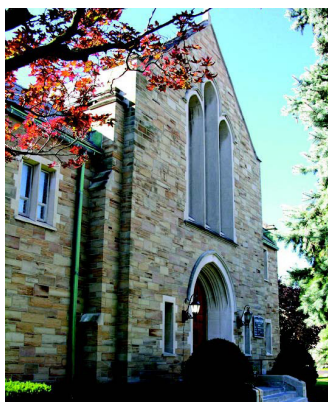


# The River Flows On

The Intermingling Stories of  
St. John de LaSalle and  
St. Charles Borromeo Parishes



BY JEFF PATERSON | JUNE 2023

# Streams of the River

Two faith families flow together



"Streams of the river gladden the city of God,  
the holy dwelling of the Most High."  
– Psalm 46:5

St. John de LaSalle Parish and St. Charles Borromeo Parish. Two streams in the same river. Two Roman Catholic parishes witnessing to the love of Christ in the LaSalle area of Niagara Falls, New York. Always flowing in the same direction, sometimes touching, sometimes diverging, and ultimately merging.



*Janet Furlong and John Panza, joined by Father Slawomir Siok, combine holy water from St. John's and St. Charles during opening ceremonies in 2008*

On July 1, 2008, St. John's and St. Charles became one. The merger was not one of choice, nor was it one of convenience. It resulted from the Journey in Faith and Grace, a planning process through which the Diocese of Buffalo whittled 275 parishes down to 198 worship sites across the eight counties of Western New

York – with further consolidations taking place over the next several years.

By 2007, a decline in population, a shortage of priests and a drop in weekend Mass attendance had led the Diocese to make major changes to its parish structure. Throughout the Diocese, proud faith communities took halting steps toward reluctant marriages.

So it was in LaSalle. Fortunately, St. Charles and St. John's shared some bonds, forming a foundation for the newly merged community.

St. Charles helped St. John's to establish its bingo program. Four ordained sons of St. John's – the Rev. Msgr. Paul Letourneau, the Rev. Msgr. John Ducette, Deacon David Slish, and the Rev. Stewart Lindsay, OSFS – ministered

at St. Charles at one time or another. Many members of each parish had once belonged to the other. And in the years just before the merger, the two parishes had worked together on prayer services, musical programs, and a celebration of the Jubilee year in 2000.

This book traces the foundation and growth of St. John de LaSalle and St. Charles Borromeo Parishes, their common bonds, and the merger that drew the two parishes together – while also looking to the future.

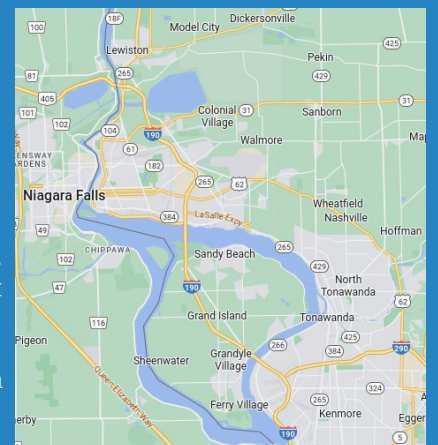
In 2023, the continued loss of active Catholics in the region has again forced the Diocese of Buffalo to reorganize. As 161 parishes are grouped into 36 "families of parishes" that will share buildings, clergy and staff, St. John de LaSalle Parish is about to form a family with four other parishes in Niagara Falls.

As the two streams of St. John de LaSalle and St. Charles Borromeo prepare to flow into an even larger river, let's revisit the intermingling path they have traveled so far.

## The River Flows ... The Niagara River

Four of the five Great Lakes – the world's largest surface freshwater system – empty into the Niagara River, which flows

north to Lake Ontario. It is 36 miles long and includes Niagara Falls in its flow. The famous cataract lends its name to St. Mary of the Cataract Parish and wraps around the family of parishes to which St. John de LaSalle will soon belong.



# Dwelling Places

The faithful encounter God in houses of worship



St. John de LaSalle  
8636 Buffalo Avenue  
1907-1918



St. John de LaSalle  
8477 Buffalo Avenue  
1918-1960



St. Charles Borromeo  
5604 Lindbergh Avenue  
1944-2008

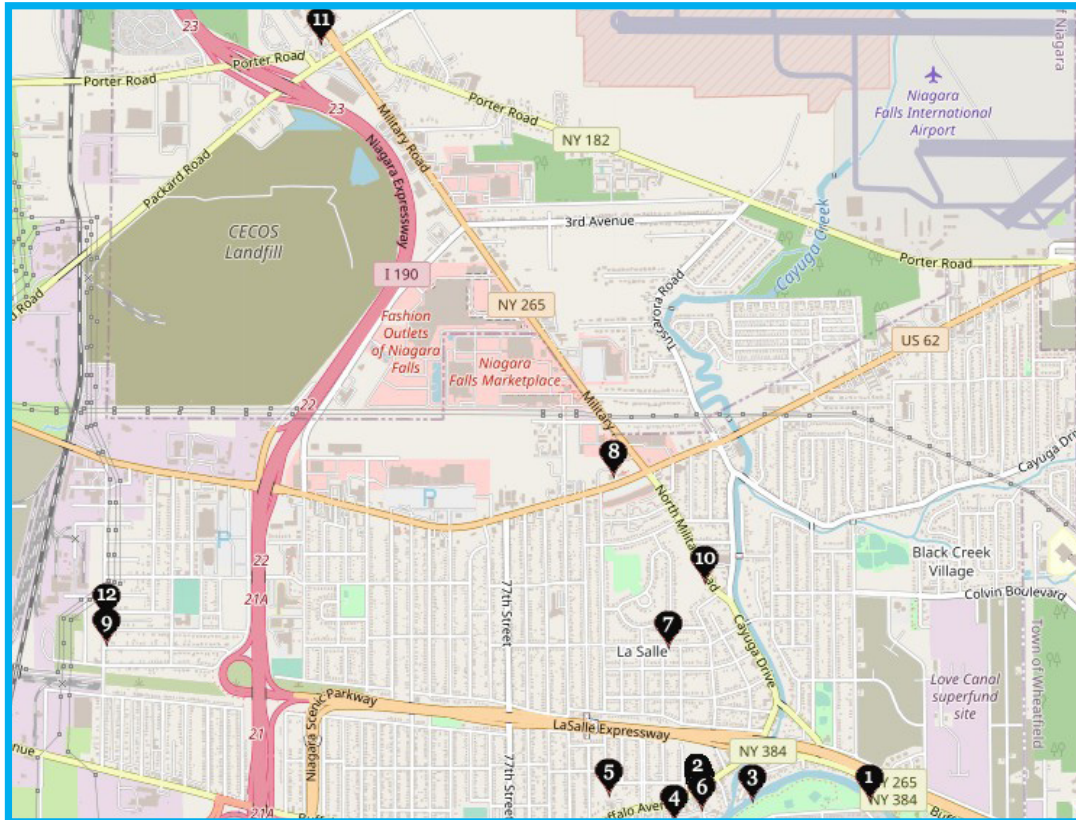


St. John de LaSalle  
8469 Buffalo Avenue  
1960-present



# Points of Grace

Important sites line the map of LaSalle



1. **9327 Buffalo Avenue** - private home where the first Mass of St. John de LaSalle Parish was held (1907), near the spot where the Griffon was built
2. **8636 Buffalo Avenue** - former German Evangelical Church, which became the first St. John de LaSalle Church (1907); no longer standing
3. **8727 Point Avenue** - first St. John de LaSalle rectory (1908), now a private home
4. **South 86th Street & Buffalo Avenue** - site of St. John de LaSalle church/school/auditorium building (1918); rectory (1921); garage (1953); new church (1960); and parish center (1976)
5. **8234 Troy Avenue** - first St. John de LaSalle convent (1921), now a private home
6. **8627 Buffalo Avenue** - second St. John de LaSalle convent (1925), later Pastoral Care Office (2000), now a private multifamily home
7. **8509 Witkop Avenue** - first Prince of Peace/St. Charles Borromeo rectory (1943), now a private home
8. **Military Road & Niagara Falls Boulevard** - former site of the Plantation Restaurant, where the first Prince of Peace/St. Charles Borromeo Masses were held (1943)
9. **5604 Lindbergh Avenue** - St. Charles Church (1944); rectory (1970); parish center (2004), now home to the Masjid Al Ibrahim community
10. **1055 N. Military Road** - Prince of Peace Church (1944 original; 1957 new church)
11. **2748 Military Road** - St. Leo Church (1956)
12. **5615 Kies Avenue** - St. Charles Parish Center (1973), now Volare Lodge



# Sent as Shepherds

Priests lead the Catholic communities of LaSalle



## Popes of the Roman Catholic Church Since 1907



Pope St. Pius X  
1903-14



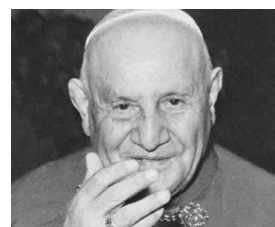
Pope Benedict XV  
1914-22



Pope Pius XI  
1922-39



Pope Ven. Pius XII  
1939-58



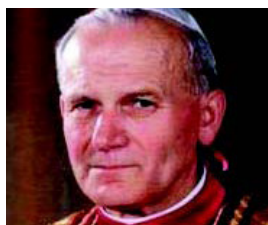
Pope St. John XXIII  
1958-63



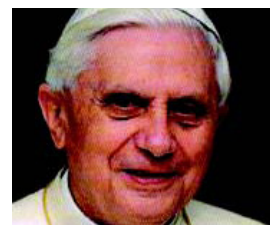
Pope St. Paul VI  
1963-78



Pope Bl. John Paul I  
1978



Pope St. John Paul II  
1978-2005

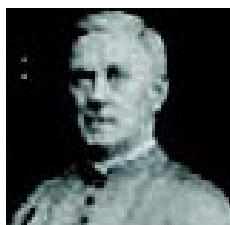


Pope Benedict XVI  
2005-13



Pope Francis  
2013-present

## Bishops of the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo Since 1907



Bishop Colton  
1903-15



Bishop Dougherty  
1915-18



Bishop Turner  
1918-36



Bishop Duffy  
1937-44



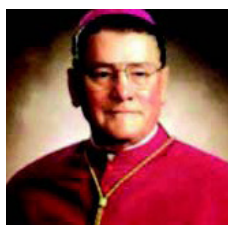
Bishop O'Hara  
1945-51



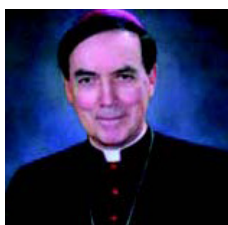
Bishop Burke  
1952-62



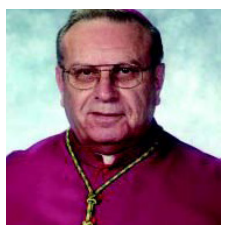
Bishop McNulty  
1963-72



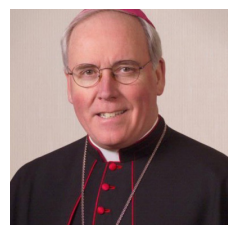
Bishop Head  
1973-94



Bishop Mansell  
1995-2003



Bishop Kmiec  
2004-12



Bishop Malone  
2012-19



Bishop Fisher  
2020-present

## Clergy of St. John de LaSalle Parish (2008-present)

following the merger with St. Charles Borromeo Parish



Rev. James Kirkpatrick  
Pastor, 2023-present



Rev. Slawomir Siok, SAC  
Pastor, 2008-22

### Administrator

Rev. James Kirkpatrick  
2022-23

### Pastoral Associate

Deacon David Slish  
2008-10

### Family of Parishes Parochial Vicars

2023-present:

Rev. Duane Klizek  
(senior parochial vicar)  
Rev. Lathislaus Mariasoosai  
Rev. Mario Racho  
Rev. Stewart Lindsay, OSFS  
(part-time parochial vicar)

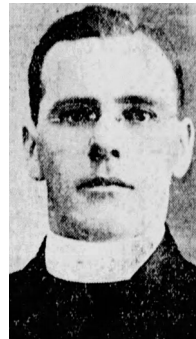
## Clergy of St. John de LaSalle Parish (1907-2008)



Rev. George Zurcher  
Pastor, 1907-09



Rev. Vincent Scheffels  
Pastor, 1909-14



Rev. Arthur Madden  
Pastor, 1914-19

### Administrators

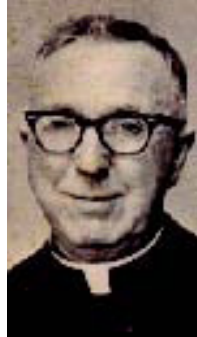
Rev. James Howley	1919
Rev. John O'Connor	1944
Rev. Joseph Spatorico	1972
Rev. Robert Dmitri	1974
Deacon David Slish	2005

### Assistant Pastors, Associate Pastors and Parochial Vicars

Rev. John Doyle	1930-38
Rev. James Reddington	1937-38
Rev. F. Lambert Haley	1939-40
Rev. D.E. Snyder	1941
Rev. J. McGill	1941
Rev. Cornelius Godfrey	1941-43
Rev. John O'Connor	1943-44
Rev. James Healey	1944-45
Rev. Chester Malikowski	1945-46
Rev. Bernard Sexton	1947-50
Rev. James Cahill	1951-64
Rev. Donald Fitzgerald	1964-65
Rev. Robert McNamara	1965-67
Rev. William Roche	1967-68
Rev. Edward Trauscht	1967-69
Rev. David Hackett	1969
Rev. James Dunn	1969-70
Rev. Joseph Spatorico	1970-72
Rev. Robert Dmitri	1972-79
Rev. Loville Martlock	1979-81
Rev. Robert Fink	1981-85
Rev. Matthias Kibuka	1985-96
Rev. Norman McTigue	1996-97



Rev. Maurice O'Shea  
Pastor, 1919-44



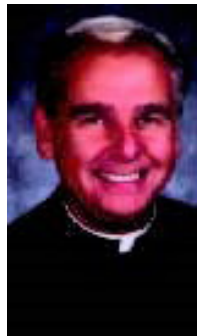
Rev. Francis McKenna  
Pastor, 1944-72



Rev. William Crotty  
Pastor, 1972-74



Rev. Msgr. Robert Hogan  
Pastor, 1974-97



Rev. Jerome Kopec  
Pastor, 1997-2005



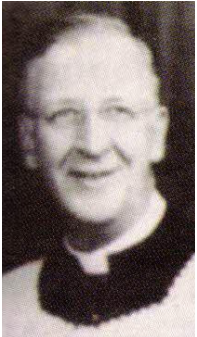
Rev. Lynn Shumway  
Pastor, 2005-08

### Pastoral Associate

Deacon David Slish	1979-84
Deacon David Slish	1986-2008



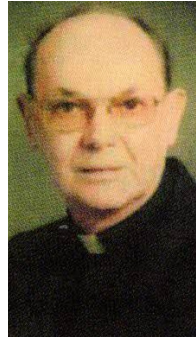
## Clergy of St. Charles Borromeo Mission (1943-1970) and St. Charles Borromeo Parish (1970-2008)



Rev. Msgr. John Carey  
Pastor, 1943-64



Rev. Msgr. Robert Murphy  
Pastor, 1964-69



Rev. William Ward  
Pastor, 1970-78

### Administrators

Rev. Paul Letourneau	1964
Rev. George Reger	1978-79
Rev. Joseph Badding	1987
Rev. Robert Gister	1989
Rev. Stanley Chwalinski	1990
Rev. Joseph Carlo	1990-92
Rev. Mark Friel	1996
Rev. Mark Friel	1998

### Pastoral Associate

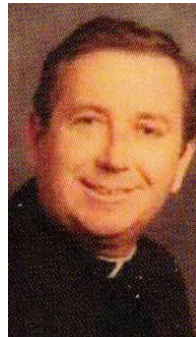
Deacon David Sligh	1984-86
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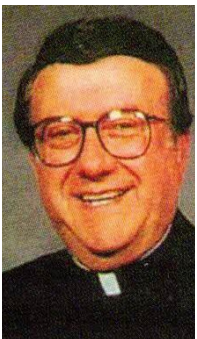
Rev. Msgr. John Ducette  
Pastor, 1979-85



Rev. John Kean  
Pastor, 1985-87



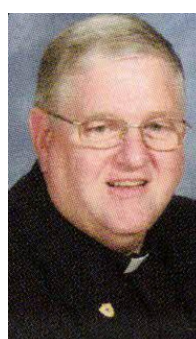
Rev. Joseph Friel  
Pastor, 1987-90



Rev. Joseph Carlo  
Pastor, 1992-98



Rev. Robert Hughson  
Pastor, 1998-2001



Rev. Stewart Lindsay, OSFS  
Pastor, 2001-08

## Vocations from St. John de LaSalle Parish

Sister Kathleen Barrett, SSJ	Entered 1963	Sister Nora Letourneau, SSJ	Entered 1948
Sister Mary Agatha Burns, SSJ	Entered 1952	Rev. Msgr. Paul Letourneau	Ordained 1954
Sister Mary Anne Butler, SSJ	Entered 1947	Rev. John Lindsay, OSFS	Ordained 1970
Rev. James Dorrill	Ordained 1960	Rev. Stewart Lindsay, OSFS	Ordained 1973
Rev. Msgr. John Ducette	Ordained 1962	Sister Mary Jane Nolan, RSM	Entered 1933
Sister Linda Kaumeyer, RSM	Entered 1968	Deacon David Sligh	Ordained 1979
Rev. Dennis Kelsch	Ordained 1972		



# From Hennepin's Hut to Zurcher's Church

A Catholic presence is built in LaSalle



A commemorative rock stands near the boat docks on Buffalo Avenue along the Little Niagara River in Niagara Falls, New York.

The rock holds a plaque that reads as follows:

HEREABOUT, IN MAY, 1679,  
ROBERT CAVELIER DE LA SALLE,  
BUILT THE GRIFFON, "OF SIXTY  
TONS BURTHEN," THE FIRST VESSEL  
TO SAIL THE UPPER (GREAT) LAKES.



*The Griffon rock where it now stands, at Griffon Park on the Little River*

And upon that rock was built a church, the first Catholic parish in what was then the Village of LaSalle.

For many years, the rock stood at a private home at 9327 Buffalo Avenue, just yards from its current location. On May 26, 1907, 18 people gathered for Mass at that very house. These were the founders of St. John de LaSalle Parish. Soon, they would move to a new church just around the bend.

\*

St. John Baptist de La Salle was a French priest who founded the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and is recognized as the patron saint of educators. He and his order of Brothers created a network of schools

throughout France, with a focus on educating children living in poverty. St. John was ordained in 1678 – the same year that the French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, reached the Niagara River. La Salle was one of the first Europeans to see the majestic Niagara Falls. La Salle was not the explorer's last name; rather, "Sieur de La Salle" translates to "lord of the manor," and was an honorific title.

Nonetheless, the name "La Salle" became associated with the explorer's travels and lent itself to the Village of LaSalle, on the edge of the Little Niagara River. The Village of LaSalle was annexed into the City of Niagara Falls in 1927, but is still known as the LaSalle section of the city.

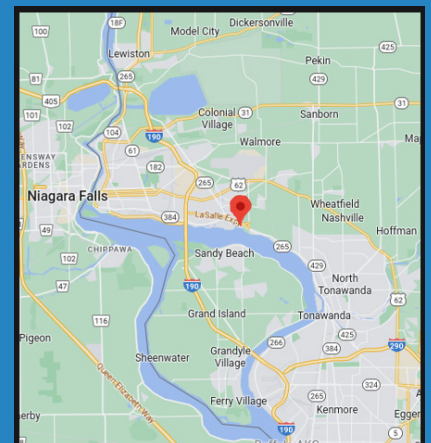
La Salle, the explorer, built a ship called the Griffon to explore the upper Great Lakes. La Salle and his crew built the Griffon in 1679 on or near Cayuga Island, a small island in the Niagara River just south of the present site of St. John de LaSalle Church. Cayuga Island had once been controlled by Native Americans as a point of departure for trading trips to other islands in the Niagara River.

## The River Flows ... Griffon Park

Griffon Park sits on the upper Niagara River as a recreation and boat docking area,

near where La Salle and his crew built and launched the Griffon in 1679.

228 years after the Griffon became the first ship to sail the upper Great Lakes, St. John de LaSalle Parish held its first Mass at a private home within yards of this historic spot.



One of La Salle's compatriots was the Rev. Louis Hennepin, a Franciscan missionary priest from Belgium. Hennepin accompanied La Salle in sailing the Great Lakes on the Griffon in 1679. Hennepin is also remembered as the one who brought the thundering Niagara Falls to Europe's attention by sharing a remarkably accurate drawing and vivid written description of the stunning sight: "The Waters which fall from this horrible Precipice, do foam and boyl after the most hideous manner imaginable, making an outrageous Noise, more terrible than that of Thunder; for when the Wind blows out of the South, their dismal roaring may be heard more than Fifteen Leagues off."

Later, Father Hennepin made outrageous and dubious claims about his exploits as an explorer. Nonetheless, he was the first Catholic priest to say Mass in the area – on December 11, 1678, in present-day Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada, and soon after in what would become the LaSalle section of Niagara Falls, New York.

While some in La Salle's party worked on the Griffon, others built Fort Conti on the site of what is now Fort Niagara in Youngstown, in a bid to control the fur trade in the lower Great Lakes. A few others worked on a pet project for Father Hennepin:

a small chapel that became the first known house of worship in Western New York, where Father Hennepin regularly said Mass. "I had one hut especially designed for observing prayers on holidays and Sundays,"

Hennepin wrote.

"Many of our people knew the Gregorian chant, and the rest had some parts of it by rote."

Though the exact location of Father Hennepin's hut is unknown, it is believed to have been very close to the present-day location of St. John de LaSalle Church, at South 86th Street and Buffalo Avenue. A 1917 article in the *Buffalo Courier* described the church at Buffalo Avenue and 86th Street in LaSalle: "The present site is said to be the one from which the great La Salle had his first view of the approach to the mighty cataracts. That it will be a shrine of great devotion, in due time, is admitted."

\*

The Village of LaSalle had been a part of the Town of

Niagara before becoming its own village in 1897. Once a farming community, it evolved into a bedroom community for employees of the chemical factories that lined the river heading toward Niagara Falls. Before 1907, a priest from St. Mary of the Cataract Parish in Niagara Falls visited the Village of LaSalle occasionally to administer the sacraments. Otherwise, the Catholics of LaSalle had to travel into Niagara Falls for pastoral care. "And the distance," according to the *Niagara Falls Gazette*, "was often more than some of the older church people could make without fatigue."

The Rt. Rev. Charles Colton, bishop of Buffalo, recognized the need to establish a parish for the people of LaSalle and surrounding communities. On May 15, 1907, he appointed the Rev. George Zurcher to organize a parish for LaSalle and part of the Town of Wheatfield. The parish's borders were 56th Street to the west, Lockport Road to the north, the Niagara Falls-North Tonawanda city line to the east, and the Niagara River to the south.

Appropriately, the first pastor of St. John de LaSalle Parish was a native Frenchman. Father Zurcher was born in 1852 in Alsace, France, on the German border, and came to the

United States to be educated at Our Lady of Angels Seminary at Niagara University. Father Zurcher was known for his generosity to those in need, and for living a simple lifestyle.

He was even better known for being a

prohibitionist crusader. A 1960 article in the *Hamburg Sun* newspaper stated, "While there is no known account of why he became such a militant fighter for prohibition, the years that he spent as chaplain at the Buffalo Poor House and as a frequent attendant at the county Sunrise Court undoubtedly led to his convictions."

According to the parish history of one of his later churches, Father Zurcher was so opposed to alcohol that he refused to use altar wine at Mass. He even wrote a book called *Handcuffs for Alcoholism*, published in 1890. This was not his only book; another tome called *Monks and Their Decline* detailed the Catholic Church's involvement in secular affairs during the Middle Ages. Both can still be purchased online.



*A very different-looking Buffalo Avenue in the Village of LaSalle, with the original St. John's on the left and streetcar tracks in the foreground*

Father Zurcher was a colorful character known throughout the northeast for his controversial stands. In 1897, he ran unsuccessfully for 25th ward alderman in the City of Buffalo. According to *The Argus*, a newspaper from the Albany area, "His action was denounced by many of the leading Catholics in Buffalo, but he defends himself by saying that – 'As an American citizen and a resident of Buffalo for many years, there were no legal grounds on which I could be prevented from running for office. Every citizen of Buffalo that knows me, knows that I am a strong advocate of temperance. Intemperance is a sin, a pernicious habit that is yearly sending thousands of our young men to ruin and an equal number of souls to hell. Would I not be serving God if, by my connection with the city government, I could in any way aid in securing good temperance laws?'"

Although the *Buffalo Times* described Zurcher as "a master of canon law and theology and one of the greatest students of learning," his writing got him into trouble with the Church hierarchy. Dubbed by the *Washington Evening Star* as "an ecclesiastical sensation for the last three months, not only in this country, but also in Europe," *Monks and Their Decline* suggested that the American government would need to suppress religious orders in Latin America in order to preserve law and order there.

In 1898, the Rev. Msgr. Sebastiano Martinelli, the pope's apostolic delegate to the United States, declared that *Monks and Their Decline* had been banned by the Church – and that Father Zurcher would be excommunicated if he did not retract the text. On December 31, 1898, Father Zurcher wrote a public letter renouncing his text and withdrawing it from circulation, promising refunds to those who had purchased it.

A year later, Father Zurcher once again found himself in hot water, this time in his role as rector of St. Joseph Church in Buffalo. The Rt. Rev. James Quigley, bishop of Buffalo, suspended Father Zurcher from the priesthood in a kerfuffle over an All Souls' Day homily. Father Zurcher had condemned what he saw as offering prayers for the dead in exchange for donations. Bishop Quigley's vicar general demanded a public retraction, but Father Zurcher failed to attend the meeting, and then issued a halfhearted

statement that only inflamed the bishop. Father Zurcher was suspended for six years. After Bishop Quigley moved on to the Archdiocese of Chicago and Bishop Colton took the helm of the Buffalo Diocese. Father Zurcher was reinstated in 1906 and allowed to work as a chaplain to the Sisters of Mercy. Father Zurcher always maintained he had said nothing improper.

All of these controversies, which occurred well before 1907, generated extensive publicity in the local newspapers. Thus, Father Zurcher was a figure of some notoriety when he arrived at LaSalle to launch a new parish.

Two anonymous letters appeared in the pages of the *Niagara Falls Gazette* in May 1907, offering praise for

the newly appointed pastor. One supporter wrote, "We predict great things for the people of LaSalle during the administration of this unselfish servant of God."

Another friend wrote, "It is our earnest hope that the people of Niagara Falls and vicinity will prove their appreciation of this brilliant and just priest by assisting him financially in his almost superhuman task of erecting a house of worship in that nearby village." The author noted that St. John de LaSalle Parish had just 27 families, many of whom had little money. "Any financial aid given will not only be heartily appreciated," according to the writer, "but will be like bread upon the waters—it will return with hundredfold interest."

While Father Zurcher initially held Masses in the Staley home, he moved quickly to acquire a permanent house of worship. A subsequent pastor, the Rev. Arthur Madden, wrote that "the

first convert made in LaSalle was not an individual but a Church." On May 30, 1907, Father Zurcher and a layperson from Buffalo built a temporary altar in the vacant German Evangelical Church on River Road near streetcar stop 59 – now 8636 Buffalo Avenue near South 86th Street. The Catholic parish rented the church while waiting to buy it.

The parish's first baptism was June 27, 1907, when Father Zurcher baptized 16-year-old Isabel Dirksen. The first infant baptism, that of Russell Mang, took place three days later. On July 25, 1907, Father Zurcher officiated at the marriage of Frederick Herr and Mary Bielman.



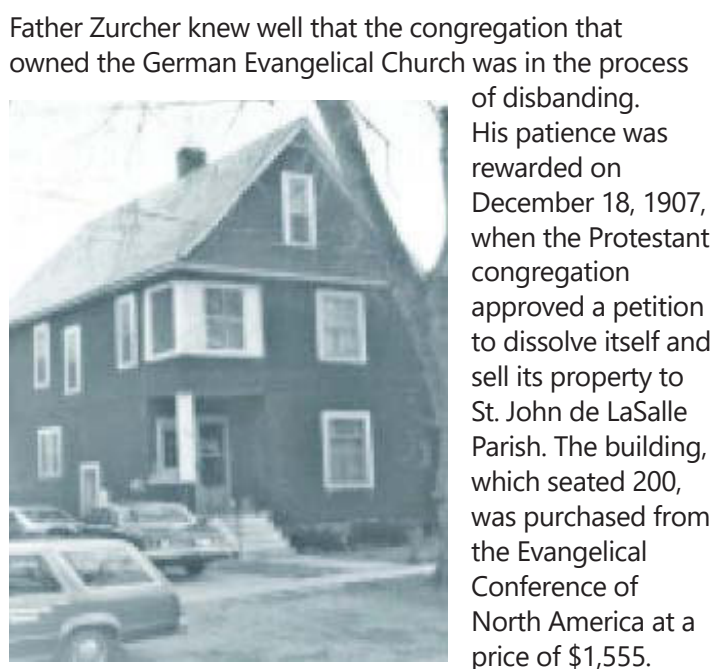
*The Griffon rock at its original location, the house at 9327 Buffalo Avenue, site of the first Mass*



As the new parish was establishing itself in LaSalle, new parishes were also springing up nearby. Holy Rosary Parish, later Our Lady of the Rosary, had just opened on the east side of Niagara Falls, while Sacred Heart Parish was being built in the city's north end.

Bishop Colton dedicated the new St. John de LaSalle Church on August 18, 1907. He was assisted by the now-Venerable Rev. Nelson Baker, Lackawanna's renowned "Padre of the Poor," who was attending in his role as vicar general of the Diocese of Buffalo. The *Buffalo Express* described the newly dedicated building as "the first Catholic church at LaSalle since Father Hennepin the French cleric said mass in the hut which sheltered La Mothe Cadillac and his band of followers during the winter of 1678-79."

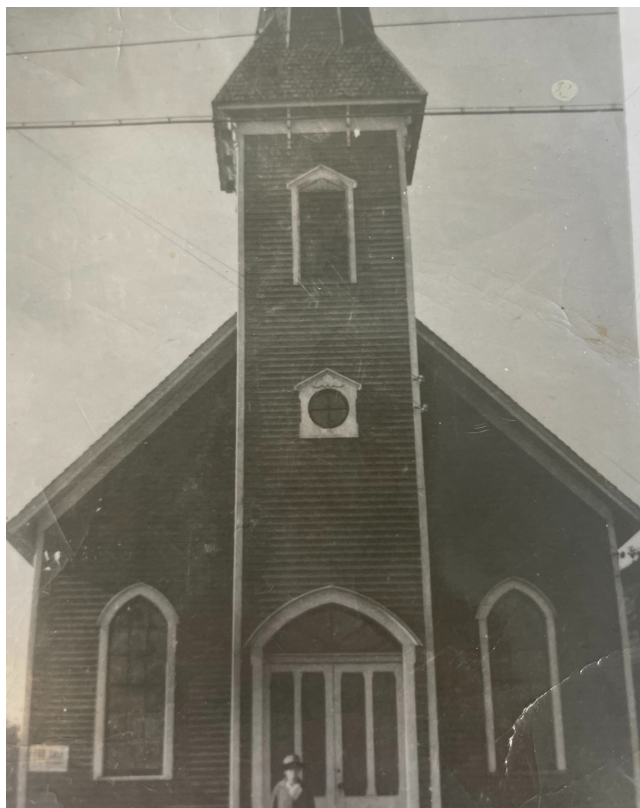
"After the dedication," said a *Niagara Falls Gazette* article, "Father Zurcher presented his first class for confirmation, just ten people, and some of them grown-ups."



*The original rectory on Point Avenue*

Father Zurcher had already found a place for his living quarters. On August 31, 1907, the parish paid \$2,153.54 for a double-lot and house

at 8727 Point Avenue, about a half-mile from the church, which remained the parish rectory until 1921.

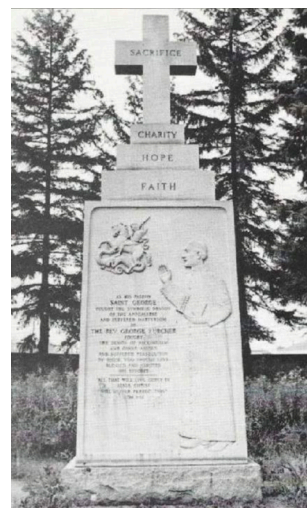


*The old German Evangelical Church, "converted" to the first St. John de LaSalle Church in 1907*

Having established St. John de LaSalle Parish, Father Zurcher was reassigned to Immaculate Conception Parish in East Aurora on February 26, 1909, an appointment that took effect on March 12. The *Buffalo Courier* wrote that Father Zurcher "accomplished his mission at LaSalle with excellent results." The *Buffalo Enquirer* wrote that Father Zurcher "took up the arduous work of establishing a mission church in the village of LaSalle. He met with his customary success and has built up a congregation which with deep regret learns of his transfer, that regret being softened only by the knowledge that he goes to a wider field in which his remarkable energy and talent for effective organization may have fuller scope."

Before receiving his new assignment, Father Zurcher had planned a series of Lenten sermons, two of them on temperance. Fittingly, his last homily in LaSalle, on March 3, was on the evils of alcohol. A farewell celebration was held on March 8, with parishioners "expressing their sorrow at his leaving the parish," according to the *Buffalo Express*.

Father Zurcher retired from Immaculate Conception in November 1912 due to declining health and moved to nearby Marilla. After his death on September 10, 1931, his fellow prohibitionists built a large monument in his memory in North Evans near 18 Mile Creek – a tributary of Lake Erie named for its distance from the Niagara River. Remarkably, the monument still stands in its original spot at what is now Southwestern Boulevard at Shadagee Road, across from St. Vincent de Paul Cemetery — a memorial to an eccentric but historically significant priest.



*Memorial to Father Zurcher in North Evans*

# A Brief But Decisive Tenure

## Father Madden establishes the footprint



When Father George Zurcher left LaSalle in 1909, he was succeeded by the Rev. Vincent Scheffels. A native of Germany, he studied theology and philosophy at the noted Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. Father Scheffels came to the United States in 1871, shortly after his ordination. He went on to serve as pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Hamburg on three separate occasions, as well as St. Mary Parish in Lockport, among other assignments. He had already been a priest for decades when he arrived at St. John de LaSalle in his 70s.

Father Scheffels had left an earlier assignment at St. Mary Parish in Lancaster under some controversy. The parish was growing rapidly, and Father Scheffels doubted that he had the energy and skill needed to lead it forward. He resigned and returned to Hamburg. How did he fare in LaSalle? It is hard to say.

It seems Father Scheffels was a caring pastor for the people of St. John de LaSalle, but few major developments were recorded during his five-year tenure. "Though he was old, he was not inactive," wrote Father Scheffels' successor, Father Arthur Madden. "He took excellent care of the people entrusted to his charge. He was deeply interested in the Parish of LaSalle."

In 1914, Father Scheffels was transferred to Sacred Heart Parish in Dunkirk as curate, or assistant pastor. He died in West Seneca on October 16, 1917. In an article on his passing, the *Buffalo Courier* called him "dean of the German priesthood" in the Diocese. "Although venerable in years, being past four score years," the article stated, "when the end came he was quite active and continued to perform religious works and pious acts until a short time ago."

It must have been quite a contrast when Bishop Colton sent 29-year-old Father Madden to LaSalle on June 1, 1914, to succeed Father Scheffels. A native Irishman, he had been ordained just four years earlier, June 24, 1910, in Dublin. His first assignment was as an assistant pastor at St. Mary of the Cataract Parish in Niagara Falls. During his time at St. Mary's, Father Madden organized a new division of the

Ancient Order of Hibernians, the largest and oldest Irish Catholic fraternal organization in the United States.

When Father Madden moved to LaSalle, Bishop Colton instructed him to find a place for a new house of worship, as St. John's had already outgrown the old German Evangelical Church. On October 10, 1914, Father Madden spent \$3,500 of parish funds to acquire property just southwest of the existing church on Buffalo Avenue – then River Road – from the Goetzman family. Another adjoining property along River Road was purchased from the Carrick family on November 24, 1914, for one dollar.



*Father Madden*

At that time, Father Madden announced ambitious building plans. He would convert the existing church into a school. He would build a basement on the newly acquired land and enclose it for use as a church, then eventually build a church over it and use the basement as a social hall. He would also sell the existing rectory and build a new one next to the church. He even listed the Point Avenue rectory for sale in early 1915, noting that it had seven rooms, an attic and a cellar, plus adjoining property, and was "two minutes' walk from train and trolley."

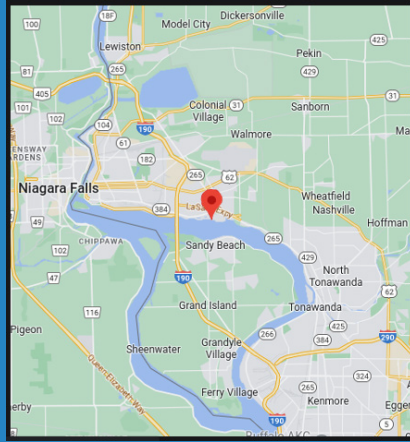
However, the energetic young priest soon came to terms with the fact that the parish still owed a large sum of money on the original church mortgage. So, he put his expansion plans on hold and began working to pay down the existing debt. After two years of fundraising, success was at hand. Nearly 400 parishioners gathered on May 29, 1916, for a ceremonial burning of the \$6,000 mortgage from the original church. Trustee Edward Nelan held the match to the document. With the parish's debt now retired, it was finally time to build a new home.

Father Madden quickly pivoted from wiping out debts to starting a building fund. On the night of the mortgage burning, he announced that two large unsolicited donations had already been made to launch the building drive. By the end of 1916, \$5,297 had already been raised for the new building – bringing the total raised since Father Madden's arrival to more than \$14,000 – the equivalent



# The River Flows ... Cayuga Island

The St. John de LaSalle campus borders Cayuga Island, a residential neighborhood in the Niagara River. Father Hennepin's chapel on the island is believed to be the first building constructed in the area by non-native people. Cayuga Island was once known as Burdett's Island and was home to summer cottages and peach orchards.



In an article on the cornerstone ceremony, the *Buffalo Courier* wrote, "Father Madden made a new church edifice possible. He has toiled among his flock many years and is counted an apostle par excellence by men of diverse ... denominations. The first mass was said in a private dwelling ten years ago. The next acquisition, by Father Zurcher, was the abandoned building that used to house a German Evangelical community, and now the parishioners have in sight a place of worship of their own." The newspaper described St. John de LaSalle as "the little parish that is rapidly forging to the front rank of Catholic communities in western New York." At that point, 75 families were registered in the parish.

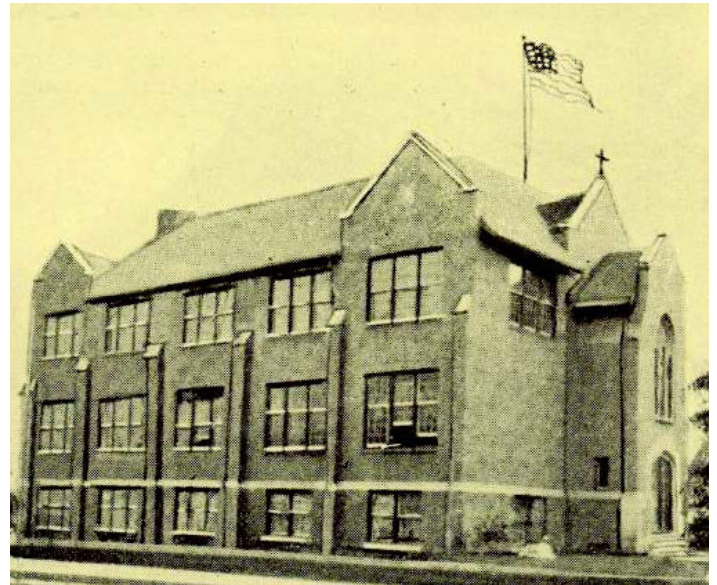
Construction was substantially complete within nine months, and the parish held a "civic celebration" of the new building on August 10, 1918. Festivities included a flag-raising, a firing squad salute, and speeches from community leaders. Why was the celebration civic instead of religious? Bishop Dougherty had been reassigned as archbishop of Philadelphia several months earlier, and a new bishop had not yet been appointed. So, an official church dedication would have to wait. Nonetheless, the parish began using the building as soon as it was ready. Father Madden celebrated the first Mass in the new building on October 6, 1918.

of \$330,000 in 2023. On June 9, 1917, the parish acquired another nearby parcel of land from B.C. Critsinger to facilitate future construction.

Now it was time to act. At a so-called "open air meeting" in August 1917, the parish elected a building committee made up of Peter Barry, Charles Boos, Peter Goff, Levi Shewan, Anthony Spitzig, and John Wallace. This committee, along with Father Madden, decided to build a combined church-school-auditorium. The 102-foot-by-56-foot structure would be made of cloister brick with stone trim. The budget was \$40,000 for the church and another \$8,000 for a new rectory to be built next to the church.

The Rt. Rev. Dennis J. Dougherty, who had become bishop of Buffalo after Bishop Colton died in 1915, approved the building plans on September 13, 1917. The parish broke ground on October 1, 1917, at River Road and Burdett Street – now Buffalo Avenue and South 86th Street. Burdett Street was named for John Burdett, whose peach orchards were the distinguishing characteristic of the island at the other end of the street – then known as Burdett's Island, and now known as Cayuga Island.

On December 16, 1917, Bishop Dougherty laid the cornerstone, which read, "Pro Deo et Patria," or "For God and Country." The bishop "was attended by distinguished churchmen from many cities and towns of Western New York," Father Madden wrote in his own notes, "and the residents of the Niagara frontier from the American and Canadian sides joined the people of LaSalle to make that day memorable."



*The church-school-auditorium, completed in 1918*

The church was on the top floor, the school was on the ground floor, and the auditorium was in the basement. The auditorium quickly became a gathering place for the LaSalle community, hosting performances, functions and lectures. Four decades later, when a new church was built, the sturdy brick structure remained as the school. It still stands as an integral part of the parish campus.



Father Madden's annual meetings with parish trustees were meticulously documented, showing an ever-increasing bank balance, reduced debt and ambitious fundraising efforts. As the parish grew, Father Madden planned to add a separate school building and convent near the church at a future date, at an additional cost of up to \$100,000. First, a new rectory was to replace the existing house a half-mile away at 8727 Point Avenue. Construction of the new rectory was expected to wrap up in 1919. Sadly, Father Madden would not live to see the project through.



*The second-floor church, used from 1918 to 1936*

Father Madden's frenetic pace caught up with him. He had already been hospitalized for exhaustion once, in 1916. By late 1919, according to the *Catholic Union and Times*, the young priest's health had "become impaired because of his strenuous application to his priestly duties."

After he was released from St. Mary's Hospital in Niagara Falls in January 1919, Father Madden was granted a leave of absence to recover his health. He traveled to Philadelphia, where his brother lived, and then set sail for his homeland shortly before Easter. "Probably a few months in his native Celtic clime," said the newspaper, "may bring about the change so earnestly desired not only by Father Madden, but by his host of friends along the Niagara frontier. He has insured a new church and school building for La Salle, but it cost more than money to realize his priestly ambition."

Father Madden had not seen his family or his native country for 10 years. He planned to stay there for three months before returning to LaSalle. On July 18, 1919, a cable reached the Rev. Felix Scullen, rector of St. Mary of the Cataract Church, with the news that Father Madden had died two days earlier in County Derry, Ireland. He was just 34 years old. A funeral was held in Ireland on July 21, while a memorial gathering was held at St. Mary's on the same day. A High Mass in his memory followed at St. John de LaSalle on August 16.

The July 18, 1919, edition of the *Buffalo Express* noted that

Father Madden was "beloved by all in his parish and his death, while not unexpected, for he had been ill for several months, will mean a great loss."

The Rev. James Howley, a retired Army chaplain who had been overseeing St. John's in Father Madden's absence, continued to do so until a successor was named.

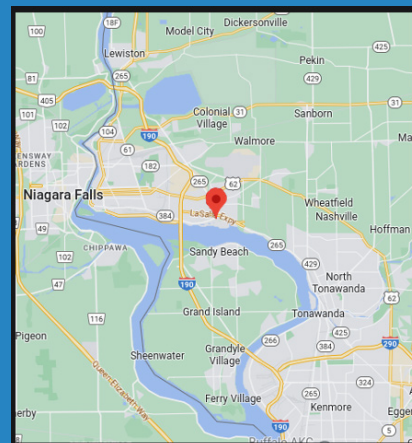
It is impossible to overstate Father Madden's impact on the Village of LaSalle and the parish of St. John de LaSalle. In less than five years, he had paid down the parish's debts, built a new church, established the parish as

a center of community activity, and left behind a vision for future growth. Even after his death, he continued to bless the parish.

In January 1920, it was revealed that Father Madden had left all of his modest savings to Catholic institutions – including a bequest of \$300 – \$5,000 in today's dollars – to St. John de LaSalle Parish.

## The River Flows ... Point Avenue

Point Avenue is a one-way street tucked away on the Little Niagara River, across from Cayuga Island's Jayne Park. The original St. John's rectory was located at 8727 Point Avenue from 1908 to 1921. In the early years of St. John's, an annual parish picnic was held at Wattengel's Grove, at 88th Street and Point Avenue.



# Trial and Triumph

Father O'Shea leads through an eventful quarter-century



The Most Rev. William Turner, who was appointed bishop of Buffalo in March 1919, named the Rev. Maurice O'Shea as pastor of St. John de LaSalle Parish on August 25, 1919. Father O'Shea hailed from Chicago, where he attended the LaSalle Institute, run by the Christian Brothers. After graduating from Our Lady of Angels Seminary at Niagara University, he interrupted his priestly career for military service. When the United States entered the First World War, Father O'Shea received a commission as an Army chaplain. He took the helm at St. John's just a month after his military service in France ended in honorable discharge.

By all accounts, Father O'Shea was one of the best-known and most popular priests in the Diocese of Buffalo. He soon became equally known in LaSalle as pastor at St. John's, a post he held for 25 years.



*2004 demolition of the original church, which had become a private home*

Church to Charles Gornbein for \$3,100. The former church soon became a private home. While it originally faced Buffalo Avenue, it was later turned 90 degrees on its foundation, so that it faced east to west. When the City of Niagara Falls annexed LaSalle in 1927, several streets were renamed and the address of the home became 8636 Buffalo Avenue. And so it remained until 2004, when it was demolished for the expansion of longtime neighbor Wendt's Dairy – which in turn closed four years later.

On January 5, 1921, 300 guests enjoyed card games, dancing and refreshments to celebrate the long-anticipated completion of the new rectory envisioned by Father Madden. The previous rectory on Point Avenue was

sold to LaSalle resident John Long for \$4,200. It is still a private home as of this writing.

On August 24, 1921, St. John de LaSalle Parish acquired a

land bordering

the Little River from John O'Haire. In February 1923, the parish borrowed \$5,000 to pay the Marquette Parkway Corporation for additional property next to the church. This 100-foot-wide strip of land ran from River Road – now Buffalo Avenue – to the Little River, opening the way for future expansion of the church grounds. And in November 1929, the parish borrowed \$65,000 to buy additional property on the Little River. Slowly, Father O'Shea was amassing the land that now makes up the grounds of St. John de LaSalle.

Meanwhile, the parish had expanded well beyond LaSalle. In the mid-1920s, Bishop Turner was driving down Niagara Falls Boulevard in the Town of Tonawanda on his way to a confirmation ceremony

in Niagara Falls, when he noted that there were no Catholic churches along the route from Buffalo to LaSalle. Not long after, a group of Catholics from the Ellcott Creek area asked the bishop for a church to be built there. A small house was purchased, and Masses were held there by a priest from Buffalo – but attendance dropped off in the winter. When spring rolled around, area Catholics again asked for a church of their own. Finally, in May 1928, Bishop Turner assigned Father O'Shea to add



*The present rectory, completed in 1921*

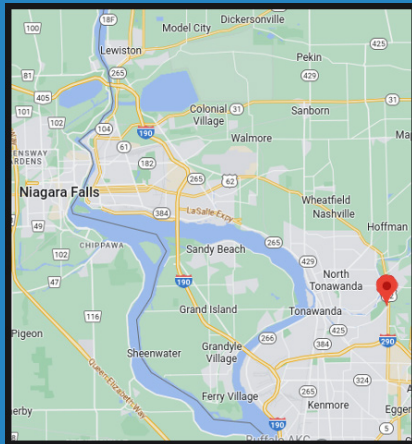


*Father O'Shea at the new rectory*



## The River Flows ... Ellicott Creek

St. Christopher Church began as a mission of St. John's in 1929 - extending the parish's reach to Ellicott Creek. Located in Tonawanda, about 10 miles from St. John's, Ellicott Creek extends from Tonawanda Creek, which in turn flows into the Niagara River. St. Christopher's became independent in 1935.



pedestrian saw flames coming from the church-school building. Firefighters surmised that the fire started near the altar in the second-floor church, then spread toward the roof and ran between partitions to the lower part of the building.

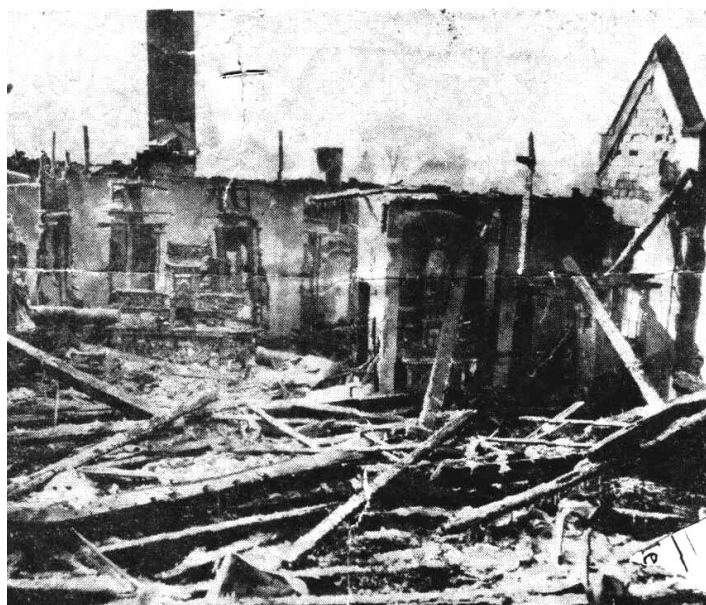


*Father John Doyle with Sisters Pancratia and Florence*

According to the March 2 *Niagara Falls Gazette*, Father O'Shea and Father Doyle risked their lives to save the Eucharist reserved in the church. Having removed the Blessed Sacrament, the two priests "made an unsuccessful attempt to beat out the flames before firemen arrived." Father Doyle's bathrobe caught fire, but he was able to extinguish the flames and avoid injury. According to the *Lockport Union Sun & Journal*, "a charred crucifix, a statue of the Blessed Virgin and a section of the altar were all that remained standing in the church." Extensive water and smoke damage affected the school and auditorium. Damage was assessed at \$30,000.

An outpouring of support from the community gave St. John's the lift it needed. On April 14, the LaSalle Community Club staged one of the most successful fundraisers ever held in Niagara Falls, as nearly 1,500 people packed the

### *Fire Does \$30,000 Damage to Niagara Falls Church*



*Newspaper photo of the devastating 1936 fire*

the Ellicott Creek area to his territory. Masses were held in a tent during the summer, and moved to a small restaurant in the winter.



*St. Christopher's in Tonawanda began as a mission of St. John's*

In November 1928, Bishop Turner approved plans for a new church building, resulting in the construction of St. Christopher Shrine on Niagara Falls Boulevard as a mission of

St. John's. Named for the patron saint of travelers, St. Christopher's was the first roadside shrine in the United States. Father O'Shea said the first Mass there on April 14, 1929. With a seating capacity of 250, the building cost \$25,000. As the community grew and its debt was paid down, Bishop Turner made St. Christopher's its own parish on July 2, 1935, and appointed the Rev. Bertram Trautman as the pastor - leaving Father O'Shea to focus exclusively on his congregation in LaSalle.

In 1930, the Diocese recognized the steady growth of St. John de LaSalle Parish by assigning its first assistant pastor, the Rev. John Doyle. Then, from June 3-5, 1934, the parish held a three-day celebration of Father O'Shea's 25th anniversary in the priesthood.

Those happy moments were overshadowed by the harrowing events of March 1, 1936. At 1:23 a.m., a



State Armory for a card party and dance. Hundreds more bought tickets even though they were unable to attend. In the meantime, the Masonic Lodge in LaSalle offered its hall at 91st Street and South Military Road for Masses until the church could reopen. St. John de LaSalle School immediately secured four vacant classrooms at nearby Cayuga Street School, a public elementary school, so that students lost no instructional time.

Parishioners also responded to the tragedy. Members of the church immediately set out to salvage any usable parts of the building. A roof was built over the first-floor classrooms, while the basement recreation hall was made into a chapel. Although this basement chapel was meant to be a temporary worship space, it remained the main church for nearly a quarter-century.

Father Doyle stayed at St. John's as associate pastor until 1938. He went on to serve for nearly 30 years as pastor of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish in Orchard Park. In a remarkable side note, Father Doyle grappled with fire once more during his tenure in Orchard Park; in 1967, a fire broke out in the sacristy at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. The church was damaged but not destroyed.

Years later, Father Doyle was included on the Diocese of Buffalo's list of priests who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse, due to incidents alleged to have occurred during his tenure in Orchard Park.

Besides Father Doyle, other assistant pastors during the O'Shea era included the Rev. James Reddington (1937-38), the Rev. F. Lambert Haley (1939-40), the Rev. D.E. Snyder (1941), the Rev. J. McGill (1941), the Rev. Cornelius Godfrey (1941-43), and the Rev. John O'Connor (1943-44).

Father O'Shea's eventful tenure at St. John's drew to a close in 1944. He had been hospitalized for a week at Mount St. Mary's Hospital due to a serious case of the flu, and was discharged on February 19. He returned to the rectory at St. John's feeling restored, but a heart attack unexpectedly

took his life in the early hours of February 20. He was 64 years old. His funeral took place at St. John's on February 22, 1944.



*The "temporary" basement chapel, which was used for 24 years*

In an editorial about Father O'Shea's passing, the *Niagara Falls Gazette* described him as "a valued and highly esteemed leader" who was "learned, experienced and filled with a zeal for service." Pointing out his "deep interest in the general welfare of the community," the newspaper emphasized Father O'Shea's devotion to the children of the parish and his stewardship of St.

John de LaSalle School, "where students revered him as a father."



*Father O'Shea with schoolchildren in 1920*

Father O'Shea had made his mark and left a legacy of growth and steady leadership. In the wake of his death, Assistant Pastor Father John O'Connor was named temporary administrator. In May, 98 children received their First Communion at St. John's, and on June 18, the Most Rev. Joseph Burke, auxiliary bishop of Buffalo, confirmed a class of 185. St. John's was a parish on the rise.

The Rev. Francis McKenna was appointed on June 19, 1944, to succeed Father O'Shea. Ordained June 11, 1927, Father McKenna had been serving as assistant pastor of Holy Family Parish in Buffalo. Father McKenna could not have predicted that he would be in LaSalle for nearly 30 years, nor imagined the challenges he would immediately face.

# Peace Dividend

St. Charles Borromeo Chapel is born



LaSalle had grown immensely by 1943 – and so had the surrounding towns of Niagara and Wheatfield. Much of the area's growth was due to the war effort, as Bell Aircraft and other industries established operations and hired thousands of workers. Housing developments sprang up from northwest LaSalle all the way to Wheatfield.

The Most Rev. John Duffy, who was named bishop of Buffalo in 1937 after Bishop Turner's death, saw the need to minister to these burgeoning communities. On September 23, 1943, he appointed the Rev. John Carey to start St. Charles Borromeo Parish, named for the archbishop of Milan and towering figure of the 16th century Catholic Counterreformation.

Educated in Rome and ordained in 1932, Father Carey served as pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Brant, before his assignment in Niagara Falls. According to the December 24, 1943, edition of the *Niagara Falls Gazette*, Father Carey's mission was "to minister to the spiritual needs of war workers and the residents of the area adjacent to the Pine avenue and Military road section of the city."

Until this point, all of LaSalle was served by St. John de LaSalle Parish. Back then, LaSalle was divided by the New York Central Railroad tracks. Today, the LaSalle Expressway cuts through LaSalle in roughly the same place. As a result, LaSalle residents have long spoken of the "Buffalo Avenue side" and the "Pine Avenue side" of LaSalle's numbered streets. Father Carey's church would focus on the area north of the tracks – or the "Pine Avenue side," east into Wheatfield and the area around the massive Bell factory.

Several years later, the Rev. Msgr. Paschal Tronolone of St. Joseph Parish on Pine Avenue in Niagara Falls said publicly that he was the one who asked Bishop Duffy to start a new church north of the railroad tracks. Msgr. Tronolone said he was looking out for those from LaSalle who were taking the

bus to St. Joseph's for Mass because they could not find a way to get to St. John's.

As was often the case in those days, the formation of the parish preceded the construction of the church. While St. John de LaSalle Parish began in a private home, St. Charles Borromeo Parish had its genesis in a restaurant.

On October 24, 1943, Father Carey celebrated the new parish's first Mass with about 20 people at the Plantation Restaurant at the northwest corner of Pine Avenue – now

Niagara Falls Boulevard – and Military Road. McDonald's and Walgreens stand near this spot as of 2023. With the use of a portable altar, the Plantation was transformed into a house of worship each Sunday morning, while Father Carey searched for a spot for a permanent church.

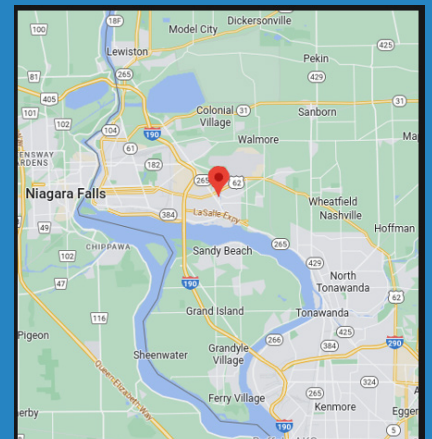


*The Plantation Restaurant*

## The River Flows ... Cayuga Creek

Cayuga Creek is a tributary of the Niagara River that shoots off from

the Little River northward into the LaSalle section of the City of Niagara Falls. Prince of Peace Church – the parent of St. Charles Borromeo and now part of St. Vincent de Paul Parish – was built about 500 feet from Cayuga Creek in 1944.





Plans progressed to build a church near the Plantation Restaurant – but Bishop Turner had a change of heart about the parish's name. At the Christmas Masses of 1943, Father Carey announced that the parish would no longer be named for St. Charles Borromeo. Instead, it would be called Prince of Peace, to honor those serving their country and to encourage prayers for the end of the war. According to the *Niagara Falls Gazette*, it was believed to be the first parish in the nation to bear the name of Prince of Peace, taken from the famous passage of Isaiah 9:5: "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace."

Construction of Prince of Peace Church moved rapidly, especially by today's standards. On May 1, 1944, the City of Niagara Falls approved a permit for construction of a small wooden church and parish hall on North Military Road between Cayuga Drive and Jacob Place, near Cayuga Creek. Two weeks later, the Niagara Falls City Council agreed to abandon a small street called Ward Place to facilitate the building of the church. The first Mass was held in the new church on June 18, 1944. That afternoon, Bishop Burke confirmed a class of 80 students.



*First Mass at St. Charles, in August 1944*

Father Carey wasted no time in founding a parochial school, with classes held in the church/parish hall starting in September 1944. It remained there until a separate school was built on the parish grounds in 1960. Prince of Peace School was staffed by lay teachers as well as the Sisters of St. Francis of Allegany.

Thanks to Father Carey's ambitious plans, there would still be a St. Charles Church, in addition to Prince of Peace.

Before the Village of LaSalle became part of the City of Niagara Falls in 1927, 56th Street was called Evershed Street, in memory of Thomas Evershed – an engineer who wanted to use hydraulic canals to carry electricity throughout the area. In turn, the surrounding neighborhood – specifically 56th to 59th Streets between Buffalo Avenue and Stephenson Avenue – was known as Evershed. This area in the west end of LaSalle was originally home to the Bowen family farm, but gave way to housing for people employed by nearby factories. Father Carey saw a need for a Catholic church there, too.

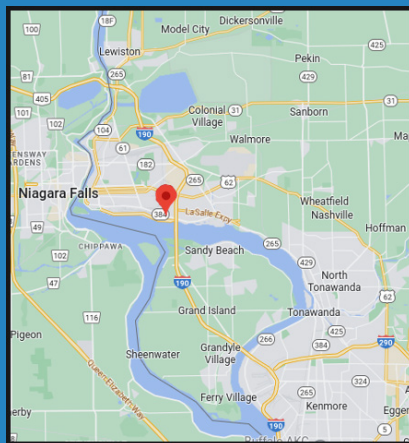
On May 20, 1944, with construction of Prince of Peace nearly finished, Father Carey secured a permit from the city to build the new St. Charles Borromeo Church – a mission of Prince of Peace – at 56th Street and Lindbergh Avenue in the Evershed area. In the meantime, Sunday Masses were held at the community building of the Griffon Manor housing development.

Construction of St. Charles Chapel wrapped up in August 1944, and the first Mass in the church was celebrated at that time. Although legend held that St. Charles was a converted Army barracks building, parishioners who lived in the neighborhood say they know that was not the case, because they saw it built from the ground up. Perhaps the misconception can be chalked up to the barebones nature of the wooden, wartime building, St. Charles was essentially the same as Prince of Peace Church, but even smaller.

There were two Sunday Masses during those early years, although the times frequently changed based on the availability of priests. The chapel was administered by the priests of Prince of Peace. Carmelite priests from Mount Carmel Seminary in Niagara Falls, Ontario, and Vincentian priests from Niagara University frequently said

## The River Flows ... Evershed

The Evershed area of Niagara Falls, from 56th to 59th Streets off Buffalo Avenue, was named for an engineer who, in 1886, proposed a series of canals to harness the hydroelectric capacity of Niagara Falls. Evershed borders the river area dotted with factories – but the canals were never built due to cost.







*Father Carey with the 1945 First Communion class at St. Charles*

Sunday Masses; parishioners took turns transporting visiting priests.

Children from St. Charles traveled across LaSalle to Prince of Peace for catechism classes; in most years, the children of St. Charles received

their First Communion and Confirmation at Prince of Peace. And St. Charles depended on Prince of Peace for pastoral leadership. Nonetheless, the church took on its own character; parishioners noted that it didn't feel like a mission.

Within a year, St. Charles included 320 individuals from 72 families. People in the neighborhood were delighted to have a church in their backyard, and they took responsibility for cleaning, taking care of the altar and sanctuary, and keeping up the grounds. "We were so glad to have a parish, we just did all these things," said Anna Francis, who grew up across the street from St. Charles on 56th Street. "No one got paid for anything." She recalled that the church had no running water in the early years, so her father would take his hose over to the church to water the flowers.

Father Carey was a dogged advocate for the residents of Evershed. Over the years, he organized neighbors to oppose industrial expansion in the surrounding area. An outspoken foe of air pollution, he also protested the dumping of materials in junkyards near the church property, leading to a requirement from the City of Niagara Falls that fences be built around the junkyards.

This activism was consistent with Father Carey's involvement in community affairs. He served as chaplain for the local Knights of Columbus and the Niagara Frontier Council of the Boy Scouts of America. He was a board member for Community Chest, the forerunner to the United Way of Niagara. He also served as secretary of the building fund for Bishop Duffy and Madonna High Schools on 66th Street, which in later years were combined as Niagara Catholic High School. Father Carey was a leader in a community effort to increase recreational programming for children and youth in Niagara Falls. He also served as a judge in the Diocese of Buffalo's matrimonial bureau, now known as the Tribunal.

For his first several years at Prince of Peace and St. Charles, Father Carey lived in a temporary rectory at 8509 Witkop Avenue, a few blocks from Prince of Peace. Finally, in 1949, a rectory was built on the Prince of Peace grounds – followed by a convent in 1950.



*The original Prince of Peace/St. Charles rectory as it appears today*

In 1953, Father Carey announced plans to build a new, much bigger Prince of Peace Church immediately north of the existing church. Oral history holds that the original Prince of Peace was a "fire trap" and there was always fear that it would burn down – so the new church may have been at least partially inspired by insurance costs. Ground was broken on July 7, 1955, with the laying of the cornerstone taking place on January 1, 1956.

Simultaneously, Father Carey looked to the Town of Niagara for expansion and established St. Leo Church there



*St. Leo Church, built in 1956*

as a second mission of Prince of Peace. Construction began in September 1955, and the first Mass was held on June 10, 1956. St. Leo's was located two miles northwest of Prince of Peace, on Military Road near Porter Road in the town. "Father Carey

believes it will fill a need long felt in the area," the *Niagara Falls Gazette* reported on December 30, 1955. St. Leo's became an independent parish in 1957.

After a half-century as an independent parish, St. Leo's once again became part of Prince of Peace Parish in 2008 as part of the Journey in Faith and Grace. The combined community, known as St. Vincent de Paul Parish, makes use of both the Prince of Peace and St. Leo's worship sites.

On December 8, 1957, Father Carey's 25th anniversary was celebrated with Mass and a dinner at the Century Club on Buffalo Avenue, where the LaSalle Waterfront Park now stands. A second jubilee Mass and dinner were held for priests the next day.

These were the first Masses celebrated in the new Prince of Peace Church – a modern house of worship built in the “praying hands” architectural style that was popular at that time, marked by steep side walls that significantly reduced construction costs. Grace Lutheran Church, a quarter-mile south on Cayuga Drive, is similar in design and was built at the same time. Notably, the new Prince of Peace Church was the first church in the Diocese of Buffalo to be built with air conditioning.

In recognition of his many achievements as a priest, Father Carey was named a monsignor on September 18, 1959. As well-respected as Monsignor Carey was at St. Charles, it was his longtime assistant pastor who won people’s hearts on 56th Street. In September 1955, a young priest named the Rev. Paul Letourneau was assigned as Father Carey’s assistant pastor. He had been ordained May 9, 1954, the first of six parishioners from nearby St. John de LaSalle to enter the priesthood.



*Father Letourneau*

Father Letourneau became a familiar and beloved figure at St. Charles, where he effectively functioned as the pastor even though he was an assistant to Father Carey. The children especially revered him, as he was responsible for their religious education classes.

Father Letourneau, who was later named a monsignor, enjoyed a long and successful career in the priesthood until his death on October 23, 2009. When St. Charles later became an independent parish, parishioners hoped Father Letourneau might be their pastor, but it was not to be. However, he did serve briefly as administrator of both Prince of Peace and St. Charles in 1964, for sad reasons.

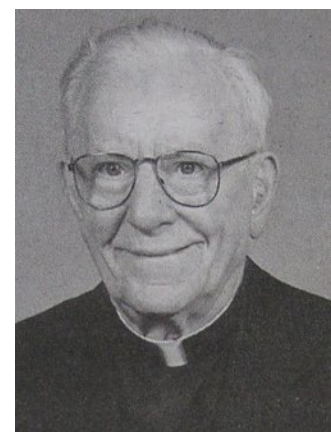
On May 15, 1964, Monsignor Carey died suddenly at age 55 during a reunion of North American College alumni in New Orleans. The *Niagara Falls Gazette* paid tribute to the “beloved and saintly pastor” by noting his commitment to the entire community, not just his own parishioners.

“He was a leader and organizer in civic, cultural, educational, philanthropic and social welfare matters,” said the newspaper.

“Friendly and frank, his considered judgment was highly respected in these circles and his contributions to many causes of community betterment were substantial. He was

especially successful as an apostle of goodwill among the area’s various races and creeds. This probably was not a conscious effort on his part, but rather a normal expression of the ecumenical spirit which he felt so keenly.”

Father Letourneau oversaw Prince of Peace and St. Charles until July 26, 1964, when the Rev. Msgr. Robert Murphy was installed as pastor of both churches. Described by parishioners as a “very gentle man” and a “class act all the way,” Monsignor Murphy had been ordained December 13, 1942, and held the prestigious role of secretary to Bishops Burke and McNulty from 1953 to 1964, before arriving in Niagara Falls. He was named a monsignor on June 5, 1959.



*Monsignor Murphy later in his career*

Parishioners remember Monsignor Murphy as a well-loved pastor who was as comfortable calling bingo as he was visiting the sick. Within a few years of his arrival, Monsignor Murphy would leave a lasting mark on St. Charles.



*The new Prince of Peace Church, built in 1957*



# A New Home in Narrowed Borders

## St. John's adjusts to changing times



With the formation of Prince of Peace – including St. Charles – St. John de LaSalle's borders were narrowed. The New York Central Railroad tracks, cutting across LaSalle from east to west, became the boundary line between St. John's and Prince of Peace.

In his waning months, Father O'Shea vigorously protested the decision to Bishop Duffy. Father O'Shea accurately pointed out that the new boundaries gave Prince of Peace the opportunity to expand into developing neighborhoods, while St. John's would remain landlocked. Bishop Duffy told Father O'Shea to pass out cards that would allow people living within Prince of Peace's boundaries to opt in to St. John's instead. Father O'Shea did as he was instructed, but there were complications.



*Father McKenna with a group of parishioners*

"Probably because of his illness," Father McKenna later wrote, "Fr. O'Shea was quoted as saying and doing things which were somewhat peculiar. So his request that (parishioners) sign cards to stay in the Parish was considered only one of his whims ... "

After his arrival at St. John's in 1944, Father McKenna likewise pressed the case with Bishop Duffy that the new boundaries left no room for expansion, and that losing families from across the tracks would be a serious blow to the parish.

"When the boundary committee chose the railroad tracks in 1943 as a clear cut and fair division of the homes in LaSalle built at that time," McKenna wrote, "they did not take into consideration the trend of population and that within a few years a tremendous amount of building would take place in the area between the tracks and Pine Avenue." He noted that as water and sewer capacity was added, and schools and fire facilities were built in the

area north of the tracks, development in Prince of Peace's territory would only accelerate – and St. John's would be unable to participate in the growth.

At Father McKenna's insistence, Bishop Duffy allowed families to decide for themselves whether to remain part of St. John's. The bishop coined the expression that "St. John's and Prince of Peace intermingle," and he authorized clergy from St. John's to minister to those living in the Prince of Peace territory.

Although Bishop Duffy died shortly after, Father McKenna proceeded according to the agreement. Some 250 families who lived outside the parish boundaries remained with St. John's through the next decade. However, the parish still lost members, not only to the north and east at Prince of Peace, but also to

the west at St. Charles. "Many people living in the western extremity of the Parish now find it more convenient to attend St. Charles Borromeo Church, resulting in a loss to St. John's," Father McKenna wrote.

When the Most Rev. John O'Hara succeeded Bishop Duffy in 1945, Father McKenna proposed a new set of boundaries more favorable to St. John's. "Prince of Peace Parish can continue to grow on three sides even though its boundary line on the south is moved closer to it than the tracks," he wrote. "But the same cannot be said of St. John's if the boundary line is made the tracks." Bishop O'Hara did not act upon Father McKenna's recommendation.

In time, parish boundaries became a thing of the past, and the faithful became free to attend the parishes of their choosing. By that point, though, LaSalle had already been carved among three churches, and many families had been removed from their mother church, despite Father



McKenna's advocacy. This setback notwithstanding, St. John's continued to build up its campus and its ministries.

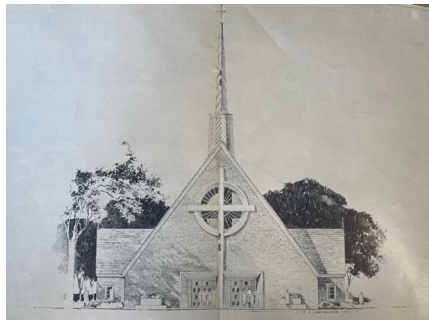
In October 1953, parishioners built a two-car garage with an attached workshop on South 86th Street, just south of the church/school building. The volunteers donated their time on weeknights and Saturdays, while the church paid for the building materials. The garage is still in use today.

But Father McKenna had his sights set on more than a garage. The "temporary" chapel in the school basement had been in use since the 1936 fire, and Father McKenna desperately wanted a new church. In consultation with parishioners and the Rev. James Cahill, assistant pastor, Father McKenna started planning the long-awaited construction. A fund drive began



*Building Fund Appeal officials celebrate good returns. From left to right are Joseph J. Gerbasi, Joseph C. Weber, Police Justice Francis L. Giles, and Father McKenna*

in 1953 under the leadership of Police Justice Francis L. Giles and Joseph C. Weber. While the initial goal of \$160,000 was met in January 1954, the cost of the project ultimately increased to \$400,000, which necessitated more fundraising.



*Original rendering of the church*

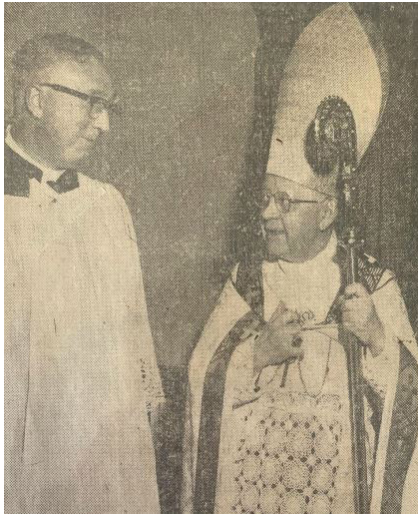
Peace. However, by the time ground was finally broken in January 1959, the sketches had changed to a semi-Gothic design with a capacity of 650.

The Most Rev. Joseph Burke, who had visited St. John's as an auxiliary bishop years earlier, was now the bishop of Buffalo; he succeeded Bishop O'Hara, who was named archbishop of Philadelphia in 1951 and became a cardinal in 1958. Bishop Burke laid the cornerstone for the church on November 6, 1959, and dedicated the newly completed building on October 30, 1960, with more than 800 people in attendance. Father McKenna celebrated the first Mass in the church on All Saints' Day, November 1.



*1959-60 construction of the long-awaited new church, located west of the school and rectory*

Father McKenna celebrated many other milestones during his 28 years as pastor. On June 12, 1952, the parish held a celebration of Father McKenna's 25th anniversary of ordination. On June 11, 1967, more than 700 parishioners gathered in the parish hall for his 40th jubilee celebration. The following day, Father McKenna concelebrated an anniversary Mass at St. John's with his close friend and classmate the Rev. Edwin Cuddihy, then pastor of St. Peter Parish in Lewiston. That same night, more than 100 priests celebrated at the Treadway Inn on Buffalo Avenue.



*Father McKenna with Bishop Burke*

When Bishop Burke died in October 1962, Father Cahill was called upon to narrate the funeral Mass on local television, just as he had for Bishop Burke's 50th anniversary jubilee



*Father Cahill*

Mass four months earlier. Father Cahill became the longest-serving associate pastor at St. John's, serving from 1951 until his appointment as pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Bemus Point on March 16, 1964.

Other assistant and associate pastors who assisted Father McKenna included the Rev. James Healey (1944-45), the Rev. Chester Malikowski (1945-46), the Rev. Bernard Sexton

(1947-50), the Rev. Donald Fitzgerald (1964-65), the Rev. Robert McNamara (1965-67), the Rev. William Roche (1967-68), the Rev. Edward Trauscht (1967-69), the Rev. David Hackett (1969), the Rev. James Dunn (1969-70), and the Rev. Joseph Sparatorico (1970-72).

Most of these associates served briefly and without fanfare. Father Trauscht, however, made headlines in 1969. The January 28, 1969, edition of the *Niagara Falls Gazette* stated that "he has deserted the Buffalo area priesthood and cannot be located." According to the article, Father Trauscht was a vocal proponent of reform in the Catholic Church, and worried that the Church was not doing enough to educate the faithful about the positive outcomes of the Second Vatican Council. Father Trauscht went on to join

the United Church of Christ, and he pastored several area churches over the next few decades.

Although Father Trauscht's departure from the priesthood was not an earth-shattering event in itself, the episode points to two notable developments. First, the newspaper article stated that "his departure leaves one of Niagara Falls' largest parishes with only one priest and a spokesman for the Buffalo chancery office said a shortage of priests would prevent assigning another to the parish at this time." Given today's clergy shortage, it is striking to see that the problem was already taking root more than 50 years ago.

Second, Father Trauscht's decision to leave the Church recalls the turbulence of the times, and particularly the resistance of some Catholics to the tectonic shifts of the Second Vatican Council. Although Vatican II brought about reforms in all areas of Church life, restoration of the Mass was most noticeable to Catholics around the world.

In September 1964, the Vatican's Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy published the first round of liturgical reforms, to take effect March 7, 1965. That day, for the first time, Catholics around the world heard Mass partly in their own language, with the presiding priest facing them instead of the back altar, as had been the previous custom. The liturgy evolved over the next five years until it was entirely in the vernacular. Accordingly, changes were made to the sanctuary at St. John's to accommodate these new ways of worship.

On Palm Sunday, March 22, 1970, the Mass of Pope Paul VI was implemented in area churches, marking the end of Latin in the liturgy. At that point, the Most Rev. James McNulty, who had become bishop of Buffalo in 1963, said that "the time for experimentation has expired" and called on parishes in the Diocese to "converge our energies in what Pope Paul has defined as the official rules." This new form of the Mass was the culmination of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II. Over at Prince of Peace and St. Charles, there was expert leadership in implementing the changes: Monsignor Murphy was chairperson of the Buffalo Diocesan Liturgical Commission at that time.

Another big step took place in the Diocese of Buffalo on July 4, 1970, when Saturday evening Vigil Masses were allowed in the Catholic Church. St. John's, Prince of Peace, St. Charles and St. Leo's coordinated their schedules to provide a variety of options for local families. All four churches added Vigil Masses and eliminated their Sunday evening liturgies. "Whatever goes into effect in the law of the diocese, we try to effect here," Father McKenna told the *Niagara Falls Gazette*. "It's good for some people, especially for the golfers who can come to mass Saturday night and then forget about it Sunday. It's the same mass."



On May 28, 1972, Father McKenna announced his plans to retire for health reasons. At a reception on June 11, hundreds of parishioners stood in line to say goodbye to their pastor of nearly three decades. Father McKenna died on January 3, 1977, at Brothers of Mercy Sacred Heart Home in Clarence. His funeral Mass was fittingly held at St. John de LaSalle.

Years later, Father McKenna was included on the Diocese of Buffalo's list of priests who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse.

A later pastor, the Rev. Msgr. Robert Hogan, reflected on Father McKenna's legacy: "It became Father McKenna's dream to build a lasting and suitable Church for the people of LaSalle. He suffered through two Building Drives, but he would not allow a shovel to be put into the ground until he could see the money in hand. His patience and perseverance produced this sturdy Gothic Church from which we buried him."



*Father McKenna at his 45th anniversary celebration, with parishioners Bea Richute and Reggie Supkowski*

popular addition at St. John de LaSalle. Father Dmitri was just 26 years old when he arrived, and his seven-year tenure was one of the longest of any of the parish's associate pastors.

The new pastor, Father Crotty, had already been a priest for nearly 40 years when he was assigned to St. John de LaSalle. His tenure was memorable mostly for its brevity: he served at St. John's until May 1974, when he became pastor of St. Paul Church in Kenmore.

Shortly after Father Crotty died on January 4, 1982, a newspaper columnist paid tribute to him in the *Tonawanda News*: "A light-hearted, good natured priest. Father Crotty had to be Irish to be able to spread humor the way he could, and to lighten a person's load with his compassionate listening."

The next pastor of St. John's would use his own Irish sensibilities to forge a sense of community.

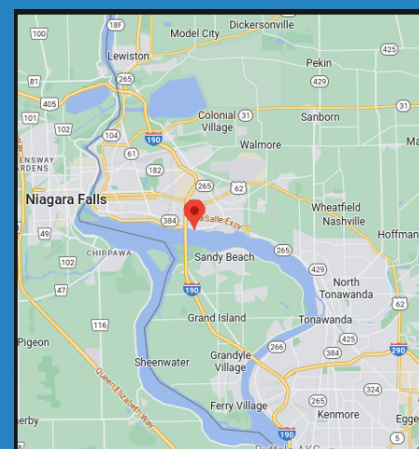
Father Joseph Spatorico, associate pastor, served as parish administrator until a new pastor was appointed. Astonishingly, fire struck St. John's again during this period. On the morning of July 24, 1972, a passerby noticed smoke coming from the empty church and called 911. Father Spatorico was not home, so firefighters had to break through the thick wooden doors of the church to battle the blaze. The fire, confined to the sacristy, was blamed on spontaneous combustion of charcoal being stored in a closet.

The Rev. William Crotty, pastor of Annunciation Parish in Buffalo, was appointed the sixth pastor of St. John de LaSalle effective September 2, 1972. He quickly requested approval to address damages from the fire. On January 11, 1973, Father Crotty received a letter from the Diocese authorizing him to spend \$28,000 on repairs.

When Father Crotty arrived, Father Spatorico left for a new assignment at Queen of Heaven Parish in West Seneca. He was succeeded by the Rev. Robert Dmitri, who was a

## The River Flows ... Treadway Inn

Built in 1963 at 70th Street and Buffalo Avenue, the Treadway hosted many parish events for both St. John de LaSalle and Prince of Peace/St. Charles over the years. It later became the Red Jacket Inn and the Inn on the River, and is now the Niagara Riverside Resort. It offers a stunning view of the river.





# The Country Church in the City

St. Charles stands on its own



Back at Prince of Peace and St. Charles, Monsignor Murphy quickly became a mover and shaker in the community – much like Monsignor Carey before him. Monsignor Murphy served as chairperson of the Niagara Falls Youth Board and sat on the Board of Directors for Mount St. Mary's Hospital. He also chaired the Catholic Charities of Buffalo Budget Committee, as well as the Buffalo Diocesan Liturgical Commission.

Parishioners celebrated Monsignor Murphy's 25th anniversary of ordination on December 12, 1967, with a Mass followed by a dinner at the Treadway Inn. On June 18, 1969, Bishop McNulty joined parishioners for a celebration of Prince of Peace's 25th anniversary.

By this time, St. Charles was on the move, and Monsignor Murphy concluded that the mission church was ready to stand on its own. Monsignor Murphy began to petition Bishop McNulty to make St. Charles an independent parish. First, he and the trustees incorporated St. Charles Borromeo Church Society as a separate nonprofit organization on May 10, 1968.

Church approval took longer than civil approval – but Bishop McNulty signed off on the new parish in 1970, and St. Charles Borromeo was on its own at last. The Rev.



*An outside view of St. Charles*

William Ward was appointed as pastor on June 7, 1970. Ordained in 1950, Father Ward had been serving as an associate pastor at Prince of Peace, so he was familiar to parishioners.

Monsignor Murphy stayed at Prince of Peace until July



*A view of the St. Charles sanctuary in the 1970s*

10, 1971, when he became pastor of Our Lady of Victory Parish, site of the renowned national shrine and basilica built in Lackawanna by the beloved Venerable Nelson Baker. Monsignor Murphy ministered at Our Lady of Victory until his retirement on February 15, 1994. He died on October 12, 2002, as one of the most respected priests in the Diocese.

The parishioners of St. Charles were always grateful to Monsignor Murphy for promoting their cause. He did not view the independence of St. Charles as a loss of prestige for Prince of Peace. "We never would have become our own parish without Monsignor Murphy," said Joe Genovese, an active parishioner throughout the lifespan of St. Charles. "He was very obliging."

Now that St. Charles Borromeo Parish had a pastor, it needed a rectory. The parish owned a few small parcels of land near the church, but the church was the only building on the premises. Father Ward lived at Prince of Peace and made the daily 3-mile commute to St. Charles. Oddly enough, the answer lay in the construction of the LaSalle Expressway.

Starting in 1969, New York State began relocating homes that were in the path of the planned highway. The George



Pappal family, parishioners of St. Charles, petitioned the state to let St. Charles buy the family home and move it to 56th Street for use as a rectory. When the request was denied, Senator Jimmy Griffin – future mayor of Buffalo and a lifelong friend of Father Ward – cut through the red tape to obtain the necessary approvals. The house was moved next to the church in 1970 and became the rectory.



*The rectory, moved to 56th Street*

At this time, St. Charles was home to nearly 300 families and was growing quickly. Father Ward and the Parish Council determined that a parish hall was needed to meet the parish's social and educational needs – and to host the parish's bingo program, which was still being held at Prince of Peace.



*Father Ward breaks ground for the center*

Construction began on a new parish hall in 1972. The building was completed in the spring of 1973 and was dedicated by the Most Rev. Bernard McLaughlin,

auxiliary bishop of Buffalo, on June 10. The building was used for bingo, meetings, religious education classes, and social events such as card parties and annual New Year's Eve dances.

Although the parish had raised some of the funds needed to build the hall, much of the cost was financed through a mortgage. The parish planned to pay off the debt using proceeds from bingo, as well as wedding and banquet rentals. Unfortunately, Father Ward had chosen an adjustable-rate mortgage. With interest rates on the rise, monthly payments ballooned to nearly \$4,000 a month, straining the new parish's finances.

Meanwhile, the Rev. Donald Zurack, OSFS, helped Father Ward from 1976 to 1977 by presiding at some of the weekend Masses.

Father Ward led the parish through a time of growth, but he was a controversial figure. He could be belligerent, especially toward those who disagreed with him. In November 1978, after eight years at St. Charles, Father Ward was transferred.

He did not receive a new assignment until August 12, 1979, when he became temporary administrator of St. Joseph Parish in Holland – which lasted only until September

2. He was then assigned to Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Elba as administrator, where he was later named pastor – a position he held until his retirement in 1998. He died on December 2, 2008. Ten years later, Father Ward was added to the Diocese of Buffalo's list of priests who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse. At least one of the accusations stems from his time at St. Charles.

After Father Ward left St. Charles, the Rev. George Reger served as temporary administrator from November 1978 until January 20, 1979, when the Rev. John Ducette was named pastor. At that time, Father Ducette was serving as associate pastor of St. John the Baptist in Kenmore, and as secretary to the Most Rev. Bernard McLaughlin, auxiliary bishop of Buffalo. Father Ducette was also diocesan director of the Apostleship of the Sea; in this role, which he held until 2003, he ministered to and prayed for the safety of seafarers, and delivered blessings at various dedication ceremonies in the area.



*The original St. Charles parish center, now Volare Lodge*





*St. Jude Chapel on the east end of the church, connecting the church to the rectory*

Like Father Letourneau, Father Ducette had grown up at St. John de LaSalle Parish. Described by parishioners as “down to earth,” Father Ducette proved to be an able leader for the young parish.

Father Ducette quickly surmised that the high interest rate on the parish center mortgage had to be addressed. He set out to convince parish leaders and members that the center should be sold to the Italian Sons and Daughters, who were looking for a home. The linchpin was a unique contractual arrangement allowing the parish to use the building for bingo, religious education, and up to six other events per year. One parishioner described it as “selling your car and getting the money but still being able to drive it whenever you want.”

After a parish vote of confidence, the sale moved forward on December 27, 1979, and the center reopened as the Volare Lodge on September 28, 1980. “We’re very pleased with the marriage,” Father Ducette told the *Niagara Gazette*. “And we realize that for continued success, both parties must continue to work in this venture.” The relationship thrived for the remainder of the parish’s history, and the Volare Lodge continues in the building today.



*An outside view with the side chapels*

Under the leadership of Father Ducette – who was later named a monsignor – St. Charles experienced spiritual, physical and social growth. Masses were overflowing, but Father Ducette had help. The Rev. Miecislau Leszczynski and the Rev. Robert Dmitri regularly presided at weekend Masses during the early 1980s.



*The ramp outside the St. Anthony Chapel*

Soon, the small church had to be expanded. Father Ducette spearheaded the addition of the St. Jude Chapel at the northeast end of the church in 1982. This chapel connected the church to the rectory, while adding seating for 25 more people. In late 1983, the St. Anthony of Padua Chapel was built on the northwest side of the church; it was the same size and shape of the St. Jude Chapel. The St. Anthony of Padua Chapel provided even more seating and made the church “cruciform” in shape. A ramp was added outside the

St. Anthony Chapel to make the church accessible.

From 1981 through 1990, St. Charles hosted an annual Miraculous Medal Novena to the Blessed Mother, led each October by Vincentian priests.

By the mid-1980s, more than 500 families were registered at St. Charles, which continued to open its doors to newcomers. During

this time, the parish became known as “The Country Church in the City” because of its intimate, friendly nature.

# Where Two or Three Are Gathered

## Monsignor Hogan builds community at St. John's



The Rev. Msgr. Robert Hogan was appointed the seventh pastor of St. John de LaSalle Parish on May 10, 1974. An Olean native ordained on May 19, 1951, he had been director of the Diocesan Office for the Propagation of the Faith – a position he continued to hold for a time



*Father Dmitri*

after arriving at St. John's. Pope Paul VI named him a monsignor in 1972 in recognition of his mission work.

Father Dmitri, the young associate pastor, served as temporary administrator of St. John's in the brief time between Father Crotty's departure and Monsignor Hogan's arrival. After leaving St. John's in 1979, Father Dmitri

served as chaplain at Mount St. Mary's Hospital in Lewiston and helped with weekend Masses at St. Charles. Sadly, Father Dmitri was diagnosed with cancer and died on August 20, 1991, at age 45.

Monsignor Hogan's impact was quickly felt at St. John's. To address perennial deficits caused by the operation of the parochial school, he launched a bingo program in 1974. Father Ward helped his neighbors at St. John's by allowing them to hold their bingo games at St. Charles.



*Monsignor Hogan*

A social person by nature, Monsignor Hogan enjoyed the buzz of activity and understood the importance of building a greater sense of community within the parish. After forming the Parish Council to increase the voice of the laity in parish affairs, he quickly began pushing for construction of a parish center and launched a building campaign in May 1975. At this time, there were 1,025 families in the parish and 240 students in the school.

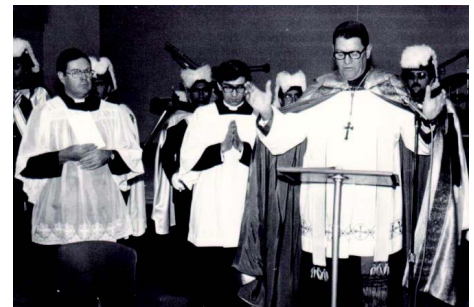
In addition to the parish center, original plans called for a new administration building to replace the 1921 rectory. The administration building was to include parish offices, meeting rooms and a priests' dining room on the ground

floor, with living quarters on the second floor for up to three priests. A walkway would have connected the administration building to the church. "Due to high cost," Monsignor Hogan later wrote, "the decision was made to build (the) center only, as (the) need for something for young people was obvious."



*A rendering of the administration building originally meant to replace the rectory*

Ground was broken for the center on November 27, 1975. More than 500 people looked on as the Most Rev. Edward Head, who had become bishop of Buffalo in 1973, dedicated the building on November 22, 1976. Almost immediately, the center began hosting community events and offering gym access for young people. Still standing as a testament to Monsignor Hogan's leadership, the center resulted in a closer union of parish organizations and made St. John's a hub of activity in LaSalle, as it had been in the 1920s and 1930s.



*Bishop Head (right) dedicates the parish center, with Monsignor Hogan looking on at left*

Like St. Charles, St. John's began to wither under the pressure of an ever-increasing prime interest rate on the parish center mortgage. Monsignor Hogan again appealed to his congregation, and parishioners responded.





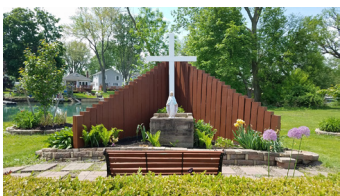
*The parish center, completed in 1976*

"We have received over \$100,000 in loans from parishioners, either at 6% or interest-free," Monsignor Hogan wrote in handwritten notes on November 11, 1981, noting that the prime interest rate at that time had shot up to 16.5%. On January 4, 1982, the parish repaid the balance of its bank loan from the construction of the center, and then had the breathing room to begin repaying \$133,000 to parishioners who had loaned money to the parish.



*Monsignor Hogan (center) dedicates accessible ramp, with Father Bob Fink at left*

Monsignor Hogan sparked other improvements to include more people in parish activities. A circular drive and ramp were dedicated on October 4, 1981, to make the church accessible to people with disabilities. Parishioners built a picnic pavilion in 1983 to complement the parish center. An outdoor grotto dedicated to the Blessed Mother and built by the Holy Name Society opened on October 13, 1985, near the pavilion. All of these amenities remain today.



*The prayer grotto*

The parish heartily celebrated milestones during Monsignor Hogan's tenure. Throughout 1982, under the guidance of general chairman Walter Garrow, special events were held in

honor of the parish's 75th anniversary – including a dinner dance, a commemoration of Christian Education Day, and numerous social events. The highlight occurred when Bishop Head presided at a jubilee liturgy on May 15, 1982, followed by a banquet in the parish center.



*Bishop Head presides at 75th anniversary liturgy*

On May 24, 1987, St. John's celebrated its 80th anniversary with a special Mass. Less than a month earlier, the parish held a surprise 60th birthday party for Monsignor Hogan, who preferred not to be fussed over and declined to attend until he found out his mother had made the trip from the Southern Tier. The timing of her visit was fortuitous: Mrs. Hogan died two weeks later, and parishioners were glad they were able to see her one last time.



*1983 pavilion construction*

While always looking after the community life of the parish, Monsignor Hogan was also a strong spiritual leader. Through his inspiration, several women in the parish formed the Legion of Mary. On Palm Sunday, March 27, 1983, the parish launched a program of taking the Eucharist to sick and homebound parishioners, a ministry that continues to thrive today. A 40-hour weekly Eucharistic Adoration program began in

1987; although this devotion was reduced in 2000 to one day a week, it is still in existence.

As the liturgy was renewed and restored through the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, Monsignor Hogan faithfully implemented the new practices. The parish offered classes to prepare lay people for their roles as special ministers of the Eucharist and lectors. The church sanctuary was remodeled, the communion rail was partially



removed, and a temporary altar was built to accommodate new liturgical norms.

During his 23 years as pastor, Monsignor Hogan became an institution in Niagara Falls. Known for hilarious one-liners and his cigar, Hogan built relationships with Catholics and non-Catholics alike. An avid golfer, he networked and even raised money on the golf course.



*Monsignor Hogan holds court at the 1984 St. John's Carnival*

Of his many contributions to St. John de LaSalle Parish, Monsignor Hogan's foremost legacy was in building a sense of community. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." To this day, one senses that where two or three are gathered at St. John's, Monsignor Hogan is there, too.



*Father Matt Kibuka*

Monsignor Hogan was supported by several associate pastors – a position which later became known as "parochial vicar" in the Diocese of Buffalo. As mentioned earlier, Father Robert Dmitri served as associate pastor at St. John's from 1972 to 1979. He was succeeded by the Rev. Loville Martlock, who served from 1979

to 1981, and was later included on the Diocese of Buffalo's list of priests credibly accused of sexual abuse.

From 1981 to 1985, a charismatic young priest named the Rev. Robert Fink served as associate pastor; he initiated improvements to the rectory and helped to start a number of new organizations, including the St. John de LaSalle Senior Citizens, a folk group for weekend Masses, and the Marthas group, which provided funeral luncheons for grieving families in the parish. Father Bob ultimately left the priesthood but continued to minister people's spiritual needs as a hospice chaplain.

The Rev. Matthias Kibuka, a Ugandan priest, served as parochial vicar from 1985 through 1996. With the number of priests on the decline, the Rev. Norman McTigue became

the last parochial vicar at St. John's, serving from 1996 to 1997.

No discussion of the Hogan era would be complete without mentioning David Slish's ordination to the permanent diaconate on June 10, 1979. A native son of St. John de LaSalle, Deacon Dave ministered at St. John's for many years and remains a parishioner. From 1979 to 1984,

he assisted with parish liturgies at St. John's while also engaging in social justice ministry at the Catholic Worker in Niagara Falls. After a stint at St. Charles in the 1980s, St. John's became his sole ministry for more than 20 years.

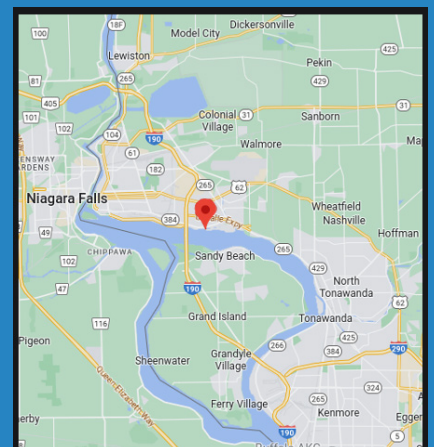
In May 1996, Deacon Dave became pastoral associate at St. John's and began to staff the parish office following the death of Dorothy Loncki, longtime parish secretary. Dorothy died on April 20, 1996, after serving as secretary for three different pastors over a 25-year span.



*Deacon Dave Slish*

## The River Flows ... The Little River

Off the north end of Cayuga Island, flowing east to Griffon Park, is the Little River, the river's narrowest point. In the 1920s, St. John's bought several parcels of land extending from Buffalo Avenue to the Little River. The parish center, pavilion and grotto were later built on the shoreline of the Little River.





# Turbulent Times

St. Charles grows through ups and downs



*Father Ducette during a baptism*

While Monsignor Hogan remained at the helm of St. John's for 23 years, St. Charles saw a quick succession of pastors and administrators in the 1980s. Nonetheless,

much was accomplished at the parish during these years – truly a testament to the dedication of the parishioners.



*Dorothy DePlanche*

For more than a decade, pastors of St. Charles had handled their own typing and office tasks. In January 1982, Father Ducette yielded to boxes of paperwork on the floor, and hired Dorothy DePlanche as office manager.

Armed with a typewriter and a stencil machine,

she worked one day a week at first. After parishioner Rose Salerno was no longer able to handle bingo bookkeeping due to illness, DePlanche took over that function as well. Her pleasant demeanor and careful organization contributed much to the parish's success. She gradually added hours until she was working three days a week, and she remained in the position until the 2008 merger.

In April 1984, Deacon David Slish was reassigned from St. John de LaSalle to liturgical and youth

ministry at St. Charles, while also assisting Father Ducette as assistant director of the Apostleship of the Sea. Deacon Dave remained at St. Charles through 1986, when he returned to St. John's.

The Rev. Ken Nielsen, another priest from Niagara Catholic, was a regular weekend associate at St. Charles from 1985 to 1988. The Rev. Eugene Ulrich, then the vocations director for the Diocese of Buffalo, also assisted with weekend Masses regularly in the late 1980s.



*Father Kean with Vita Husanian and Alfreda Palka*

Effective December 9, 1985, Father Ducette was appointed pastor of St. Timothy Parish in Tonawanda, where he remained until his retirement in 2008; he was later named a monsignor. He died April 12, 2016.



*Renovated sanctuary in the 1980s*

When he departed from St. Charles, Father Ducette traded places with the Rev. John Kean, who left St. Timothy's to take the helm at St. Charles. Years before, Father Kean had been an assistant pastor at Prince of Peace, so he was familiar to St. Charles parishioners. A Lockport native, he was a popular pastor described by parishioners as "jovial" and "friendly." Father Kean often invited parishioners into the rectory for coffee and doughnuts after Sunday Mass, beginning a tradition that would blossom in future years. Father Kean oversaw renovations to the church's interior, including paneling over the original Homasote wall boards.

In 1987, Father Kean went into the hospital for minor surgery, but a blood clot formed in his leg and went to his heart. He died suddenly on April 3, 1987, leaving his parishioners in shock. His body lay in the church for parishioners and friends to pay their respects, and Bishop McLaughlin celebrated a memorial Mass at St. Charles on April 6. St. Charles was not big enough to host the funeral Mass, which instead was held on April 8 at St. Paul's in Kenmore. With the help of the Rev. Thomas Moran, pastor of St. Bernard Parish in Youngstown, Dorothy DePlanche cleaned out Father Kean's room. "It was such a sad day for both of us," she later recalled.

The Rev. Joseph Badding served as temporary administrator until the Rev. Joseph Friel was appointed pastor of St. Charles in May 1987. Father Friel had been ordained March 16, 1957, and served at numerous parishes as an associate pastor before being named administrator of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Forestville.

At St. Charles, Father Friel began exploring the conversion



*Father Joe Friel with Marie Kramarz, Anna Wargo and Antoinette Cacchio*

of a two-car garage next to the rectory into a small parish center. He also started planning a new church entrance at the south end of the church.

Neither of these plans came to

fruition during Father Friel's pastorate, but both would be completed in the coming years.

In the summer of 1989, Father Friel took a sabbatical and left a letter to be read to parishioners at weekend Masses. In the letter, he acknowledged that he was struggling with an addiction to alcohol, and he asked parishioners for their prayers.

The Rev. Robert Gister served as temporary administrator at St. Charles during Father Friel's sabbatical. A teacher at Niagara Catholic High School, Father Gister had been helping as a regular weekend associate at St. John's. While still looking after St. Charles, Father Gister left Niagara Catholic to join the faculty of Cardinal O'Hara High School in Tonawanda. Sadly, the young priest died of cancer on May 6, 1990.

Father Friel returned from his sabbatical for a brief time, but he left St. Charles in 1990 for good due to poor health. His next assignment was from 1991 to 1992, when he served as senior parochial vicar at St. Leo the Great Parish in Amherst. Father Friel then took a medical leave, and he died on August 19, 1995. He is included on the Diocese of Buffalo's list of priests who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse. Dubbed by one local television news station as "the predator priest," Friel stands accused of numerous cases of misconduct – all stemming from assignments he held prior to serving at St. Charles.

Beginning in 1989, Father Joe Friel's cousin, the Rev. Mark Friel, became a weekend associate at St. Charles, often presiding at the 4:30 Saturday Mass. He continued to assist the parish for several years after his cousin's departure, in addition to his duties as chaplain at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center. Like his cousin, Father Mark is included on the Diocese of Buffalo's list of priests who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse. He died on February 24, 2023.

By 1990, priests were becoming scarcer in the Diocese of Buffalo, and the Diocese approached St. Charles with the idea of becoming a mission again. Seeing this change as a step backwards, parishioners formed several committees, which met for six months under Ralph and Theresa Meranto's leadership, to increase activity in the parish.



*Father Mark Friel*

They received a boost from the Rev. Stanley Chwalinski, who served as parish administrator when Father Joe Friel left. Father Stan began his assignment on Easter weekend in 1990, and although his tenure lasted less than four months, he was an important figure in the development of St. Charles. He initiated a planning process to make the parish more viable. He also took steps to rejuvenate the parish's liturgical celebrations.



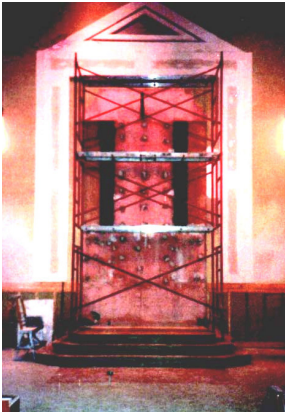
*Father Stan*

Father Stan died at age 67 on March 14, 2004, after a heart attack. At the time of his death, he was pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Attica. Parishioners of St. Charles fondly remembered him as a forward-looking priest who, however briefly, paved the way for an exciting era in the parish's history.



# The Future Starts Today

St. John's prepares for the new millennium



*Top: Sanctuary in the 1980s, before 1991 renovation*

*Center left: Sanctuary being renovated in 1991*

*Center right: Monsignor Hogan says Mass in temporary basement chapel*

*Bottom: Newly renovated sanctuary decorated for Easter*

At Buffalo Avenue and South 86th Street, the dawn of the 1990s brought an exciting new endeavor. From his arrival in 1974, Monsignor Hogan had always hoped to renovate the church. His prayers were answered in 1991 through a successful fund drive. The church closed for construction on January 6, 1991. During nearly three months of remodeling, the parish held weekend liturgies in the parish center, while weekday Masses took place in a temporary chapel in the church basement.

Inside the church, a permanent altar was constructed using marble from the original altar. The green tile walls were covered with wood paneling, creating an ambience of warmth and simple elegance. A small chapel for weekday liturgies and Eucharistic adoration was added where the sacristy had been. A former office on the other side of the sanctuary became the new sacristy. Other features included a new baptistery, an electronic piano and music area in the main body of the church, an accessible seating area for people who use wheelchairs, and a new organ in the choir loft. After a thorough scrubbing by a large group of volunteers, the beautiful worship space opened just in time for the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, March 28, 1991.



*Baptistery after renovation*

The Monsignor Hogan era continued for several more years, and while the fiscal pressures of operating a parochial school were always challenging, he remained a faithful shepherd for the people of St. John's. He celebrated his last major event as pastor on May 25, 1997, when the parish held a 90th anniversary liturgy and breakfast.

In July, Monsignor Hogan retired from active duty in the priesthood. By then, he was one of the most recognizable members of the LaSalle community. On June 22, 1997, more than 450 people, including the Most Rev. Henry Mansell, who had been named bishop of Buffalo in 1995, packed the Inn on the River on Buffalo Avenue – formerly the Treadway Inn – for Monsignor Hogan's retirement party. He then moved into the former convent, which the Felician Sisters had vacated upon their departure from the parochial school, and he remained an active part of the parish community.



*Monsignor Hogan (left) joins Father Jerry for his installation as pastor*

It is difficult for a pastor to follow a figure as beloved as Monsignor Hogan. Yet the Rev. Jerome Kopec was up to the task, and he accomplished a great deal in his nearly eight years at St. John's. A canon lawyer and Kenmore

native ordained in 1979, he was appointed pastor on July 14, 1997, following a term as coordinator of the Diocesan Priests' Personnel Board. He had previously pastored St. John Kanty Parish and held administrative roles with the Diocese. Cerebral but approachable, with a lively sense of humor, Father Jerry would make an impact by being



*Father Jerry with Deacons Walter Fudala (left) and David Sligh*

highly strategic about the steps needed to prepare St. John's for the new millennium.

With the departure of Father McTigue as parochial vicar just after Father Jerry arrived, the parish had only one assigned

priest for the first time in more than 60 years. Father Jerry hired a business manager, Deacon Walter Fudala, so he

would be free to attend to the parish's spiritual needs. He then turned his attention to the beauty and sacredness of the liturgy, and he made various improvements to the worship space, including enhanced lighting and sound. Father Jerry also oversaw the addition of bronze glass tabernacle doors to complete the ambience of the daily Mass chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. The Most Rev. Edward Grosz, auxiliary bishop of Buffalo, formally blessed the doors on April 1, 2001.

In the midst of these developments, the parish endured a heartbreaking loss when Monsignor Hogan succumbed to cancer on April 17, 2000, during a visit to Florida. He died during Holy Week, and his funeral was scheduled for Holy Saturday, April 22. Because Mass may not be said during the day on Holy Saturday, a Liturgy of the Word service was held that morning, followed by a Memorial Mass on April 25. Hundreds of people turned out to bid a final farewell to their beloved priest and friend.

With the former convent no longer occupied, Father Jerry had the building converted into a Pastoral Care Office. The building was blessed on October 15, 2000, and all renovations were completed by September of the following year. The parish offices moved from the rectory to the first floor of the former convent, while meeting rooms, a chapel and library were created on the second floor, and the parish archives were established on the third floor.



*Father Jerry dedicates the Pastoral Care Office*

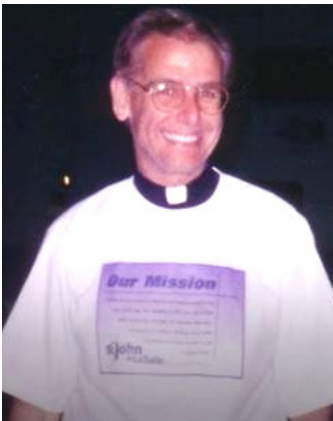




*Father Jerry and Father Bob Hughson join parishioners for a joint celebration of the Jubilee 2000 year*

The newly energized St. Vincent de Paul Society, originally founded in 1924, eventually converted the basement of the Pastoral Care Office into a food pantry, serving hundreds of families each year.

Father Jerry also led efforts to define the parish's values and identity. He engaged parishioners in creating



*Father Jerry wears a shirt with the parish's new mission statement*

a mission statement to articulate the parish's purpose, and he had a parish logo created for the first time, shown above.

The parish held several spiritual and social events in collaboration with St. Charles during Father Jerry's tenure. These included an August 2000 picnic and evening of musical praise that drew 300

people to celebrate the millennium Jubilee year, a joint parish mission in April 2001, and several Advent and Lenten evenings of reflection.

The Rev. John Bucki, SJ, director of campus ministry at Canisius College in Buffalo, offered in 2001 to preside at Sunday Masses as often as possible – usually twice a month – to help Father Jerry. He continued to assist with weekend

liturgies following the merger with St. Charles. This was not the first time that the Jesuit Fathers came to the aid of St. John's. A quiet, humble man named the Rev. John Kieffer, SJ, was a regular weekend associate at St. John's from the mid-1980s through his departure from the area in 1991.

True to its tradition of social activity, St. John's held many special celebrations at the start of the new millennium. On May 26, 2002, the people of St. John's enjoyed a special liturgy and breakfast in celebration of the parish's 95th anniversary. The Diocese of Buffalo asked the parish to host a concert by the renowned University of Notre Dame Folk Choir on May 24, 2003; parishioners opened their homes to provide lodging for nearly 50 Notre Dame students during that weekend.

On June 13, 2004, Deacon David Sligh celebrated his 25th anniversary as a permanent deacon with a liturgy and reception, and on October 16 of the same year, more than 200 parishioners and friends

joined Father Jerry for a Mass in honor of his silver jubilee of priesthood, followed by a dinner at the parish center.

On October 25, 2004, with the support of the Parish Council, Father Jerry launched a "Future Fund" capital campaign.

Parishioners were asked to make pledges over three years, allowing the parish to modernize its buildings in anticipation of the approaching

centennial celebration. On Christmas 2004, Father Jerry announced that the campaign had exceeded its \$300,000 goal. The future looked bright.



*Parish logo created in the early 2000s*



*Father Jerry's 25th anniversary in 2004*

# From Strength to Strength

St. Charles advances as a community of faith



As St. John's prepared for the new millennium, so did St. Charles. The 1990s were a time of tremendous growth and achievement at St. Charles – a time when people from far beyond the neighborhood were attracted to the parish's close-knit and welcoming atmosphere. Parishioners traveled to St. Charles from Wheatfield, Lewiston, Youngstown, Lockport, Grand Island and other neighboring



*Father Carlo and Monsignor Ducette*

towns because they felt the authenticity of the St. Charles experience.

This era of growth was built on a foundation of steady leadership. After two

brief pastorates and several transitional periods, the parish found the shepherd it needed on August 6, 1990, in the form of the Rev. Joseph Carlo. A Niagara Falls native and longtime associate pastor at Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, Father Carlo had been serving as pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Albion when he had a heart attack. After a period of convalescence, he found he was no longer able to handle a large parish. But at St. Charles, he was no mere caretaker.

Father Carlo's sense of humor endeared him to many parishioners in short order. Known for his constant jokes and his riotous laugh, he brought a sense of familiarity to the office of pastor. He reorganized the Parish Council, added more music to the liturgy, and completed the conversion of the garage into a modest parish center east of the rectory.

His enduring legacy was an extensive renovation of the church. Previously, the sanctuary had been quite small, ringed on either side by a tiny sacristy and a storage room. On July 31, 1991, Father



*Christmas before and after the 1991 renovation*

Carlo broke ground for an addition at the south end of the church. The sacristy and storage room were moved from the sanctuary to the new front entrance. As a result, the sanctuary tripled in size, complete with a new altar and other furnishings, and a beautiful parquet floor. Longtime parishioner Walter Dean, who was later named a parish trustee, built the altar, ambo and other accessories for the sanctuary.



*Good Shepherd window at front entrance*

Father Carlo had new carpeting placed throughout the church, and he purchased a new digital organ to replace the obsolete organ that had been used for many years. He also bought new



statues, including a striking statue of the Holy Family that greeted people as they entered the church. An enclosed confessional room, which doubled as a crying room for



*Newly expanded front entrance*

young children, was added near the front entrance.

Father Carlo was instrumental in hiring Dr. Rudolph Sandon of Little Valley,

New York, to design, construct and install faceted glass windows throughout the church – including a magnificent window of the Good Shepherd, which graced the new front entrance. An Italian immigrant, Sandon was known worldwide for his work, some of which can be found in the chapel of the presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland. St. Charles' windows were the last ones that Sandon completed prior to his death in 1992. Individual parishioners paid for all the new windows as memorials to loved ones.



*Bishop Head at 50th anniversary Mass*

Father Carlo was officially assigned as pastor on August 4, 1992, two days before his second anniversary as parish administrator. In June 1993, parishioners

gathered at Dante's Ristorante on Pine Avenue to celebrate his 30th anniversary of ordination. On September 10, 1994, the parish celebrated its 50th anniversary with a festive dinner, followed by an anniversary Mass with Bishop Head on October 16.

During Father Carlo's tenure, new spiritual and social activities abounded. The parish began to offer Bible study classes and held a parish renewal weekend to build the bonds of community. A newly formed social committee made extensive use of the new parish center by hosting regular social activities, including weekly coffee-and-doughnut socials after Sunday Masses. An annual volunteer dinner was held to thank all the parishioners who offered their time and talent, and an annual parish picnic was

instituted. The St. Vincent de Paul Society also experienced a renaissance during the 1990s.

In 1994, Bishop Head initiated a Diocese-wide planning process called New Visions. The purpose was to imagine a future with far fewer priests. Representatives of every parish were challenged to come up with potential consolidations in the event that churches would have to close. After much discussion, it was concluded that St. Charles would once again become part of Prince of Peace Parish if it became impossible to send a full-time priest to the parish. However, Bishop Head retired in 1995, and his successor, Bishop Henry Mansell, chose not to implement the plan.

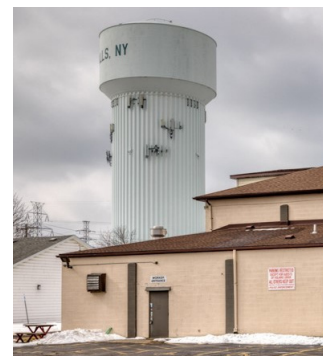


*Father Carlo, longtime music director Jeff Paterson, and Father Tom O'Connor*

During the mid-1990s, the Rev. Thomas O'Connor, SJ, of Canisius College became a familiar face. He regularly assisted with weekend liturgies as a weekend substitute for Father Carlo.

One major change to St. Charles' landscape during this period was beyond the parish's control. From 1994 on, parishioners walking out of Mass would be greeted by an enormous light blue water tower! The City of Niagara Falls built a hulking 2 million-gallon tank across 56th Street to store water treated at the nearby water plant.

Father Carlo had accomplished a great deal, but his health was precarious. With the permission of the Diocese, he took a brief sabbatical in the spring of 1996. During this time, Father Mark Friel served as temporary administrator; he had been assisting with weekend Masses at St. Charles for many years.



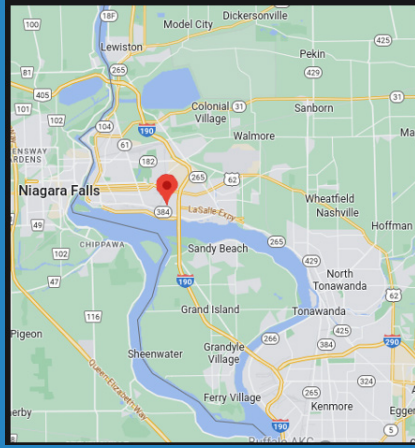
*The 56th Street water tower hulking over the former parish center*

Father Carlo returned after a short time and continued his effective leadership of the parish. But in March 1998, he stunned parishioners by announcing that he was leaving for a new assignment as pastor of St. Mary Parish in the rural community of Pavilion in Genesee County. After years of

# The River Flows ... 56th St. Water Tower

Built in 1994, the 56th Street Water Tower hovers over the former St. Charles property.

At any one time, the giant tank stores up to two million gallons of water that has been treated at the water treatment plant a half-mile away on Buffalo Avenue at 58th Street, on the banks of the Niagara River.



city life, Father Carlo yearned for a quiet existence in a small town. His final Mass at St. Charles was on Easter Sunday, April 12. A farewell dinner was held at the Como Restaurant on Pine Avenue on April 15. He left for his new assignment secure in the knowledge that he had positioned St. Charles for a bright future.

After his retirement from pastoral responsibilities in 2003, Father Carlo moved back to Niagara Falls and frequently substituted at St. Charles. Parishioners were always happy to see their former leader, who had played a vital role in the parish's story. Father Carlo died on January 25, 2017, and his funeral Mass was held at the St. Joseph's site of Holy Family Parish in Niagara Falls.

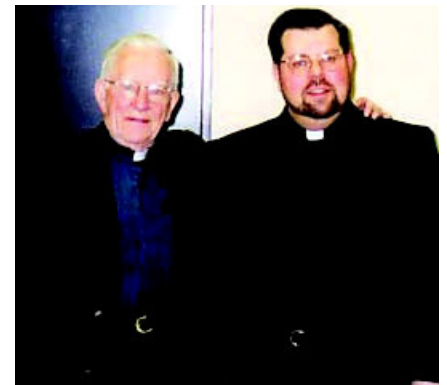
During his career, Father Carlo was known to lament that "there's nothing deader than a dead priest." However, the stories and warm memories shared to this day by his former parishioners suggest that his memory is very much alive.

When Father Carlo left for Pavilion in 1998, Father Mark Friel once again served as temporary administrator. The Rev. Fred Reisert, SJ, from Canisius College graciously presided at many of the weekend liturgies during this time of transition. With a priest shortage affecting the entire Diocese, the people of St. Charles wondered how long it would take for a new pastor to be assigned – and who that new pastor would be.

They received their answer on Ascension Thursday, May 21, 1998. After Mass that evening, the Rev. Robert Hughson stopped in at St. Charles after Mass and discovered that some of the music ministers were rehearsing. He excitedly shared the news that he had visited the Chancery earlier that day, and Bishop Mansell had assigned him as the new pastor, effective June 6.

A native of Albion ordained in 1979, Father Bob was no stranger to Niagara Falls. He had served as parochial vicar at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish for a number of years, before being assigned to Niagara Catholic High School. Initially, he was to split his time between St. Charles and Niagara Catholic. After a year, however, he was assigned full-time to St.

Charles. During his pastorate, he guided the formation of the Niagara Falls Catholic Schools Network.



*Monsignor Murphy and Father Bob*

An affable, social priest, Father Bob brought a fresh outlook to the parish. He started

the tradition of celebrating the parish's patronal feast on November 4. The annual Mass and party for the Feast of St. Charles instilled parish pride while allowing parishioners to learn about the legacy of their famous patron saint. At the inaugural Feast of St. Charles celebration in 1998, Father Bob and Father Mark Friel were joined by a special guest: Monsignor Robert Murphy, who had overseen St. Charles' transition to an independent parish in the late 1960s.

Father Bob took a keen interest in the parish's liturgical life. He formed an active Liturgy Committee, along with an Art and Environment Committee, which focused on the decorations and ambience for parish liturgies. The ministry of greeters also began during this time.

Father Bob had the music area moved from an obscure location in the back of the church into the St. Anthony Chapel at the northwest end of the church. He also purchased a new digital piano to supplement the organ. These efforts breathed new life into the parish music ministry. In early 1999, Father Bob entered a drawing held by Oregon Catholic Press, publisher of the parish's hymnals. By chance, he won first prize, entitling the parish to a free



concert by any OCP artist of its choosing. The parish chose Grayson Warren Brown, who held a concert and workshop at St. John de LaSalle because of its larger seating capacity.

Father Bob also focused on buildings and grounds. As weekend Masses became more crowded, he saw the need for more off-street parking. He acquired the double lot across Lindbergh Avenue to the south of the church, and in 2000 he had it paved to provide more than 40 new parking spaces. He engaged volunteers in starting a garden club to beautify the grounds with more plants and flowers. He purchased an attractive sign with magnetic lettering to draw more attention to the parish and its events. Finally, as the parish was outgrowing the small parish center next to the rectory, Father Bob worked with the Parish Council and parishioners to draw up plans for a new parish center.

St. Charles endured a major disappointment when the



*Father Stew and Father Bob share a light moment during Father Stew's installation reception*

Diocese of Buffalo rejected plans for the proposed \$600,000 parish center. The Diocese concluded that, at 5,400 square feet, the proposed structure was

too big and would lead to too much debt.

In August 2001, Father Bob was assigned as pastor of Prince of Peace Parish to replace the retiring Father William "Connor" McGarry. Bishop Mansell quickly appointed the Rev. Stewart Lindsay, OSFS, another native son of St. John de LaSalle Parish, as the new

pastor of St. Charles. A priest of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, Lindsay had previously ministered at Prince of Peace Parish and Niagara Catholic High School. He was installed as pastor of St. Charles on September 2, 2001.

Father Stew, as he was called, was loved for his warmth, compassionate care of the sick, and folksy preaching style. He continued the parish's tradition of friendliness, social activity and charitable outreach. He served as canonical administrator for the new St. Dominic Savio Middle School from 2002 to 2004, because the school was not affiliated with a particular parish and needed a priest to oversee it. The parish's youth ministry also expanded during Father Stew's tenure.

Led by Father Stew, St. Charles continued to pursue the dream of a new parish center. At last, the parish received approval from the Diocese to replace the existing center with one that was approximately 1,600 square feet. Fully equipped with kitchen and meeting facilities, the new center was dedicated on October 30, 2004, by Bishop Grosz. Father Stew's brother, the Rev. John Lindsay, also an Oblate, was



*Father Stew and Bishop Grosz dedicate the parish center*

visiting from California and took part in the dedication ceremony.

Thriving ministries, powerful outreach and a warm, welcoming environment made St. Charles a truly vibrant faith community as it entered its seventh decade of ministry.



*The St. Charles parish center, built in 2004*

# Alpha and Omega

## Centennial marks the end of the "old" St. John's



As St. Charles passed its 60-year mark, St. John's was marching toward its 100th anniversary. But the parish hit a few speed bumps in the two years leading up to the big celebration.

At the 2004 Christmas Masses, Father Jerry Kopec announced that he had been appointed pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Williamsville by the Most Rev. Edward Kmiec, who was named bishop of Buffalo in 2004 after Bishop Mansell became archbishop of Hartford, Connecticut. Father Jerry left for his new assignment on January 21, 2005. Parishioners would miss his skilled leadership and thought-provoking homilies.

As pastoral associate, Deacon David Sligh assumed day-to-day responsibility for the parish, a role that was formalized when Bishop Kmiec named him parish administrator after the parish went without a pastor for several weeks.

Weeks became months, and still there was no priest to take up residence at St. John's. The shortage of priests in the Diocese of Buffalo was taking its toll, and the people of St. John's were, in the words of the Gospels, "like sheep without a shepherd." The parish went on conducting activities and celebrating the sacraments while awaiting the appointment of a new spiritual leader.

During this period, many priests – most of them retired – graciously came forward to preside at parish liturgies. These included the Rev. Msgr. Thomas Crane, recently retired pastor of St. Joseph Parish in North Tonawanda; Father William "Connor" McGarry, retired pastor of Prince of Peace Parish; the Rev. Msgr. Dino Lorenzetti, retired pastor of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish in Orchard Park; and the Rev. Msgr. Paul Juenker, retired pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish in Buffalo. Father John Bucki, the well-liked weekend associate from Canisius College, increased his schedule at St. John's so he could help the parish through its time of transition. Father Matt Kibuka, who had served as associate pastor from 1985 to 1996, also assisted regularly during this period, as did Father Joe

Carlo, former pastor of St. Charles. At a Mass in June 2005, Father Carlo announced to applause, "I will be here to say Mass until you have a new pastor."

Finally, on July 1, 2005, the Rev. Lynn Shumway was appointed the ninth pastor of St. John de LaSalle Parish. A Niagara Falls native, Father Lynn had spent several years

as a Latin teacher at the former Bishop Duffy High School, before working in information technology for Conrail. He entered Christ the King Seminary at age 50

and was ordained to the priesthood on May 24, 2003, at age 55. When he arrived at St. John's from his assignment as parochial vicar at St. Christopher Church in the Town of Tonawanda, he noted that St. John's had founded St. Christopher's, and St. Christopher's was returning the favor by sending a pastor.

Father Lynn immediately set out to fulfill the promise of Father Jerry's Future Fund capital campaign. Among other improvements, the church was painted in early 2006 for the first time since the 1991 renovation, and air conditioning was added to the church. New furniture was purchased for the newly painted parish center, and the center's leaking roof was replaced.

In the fall of 2005, Father Lynn, Deacon Dave and a large group of parishioners began planning the centennial celebration, with Walter Garrow serving as general



*Father Lynn and Stipend*

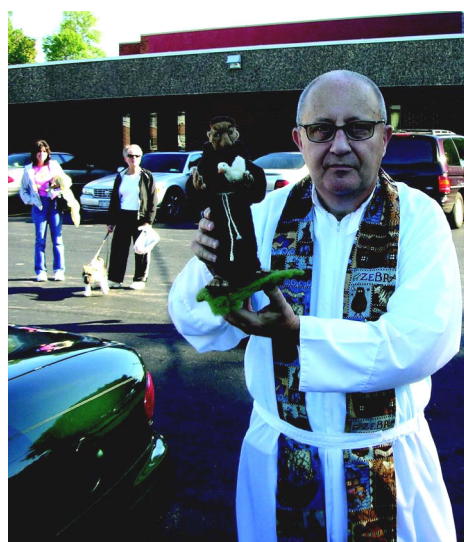


chairperson, as he had for the 75th anniversary. The celebratory spirit was dampened when the Diocese of Buffalo announced in February 2006 that it would close St. John de LaSalle School in June. This decision was met with vigorous protests by Father Lynn, families and staff. Shortly after the announcement, Father Lynn stated his intention to consolidate parish programs and offices in the school building.



*The newly painted sanctuary in 2006*

The Pastoral Care Office, located in the former convent, was sold in October 2006 and became a private, multi-family home. The parish offices, archives and St. Vincent de Paul food pantry moved into the former school. Surplus space in the school basement was rented to a dance studio, while the LaSalle Early Childhood Education Center occupied the remainder of the building. The dance studio relocated in 2009, leaving more room for parish meetings and youth ministry activities.



*Father Lynn prepares to bless animals*

The centennial jubilee year opened on the weekend of January 7, 2007, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. Special centennial prayers were observed at each weekend liturgy, followed by a champagne brunch in the parish center on the morning of January 7. A photo

directory and parish history was printed and distributed in March, and a reception was held on St. John Baptist de La Salle's feast day, April 7.

Despite the jubilant mood, apprehension was in the air. On June 8, 2005, Bishop Kmiec had announced a Diocesan restructuring program called the Journey in Faith and Grace, through which many parishes and schools would be merged and closed to reflect the area's population decline and the dwindling number of priests. Clergy and lay leaders from area parishes met throughout 2006, and

the initial recommendation from the "LaSalle cluster" called for St. John de LaSalle to merge with St. Charles Borromeo. However, as the year went on, it became clear that some priests in the West Niagara Vicariate had marked St. John's for closure – and not always for the best of reasons. Private deals, ambitions and political calculations were working against the parish, and the rumor mill had it that St. John's would not see its 101st year.

By the time Bishop Kmiec arrived to preside at an anniversary Mass on May 12, speculation about the parish's future had reached a fever pitch. Nonetheless, the parish went on with a festive liturgy that included clergy and sisters who had previously ministered at St. John's. Representatives of the Christian Brothers, the religious community founded by St. John Baptist de La Salle, also participated. A festival choir was joined by a brass quartet to lead a packed church in song. The Mass was followed by a dinner at Antonio's Banquet and Conference Center on Niagara Falls Boulevard, just a few minutes from the church. During the celebration, Bishop Kmiec remarked, "May St. John de LaSalle continue



*Monsignor David LiPuma and Bishop Kmiec at the centennial Mass*

for another 100 years!" The assembled parishioners broke into applause, hoping that his words foretold a bright future for the parish.

On May 26, 2007, more than 40 parishioners gathered at the Griffon memorial rock on the Little River to mark the 100th anniversary of St. John de LaSalle Parish's first Mass. Led by Father Lynn under clear skies and brilliant sunshine, the group joined in Morning Prayer just yards from the spot where the parish began a century earlier.

The joy was short-lived. On May 31, representatives of all parishes in Niagara Falls were summoned to hear the Diocese's

decisions. Sister Regina Murphy, SSMN, director of strategic planning for the Diocese, broke the news that had long been rumored: St. Charles Borromeo, St. John de LaSalle and Prince of Peace Parishes were to merge at the Prince of Peace site. The buildings at St. John's and St. Charles would no longer be used, and the

two parishes would cease to exist. Several other parishes in Niagara Falls were also to be merged, causing waves of anger and sadness throughout Niagara's Catholic community.

A small group of parish leaders – including Father Lynn, trustees Anthony Girasole and John Finn, Journey in Faith and Grace representatives Janet Furlong and Walter Garrow, and parish musician Jeff Paterson – began meeting and conversing almost daily, discussing any and all ideas to make the case for keeping St. John's open. On June 17, parishioners held a "prayer rally" along the Little River, behind the pavilion. Girasole opened the service with a few remarks, saying, "We are here not to protest, but to pray. We are here not to condemn our bishop and Diocesan leaders, but to ask God to bless them with divine guidance." The prayer rally received significant newspaper coverage.

Both publicly and privately, the struggle against consolidation continued. Meanwhile, the centennial year went on with many more celebrations, including a concert

featuring music ministries from St. John's and numerous other parishes (July 12), a family picnic on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15), an evening of reflection (October 16), a commemoration of the 48th anniversary of the laying of the church cornerstone (November 3-4), and closing ceremonies with a family breakfast (December 29-30). A time capsule with mementoes of the year was buried on the church grounds on November 25.

At St. Charles, parishioners faced the same anxiety about losing their faith community. Members of St. Charles questioned why the Diocese would close a parish with

active ministries, money in the bank, a new parish center, and a priest whose order was willing to let him continue there. Parishioners believed the faithful should have the option of worshiping in smaller, close-knit communities. However, size was clearly working against St. Charles.



*Father Lynn leads centennial Morning Prayer at the Griffon Rock in 2007*

By early August, word began to

spread that the Diocese had changed its plans. St. John's would merge with St. Charles at the St. John de LaSalle site. A September meeting with Sister Regina confirmed this news, which was made official by decree of Bishop Kmiec on October 14, 2007: "St. John de LaSalle and St. Charles Borromeo will merge to form a single parish, possibly with a new name, at the St. John de LaSalle site. The buildings and property at the St. Charles Borromeo site will no longer be used and their disposition will be left to the discretion of the merged parish." The merger was slated to take place July 1, 2008.

Sadly, the St. Charles site would cease to be used. A proud, 65-year tradition of Catholic worship at 56th Street and Lindbergh Avenue was coming to an end. And although the buildings of St. John's would be utilized, the parish would cease to exist as it had in the past. The merger was to give birth to a new parish. Therefore, St. John de LaSalle's centennial celebration marked the end of the "old" St. John's.

The work of transition and merger was about to begin.



# A New Creation

St. John's and St. Charles come together



Anticipating the merger of St. John's and St. Charles, in September 2007 the two parishes asked for volunteers to form a transition team. This group would be charged with creating a strategic plan for combining parish ministries and operations. More than 50 people responded to the call. On October 3, 2007, all volunteers were invited to a social gathering at the St. John de LaSalle parish center to start getting acquainted.

Father Stew appointed Ralph Meranto as transition co-chairperson representing St. Charles. Father Lynn appointed Jeff Paterson, who had worked as a pastoral musician for both parishes, as co-chairperson representing St. John's. The pastors and co-chairpersons agreed on a structure consisting of six committees, each with co-chairpersons representing the two parishes. The committees included liturgy and worship; social life; religious education and youth ministry; finance and properties; outreach and evangelization; and communication. The process began formally on October 24, when the transition team held a general meeting at St. Charles to explain the structure and set a timeline for the process. Committees were asked to finish their work by the end of April 2008.

The committees' recommendations were then compiled into a detailed document to guide the new pastor and parish leaders in blending the two parishes. The Diocese of Buffalo praised the document as one of the most detailed transition reports to emerge from the Journey in Faith and Grace; the transition process and report were profiled in the Diocesan newspaper, and the report was posted on the Diocesan website as an example for other parishes in the Diocese.

The transition was not without its challenges, however, and the naming of the new parish was the most contentious



*The St. Charles sanctuary as it looked when the parish closed in 2008*

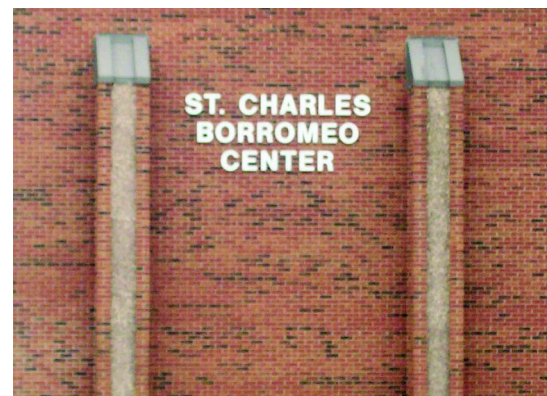
issue. The Diocese of Buffalo had directed St. Charles Borromeo Parish and St. John de LaSalle Parish to merge, "possibly with a new name." Other merged parishes in the area chose to rename themselves. The Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church states, "Each church is to have its own title which cannot be changed after the church has been dedicated." Thus, the church would have to continue to be called St. John de LaSalle as long as it was used as a Catholic church. However, the name of the parish encompassing St. John de LaSalle Church could still be changed with Bishop Kmiec's approval.

At the first general transition team meeting, a St. Charles parishioner made a motion to designate St.

John de LaSalle as the name for the newly merged parish because of its historical and geographical significance. The transition team members agreed without objection. At the same meeting, the transition team voted unanimously to keep the St. Charles Borromeo identity alive by naming the parish center as the St. Charles Borromeo Center, and the daily Mass chapel at St. John's as the St. Charles Borromeo Chapel.

As time went on, some St. Charles parishioners encouraged

adoption of a new name. After a survey and much discussion, the transition team decided – albeit not unanimously – to stay with the names of St. John de LaSalle



*The newly named St. Charles Borromeo Center at St. John de LaSalle*

Parish and the St. Charles Borromeo Center and Chapel. Some St. Charles parishioners saw this decision as St. John's asserting its dominance, although this was not anyone's intention; the resulting dissension caused a sizeable group of St. Charles parishioners to decide against joining the newly formed parish.

While the parish would not have a new name, it would have a new pastor. Father Lynn felt strongly that any newly formed parish should have new leadership, in fairness to those whose church sites were closing. He accepted a new assignment as parochial vicar at St. Stephen Parish on Grand Island, where he had previously served during his preparation for priesthood.

On the weekend of June 28-29, 2008, the "old" St. John de LaSalle Parish held its final Sunday liturgies. At the end of each Mass, Father Lynn led parishioners in a solemn procession through the front doors of the church. Parishioners were reminded that, the next time they entered the church, it would be a new parish.

A farewell reception for Father Lynn was held on June 29 after 11 a.m. Mass. The reception was filled with parishioners who had become attached to their pastor during his brief term. In his first months at St. John's, Father Lynn came across as rather stoic. However, his sense of humor and his keen interest in the parishioners soon came to the fore. His relationship with the faithful was aided by his bulldog, Stipend, who was a fixture on the grounds and at parish events.

Parishioners could see that Father Lynn had been the right pastor for the era. Never intimidated by long odds or church politics, he was a staunch defender of the parish's interests. He understood when to do battle and when to use diplomacy. One parishioner described him as a "chess player" – and these strategic skills undoubtedly helped St. John's through a time of uncertainty.

After leaving St. John's, Father Lynn visited often and kept in touch with many of the parishioners. After battling an aggressive case of esophageal cancer, he retired from St. Stephen's on July 9, 2017, and filled in at St. John's from time to time. He died on June 12, 2019 – the same day that a prayer vigil was held at St. John's to support Father Lynn on his journey home to God. His funeral was held at St. John's on June 22, 2019.

\*

The weekend of June 28-29, 2008, was filled with sadness at St. Charles, where parishioners said farewell to the church and parish center that they called home. At all three weekend Masses, and at the receptions that followed, many parishioners simply did not want to leave. They dreaded

the finality of walking out the doors for the last time.

St. Charles parishioners were also sad to lose their pastor. With his ready smile, easy sense of humor and deep compassion for people in need, Father Stew had become an important part of people's lives in the parish.



*Father Stew says St. Charles' last Mass*

Although many parishioners from both St. Charles and St. John's encouraged him to become pastor of the newly formed parish, he agreed with Father Lynn that the new parish needed a fresh start. Instead, he accepted an assignment as senior parochial vicar of Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph Parish, formed from the merger of St. Joseph and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parishes in Niagara Falls.

Not all St. Charles parishioners became part of the merged parish. Some decided to join parishes where they had earlier roots. Others who traveled long distances to St. Charles simply joined the parishes closest to home. Still others decided to try different churches until they found a comfortable place to worship; some jokingly referred to themselves as "roamin' Catholics." About half of active St. Charles families eventually settled at St. John's.

While the 65-year tradition of Catholic worship on 56th Street was over, St. John de LaSalle Parish was responsible for maintaining the St. Charles property. The parish was unable to sell the property, but in February 2009 the nondenominational Niagara Falls Vineyard Church reached an agreement to rent the church and center, and continued to use the space for several years.

\*

Parishioners of the newly merged parish knew the identity of their new pastor months in advance. On January 23, 2008, Bishop Kmiec appointed the Rev. Slawomir Siok, SAC, a member of the Pallottine Fathers, as the first pastor of the "new" St. John de LaSalle Parish, effective July 1. Father Slawek, as he became known to parishioners, was born in 1963 in Myszyńiec, Poland. Ordained on May 5, 1990, he completed assignments in Poland and Scotland before arriving in the Diocese of Buffalo in 1992 and serving six years as parochial vicar at St. Peter Parish in Lewiston. After ministering for five years at a Brooklyn parish, he returned to the Diocese of Buffalo in 2003,





*Father Siok at the opening Mass of the newly merged parish*

serving as pastor of Holy Trinity and St. Stanislaus Kostka Parishes in Niagara Falls. He remained in that assignment until March 8, 2008, when his two parishes merged with Our Lady of Lebanon, Our Lady of the Rosary

and St. George Parishes to form the new Divine Mercy Parish.

As Father Slawek moved in at St. John's, furnishings were moved out of St. Charles. Staff and volunteers transferred some of the statues and furniture, the altar and ambo, and the digital piano from St. Charles to St. John's. These items were melded into the environment at St. John de LaSalle to create a level of familiarity and comfort for parishioners coming from St. Charles.

An evening liturgy and informal reception were held on July 1, 2008, to mark the formation of the new parish. More than 100 people attended. Formal merger ceremonies were held at all Masses on the weekend of July 19 and 20. At 4:30 Mass on July 19, the two new parish trustees – Janet Furlong of St. John's and John Panza of St. Charles – mingled holy water from each parish into a shared vessel, symbolizing the two streams becoming one river. Similarly, a new parish logo depicted two streams flowing together.



*Father Siok rededicates the parish center*

On November 8, just a few days after the Feast of St. Charles Borromeo, Father Slawek rededicated the parish center as the St. Charles Borromeo Center. New signage

was placed on the building to denote its new name. On July 1, 2009, the merged parish held an outdoor Mass and reception to mark its first anniversary.

After going online with a parish website in 2007, St. John's entered the age of social media in July 2009 with its own Facebook page. About 1,000 people, including current parishioners as well as former parishioners who have relocated but want to maintain their bond to St. John's, now keep tabs on parish happenings through Facebook.

The front entrance of St. John's changed quite a bit as Father Siok

implemented his vision for the parish grounds. In August 2010, the circular driveway in front of the rectory was expanded, adding several new accessible spaces for those



*Holy Family statue in front of rectory*

using the ramp at the northeast door of the church. One of two enormous pine trees that stood for many years on either side of the church's front doors was removed as part of the parking lot redesign. Meanwhile, the familiar statue of the Blessed Mother at the front of the parking circle gave way to a stunning statue of the Holy Family donated by parishioner Fred Bidak in memory of his late wife, Monica.

In April 2011, the Good Shepherd window that formerly graced the front entrance



*New sign with new logo; the St. Charles Good Shepherd window overlooks it*

of St. Charles Borromeo Church was installed on the top floor of the Pastoral Care Office, where St. John de LaSalle Church and School were once located. The beautiful, well-



lit faceted glass window is an ongoing reminder of the proud heritage of St. Charles.

September 1, 2010, brought the retirement of Deacon David Slish, as well as Deacon Walter Fudala and his wife, Marge, from their office positions. With the parochial school now closed, the parish required less administrative support. A farewell reception was held on September 12. Although his office position was not a formal part of his assignment as permanent deacon at St. John's, Deacon Dave took the opportunity to open a new chapter in his diaconal ministry. He accepted an assignment as pastoral associate at Divine Mercy Parish in Niagara Falls effective September 18, 2010. Deacon Dave and his wife, Pat, are still parishioners of St. John's.

At that time, Mary Newman was hired as office administrator. Father Slawek, with help from volunteers, absorbed Deacon Dave's pastoral responsibilities. When Mary reduced her hours in 2018, parishioner Cindy Tripoli became a part-time office assistant. Mary retired in 2021, and Cindy became office administrator. Other office staff during this time have included Debbie Burns, Sharon Benavidez and Patricia Prawel.

A significant change in the liturgical life of the parish took place on the First Sunday of Advent in November 2011, with the introduction of the new edition of the Roman Missal. This text provided new translations of most prayers



*Michael Slish and Father Siok at Father Bucki's sendoff*

of the Mass for the first time since the early 1970s. On June 24, 2012, the parish held a farewell Mass and reception to thank the Rev. John Bucki, SJ, of Canisius College for his years of warm, inspiring service as a weekend associate over the previous 11 years. He had accepted a new role in campus ministry at LeMoyne College in Syracuse, making it impossible to continue at St. John's. Father Bucki died on September 2, 2017, in the Bronx after a courageous battle with cancer.

The Most Rev. Richard J. Malone was installed as the 14th bishop of Buffalo on August 10, 2012, replacing the retiring



*Bishop Malone's 2014 visit*

Bishop Kmiec. Bishop Malone made a pastoral visit to St. John's on April 7, 2014, the feast day of St. John Baptist de La Salle. The church was packed for the Monday evening liturgy, with a reception following in the parish center.

Father Siok celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood on May 5, 2015. On May 2, a jubilee Mass was held at 4:30 p.m., including parishioners as well as Father's friends, family and fellow priests. Immediately after, more than 150

guests attended a dinner in his honor at the LaSalle Yacht Club on South 68th Street. The following morning, a reception was held in the parish center for those who were unable to attend the dinner. One highlight was an extended visit from Father Siok's mother, Stefania Siok, who traveled from Poland to take part in the festivities.



*Father Siok and his mother at his 25th anniversary celebration*

Along with his duties at St. John's, Father Siok was appointed in 2020 as superior and provincial delegate for his religious order, the Infant Jesus Delegation of Annunciation Province of the Pallottine Fathers.

Although Mass attendance had declined at St. John's, as it had in churches across the United States, the light of faith was still burning at Buffalo Avenue and South 86th Street. Very soon, though, the parish, the Diocese and the whole world would experience unprecedented turmoil.



*Parishioners join in a Palm Sunday outdoor procession*



# Road to Renewal

The parishes of Niagara Falls prepare to unite

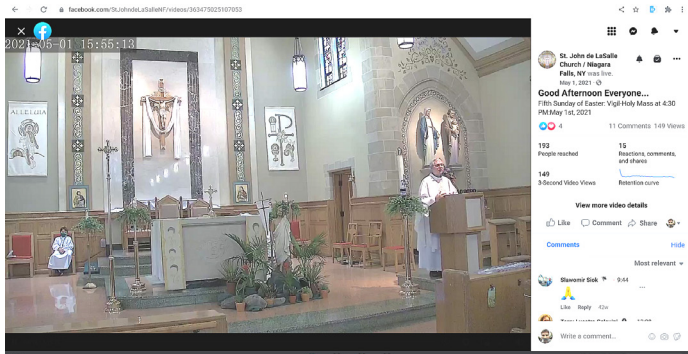


Beginning in 2018, the Diocese of Buffalo was rocked by dozens, and eventually hundreds, of credible allegations of sexual misconduct by priests in Western New York over many decades. Although the Diocese had long since instituted measures to prevent continued abuse, revelations that Diocesan leaders had consistently mishandled past abuse cases caused church attendance and monetary support to decline even further than before.

The vast majority of cases occurred long before Bishop Malone was assigned to the Buffalo Diocese, but questions about his transparency in handling the new revelations led to his resignation on December 4, 2019. The Most Rev. Edward Scharfenberger, bishop of Albany, was assigned to guide the Buffalo Diocese temporarily as apostolic administrator, while retaining his post in Albany. Facing an avalanche of legal claims, the Diocese of Buffalo filed for bankruptcy protection on February 28, 2020.

That same day, the United States reached its 64th known case of the novel coronavirus that would soon lead to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The virus, which originated in China and soon reached other parts of the world, was beginning to spread stateside. On March 15, 2020, rapid airborne transmission of the potentially lethal virus led Bishop Scharfenberger to cancel all public Masses in the Diocese until further notice.

St. John de LaSalle Parish responded quickly by broadcasting Masses on Facebook, beginning March 21. Determined to keep parishioners connected, Father Siok



*A livestreamed Mass during COVID-19*

live-streamed a full schedule of weekday and Sunday Masses, as well as devotionals such as the rosary, the stations of the cross, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Perhaps no other priest or parish in Western New York was more active in offering live and recorded prayer opportunities during this time of isolation. As the pandemic raged on, even Holy Week and Easter Masses were held online, with just enough altar servers, music ministers and readers to make it all possible while following public health mandates.

Father Siok's 30th anniversary of ordination fell on May 5, 2020. Due to the pandemic, parishioners could not safely gather with their pastor. Instead, a surprise drive-by celebration

was held after the livestreamed Sunday Mass on May 3. Father walked to the parking lot to find more than 100 parishioners lined up in their cars, honking and waving signs.



*Father Siok's "drive-by" 30th anniversary*

Once there was a greater understanding of how to gather safely, the Diocese lifted its ban on public Masses beginning June 13, 2020. St. John's resumed in-person worship right away, with social distancing and disinfecting precautions in place. Parishioners were delighted to reunite in their beloved church. On June 5, 2021, once vaccines were widely available, the Diocese revoked the dispensation from attending Sunday Mass. By then, some Catholics had grown accustomed to attending Mass remotely or not at all. This change in habits, combined with occasional surges in COVID-19 cases, further depressed Mass attendance.

In addition to the abuse crisis and the pandemic, St. John's and other parishes in the Diocese of Buffalo have

been hurt by population decline in the region, increased secularization, and a cultural trend toward individualism.

The Most Rev. Michael Fisher, an auxiliary bishop in the Diocese of Washington, DC, was installed as the 15th bishop of Buffalo on January 15, 2021. Bishop Fisher presided over confirmation ceremonies at St. John de LaSalle on May 2, 2021, continuing the parish's long tradition of episcopal visits.



*Bishop Fisher's 2021 visit*

Each parish in the Diocese of Buffalo pays an annual assessment to support Diocesan ministry and administration. Like many other parishes, St. John's fell behind over the years; while the parish had diligently been paying down its debt to the Diocese, a significant balance remained as of 2021. In late 2021, the Diocese stated that if the parish could pay \$40,000 by year's end, the rest of the debt would be wiped away. Parishioners banded together and raised the funds needed to pay off the debt, giving St. John's a clean slate.

Meanwhile, Father Siok kept a watchful eye on the parish campus. The deteriorating front steps to the church were replaced with new marble stairs, and the brick facade of the church was repointed. Cosmetic improvements were made to the parish center to make it more functional for parish and community events.

By this time, the Vineyard Church had vacated the former St. Charles site. Ironically, the small congregation began using less expensive space at the Niagara Riverside Resort, formerly the Treadway Inn. In December 2021, St. John's sold the property at 56th Street and Lindbergh Avenue to the Masjid Al Ibrahim community. Nearly 90 years after Father Carey first established a Catholic presence in the Evershed neighborhood, the "country church in the city" had become a mosque used for Muslim worship.

\*

On the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, June 16, 2022, Father

Siok, Deacon David Slis and a large assembly of parishioners held a Mass and outdoor Eucharistic procession, followed by a reception, to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the Diocese of Buffalo.



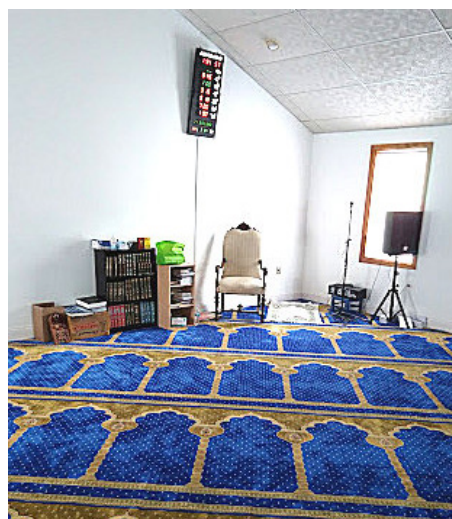
*Eucharistic procession celebrating the Diocese's 175th anniversary*

While the Diocese was celebrating, it was also retrenching. Faced with a shortage of priests and material resources, in 2020

the Diocese embarked on another restructuring effort known as the Road to Renewal. On December 1, 2021, the Diocese announced that its 161 parishes will be grouped into 36 "families of parishes" that will share buildings, clergy and staff. Individual parishes are not slated to close, at least as of this writing. In the summer of 2023, St. John's is to form a family with Divine Mercy Parish, Holy Family Parish, St. Mary of the Cataract Parish, and St. Vincent de Paul Parish.

Father Siok made it known to parishioners that he had reservations about the Road to Renewal. At Masses on the weekend of September 17 and 18, 2022, he announced that he would step down as pastor of St. John's effective October 15. After a planned trip home to Poland, Father Siok presided at his last Mass at St. John's on October 14 and departed for a new assignment as administrator of St. Mary Magdalene and St. Aloysius Parishes in Columbus, Ohio. A farewell reception was held on October 13.

Thus ended Father Siok's 14-year tenure at St. John's – marked by the same reduction in attendance and activities that plagued other Catholic communities across the nation. Counterintuitively, the same period saw relief from debt and investment in the parish's physical footprint to secure it for the future.



*The former St. Charles building in 2023, now a Muslim worship site*



Bishop Fisher appointed the Rev. James Kirkpatrick, a native of nearby Sanborn, as temporary administrator of St. John de LaSalle effective November 7, 2022. These new



*Father Jim*

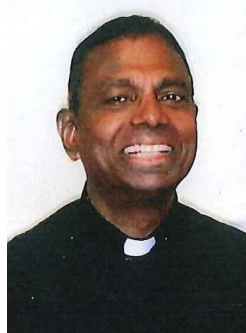
responsibilities were in addition to Father Jim's duties at St. Jude the Apostle Parish in North Tonawanda, where he had served as pastor since 2015.

Ordained May 17, 2008, Father Jim brought a new openness to the parish, even as he balanced dual responsibilities at St. Jude's. Many

priests helped him by saying weekend Masses at St. John's – including even Bishop Malone, now retired. The most frequent visiting priest during this period of transition was a familiar face: Father Jerry Kopec. Now serving as vicar for priests for the Diocese of Buffalo, Father Jerry is not assigned to a parish and has been a welcome guest at South 86th Street and Buffalo Avenue.

On May 17, 2023, Bishop Fisher appointed Father Jim Kirkpatrick as pastor of the Niagara Falls family of parishes – including St. John de LaSalle, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Mary of the Cataract, Divine Mercy, and Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph – effective June 1. The Rev. Lathislaus "Benjamin" Mariasoosai, outgoing pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Holland, was assigned as a parochial vicar to the family of parishes. Father Benjamin moved into the rectory at St. John's and became an integral part of the parish community.

Meanwhile, the Rev. Duane Klizek, outgoing pastor of Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph Parish, was named senior parochial vicar of the family of parishes. The Rev. Mario



*Father Benjamin*



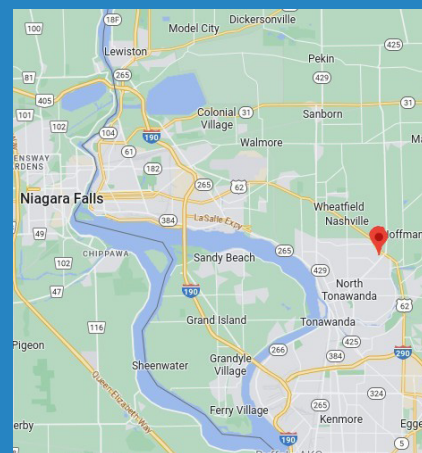
*Father Duane*



*Father Mario*

## The River Flows ... Tonawanda Creek

Tonawanda Creek is a 90-mile tributary of the Niagara River that flows into Erie County and beyond. St. Jude the Apostle Parish in North Tonawanda sits across from a narrow stretch of the creek. The new pastor of St. John's, Father Jim Kirkpatrick, spent months serving at both parishes.



Racho, a parochial vicar at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Niagara Falls, was also assigned to the family as a parochial vicar. The reorganization brought about changes for two former pastors of St. Charles Borromeo. Father Stew Lindsay, who had been serving as senior parochial vicar of Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph since 2008, remained in residence to assist the family on a part-time basis. Father Bob Hughson, longtime pastor of St. Vincent de Paul, retired on June 1, 2023, but chose to remain in residence for a time during the transition to the family of parishes.



*Father Stew*

Members of all five parishes volunteered to form workgroups in six "pillar" areas of the newly formed family: administration, liturgy, stewardship, faith formation and education, spiritual life, and outreach. These lay leaders, along with the newly appointed clergy, began meeting in the summer of 2023 to set the future course of St. John de LaSalle and the other members of the family.

As our two streams now join an even larger river, we look ahead with cautious optimism as we wait to see what God has prepared for us!

# Entrusted with the Teaching of the Young

A legacy of learning builds in LaSalle



"To be entrusted with the teaching of the young is a great gift and grace of God."

– St. John Baptist de La Salle

St. John Baptist de LaSalle was a pioneering educator. Appropriately, both St. John de LaSalle and St. Charles Borromeo Parishes share a legacy of passing the faith on to the young through education.



*The 1st grade class in 1919*

In particular, the story of St. John de LaSalle Parish is interwoven with the

story of St. John de LaSalle School. For 87 years, the parish followed in the footsteps of its patron saint by operating its own parochial school. In 1919, when no sisters were available to teach at the school, Father O'Shea hired two

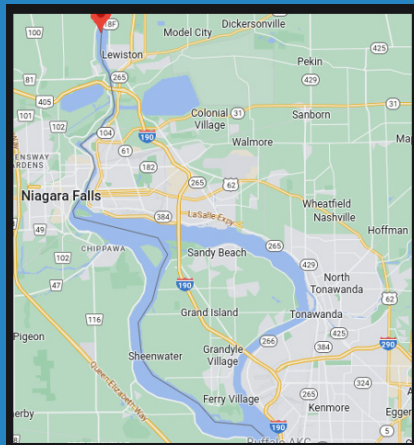
young women, Miss Kelly and Miss Mail, to instruct the children. Subsequently, three different orders of sisters staffed the school. By 1997, it was once again operated entirely by lay teachers and administrators.

In 1920, Bishop Turner asked three Franciscan sisters from Stella Niagara near Lewiston to teach at St. John's: Sister Renata Kerling; Sister Immaculate McCarthy, a novice; and Mary Dunn, a postulant later known as Sister Irma Dunn. By 1921, there were 153 students, and an additional sister joined the faculty.

At first, the sisters commuted from Stella Niagara each day, because St. John's had no convent. Faced with transportation problems, Mother Gerard Zimmerman finally asked the parish to provide living quarters. Accordingly, Father O'Shea rented a furnished home at 8234 Troy Avenue for the sisters.

## The River Flows ... Stella Niagara

Stella Niagara is a small hamlet at Lewiston. It is home to Stella Niagara Education Park, a co-ed Catholic school on the Niagara River that opened in 1908. The school is operated by the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Charity, who traveled back and forth to St. John's School in the 1920s.



Upon the Franciscans' departure, the Sisters of St. Joseph – who were already running Sacred Heart School in the north end of Niagara Falls – took charge of St. John de LaSalle School on September 8, 1925. They moved into the new convent at 8627 Buffalo Avenue, just across South 86th Street from the school, on October 7.



*Buffalo Avenue convent*





*1950s kindergarten addition*

classrooms and a kindergarten addition.

During Father McKenna's time, the school continued to grow, necessitating additional space. By the end of 1952, the school had a new library, five new

In 1999, St. John de LaSalle and St. Charles Borromeo joined all other Catholic parishes in Niagara Falls to form the Niagara Falls Catholic Schools Network. Through the Network, all the Catholic churches were to share the enormous costs of running the five parochial schools still operating in Niagara Falls. Under Bishop Mansell's leadership, in 2001 the Network built a shared school, St. Dominic Savio Middle School, for all students in 6th to 8th grades in the Network. At that point, St. John's and the other parochial schools eliminated their middle school grades. St. John's added a pre-kindergarten program at that point.

In the 1960s, the school benefited from an active Mothers' Club that raised funds and provided volunteer support. Their annual bazaar, in particular, was a much-anticipated annual event. The Mothers' Club gave way to the Home School Association in the 1980s, which played a crucial role in supporting the school.

In 1970, the Sisters of St. Joseph informed Father McKenna that they could no longer provide teachers for St. John's. Through the efforts of Joseph Weber, a parish trustee, the Felician Sisters stepped in. Along with numerous Felician teachers, Sister Mary Salvatore served as principal from 1970 to 1976, followed by Sister Mary Francetta (1976-1982), Sister Mary Rosalie (1982-1989), and Sister Mary Fredrica (1989-1997).



*Sister Rosalie at the 1985 Carnival*

In June 1997, the Felicians were forced to withdraw from St. John's due to a decrease in the number of teaching sisters in their order.

Beginning in September 1997, St. John de LaSalle School returned to its roots with an entirely lay staff. Lay principals from 1997 to 2006 included Dr. Joseph Lazzarro, Patricia Muscatello, Jenny Muscarella, and Mary Ann Ross.



*Felician Sisters in 1982: Sisters Clare, Gerard, Francetta and Nadine*

The Network did not fulfill its promise of greater financial stability for the Catholic schools in Niagara Falls. First, the Network closed Sacred Heart School in 2001, then St. Joseph School in 2003. Rumors soon circulated that St. John de LaSalle School was next on the list. Network leaders confirmed those rumors late in 2005, and in February 2006 Diocesan officials announced that St. John's School would close at the end of the school year. Our Lady

of Mount Carmel School closed in 2009, leaving only Prince of Peace School still open in Niagara Falls. It was rebranded as Catholic Academy of Niagara Falls and remains open as of this writing.

When St. John's School closed, the parish took some consolation in the announcement that the popular preschool program would continue to operate, independent of the Network. In 2006, LaSalle Early

Childhood Education Center began in the school building; it is a separate entity not sponsored by the parish.

\*

Of course, both St. John's and St. Charles also have a legacy of providing for the faith formation and sacramental preparation of public school students through religious education programs.

In 1916, before the opening of St. John de LaSalle School, children of the parish attended catechism classes led by sisters from St. Mary of the Cataract in Niagara Falls. Clergy oversaw catechism classes in the years that followed.

Father Cahill took a novel approach beginning in 1958. Having been assigned by Father McKenna to educate the

parish's public school students, Father Cahill noted poor attendance in high school catechism classes. He realized that the 25-minute walk from LaSalle Senior High School was deterring participation. So, he started holding classes at the Beverly Lanes bowling alley next to the high school – and attendance improved dramatically.



*Monsignor Hogan gives Holy Communion to children*

Religious education classes were largely the responsibility of clergy and sisters until 1979, when the parish hired Shirley Wayda as its first lay director of religious education. She was followed by Joan Paterson (1985-1997), Michelle Rueter (1997-2000), and Marybeth Simoneit (2000-2008).

At St. Charles, clergy and sisters from Prince of Peace were responsible

for religious education during the mission years. Once St. Charles became its own parish in 1970, priests oversaw religious education at St. Charles with the help of dedicated volunteers. In the early 1980s, Father Ducette asked parishioner Marie Kramarz to take responsibility for the religious education program. She served as the director of religious education on a volunteer basis for 12 years, with help from office manager Dorothy DePlanche. With space at a premium, as many as three classes met on Tuesday afternoons in different parts of the church at the same time.

Father Carlo hired Darice Destino as the paid coordinator of religious education in 1992. When Destino left the area in 1998, Father Hughson hired Patricia Birmingham to replace her. During this time, the religious education program moved to Sunday mornings and made use of nearby Catholic schools.

In its final years, St. Charles was known for its ambitious youth ministry program, directed by Birmingham in collaboration with parish volunteers. The youth ministry

group participated in numerous conferences, spiritual programs and events, while also involving itself in social justice. At the annual Sleep Out for Hunger event, young parishioners slept outside to raise funds to combat hunger and homelessness. Birmingham oversaw the parish's youth ministry activities until St. Charles closed in 2008.



*Young people at a St. Charles Sleep Out for Hunger event*

At St. John's, Cub Scout Pack 841 has long been affiliated with the parish and remains so as of this writing. Several youth groups – including the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) in earlier years – have existed at various times as well.

When the two parishes joined forces in 2008, Marybeth Simoneit was appointed director of religious education for the merged parish. Religious education classes were offered to 1st through 10th graders through the efforts of volunteer catechists determined to pass the Catholic faith on to succeeding generations. A vacation bible school and youth-oriented programs were also held. Young parishioners regularly attended World Youth Day celebrations at various international locales.



*Longtime religious education and preschool director Marybeth Simoneit with the last school principal, Mary Ann Ross*

Following new Diocesan practices, in 2018 the traditional religious education program at St. John's transformed into a faith formation program. Families were given resources to teach their children at home, supplemented by monthly intergenerational meetings where families could share their faith together.

In July 2022, Marybeth Simoneit stepped down as director of religious education; at that time, St. John's consolidated its religious education program into a citywide program offered at the St. Leo's site of St. Vincent de Paul Parish.

Simoneit remains as director of the LaSalle Early Childhood Center, a separate entity from the parish, which continues to offer high-quality pre-kindergarten classes to the LaSalle community as of 2023.



# Preaching By the Way We Live

Faithful parishioners spread the Gospel



"Be sure that you first preach  
by the way you live."

– St. Charles Borromeo

Both St. John de LaSalle Parish and St. Charles Borromeo Parishes have a strong tradition of lay leadership. Countless parishioners have devoted themselves to the service of the Church, in cooperation with ordained parish leaders.

## ***Trustees***

In every parish, the pastor selects lay trustees to assist with financial and legal aspects of parish administration. Twenty-four people have held this critical role at St. John's and St. Charles.

### Trustees of St. John de LaSalle Parish (1907-2008):

Albert Huttelmayer	1907-14
Edward Nelan	1907-16
Otto Stotzenfels	1914-16
Peter Barry	1917-20
Charles Boos	1917-20
August Perry	1920-25
George Mohan	1920-34
John Spillane	1925-34
John Nolan	1935-40
Joseph Calahan	1935-40
John Weigel	1940-70
Vincent Furlong	1944-51
Thomas Gielon	1952-69
Joseph Weber	1970-77
Fred Stauffer	1977-87
Anthony Girasole	1977-2008
John Finn	1987-2008



*Joseph  
Weber*



*Anthony  
Girasole  
and  
Fred  
Stauffer*

### Trustees of St. Charles Borromeo Parish (1943-2008):

John Amato	1943-1978
Leo Faiola	1943-1993
Joseph Downie	1978-2008
Walter Dean	1993-2008



*John Amato*



*Leo Faiola*



*Walter Dean and Joseph  
Downie with Father Carlo*

### Trustees of St. John de LaSalle Parish following the merger with St. Charles Borromeo Parish (2008-present):

Janet Furlong	2008-present
John Panza	2008-2016
Michael Casale	2016-present

## ***St. Joseph the Lay Worker Award Recipients***

Through the years, a number of parishioners from St. John's and St. Charles have been chosen by their pastors to receive the Diocese of Buffalo's St. Joseph the Lay Worker Award. This award recognizes exemplary service by laypersons.

Honorees from St. John's beginning in 1974 include custodian John Faix; organist and choir director Martha Dowdall; parish secretary Dorothy Loncki; trustee Fred Stauffer; Beatrice Richute and William Boyle, both long active in many parish organizations;



*Martha Dowdall, John Faix and  
Dorothy Loncki*



*George Steinbroner, Irene Goldbach, Carol Pagano, Joan Paterson and Jim Pagano with Father Jerry Kopeck*

sacristan Stella Sosnowski and her husband Theodore; custodian James Pearson; Eucharistic Adoration coordinator George Steinbroner; Irene Goldbach, a longtime parishioner who

served as a lector and provided years of volunteer clerical support; and James and Carol Pagano, both active in liturgical and other parish ministries. All of these honorees are now deceased. Past recipients who are still living include Joan Paterson, parish archivist, former director of religious education and longtime Liturgy Committee member; and Margaret Touma, who has served as a lector, catechist and Rosary Altar Society officer.

Honorees from St. Charles included Altar and Rosary Society stalwart Anna Wargo; lector, Eucharistic minister, trustee and devoted parish elder Walter Dean, who built many of the church furnishings; lector, Eucharistic minister and St. Vincent de Paul and Catholic Charities Appeal leader Willie Favero; longtime parish trustee and bingo chairperson Joseph Downie, who gave countless



*Bishop Mansell presents St. Joseph the Worker Awards to Willie Favero (left) and Ralph Meranto (right)*



hours toward the plumbing, heating, air conditioning other maintenance issues; and catechist, usher, Catholic Charities Appeal chairperson and multi-term Parish Council chairperson Ralph Meranto. All of these lay leaders have since gone to their eternal reward.

Since the merger, honorees have included Marilyn Murphy, who assisted with various parish events and spent

countless hours keeping the church clean as a volunteer; lector, parish trustee and longtime Rosary Altar Society leader Janet Furlong; Candace Promowicz, who oversaw the Marthas bereavement ministry along with many other volunteer contributions; Michael Promowicz, a talented carpenter who built many furnishings and accessories for the church; Rosemary Sligh, a dedicated bingo volunteer and church cleaner; the late Sarah DeMiglio, the volunteer sacristan who labored to keep the sanctuary and sacristy in good working order; and Terry Calovini, leader of the parish bingo program.

### ***Liturgical Ministries***

Both St. John's and St. Charles have experienced spirited liturgies and worship, thanks in no small measure to lay liturgical ministers. Altar servers, lectors, special ministers of the Eucharist, ushers, greeters, liturgy committee members and volunteer decorators have enlivened the liturgical life of both parishes.

The merged parish is also home to a Children's Liturgy of the Word program, where children attending Sunday Mass can participate in age-appropriate activities to better appreciate the liturgical readings of the day. Both St. John's and St. Charles offered Children's Liturgy of the Word prior to the merger.

Music has played a vital role at both parishes. At St. John's, various musical groups – including choirs and ensembles – served under the direction of such pastoral musicians as the late J. George DeLisle, who served in the 1920s; the late Martha Dowdall, organist and choir director from 1939 until the early 1980s; Terrence Brown, a longtime organist; Christy Murty, who devoted more than 25 years of service to the parish as organist and music director prior to the merger; and Jeff Paterson, organist, piano and ensemble director beginning in 2001. The ministry of cantors was established at St. John's in 2002 to lead the assembly in sung prayer. Tricia Allen Solberg was the parish's first cantor, followed by Kristen Nixon Frisina.

At St. Charles, a young man known as William "Connor" McGarry was the organist and choir director in the 1950s. He was later ordained a priest of the Diocese of Buffalo. After a distinguished career as a military chaplain, Father McGarry returned to his native Niagara Falls as pastor of



Prince of Peace. He retired in 2001 and continued to help with Masses in local parishes until his health no longer allowed him to do so. He passed away on May 13, 2020.

After McGarry left St. Charles, there was no real structure to the music ministry there for several years. In the words of one parishioner, "Anyone who could play a few chords had to pitch in and help us through." Musicians such as Roxanne Downie and Vi Maracle provided music ministry during this time.

In 1973, Eugenia Giancola became organist and choir director, and she reestablished the choir. After her death in 1978, the music program was led by organist Michael Ostrzynski and then by his cousin, Nancy D'Albenzio Major. By 1980, Nancy was playing at all parish liturgies as organist and choir director, and the choir grew under her leadership. Other organists in the 1970s and 1980s included Denise Schiesser, Alison Milne and Vi Maracle. Jeff Paterson, who grew up at St. John's, began as an assistant organist at St. Charles in 1988, and then became director of music ministry in 1993. In 2001, Jeff returned to St. John's and was succeeded by Vi Maracle, who served as music director until St. Charles closed in 2008.

Once the two parishes merged, a team of music ministers began to work together to provide music for the new parish. Jeff Paterson, Christy Murty and Vi Maracle were hired as music ministers, assisted by Kristen Frisina as cantor. Maracle retired in 2012 and was replaced by parishioner Teresa Antholzner, who remained on staff through 2016. When Frisina reduced her schedule in 2015 and then stepped down in 2016, parishioner Alexandra Casale Fitch joined the staff as cantor. A volunteer contemporary music group ministers on Sundays under Christy Murty's direction.

For more than 35 years, St. John's has hosted a weekly Mass and novena to St. Jude on Tuesday evenings; this ministry continues as of this writing.

Stella Sosnowski and her sister, Julia Oset, labored faithfully as parish sacristans at St. John's for many years. Patricia Slish and – since the merger – Sarah DeMiglio and Cindy Tripoli have filled this vital role at St. John's. St. John de LaSalle Parish has been fortunate to have several volunteers who take responsibility for cleaning the church as well.

At St. Charles, for a number of years in the 1980s and 1990s, a quiet, kindly lady named Ruth Dugan worked a few hours a week as the sacristan. Otherwise, the altar and sanctuary were tended mostly by volunteers from the Altar and Rosary Society.

### ***Rosary Altar and Holy Name Societies***

The St. John de LaSalle Rosary Altar Society, an organization for women, occupied a place of honor in the parish from

the time that Father O'Shea founded it in 1944. Helen Furlong was the first president, and many women of the parish went on to chair the organization through the years. This women's group gathered monthly for prayer and socialization. Members also offered their time and talent to support the parish, particularly in furnishing the church.

Dating to the 1910s, the Holy Name Society for men worked alongside the Rosary Altar Society to support the parish. Providing both social and service opportunities for the men of the parish, the Holy Name Society was part of the backbone of St. John's until it disbanded in the 1990s due to faltering membership.

At St. Charles, the Altar and Rosary Society started in 1969 as St. Charles prepared to become independent. Before the parish hall was built, the group met in members' homes and sometimes at Your Uncle's Restaurant – later JJ's Truck Stop – located on Buffalo Avenue at 55th Street. Beginning in 1971, the Altar Rosary Society raised funds for the parish by holding



*Original St. Charles Altar Rosary Society*



*Alice Hansen, Janet Furlong, Mary Lou Korzak and Carol Pagano work at a St. John's Rosary Altar Society basket auction*

card parties and other events. Aside from fundraising, the St. Charles Altar and Rosary Society provided much of the social life for the parish through events and parties, especially in the 1970s and 1980s before the advent of the social committee.

The St. Charles Holy Name Society provided for the parish's material needs through the late 1970s. The group held regular family breakfasts, dances and Halloween parties. Like the Altar and Rosary Society, the Holy Name Society met first at Your Uncle's Restaurant, and then in individual members' homes until the parish center was built. After the Holy Name Society declined and eventually disbanded, the Altar and Rosary Society filled the gap.

Following the 2008 merger, the St. John de LaSalle Rosary Altar Society continues to provide vital financial support for



*Jim Webb, Bob Cirrito, Chuck Siegfried, Mike Casale and Walt Garrow of the Holy Name Men's Club volunteer at a 2023 pancake breakfast*

the church, as well as a social and spiritual outlet for the women of the parish. The Society's popular basket auction, held each fall beginning

in the 1990s, provides crucial material support for the church. Meanwhile, the Holy Name Men's Club has been reestablished, with a dedicated group of members offering a variety of social, spiritual and service activities.

### **Outreach and Social Justice**



*1980s-era Catholic Charities volunteers at St. John's*

Social justice and concern for people in need are woven throughout the history of St. John de LaSalle and St. Charles Borromeo Parishes. Both communities were known for their

strong support of the annual Catholic Charities Appeal; their annual Appeal contributions regularly exceeded those of much larger parishes. The merged parish is still raising an astonishing amount each year to support the Catholic Charities Appeal – most recently contributing \$43,000 in 2023.

During Father Jerry Kopec's tenure at St. John's, the parish began to provide over-the-counter medications and other donations to help the Sisters of St. Francis of Stella Niagara with their medical mission among the poor, indigenous people of Chiapas, Mexico. Several individual parishioners traveled to Chiapas at various times to help directly with the medical mission.

Beginning in 1924, the St. Vincent de Paul Society at St. John's actively served those in need for most of the parish's history. In



*St. Vincent de Paul Society members at St. John's in 1982*

2008, St. Vincent de Paul Society district leaders decided to revoke the charter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society at St. John's at the request of St. Vincent de Paul Parish, due to disagreements over protocol and procedures. Undaunted, parish leaders chose to continue the group's mission through St. John de LaSalle Community Care, best known for its food pantry and holiday food baskets.

St. Charles also had an active St. Vincent de Paul Society. For many years, the Society quietly provided support for



*St. Charles parishioners organizing items for the Nicaragua mission*

individuals and families in crisis, from emergency cash assistance and food to bail for prisoners. In the 1990s, the Society experienced a surge in membership and became more visible in the parish.



The group began an annual flea market and provided sponsorships for children to attend the St. Vincent de Paul summer camp in Angola. Under the Society's leadership, St. Charles parishioners adopted the Nicaragua mission of Buffalo native Ann Marie Zon. Through generous donations of cash, clothes and supplies, St. Charles helped Ann Marie to care for countless Nicaraguans who felt the sting of poverty.

Post-merger, St. John's remains in the forefront of social ministry in Niagara Falls. The Community Care Food Pantry has moved across the street to the building at 8600 Buffalo



*St. John's Community Care Food Pantry's current home across from the church*

Avenue, providing food for hundreds of people in need. It is affiliated with Feed More WNY, the successor to the Food Bank of Western New York, and offers an array of well-organized services to people in the area. Community Care also continues to offer

food baskets for Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas, as well as Christmas gifts for children in need.

From the early 1980s until 2020, the Marthas bereavement group provided funeral brunches for families of deceased parishioners. This wonderful service, sadly, fell off during the COVID-19 pandemic and was discontinued at that time.



*Members of the Marthas bereavement group in 2007*

### ***Other Organizations and Ministries***

At St. John's, several other groups made important contributions before fading from the landscape in the parish's later years. These included the Pro-Life Committee, the Bishop's Committee, the Ladies of Charity, the Legion of Mary, the Senior Citizens' Club, and the Knights of Columbus Father Pierre Millet Council 8888. There was

even a Dramatic Club in the 1910s that put on community performances in the church/school auditorium.

The Second Vatican Council called for greater lay involvement through councils to be formed at all levels of the Church. As a result, parish councils were formed in Catholic churches across the United States, giving pastors a mechanism to seek the advice of parishioners of matters of import. At both St. John de LaSalle and St. Charles, parish councils provided invaluable assistance to pastors beginning in the 1970s. A new Parish Council was established in 2008 for the merged parish of St. John's.

At St. Charles, some of the most important volunteer work through the years involved buildings and grounds. From the beginning, parishioners who lived in the neighborhood felt a sense of ownership toward the church; they took it upon themselves to continuously improve the property and fix anything that wasn't working. From building the cupola atop the church, to maintaining the plumbing and heating, to building the furniture, countless members of St. Charles adopted the church as their second home.

### ***Fundraising and Events***

On Labor Day, September 2, 1907, St. John de LaSalle Parish held a community-wide picnic with food and entertainment. True to form, Father Zurcher made it clear that no alcohol would be served. Within a few years, the

parish picnic had become a mainstay in LaSalle. Usually in Wattengel's Grove, at 88th Street and Point Avenue where there are now private homes, the picnic offered food, music and raffles.

During Father Madden's tenure in the 1910s, when the parish was energetically raising money to build a new church, a range of fundraisers were held, from corn roasts to card parties to theatrical performances to the annual picnic and fair. By 1930, picnics had given way to an annual

lawn fete on the church grounds. Card party fundraisers were a mainstay of both parishes in earlier decades as well.

Other successful fundraisers and community events at St. John's included car raffles dating to the 1950s, along with annual spaghetti dinners that were held for many years. In the mid-1970s, St. John's launched a bingo program with the help of St. Charles. St. John's held bingo weekly at St. Charles until the St. John de LaSalle parish center was built in 1976. Anti-smoking laws and competition from Native American casinos spelled the end of bingo at St. John's in the late 1990s.



*Joe Downie, Marie Kobrock and Tony Gara work at St. Charles Bingo*

St. Charles launched a bingo program in 1971 by taking over the bingo program offered at the Century Club, a private club located on Buffalo Avenue where the LaSalle Waterfront Park is now located. Parishioners ran the St. Charles bingo program at Prince of Peace until games were moved to the new St. Charles parish hall in 1973. Even after the parish hall became the Volare

Lodge in 1980, St. Charles bingo continued there until the parish closed in 2008. Led by parish trustee Joe Downie, the program was supported by many devoted volunteers.

The newly merged parish decided to keep running bingo at the Volare Lodge on Tuesday evenings. In 2021, the bingo program moved to the parish center on the St.

John's grounds and is the parish's most successful ongoing fundraiser.



*The St. John's Carnival in 2014*

dedicated volunteers, the Carnival originally supported St. John de LaSalle School. By popular demand – and

the necessity of keeping up with expenses – the event continued even after the school closed. It continued for a time in the post-merger period, with some changes. As more and more "carnival" events sprang up in the community, attendance was declining, while the cost of security and rides was going up. In 2016, the event was rebranded as St. John de LaSalle Summerfest. Scheduled for two days instead of four, Summerfest included live music, entertainment, food and a limited selection of rides. Although well-attended, the event could not be sustained, and only one was held.

St. Charles held an annual lawn fete during its early years in the 1940s on a small plot of land near the church. An annual bike raffle headlined the annual gathering, which was a much-anticipated event and a major fundraiser for the church. In 1969, a group of parishioners at St. Charles even organized and promoted a boxing match to raise funds for the church!

Launched under the name "Trash and Treasures" in 2006, the St. John de LaSalle Monster Garage Sale grew into one of the parish's most anticipated events. The sale gave members and friends of St. John's a place to donate items they no longer wanted. Hundreds flocked to the parish center each July to haul away their finds. Due to the physical labor involved, the Monster Garage Sale was phased out. The final sale was held in 2021.

The weekly Lenten fish fry has raised funds at St. John's for several years, under the direction of parishioner Connie Andreini. The dinners nearly ended in 2019, but a new group of volunteers came forward to keep them going. These dinners continue

to be offered during Lent as of this writing. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, take-out meals were offered.

The men, women and organizations mentioned here constitute an incomplete list. Countless parishioners at St. John's and St. Charles have given richly of their time, talent and treasure to build God's kingdom in LaSalle. Their legacy of service is left to those who remain and those who will follow.

These two streams now join the larger river of faith in the Niagara Falls community. May the river flow on for many years to come!



# Notes and Acknowledgments



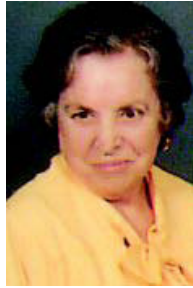
Louise Hahn



Joan Paterson



John Panza



Alfreda Palka



Sarah DeMiglio



Joe Downie, Anna Francis,  
Sarah DeMiglio and Joe Genovese

I have been blessed to worship with and minister to both the St. John de LaSalle and St. Charles Borromeo families. At different times, each parish has been a second home to me. It is a privilege for me to record their stories.

An early and brief version of the St. John's story took shape for the parish centennial in 2007. Shortly after the merger with St. Charles in 2008, I realized the importance of preparing a shared parish history, which was published in 2009. I have prepared periodic updates in the years since, to make sure the story is kept current. In 2023, in preparation for the formation of the new family of parishes, I concluded that the history needed updating – which provided an opportunity to conduct new research and flesh out details that I had not previously explored.

Any project of this sort relies in part on oral history, which by nature can be messy and unreliable. Memories simply fail us at times. Therefore, I cannot certify that every date, assertion and story in this book is accurate. However, I can attest that I have verified as much as possible by consulting multiple sources. These sources include church records, scrapbooks, newspaper articles, and notes that priests and parishioners have committed to paper.

The St. John de LaSalle portions of the history draw heavily from the scrapbooks compiled by the late Louise Hahn, longtime parish historian; Walter Garrow pulled many of those threads together in a historical account published for the 75th anniversary in 1982, which I consulted heavily. The writings of Father Madden, Father McKenna and Monsignor Hogan, added useful details. Parish archivist Joan Paterson, my mother, was an invaluable resource, too.

The St. Charles Borromeo sections of the book are based on a number of sources. John Panza's thorough oral history of St. Charles is the backbone of the parish story that is presented here. The late Alfreda Palka preserved much of the parish's history through the years in scrapbooks that provided colorful details. The late Sarah DeMiglio painstakingly compiled historical materials before the parish's closing, and these collections also helped immensely. Numerous people graciously shared their memories with me in 2008 to round out the St. Charles

story, including Dorothy DePlanche, the late Joe Downie, Anna Francis, Joe Genovese, and the late Marie Kramarz. Sister Ann Louise Hentges, SSMN, then-archivist for the Diocese of Buffalo, along with Maureen Fennie and the staff of the Niagara Falls Public Library and its Local History Department, provided invaluable assistance in 2007 and 2008. The records of these institutions offered precise details that oral history alone could not produce.

More recently, the Old Fulton New York Post Cards Support Forum and its online newspaper archive ([fultonhistory.com](http://fultonhistory.com)) offered access to a staggering amount of new information that has added rich detail to the 2009 text. These articles allowed me to correct minor errors from the original text. Where there are factual differences from the 2009 version, this 2023 edition should be considered authoritative.

Finally, the "wave" design in the chapter titles throughout the book came from [vecteezy.com](http://vecteezy.com).

\*

The Niagara River winds its way through the history of St. John de LaSalle and St. Charles Borromeo Parishes, and connects these two communities with the larger community of believers throughout our region.

The story begins on the banks of the Niagara, where a ship was built. It flows throughout LaSalle, the Towns of Niagara and Wheatfield, and surrounding communities. It honors brave soldiers who defended our nation by air, land and sea. It courses through the Evershed neighborhood, which reflects our region's historic connection to hydropower. It even touches the banks of Ellicott Creek and flows into other points north and south. And soon, these stories will merge with those of the other Catholic parishes of Niagara Falls – adding even greater power and reach to the river of our faith.

May that river – which courses through LaSalle and extends into the larger community of Western New York – cleanse, carry and consecrate the faithful well into the future.

*Deus gubernat navem!*

# A Heritage of Faith

The family of parishes traces its lineage



**St. Mary of the Cataract  
(1847)**

## **Divine Mercy (2008)**

formed from  
Holy Trinity (1902)  
Our Lady of the Rosary (1906)  
Our Lady of Lebanon (1914)  
St. George (1915)  
and  
St. Stanislaus Kostka (1917)



**Holy Family of Jesus,  
Mary and Joseph  
(2008)**

formed from  
St. Joseph (1903)  
and  
Our Lady of Mount Carmel  
(1949)

## **St. John de LaSalle (2008)**

formed from  
St. John de LaSalle (1907)  
and  
St. Charles Borromeo (1970)



**St. Vincent de Paul  
(2008)**

formed from  
Prince of Peace (1943)  
and  
St. Leo (1957)





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