



# Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

## Siting the Third Church .... the Deacon with a tape measure



*Figure 1 Second Church and St. Peter's statue after the fire, June 2004*

After fire destroyed St. Peter's Second Church and the immediate needs of where to celebrate liturgical events had been arranged (including where to house our pastor!), all thoughts turned to rebuilding. But that term – rebuilding - meant different things to parishioners.

The Parish had been growing and for about 10 years, Masses were being said simultaneously in the Church and the Parish Center to accommodate everyone. Shortly before the fire, the Parish planning committee asked Fr. John Dietzenbach for permission to start looking for another site to build a larger church; possibly on campus, but

probably on new land. After the fire, the subject of where to build suddenly became an immediate need. Some parishioners understandably wanted to have a replica of the beloved second church re-built; but since the Parish was growing – we needed a larger church.

Prior to June 3<sup>rd</sup>, the planning committee had looked to potentially build a larger church on adjoining farm land. In connection with that plan, a gentleman's agreement had been reached on the price. That was before the fire. After the fire, the official price for the land increased significantly, which made the cost prohibitive. A new plan would have to be developed. And quickly. The Parish Council had already announced the date for a parishioner meeting, to announce plans for building our new church – but now those plans were no longer feasible.

Enter Deacon Michael G. Misulia. A civil engineer by training, he was a 1941 graduate of Rensselaer Polytechnic College, who prepared coastal charts of France for the allied invasion of Europe as well as charts of the Philippine Islands for McArthur's 'return' while working with the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey. He then transferred to the Army



*Deacon Michael Misulia (right), who died Oct. 30, is shown in 2006 helping break ground at the new site for St. Peter the Apostle in Libertytown, one he helped plan. (CR File)*

*Figure 2  
November 11, 2011 Catholic Review article on the life of Deacon Misulia*

Map Service where he mapped the surface of the moon for the first lunar landing and moonwalking the 1970's. Which is to say, that Deacon Mike's skill set was not limited to those activities normally associated with an 86 year old 'officially retired' deacon. Deacon Misulia came to Fr. John with good news. He had taken his tape measure and walked the area where the burned church, the damaged rectory and the original chapel had stood. By angling a new building just so, Deacon Mike explained how he believed we could just fit a church of the size we needed, on our existing land. Rubeling & Associates, the architectural firm hired by the Parish for the project, would later confirm Deacon Mike's calculations.

Once it was realized that this plan would actually work, it wasn't long before practically everyone agreed – we would have the best of all worlds. We would reclaim the land where the original chapel stood, take a small piece of the cemetery (a couple of graves would need to be moved), use the land where the remains of the second church stood, add the land immediately behind the second church and include the land where the damaged rectory currently stood. By combining all those parcels of land, we would be able to "build a church for our children's children's children", as Parish Council member Sheila Thompson so poignantly stated. Looking back, Fr. Dietzenbach mused that providentially, the pieces for our new church were being laid before we realized it. Two years earlier in fact, when Angel Hill had been purchased, the parking lot for the to-be-built church had been part of the purchase. Now this additional parking would become critical to the success of the plan, along with Angel Hill itself - the 'spare residence' which would now become the new rectory.

Deacon Mike was born in 1918 of immigrant parents (his father Russian; his mother Ukrainian) and grew up in New York City in the Russian Orthodox Church. He moved with his wife Josephine to Philadelphia to design aircraft for the World War II effort and while raising his 3 sons, converted to Roman Catholic. In 1958, the Misulia family found a catholic school at Notre Dame Academy in Libertytown and a catholic high school at St. John's Literary Institution (at Prospect Hall) in Frederick – essential ingredients for their sons' development. They moved to Cedar Brook Farm on Daysville Road in Libertytown and discovered the added bonus of country living.

Deacon Mike taught CCD for ten years and managed the cemetery for many years, organizing the records and opening a new section. With his wife Jo, Deacon Mike organized the St. Vincent de Paul Society. They both sang in the choir and Jo opened the thrift shop, which still operates today. Vatican II opened many doors to the laity. When the permanent diaconate became available, Deacon Mike took early retirement in order to study to become a deacon. He was ordained St. Peter's 2<sup>nd</sup> permanent deacon (James S. Wright was ordained our 1<sup>st</sup> permanent deacon in 1977) by Bishop Murphy in 1978 during Fr. Iaia's pastorate – and got in just under the wire of the 60 years of age limitation! Deacon Mike was awarded the Archdiocese of Baltimore Medal of Honor in 2003 and was fortunate to be able to see his vision for the 3<sup>rd</sup> church become a reality. He was Deacon of the Gospel for St. Peter's *Dedication of a Church and an Altar* on September 7, 2008. He died 3 years later, in 2011, but his legacy lives on – in the current church he helped make a reality, the Parish he loved so much and his beloved 3 children and 7 grandchildren.

Following in his grandfather's footsteps, his name sake, Michael Misulia, was ordained a transitional deacon on May 20, 2023 and his priestly ordination is slated for next June, 2024. What a blessing for St. Peter's!



Figure 3 View of the Misulia headstones through the main window of the third Church