



Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

Bishop Michael William Hyle

Bishop Michael Hyle served as pastor at St. Peter's from 1943 to 1946. He was large of frame and had a bass voice with a very low range. As pastor of the church, Fr. Hyle oversaw several maintenance projects for church buildings, such as the painting of the steeple.

On April 23, 1946, a reception and dance honoring the returned servicemen of Libertytown District was held at St. Peter's Hall (known today as Sappington Hall). Fr Hyle welcomed the veterans and then refreshments were served and records were played for dancing.

Fr. Hyle also worked with the parishioners to bring back the annual picnic and tournament, which had ceased in 1942 due to the war. The significance of this event was that 1946 was the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the parish (1821) and the 75th anniversary of the second church (1870). Tournament riding began at 11 AM and there were several booths and games to enjoy, dancing was held in the afternoon and evening, and food was served throughout the day. Both Fr. Stephen Chylinski, who had just been appointed pastor of St. Peter's, and Fr. Michael Hyle, now at St. Stevens in Bradshaw, participated in the event.



*Bishop Michael Hyle,
photo credit to FindaGrave.com*

Fr. Hyle was born in Baltimore on October 13, 1901. He attended St. Charles College in Catonsville, MD, St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, and the North American College in Rome. He was ordained at St. John Lateran in Rome on March 12, 1927, by Bishop Giuseppe Palica. In 1961, Mount St. Mary's College in Emmitsburg, MD, granted him an honorary Doctor of Laws Degree.

Upon returning to the U. S., he was assigned to the Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Washington, DC, and appointed administrator of Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Washington. From these assignments he was appointed pastor of St. Peter's, and following that, as pastor of St. Stephen's Church in Bradshaw, MD, from 1946 to 1957, and then to St. Mary's of the Assumption Church in Govanstown, Baltimore.

Pope Pius XII named him a monsignor on April 30, 1958.

On July 3, 1958, he was named Coadjutor Bishop of Wilmington, DE, with the right of succession to the current bishop, Most Rev. Edward J. FitzMaurice. He was ordained a bishop on September 24, 1958, and on March 2, 1960, upon the retirement of Bishop FitzMaurice, who had been bishop of Wilmington for 35 years, he acceded to the bishopric.

As the fifth Bishop of Wilmington, he was present in Rome for the first three sessions of Vatican II and left the fourth early due to illness. He brought the philosophy of the Council home to his diocese and implemented several changes. He established a board of laymen to assist him in the areas of planning and development and in other areas where laymen had particular expertise. He established the Parish Council system in the diocese; it was to go into effect in January 1968.

Catholic social agencies were improved and their programs expanded. He took an active role in the civil rights movement, financing trips by diocesan priests and sisters to places like Selma, AL, to participate in rallies and marches. He established St. Mark's High School in the diocese and the University of Delaware's Newman Center.

He was also active in ecumenical matters, giving an address to the 1964 Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Delaware and acting informally in groups and organizations to promote this attitude. In November, 1964, he said, "This is a moral principle – that all men should be absolutely free to follow the religious dictates of their own consciences as long as they do not interfere with the rights of others," adding, "We believe that individuals have rights, even though they may be in error."

On occasion he was a heavy smoker, and would often ask others for remedies for laryngitis ... except giving up cigarettes.

Bishop Hyle died on December 26, 1967. He entertained a relative in the afternoon and went upstairs to rest. The housekeeper brought him a newspaper at 5:30. He did not respond to her call for dinner and she went upstairs at 6 PM and found him collapsed. He was pronounced dead by a doctor called to the house. He was the first bishop of Wilmington to die in office. It was later determined that he had had a coronary thrombosis.

The Pontifical Funeral Mass was held on Saturday, December 30, 1967, at Christ Our King Church, his first assignment in the Diocese of Wilmington. He was buried at All Saints Cemetery, Wilmington, DE.