

# Through the Years

The parish of Saint Theresa was first established in 1960, with her humble beginnings as a Mission Church of Holy Ghost Parish of North Tiverton. Father Kerry O'Connor Keene, pastor of Holy Ghost, asked for parishioners in the Stafford Road area to hold religious education in their homes. A decade later the people of the East side of town decided a mission church in this area was due.

As the mission was developing arrangements were being made to purchase land at the corner of Stafford and Eagleville Roads. The land was deeded by Otto V. Macomber on July 6, 1951 to Holy Ghost Church. It wouldn't be available to use until 1974.

Father Gerhard Grams came to Holy Ghost Church as Father Keene's assistant in September 1950. From then he became very involved with the people of East Tiverton in helping to build our parish.

The Commodore Perry School, a two-room schoolhouse, was



Our Parish 1960-1974

vacant which made for a perfect place to hold meetings, socials and Sunday Mass. The school was leased and later deeded to the Holy Ghost Church at a Financial Town Meeting in thanks to the efforts of local families, Father Keene and Father Grams.

With a lot of hard work at hand people came with hammers, paint brushes and other materials needed to transform the schoolhouse into a combination Mission Church and hall with Father Grams at the helm.

Nearly 200 people attended our first Mass as a Mission Church on July 5, 1952 with Father Grams celebrating. From there the 8:30 Sunday Mass came to being.

To help raise money for a larger building, whist parties, suppers, dances and bazaars were held with Father Keene's full support. The "Ladies Sewing Circle" was formed. Throughout the year the area ladies would make handcrafted articles to sell at their yearly Penny Sale.

Father Grams was transferred in 1953. His replacement to help continue the work was Father John Rondeau.

Mary Jane Morin donated a parcel of land on August 21, 1958 which abutted the land deeded to Holy Ghost by Mr. Macomber. The stipulation was that she would stay there as long as she lived. Since her death the house was torn.

February 1959 brought Father Francis FitzGerald as our first pastor. At the same time we were in the process of purchasing the former Tommy Ryan's Nightclub on Hancock Street. The front would be used as the "rectory" for Father FitzGerald to live and the back as the hall for social events. In October the property was purchased by the Diocese.

Local people, once again, donated their time to turn the nightclub into a rectory and hall. In the meantime we were without a pastor. Father FitzGerald had become very ill.

It was through petitions and many prayers Father Grams was brought back to us to help while Father FitzGerald recuperated.

We now had a Mission Church, rectory and hall and was able to approach the Bishop to become our own parish. Father FitzGerald was now back as our pastor.

On March 29, 1960 we officially became the Parish of St. Theresa. The Bishop issued this proclamation and appointed two trustees.

Father FitzGerald officially blessed the newly renovated rectory/hall with many well-wishers in attendance. The Diocese conveyed the title of the property to us a few weeks later.

A Holy Name Society began then a Ladies Guild and later a Men's Club. The most popular event was the annual bazaar.

It was time to make our mission into a real Church. Permanent pews replaced the folding chairs, the altar which Father Grams built was replaced by a new one of the west side of the building. A new entrance was made to the east side of the building facing Stafford Road. There was now an aisle, and next a choir loft, baptismal font and confessional. We now had a "church."

Again Father Grams was transferred. The new assistants for the next few years under Father FitzGerald were Father William Joyce, Father John O'Neil, Father Bartholomew McMahan, Father John Murray and Father Joseph Donahue.

A replacement was sought due to failing health for Father FitzGerald in 1970. In August Father Stephen Lasko became our second pastor. The following month a testimonial in Father FitzGerald's honor was held in our parish hall.



Our Parish 1974 - 2002

Father Lasko worked hard with the Diocese, Trustees and the newly appointed Building Committee. On June 2, 1974 groundbreaking ceremonies took place on the land at the corner of Stafford and Eagleville Roads.

Construction was now underway. A well was dug and septic system installed. The building was to be 60 feet by 58 feet as well as the hall area to be 60 feet by 63 feet. It was to seat 262. An expanding curtain behind the sanctuary drape was able to open to accommodate overflow congregation up to 500 plus people. On September 25, 1974 the fiberglass steeple was raised in place. It stood 32 feet high. The hammered pewter altar, handcrafted by our parishioner, Mr. Lionel Thiboutot, was put in place.

The official dedication took place on December 1, 1974 with Bishop Louis Gelineau presiding. It was a day for parishioners to be proud of all their hard work and know this was "their" parish home.

The 20/20 Club, Senior Citizens Group and the CYO began in 1975. The year marked the retirement of Father Donahue and the passing of Father FitzGerald.

In 1976 the building which became our Mission Church was sold and new plans were being made for a new rectory. The building would be located next door to the Church.

Groundbreaking took place on September 28, 1976. Just before Father Lasko was able to reside in his new quarters in May of 1977, he was transferred to another area. This led to Father John Skaj becoming our third pastor. In July of that year another groundbreaking took place for a new garage. CCD classrooms were built in the rectory basement in November. The same month the new rectory was blessed.

St. Theresa celebrated twenty years in 1980. Devotions to the Holy Spirit began and were held weekly from the Sunday after Easter until Pentecost. Each day the Rosary was said in seven different homes where devotions were scheduled.

Our first parish feast took place September 27th and 28th, 1980. A procession on Eagleville Road and back to the Church in honor of St. Theresa took place on Sunday with Father Skaj carrying the Blessed Sacrament.

Also that year the old rectory/hall on Hancock Street was sold in December. Sadly, earlier in the year, we mourned the passing of Father Donahue. In October Father Grams returned to us for a third time to retire.

The next two years a Finance Committee and a Parish Council were developed. To Father Skaj's credit the parish debt that exceeded \$90,000 at his arrival was now less than \$15,000 at his departure.

Bishop Gelineau came to bless the St. Theresa statue in the church and declared it a shrine in October of 1981.

On July 1, 1983 Father Skaj was transferred and Father Joseph McDonough became our fourth pastor. A few weeks later Father Grams had passed away.

Coming back to us In August 1984 to assist Father McDonough was Father McMahan. To his amazement he found the parish "quite changed."

During Father McDonough's years the parish added a garage. The Women's Club held their Christmas Bazaar which helped fund the replacement of the church carpet. Our Lady of Fatima was placed to our backyard for quiet and peaceful reflection.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the parish was celebrated in September of 1985.

In 1987 three ramps were installed on the front, rear and side steps of the Church. Father McDonough had a time capsule placed at the front ramp consisting of papers, signatures of the CCD children and a booklet from the twenty-fifth anniversary.

January of 1988 had Father Lasko and Father McDonough switch assignments bringing Father Lasko back to us for a second time. In March a farewell reception was held for Father McDonough. A scholarship fund was established in memory of Father Grams and was later changed to the Holy Ghost Scholarship Fund.

In 1990 Father Lasko left us bringing Father David Marshall as our sixth pastor. It was during his stay here that the new organ was purchased.

Father Bertrand Richman became an Administrator for the parish in 1995. Also in that year former trustee, John Medeiros, donated a Reconciliation Room.

The rectory was expanded for a new office and CCD classroom in 1996.

In 1997 the Vigil Mass was changed to 4:00. It also marked the 100th anniversary of the death of St. Therese. One of our longer running fundraisers, the grocery certificates, was started.

A year later the parking lot behind the Church was expanded to accommodate extra parking for our growing parish.

Plans had begun to expand the existing Church in 1999 due to increase in parish size. The Parish Renovation Fund Drive began. Original plans for the Church were to move the altar into the hall and significantly shrink the size of the parish hall. In this year the adult Religious programs began. One of our young parishioners, David Martins, began his preparation for the priesthood.

With Father Richman's failing health two priests stepped in to help to whom we call our Good Samaritans. Father McElroy and Father Barrett took over to help keep spiritual guidance in to our parishioners. The parish mourned the loss of Father Richman in July 2000 to which brought us our seventh pastor Father Peter Andrews. In this time Father Andrews celebrated

his twelfth year of Ordination.

During year's end of 2001 a Capital Campaign began with the intent of parishioners donate pledges to help raise funds for our newly designed Church. The new designs placed more emphasis on the parish's needs keeping the parish hall intact. It was to be combined with the campaign that had begun during Father Richman's reign.

At the end of the school year of 2001-2002 our CCD coordinator, Barbara Medeiros, retired after many years of service. Many of our young parishioners were blessed to have had her spiritually prepare them for the Sacrament of Communion.

In August 2002 Masses were temporarily moved into the Church hall as our renovations started. The decision was made to expand the Church more toward Stafford Road and not into the hall as previously planned thus keeping the hall its current size. The altar, made of marble, is to be on the side toward Stafford Road making our main entrance now on Eagleville Road. The expansion would seat over 500 people thus alleviating overcrowding.



Our present day Parish

A Baptismal Font will be a sign of welcome to people as they enter the Church. A larger crying room will accommodate for the growing families in the parish. Groundbreaking for the new Church began after the feast in September 2002.

And this brings us to today, a very joyous occasion where we are dedicating a Church that can move forward and grow as a parish. A Church that our young people can enjoy and worship in for years to come.

May God bless our new home and Her people!