



Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

Fathers White, Norton and Sargus

Similar to Frs. Monteverde, McNulty and Farrell, none of these three priests were assigned to St. Peter's for very long. Combined, their pastorates at St. Peter's totaled only 9 years; each serving about three years as our Pastor. While Fr. White and Fr. Norton pre-date today's parishioners, it is very likely that a number of today's parishioners will recall Fr. Sargus, who was at St. Peter's in the late 1950's.

Fr. John Paul White was born in County Cork, Ireland, in 1860. He graduated from Mill Hill College in England and was thereafter ordained by Cardinal Herbert Vaughan. Cardinal Vaughan established St. Joseph College of the Sacred Heart in Mill Hill in 1866 and in 1870 the Mill Hill missionaries were directed by the Pope to do mission work in the United States with especial emphasis of service to the recently freed enslaved persons. Here, in 1893, the Josephite Order was established.

Fr. White was sent as a Mill Hill missionary priest to Louisville, KY, and in about 1892 was transferred to Baltimore, MD. He served as assistant pastor at St. Jerome's in Baltimore and in 1894 was sent as pastor to St. Peter's in Libertytown. He was transferred from St. Peter's in October, 1897, to be assistant pastor of St. Joseph's church in Baltimore and later he became pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Fr. White died on August 15, 1904, in St. Joseph's Hospital in Baltimore. He died from peritonitis, which set in after an appendicitis operation. At the time of his death he was pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in south Baltimore. He is buried in New Cathedral Cemetery in Baltimore.



*Figure 1 Fr. John P. White
c. 1894-1897*



*Figure 3 undated photo of Fr. John Norton
Courtesy, Archives of the Archdiocese of
Baltimore. Associated Archives at St.
Mary's Seminary & University, Baltimore,
Maryland.*

Fr. John T. Norton was born in Baltimore in 1869. He studied for the priesthood at St. Charles College, St. Mary's Seminary, and at the North American College in Rome. He was ordained in Rome on June 4, 1898, at the Church of St. John Lateran by Archbishop, later Cardinal, Francesco di Paola Cassetta. His first assignment on returning to Baltimore was St. Peter's in Libertytown.

In January, 1902, Fr. Norton was succeeded by the recently ordained Father Samuel J. Kavanagh. Fr. Norton, on January 12, 1902, assumed his duties as assistant pastor at St. Martin's, Baltimore. He remained there until 1915, when he was transferred to St. Augustine's in Elkridge as pastor.

On Saturday, October 15, 1932, Fr. Norton's sister, Miss Fannie Norton, was attacked by John Hess, a church sexton, who was drunk. Fr. Norton came to his sister's assistance. Both were stabbed in the attack, her in her cheek and him in his side. He was also hit in the head with a crowbar, requiring 12 stitches. Two men subdued Mr. Hess who was attempting to attack them a second time. The Catholic Review reported on

October 22 that the two were recovering well from their injuries.

Fr. Norton died two months later, on December 14, 1932. Dr. Howard Maldeis performed an autopsy on the body of Fr. Norton and stated that the death was caused by acute cardiac insufficiency, or heart trouble, and not the stab wounds inflicted by John Hess the previous October. The autopsy was deemed necessary to obtain a cause of death with certainty. Mr. Hess would thus not be charged with murder, but the charge of attacking the priest with intent to kill would stand, and Mr. Hess would be tried at the next session of the court in Ellicott City.

Archbishop Curley presided over his funeral service on Saturday, December 17, 1932, and he was buried at St. Mary's Cemetery, Govans, MD. His obituary lastly notes, "A priest of a gentle, kindly disposition, Fr. Norton was beloved by all who knew him. He was a welcome guest wherever he went."

Fr. Edward T. Sargus was born in Newark, OH, in 1913. He was the fourth of five children born to two Syrian immigrants. During his early years the family moved to Westernport, MD. He studied for the priesthood at St. Charles College in Catonsville and St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, from which he graduated in 1935 with a bachelor's degree. After further theological studies at St. Mary's Seminary he was ordained by Bishop John McNamara on June 8, 1939.



Figure 2 undated photo of Fr. Edward T. Sargus, Courtesy, Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Associated Archives at St. Mary's Seminary & University, Baltimore, Maryland.

His first twelve years as a priest were spent as assistant pastor at St. Bernadine's in Baltimore. Following that he was assistant pastor at St. Alphonsus and St. Bartholomew, both in Baltimore. Then he came to St. Peter's from 1958 to 1961 as pastor. After that he was assigned as pastor for two years at St. Martin in Baltimore and to St. Stephen's in Bradshaw from about 1964 to 1972. His last assignment before retirement was to St. Anthony Shrine in Emmitsburg from 1973 to about 1980.

Fr. Sargus returned to St. Bernadine's for a visit after he retired. At the time they were doing work to restore the gold dome of the church and found that it had been hit by gunfire. Fr. Sargus owned that he had shot at pigeons on the dome from the third floor of the rectory and donated \$2000 to the repair fund.

He retired to Hollywood, Florida, where a sister lived.

While there he continued to minister as assistant pastor of Nativity church in Hollywood and as chaplain at the

Hollywood Medical Center for many years. He died from cancer on August 19, 2004, at the age of 91. He is buried at his family's plot in New Cathedral Cemetery, Baltimore, near his parents and his siblings.