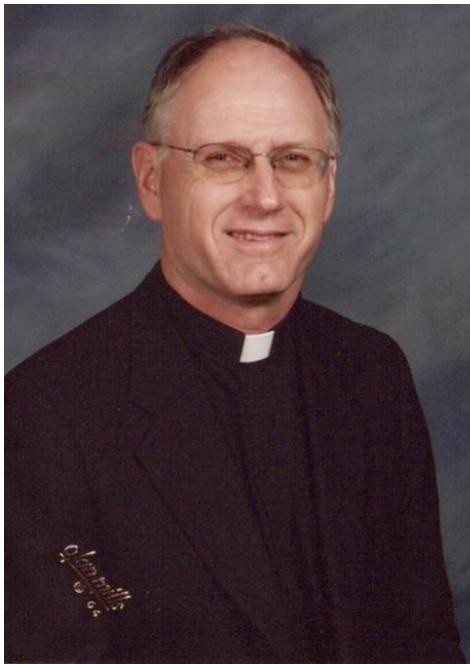


Key Moments in St. Peter's History

A series of historical highlights from the first 200 years of St. Peter – Libertytown.

Monsignor John A. Dietzenbach



*Figure 1 Msgr. John A. Dietzenbach c. 2006
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John Augustine Dietzenbach was born on December 9, 1951 at West Union, Iowa, the second of six children. He grew up on a family farm near Fort Atkinson, Iowa and attended St. Luke Church and school in St. Lucas, Iowa. After graduating from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa in 1974 with a BA double major in Business Administration and Philosophy, he attended St. Mary's Seminary and University in Roland Park, Baltimore, MD. He graduated with a Masters of Divinity in Theology from there in December of 1978 and during his last year in the seminary, he sought incardination (the official acceptance by one diocese of a clergyman from another diocese) with the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Fr. John was assigned to All Saints Parish on Liberty Road in January 1979, where he remained through his deaconate ordination on May 24, 1980 and his ordination to the priesthood on November 29, 1980. In the summer of 1981 he was assigned to St. Elizabeth Parish on Baltimore Street where he remained for 5 years, the shortest assignment of his priesthood. From St. Elizabeth's

he was assigned in 1981 to St. Stephen in Bradshaw, which was just beginning to be reconstructed after a second major fire had devastated it; experience which would prove useful to more than one parish in the future.

In January 1994, Fr. John arrived at St. Peter's in Libertytown – his first pastorate - immediately winning hearts and souls. Recalls one parishioner – “My daughter was making her first reconciliation and was in tears – she did not want to go into the “box”. Fr. John came out of the confessional, asked whose child this was and after I spoke up, he looked at me and said, Why don't you come in with her, Mom.” I had not spoken with Fr. until this time, but my opinion of him as a kind and caring person was formed at that moment, and it never changed.”

While many of us will recall how instrumental Fr. John was in the hours, months and years after fire destroyed our beautiful 134 year old church, Fr. was making a difference at St. Peter's and in

Libertytown long before the fire in 2004. During the first 10 years of his pastorate, a maintenance building was built, Sappington Hall was renovated, the building where the Thrift Shop and Food pantry are located was bought and renovated, and Angel Hill was bought and renovated. All of which was no doubt in preparation for the biggest building project yet to come – our current Church.

In May 2004, it was announced during the weekend Masses, that Fr. had been re-assigned to St. Ann's in Hagerstown. With a heavy heart, the parishioners prepared to say good-bye over the coming weeks. Then June 3, 2004 happened.

As bad as this fire was, this was not Fr. John's first experience with the effects of a fire and facing the "next day". In an interview given to the Frederick News-Post directly following the fire, he recalled that when he was a child, his family's barn burned. The animal escaped unharmed, but he had never seen his father devastated before. However, the next day his dad and uncles took chainsaws into the woods and by Christmas they had a new barn. He said, "In the face of catastrophe, you find out what you are really made of ... and how deep your faith is."

Losing a pastor AND a church at the same time was unthinkable. Even a letter to the editor of the Frederick News-Post asked that his transfer be reconsidered. Cardinal Keeler obviously agreed, as Fr. was informed that he would not be transferred from St. Peter's, to the relief of his flock.

Nearly two years later, on April 21, 2006, the parish family gathered to celebrate the groundbreaking of our new church. Cardinal Keeler announced to all present - and to the surprise of Fr. John, that our Pastor was being elevated to Monsignor John. Such a wonderful day for the Parish and the Priest!

Our 3rd and current church was dedicated in the Fall of 2008, and the following summer, in June 2009, now Msgr. John was assigned to pastor the Church of the Resurrection in Ellicott City. This parish came with a school, an associate priest and 10 years later, in 2019, the added responsibility for St. Paul Parish in Ellicott City as part of the Pastorate of St. Paul/ Resurrection.

In September 2020, about the time when Msgr. John may have reasonably been contemplating retired life, he instead embarked on a major reconstruction/renovation and new construction of a Church/hall/gathering space and a new cafeteria at Resurrection. Completion date is set for Spring of 2024, but in the meantime the congregation is meeting "under the big top" on Parish property, winter weather notwithstanding. And true to Fr's practical approach to situations like these, there is a sign inside the Pastoral Center that reads: "Bring a blanket, it's going to be cold this weekend."

In addition to his many responsibilities as pastor, Msgr. Dietzenbach has served on various Archdiocesan committees and was on a study of urban parishes headed by Bishop Riccard. He served on the Priests Council twice, the placement committee, the Priest Life and Ministry Board and the priests retirement board. In 2002 he was named vicar forane (a priest in charge of a subdivision of a diocese) for Western Maryland and he was also an Archdiocesan Consultor. A monsignor's job is never done, it would seem!

When asked to describe his priesthood, one of Msgr. John's reflections were that buildings have played a major role – quite the understatement, and reflective of the Iowa he carries with him. He also shared that he enjoys preaching, celebrating Mass, sacraments, parish social gatherings, meeting new people and while at St. Peter's, daily conversations with Deacon Mike (Misulia) before daily Mass. He reflected on the joys which have come from running youth group activities and retreats when he was newly ordained and later, as pastor, the good fortune he has had to have staffs that worked together and good councils to help guide the parish.

While at St. Peter's, he took a particular interest in personally repointing of the brick inside Angel Hill, not realizing it would later become his home. Whether picking up auction items in his truck, collecting soda cans for recycling, shoveling snow alongside Pat Spielman, or planting shrubs around the new church before the dedication – Fr. was always ready to lend a hand; UNLESS it was Saturday afternoon, in which case there was a homily which needed writing!



Figure 2 Fr. John clearing area outside Sappington Hall

Fr. also enjoys Church activities - the carnivals at St. Elizabeth and St. Stephen, Christmas in the Country and auctions at St. Peters, and Fall Festivals at Resurrection/St. Paul, to name a few. But all of these events require a lot of volunteers, so Msgr. instituted volunteer thank you parties at both St. Peter's and Resurrection – events which, according to him, “have provided me with memories for a lifetime.” Those who saw him dressed up as ‘leader of the pack’ or the scarecrow from the Wizard of Oz, have no trouble reliving the memories created by those wonderful annual “productions”, performed by Fr. and his staff, for the enjoyment and delight of Parish volunteers.

Msgr. celebrated 40 years as a priest in the fall of 2020. He is currently having his forever home built (building really IS a theme!) and is looking forward to reading, gardening, kayaking and cutting wood in his retirement. And maybe a little travel. He considers himself very blessed – but then so are all his many parishioners.