I know how those conversations go: '*why did he do this; why did he put that there; where did he buy that.*' With the development of high tech sound equipment, we put some small microphones over there. I will be interested to listen to the conversations.

My Family who came for this significant occasion - all my relatives

My family started in Williamsport Pa, but then we all moved to other parts of Pennsylvania, New York, North Carolina, Florida, Colorado. I am grateful so many could come here today for this celebration. Some came for the NC BBQ, and some came because they live in a land locked State and we are going to the beach next week.

Bishop Desmond Tutu said '*You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, [as you are to them.]* God was good to me.

My Friends from Vietnam, who came to USA to live with me in Durham, then moved to other places

In the middle of my life, twice - in 1982 and again in 1996 Bishop Joseph Gossman and our Diocese offered me the opportunity of 2 sabbaticals. Those opportunities were my introduction to Asia, and I still marvel how it

all unfolded. For my friends from Vietnam here today - I want to recognize their gifts for our church, even tho not members - and their gifts to our country. They were the boat people who took long and sometimes perilous journeys in their human search for Freedom, for Family, for Faith. And one more F that pertains to the more mundane for me: for Food

Our StMM Staff

When we were both young priests, Msgr. John Wall told me that *'the secret of administration is delegation.'* Our staff at St. Mary Magdalene is blessed with talent, dedication, and friendship - and the ability to find and encourage even more talent among the members of our parish.

Some Special Acknowledgements [3, then applaud at end]

Joan Keary

Has been our sacristan without official title for church liturgies. She has brought and secured church decorations for Mass each week, in church and in the chapel. For the construction process she has been the one who researched not only the big items like the stained glass windows, but the small items of candle followers and altar adornments. Joan is so valuable we keep doubling her salary, but 10 x nothing is still nothing.

Anthony Reese

Anthony has 3 jobs: he the founder and director of Parish Athletics, organizing 1500 children and volunteer coaches in 5 sports throughout the year, he is part time Director of our Facilities, and for the construction process he has been the go-to person for getting tasks done when there were loose ends.

Celeste Usischon

Is our Parish she is Director of Faith Formation and coordinates our special Sacramental Liturgies. She finds the volunteers and trains them and trains our liturgical ministers. For the construction project she has organized this

day of celebration and supervised the creation of the Dedication Program. Celeste makes all the trains run on time. If I am ever called to lead our country in a military invasion I will only accept the job if Celeste is the Quartermaster.

I have some gifts for them – On the evening of a First Communion rehearsal in May the picture on the Dedication Program was taken.

On these pictures are words: *God made the rainbow*, but Celeste made our Dedication Day, Anthony helped put the construction pieces together, Joan brought together the new church adornments.

Jim Galkowski

Jim has been the Project Director for this new church. Jim is a physician's assistant, and when I had some bothersome illness last January I can attest to his caring and experienced bedside manner. He has been a Veterans Hospital CEO, managed government construction projects in the hundreds of millions of dollars, has been our longtime Parish Finance Council Chair and has a computer on which every penny we ever took in or spent can be found.

When we began our church project, the Diocese told me I needed a Project Director. I said why? *'When we built the other 3 buildings our Principal Bob Cadran and I did fine without a Project Director.'*

The Diocese said *'you need a Project Director.'* I was mulling that over, trying to remember the seminary course in Church Law that goes something like this: *'how to get around church rules when you don't like the rule.'*

One day Jim and I went to the office of the Architects and there was some complication in our plans that involved the interaction of materials, schedules, money, personnel, sub-contractors, vendors, etc – and I realized: the Diocese was right.

When we came out of the meeting I told Jim we needed to find someone like him. A pause - and he said he was thinking about making some changes in his work life. I knew then - we were in very capable hands.

One memorable day for me: we were having USA and Vietnam paperwork problems about the Stations of the Cross and Statues - and Jim called the Embassy of Vietnam in Washington. Marvel is: they called him back.

I have a gift for Jim. The gift has nothing to do with Jim's talents. This gift represents the exact opposite of who Jim is and what he can do and how he does his work. It is one of those gifts in which it is not the gift that matters - it is the thought behind the gift.

It's Jonah - check the parish bulletin for Jonah details.

Members of our Parish

In December 2011 we became aware of a historic stained glass window of St Mary Magdalene at the Resurrection. I mentioned to the parish it would be good to have this for a new church someday. I described where it came from and that it was part of a set.

Within a week 6 people offered to buy the set of windows. I said to myself: *'what have you done? You will never be able to find enough money to provide a church the size that Apex will need.'* Oh, me of little faith!

For all those whose names are in the Program on that list of donors - recognize that your generosity has brought about something I thought impossible.

You will have recognized we are not finished construction. Remember last Christmas sermon about the *'wiggly Jesus,'* the statue back here? Members responded generously so we could include the Chapel, but it takes a while to get all the items in the pipeline moving.

CONCLUSION

When we celebrated our first parish Mass together on September 12, 1999 at Apex Middle School our parish theme song was taken from Leonard Bernstein's Mass: *'Sing to God a simple song; make it up as you go along.'*

God has blessed us. We sure have *'made things up'* in a memorable way.