



# Key Moments in St. Peter's History

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

## Father Jason Worley

“Your church is on fire.” This is not the account of our parish staff learning of the terrible June 3, 2004 blaze that destroyed our second St. Peter’s church. Those same words were spoken that morning in the rectory kitchen at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Essex by pastor Monsignor Robert Hartnett to associate pastor Fr. Jason Worley who had walked in. Msgr. Hartnett had just heard on Baltimore radio about the Libertytown fire and knew that Fr. Jason was to transfer here in a few weeks. Those plans would change.

Jason Worley was born April 24, 1966 in Baltimore, the seventh of the eight children of Herbert and Margaret Worley. He started school at Woodhome Elementary, but his parents wanted their children to experience a Catholic education, so he transferred to his parish school at St. Michael the Archangel in Overlea. He would later graduate from Towson Catholic High School. While a teenager, he was very active in his parish, serving St. Michael’s as a sacristan, a cantor, in the contemporary choir, the adult choir, and working in youth ministry. He loved it and spent almost every weekend at the church. He believes this is where his vocation was fostered, even as he worked as a baker for Weis Markets and managed the Fudgery at Harborplace.



*Figure 1 Father Jason Worley*

In 1988 he entered St. Hyacinth College and Seminary in Granby, Massachusetts where he would earn a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy. St. Hyacinth’s provided the formation program for the Order of Friars Minor Conventual, where men trained to become Franciscan priests and brothers. Fr. Jason loves to note that he graduated in the top 3 in his class, but then always adds that there were only three of them in it!

Following his years of candidacy and then in the novitiate, he took his temporary vows as a Franciscan. As that timeframe was nearing an end, he discerned that his calling was to be a parish priest and he really wished to serve in Maryland where he had been raised. Entering Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in 1995, he would earn a Masters of Divinity there and then be ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore by William Cardinal Keeler in 1999.

Fr. Jason’s first assignment was as an associate pastor of St. Mark’s in Catonsville, before moving onto Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Essex in 2002. It was while there that he received the call to become our pastor at St. Peter’s. In early spring of 2004, Fr. Jason drove out to Libertytown for a quick peek at his new assignment. He remembers parking in the lot next to Sappington Hall and admiring the old church and the campus. In the following weeks he would return to meet with pastor Fr. John Dietzenbach, some of the staff and the Pastoral Council. By the end of May the change of pastors had been announced to the affected parishes and in the Catholic Review, to be effective July 1. Then the June 4 fire happened. Fr. Jason rushed to Libertytown that day to see how he could help, and returned regularly the following days. With the Archdiocese’s subsequent decision not to make the change of pastors in the aftermath of the blaze, Fr. Jason was instead assigned as administrator and then pastor of Our Lady Queen of Peace in Middle River. It would be five years before he again received the call to become our pastor at St. Peter’s.

Another trip out to Libertytown brought him back to the same spot in the parking lot next to Sappington Hall for a view of the new church and an appreciation for how, in the ensuing years, the parish had overcome the tragic fire. He fondly remembers the morning that he moved his possessions into the rectory. There was a knock at the door and in walked Elizabeth Lee with some of the food that the Ladies Club had sent over, following a funeral repast in the Parish Center. Fr. Jason remembers everything that they sent over for lunch that day, including pickled beets, which he had never eaten before. He ate them to be polite, and realized they were delicious. From that time on the Ladies Club members were like his “aunts or sisters,” making him feel welcomed in his new parish.

While the new church had been built and dedicated, it had not yet been fully paid for. With his new assignment to St. Peter’s came \$6 million in debt to service, which weighed heavily on Fr. Jason. He recalls with great appreciation the help of Chris Gordon, a CPA and parishioner who offered to help tackle the numbers and, with his finance committee, worked out a realistic plan with the Archdiocese for repayment of the debt. The Archdiocese’s flexibility on their own capital campaign, and the ability for St. Peter’s to use all the funds that parishioners contributed to the Archbishop’s Annual appeal to service debt for a couple of years helped tremendously. Functions such as the BBQ & Bluegrass event and other parish fundraising activities also helped bring the outstanding debt down below \$1 million before Fr. Jason’s pastorate here ended at the start of 2018.

The history of our parish and its grounds impressed Fr. Jason. He would often walk through the cemetery as he was saying his prayers, much as his predecessor of a century earlier, Fr. Samuel Kavanagh had done. In fact, while Fr. Jason was here, the Calvary group statue of the crucifixion at the front of the cemetery, which is the earliest known memorial to victims of the Titanic sinking, dedicated by Fr. Kavanagh in April 1912, was rededicated by Fr. Jason in April 2012. And speaking of the campus, Fr. Jason liked to help out our maintenance supervisor Ryan Danieleley when it came time to clear snow. He

would grab a snow shovel to take care of the stairs, reminding him of his days as a youth when the kids would walk to St. Michael’s to shovel snow after clearing the walk at home.



*Figure 2 Fr. Jason in St. Peter’s Square as seven saints were canonized Oct. 16, 2016 during St. Peter’s pilgrimage to Rome.*

Fr. Jason fondly recalls that St. Peter’s has “a deep sense of faith, community and family, with a great spirit.” He talks about we are blessed with a loving staff who was so supportive when his parents were facing health issues. With Deacons John Martin and Jerry Jennings and Adult Faith Formation Coordinator Carolyn Nolan, Fr. Jason initiated the Sacred Sunday sessions at the Parish Center, in between the Sunday morning masses. He also notes how the parish has been a veritable “gold mine” of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, as well as hosting “awesome” youth ministry and elementary religious education programs. It was while one of those vocations, Fr. Michael Ruebling, was completing his final year of study in Rome that Fr. Jason led a group of parishioners on a pilgrimage there organized by parishioner Sheila Gorman.

Fr. Jason left St. Peter’s when he was assigned as pastor of St. Ursula’s in Parkville in January of 2018, where he continues to serve the faithful in his parish.