



Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

First Communions and May Processions over the Years

Receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion for the first time has always been a milestone in the faith journey of a Catholic, whether - adult or child. Nearly 200 years ago, just months after the consecration of our first church, Fr. McElroy held a three day “preparatory retreat” for thirty future first communicants. Two days later on March 25, 1824, seventeen first communicants, five of whom were converts, celebrated their First Holy Communion.¹ Almost 100 years later, on Christmas Day in 1915, Fr. Kavanagh gave young girls and boys – and at least one adult – 24 year old William Bunke, their First Holy Communion. The Frederick papers reported that Mary Angela Sappington dedicated “... a few lines to the little girls and boys who were instructed by Rev. Fr. S. J. Kavana[u]gh for their First Holy Communion at the midnight mass...”



Figure 1 Alexander Gary Moxley 2000

Today, First Holy Communions are generally held in the Spring - in April or May, and celebrating First Holy Communion at Saint Peter's has continued to be a very special and memorable occasion for children, parents and the parish family. In more recent times, however; preparation into the meaning and purpose of the sacrament begins more than a year in advance.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame took a leading role as the catechists for this sacrament while they were running the Notre Dame Academy (1892-1965) and then staffing St. Peter's School (1965-1970). In 1970, Sister Catherine Ann Birch (for whom the Birch Library is named) remained on the campus to open St. Peter's Religious Education Center, training lay volunteers to teach a CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) program, remaining seven years, through February 1977. After Sister's departure, coordinators of the Early Religious Education program included Martha Langdon, Sr. Joan May O.P. and Carmela Douds. From 1994 through 2012, Anne Mason served in that role for the Parish and for the past 13 years this role has been held by Stacy Wright.

Under Anne and now Stacy's direction, parents gather several times throughout the year for instruction and prayer. Participation in weekend retreat liturgies for both First Reconciliation and First

¹ Archives of the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus, Box #10/Folder # 14, on deposit at the Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Georgetown University Library, Washington, D.C.

Holy Communion is a priority as well as attendance at Mass, to learn about the way we as Catholics pray through the Mass.

During Anne's tenure, the First Communion retreat was known as 'Come to the Table' day, which included a day where the history of bread was taught by Margie Gaudino and the children would bake their own prayer bread to share at home. Banners, made by the children, were used to designate family pews at the celebration, and this practice continues today. Anne would give a study on the Last Supper and Eucharist; Terri Jackson would give a detailed tour of the Church, explaining every important aspect of the vessels and vestments used during liturgy; and Donna Leo would hold a "mock" Mass having her son, Vincent, pose as the priest. Today, our pastor, Fr. Chuck Wible, conducts a Church tour and explains the parts of the Mass as well as his garments and why he wears what he does during Mass as one part of the First Communion retreat. Music has always played an important part the celebration; today the children learn their Communion song during the First Communion retreat as part of the three stations in which they participate.

In more recent years, First Communion Celebrations occur near the end of April. Prior to the building of the new church, the Parish held up to 6 separate celebrations over two weeks, in order to accommodate everyone in the smaller church. Since 2009, even with a class size of 136 (in 2012), everyone has been accommodated in a single celebration in the third and current Church. The children meet in the Daily Mass Chapel and the Knights of Columbus lead the children to their family pews followed by the Presider and Servers. It truly does "take a village."



Figure 2 Gerry Morrissey, Millie Williams, Marlene Tregoning May Procession 1956

Another devotion which St. Peter's continues to celebrates each Spring is the May Procession, or May Crowning. May has traditionally been the month in which Catholics focus on Mary. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, school age boys and girls would process to a statue of the Blessed Mary dressed in their finery (often First Holy Communion attire), where songs to Mary would be sung and Mary would be crowned with flowers. At St. Peter's, in years past, the girl in the 8th grade with the highest academic grade would be chosen May Queen, to crown Mary, and the girl with the next highest academic grade was chosen as her attendant. The celebration started with a procession to the Grotto with singing Marian hymns and the May Queen would place a flower crown on our Lady of Lourdes statue. In the 1980's, families brought flowers from their garden and the May procession was held inside, by processing as a congregation after the 9am Sunday Mass within the Second Church and crowning the statue of Mary in a

'grotto' under the Choir steps at the back of the Church. Today, the Parish honors our Blessed Mother by processing outdoors to the Grotto as a group after the 11am Sunday Mass, singing songs and placing flowers in Mary's honor.