



# Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

## Parish Center

“Our facilities are greatly strained...” noted our parish in correspondence with Archbishop William Borders seeking permission to begin a building campaign for a new parish center in 1988. The case was made for the beautiful facility that, once completed, would be dedicated on December 22, 1991.

The 1980's had been a period of tremendous growth for St. Peter's. With the parish covering 400 square miles and encompassing 20 small communities in eastern Frederick County and western Carroll County, the 5% annual growth rate of that region was eclipsed by an even greater rate of growth at St. Peter's. The number of families in the parish had grown from 340 in 1985 to 425 just two years later. The Religious Education Program was caring for more than 300 young people from pre-school to high school. The Religious Education Center and Hall (now Sappington Hall, the former parish center) was also being used for Adult Education, Scouting, Alcoholics Anonymous, Ala-non, senior citizens, Men's & Ladies Clubs, parish & community social gatherings & dinners, craft & youth groups, and for food & clothing distribution to the poor. The other community facilities in Libertytown such as the fire hall and Methodist Church hall were also pressed to their limits. The Sunday School Program of Religious Education was seen as having the greatest space problem. The large number of children had to be divided and meet on alternate weeks, presenting a real challenge to the volunteer teachers who wished to provide weekly instruction.

Archbishop Borders reviewed the parish's request that he received on March 8, 1988 and quickly agreed with the parish's conclusion that a new facility was needed, granting permission for the campaign. A building committee was formed and began meeting as well as coordinating with the Parish Corporators John Lyons and William Beckman.

Former pastor Fr. Gene Nickol, former Director of Religious Education Carmela Douds and her secretary Theresa Hagy, Pastoral Council President at the time Terry Poole, and some other members of the Pastoral Council who were involved with the project recently gathered in the facility they helped make happen more than thirty years ago. Pat Carson, Harry Ford, Dorothy Branzell, and Jan “Jack” Niemiec all recalled that parishioners supported the idea and recognized the need. Carm Douds noted that the dirt floor cellar of the old school building had been dug out and



Fig. 2 – Former pastor Fr. Gene Nickol, past Parish Religious Education staff and Pastoral Council members meeting with St. Peter's History Committee members in October 2022.

lowered to provide more space for religious education, but that the conditions were far from ideal. “Jack” Niemiec, who led the fundraising effort, recalled how readily parishioners were willing to pitch in with contributions to help achieve the goal of building the new center, even local farm families who appeared to be scraping by made generous pledges.

The group shared a vision for a facility that would be “classy” but still within the parish’s means. Archived minutes from the planning meetings reflect that the committee spent time on many details from lighting fixtures and chair rail molding to paint colors and door hardware. Floor and wall coverings, table and chair selection were all coordinated. The volunteer committee members envisioned the various ways the building could be used, and made sure those uses would be accommodated. All remember the invaluable input of parishioner Dan Sullivan who, as an architect, advised the committee and provided many suggestions along the way. Sadly, he passed away in May 1990, a month before ground was broken for construction of the parish center. Its largest room, Sullivan Hall, is named in his memory.

On Dec 22, 1991 the new Parish Center was dedicated in conjunction with the centennial of the founding of Notre Dame Academy whose former building, now our parish office, sits adjacent to the new center. Archbishop William Keeler was the celebrant. (He had succeeded Archbishop Borders who had authorized the building campaign three years earlier.) There was no sigh of relief for Fr. Gene, the Council or Building Committee yet, though. Christmas was just three days away and there were NO CHAIRS YET! But at 7am on Christmas Eve a large tractor trailer pulled up with the seating that was to be used that night. Fr. Gene called Otto Pototschnik who rallied many hands to make quick work of what felt like a Christmas miracle.



*Fig. 3 St. Peter's Parish Center seen from Church St./MD Rt.75  
Christmas, 2000*