

PARISHIONER MEMORIES of ST. BENEDICT CHURCH

- ❖ **Parishioner, Mrs. Henrietta Callahan Wood, shared the following thoughts and memories:** “When I tell anyone about our parish it is about the friendliness of the parishioners. I attended several weddings at St. Benedict’s in the 1940’s. My real membership at St. Benedict started in 1950 when I married my husband, Leo Wood, and moved to Caroline County (*prior to that time, Henrietta attended St. Joseph’s Church in Cordova, MD*). Through the years, my 7 children were all baptized and confirmed at St. Benedict’s. My receiving of a certificate to teach religion was the beginning of about 20+ years of teaching “Sunday School”. I really don’t remember all the changes in either church. A big change that I do remember is the change from the use of Latin to English. Every priest, with their own personality, has been woven into both St. Elizabeth and St. Benedict Churches.”

- ❖ **Parishioner, Mrs. Marlene Hammer Hayman, shared the following thoughts and memories:** “My great grandfather, John J. Hammer, Sr., came to the United States from Germany in 1867. They settled in Hillsboro, MD and attended St. Elizabeth Church in Denton. They are buried in the cemetery next to the church. I was born to Charles & Dorothy Hammer on October 20, 1937 and attended Mass at St. Benedict Church. I have many memories of attending Mass and the current events. Mass at that time was in Latin. All of the priests through the years have had an impact on my spiritual life. I received all of my sacraments at St. Benedict Church. CCD was inside St. Benedict Church when I was young. In the footsteps of my mother, Dorothy Hammer, the Ladies’ Sodality is the ministry that I support within the church. My late husband, Norris Hayman, Sr., and I were the first members to use the Parish Hall in November 1958 for our wedding reception. I also remember participating in the crowning ceremony of Mother Mary in the Church in the 1950’s along with ceremonies at the Plains. Many family members of the John J. Hammer, Sr. family attended Mass at this parish and some of the family members currently attend to this day. Many members of the Hammer family participated in the sacraments at St. Benedict’s Church.”

- ❖ **Parishioner, Mrs. Julia Puspoki Seiler, shared that her parents arrived in Caroline County from Hungary, along with her two older siblings, just before she was born.** They originally settled in Henderson, MD and then later moved to Greensboro. It was at that time, when Julia was around 7 years old, that they began attending St. Benedict Church. Fr. Hensel was the pastor at that time and all of the Masses were celebrated in Latin. Julia also remembers that you had to wear a hat to church to cover your head. Since her family lived less than a mile from the elementary school, she and her siblings had to walk to school each day (often after first picking strawberries from Mr. Saulsbury’s fields in Ridgely); but, since the church was further from their home, they always drove to Mass in her father’s 1928 Chevy. She remembers the sisters from St. Gertrude’s Monastery coming to St. Benedict’s each Sunday to teach Sunday School, in the back few pews of the church. After meeting and marrying her late husband, Michael Seiler, in 1952, they began attending St. Elizabeth Church in Denton. After military service in the Army that took him to Korea as a Staff Sergeant and cook, Michael went into business for himself as a carpenter in Caroline County and he made one of the early wooden crosses to mark Holy Cross Cemetery in Greensboro. Through the years, Julia volunteered at the parish as a money counter and member of the Ladies’ Sodality.

- ❖ **Parishioner Jane Wood shared** that when she was a child/teenager, her mother (whose maiden name was Vonville), grew up in Greensboro and went to St. Benedict Church where she was taught Sunday School by the sisters at St. Gertrude's. Her mother talked about going to church and being friends with many families there. Jane remembers her mother's stories about such families as the Brubaker's, Gardner's, Hammer's, Kibler's, Linhard's, Vogt's, Schreiber's, and of course the Wood's. There are other names that Jane can no longer recall. Jane and her husband, Earle, had their first date in 1963 at the Easter Vigil Mass at St. Elizabeth Church which was celebrated by Fr. Francis Tierney. Earle was already a member of the parish having received the sacraments of Baptism and First Communion at St. Elizabeth's and Confirmation at St. Benedict's. Jane & Earle married and lived in Easton for a short while before moving to Denton and attending St. Benedict/St. Elizabeth Churches. Jane felt that she already knew so many of the wonderful families attending the parish at that time since her mother had spoken of them so frequently. They did not feel like strangers to her even though she was new to the parish. A few parishioners at that time even remembered Jane's mother, especially Kathleen Porter and Suzie Booze. Some of the members of those families have long been deceased, but Jane still remembers them well as a part of her mother's past and feels a strong connection to the parish through them.

- ❖ **Parishioner, Cyndy Ingram, recounts:** "My husband, Gene, and I have been members of St. Benedict Church for 30 years (since October 1991). When we first moved to the area, we attended Mass at Sts. Peter & Paul Church in Easton once or twice. But, then one Sunday we attended St. Benedict Church and we were very enthusiastically welcomed by parishioner, Mr. Marvel Woodward. At that moment, we knew that St. Benedict was the perfect parish home for us. When we arrived, Fr. Clarahan was the pastor at St. Benedict. We have enjoyed each priest that has served during our time at the parish (Fr. Clarahan, Fr. Coine, Fr. Kelley, Fr. Carroll, Fr. Hilary, Fr. Gabage, Fr. Lewis and Fr. Coffey). Each has had a special gift to share and has involved us in various ways. We are very appreciative of their service to the Church. Different priests have rearranged and re-decorated the church over the years. To my great pleasure, a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was added to the church during Fr. Gabage's tenure, and the statue of St. Benedict was moved to the front of the church. One funny memory I have was of one Lent when I came to the church for Adoration. I entered the church very reverently and took a seat in a pew near the front. I put my purse down and knelt to pray. Just about that time, I heard a sound like an ancient shofar from Israel – it felt so holy, and I was startled and amazed because I didn't know where the sound was coming from. Moments later, I realized that the ancient shofar was actually my cell phone ringing on the "vibrate" mode inside my purse! I have served as a CCD teacher at the parish, first in 4th grade under the mentorship of Carol Seward, from whom I learned a lot, and then in 7th grade which I enjoyed because the students were on the cusp of young adulthood and were curious and had thought-provoking questions. As a RE teacher, I learned to have a focus for each lesson and that as long as I was sure to communicate that focus each week, I felt that the students would take away some good building blocks for their future lives of faith. My daughter taught me that it was a chance for me to share witness of my own journey of faith and the impact that faith had in my own life. The ministry that is most important to me is that of Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick. I have learned so much from those to whom I have ministered about how to live life and how to accept the circumstances that you are in. One of my mottos, from St. Paul, is "Be content wherewith thou art." The ministry of EMHC to the Sick has taught me the true importance of this motto. The adult faith

formation programs offered by our parish have been most helpful to me in continuing to learn about my faith. As a convert to Catholicism in my early 20's (from the Methodist faith of my childhood), I missed a lot of the early study of the Catholic faith as a child. I learned a lot as a teacher in the Religious Ed program, but I also learned a lot through the adult faith formation programs. All in all, I have lived in Caroline County the longest I have lived anywhere in my entire life (my father was in the military, and we moved around quite a lot in my youth), and this place and this parish is my home, and I'm very happy for it."

- ❖ **Parishioner, Ms. Mary Ellen Black, shared the following thoughts and memories:** "I moved to Denton in 1994 and became a member of the church that year. One of my first memories is being welcomed to the church by Maureen Duggan-Cassidy. Fr. Coine was here when I joined the church and I most especially recall a funny moment when Fr. Coine was saying Mass and a mouse scampered across his feet! I took training to become an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick and enjoyed taking Communion to the elderly parishioners that lived near me through the years, including the late Doris Wood-Sharp. I remember feeling welcomed at all times and helping with parish bazaars and other events. I have enjoyed getting to know all of the priest that have been assigned at the parish during my time here."
- ❖ **Parishioner, Mr. Leonard Vogt, recounts** that "his first remembrance is of St. Elizabeth Church. St. Elizabeth was composed of European Catholics living on the East side of the Choptank River. St. Benedict Church was primarily Irish Catholics living on the West side of the Choptank River. Families in both churches were mostly farmers (as were most of the people in Caroline County). My family was part of St. Elizabeth's since the 1870's. I received the sacrament of Baptism at St. Elizabeth Church. I received the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation at St. Benedict Church. Some members of my family were married at St. Benedict Church and some at St. Elizabeth Church. Today, there is less division between the two churches. There are so many new faces, so much has changed family-wise. I prefer St. Elizabeth's because it is brighter inside, not frilly, and the kneelers are easy to kneel down on. As for differences between the two churches, St. Elizabeth's has a graveyard and St. Benedict's has a rectory. Otherwise, they are quite alike. As I recall, sometime in the mid-1950's, there was a drive to collect monies for a new church. This church would replace both St. Benedict and St. Elizabeth. The new church was to be built where the Denton Elementary School stands today. Remember that I was very young at that time, and this is what I seem to recall. Back then, Sunday School was held in the back pews of both churches. A nun would come each Sunday from St. Gertrude's Monastery in Ridgely to teach from the Baltimore Catechism. For older kids, CCD was held on Wednesday evening on the 2nd floor of the Ridgely Fire Department building. Nothing fancy, ceilings and floors were dark, unfinished lumber, maybe two 60-watt light bulbs, not much heat. Students sat on folding steel chairs, maybe a dozen kids. The teacher had her own table and chair. Miss Alicia Knotts, a retired public-school teacher, was our CCD teacher. She was probably a good teacher, and I was probably a very poor student! Over the decades, many priests have come and gone and bishops as well – too many to name. Most of them good men, a few very good – it's a Divine calling. Amen! The new church was never built and by the late 1950's a new block building was constructed in back of St. Benedict Church. This building was called the Parish Hall. It had a large center hall, a kitchen, bathrooms along the roadside, and three classrooms along the back side. By this time, I had completed all of my required spiritual education, so I never had a class there."

❖ **Parishioner Rosemary Kinnamon shared these memories:** “My grandmother, Agnus Emma Gaitley Lane, was married in 1908 in Baltimore and moved to Ridgely where she and my grandfather, Frank Sterling Lane, lived until her passing away in 1959. She attended St. Benedict Church all her married life. After her death, her husband became a Catholic and was buried from St. Benedict Church in 1965 by Fr. Eugene Clarahan. All of their children were baptized at St. Benedict except for my mother, Mary Alice Lane Knott, who was the oldest and was baptized in my grandmother’s old church, St. Paul’s, in Baltimore. My grandmother, Mary Rebecca Spurry Knott, attended St. Benedict Church and was buried from there in 1940. I do not know when she started attending St. Benedict Church, but I know that it was before 1925. Her husband, John Walter Knott, made kneelers a table for the church (which is still used today). He died in 1925. I was baptized in St. Benedict Church on October 31, 1937, made my First Communion there in 1942, was Confirmed there in 1950, and married there on April 26, 1957. All of my children were also baptized at St. Benedict’s. Every important event in my life has centered around St. Benedict Church in Ridgely. When we had Sunday School, we were taught by the Benedictine Sisters from the Plains (the Benedictine Monastery). The younger children sat in the front row on the left side of the church and the older children sat on the right in the back rows. We were taught from the Baltimore Catechism. I have been in the Sodality, the Choir, sewed vestments, attended Bible Study, helped with the flowers for the altar, and served as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion during Mass and to the Sick. When we had RENEW it was a wonderful experience as we shared our faith and became much closer as a church. When I was little, I would go with my grandmother on Saturdays to take flowers from her garden and put them on the altar. The ministry that was most influential to me was picking out the music for the choir as I had to study the liturgical readings to choose songs that complimented them. That led me to Bible Study. The most precious were my years as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, bringing Communion to the homebound. I will always treasure those times. One Christmas, I, along with parishioner, Nina Taylor, made costumes for the Three Kings using fabric and materials donated by Carol Roller. Fr. Coine was pastor at that time. The children of the parish were very impressed! Our Three Kings were Paul Fountain, Joe Dunnington, and Gene Ingram. They made quite a stir outside of the church in their costumes waiting to come in bringing the gifts for the newborn King. I have seen many changes in my years of attending St. Benedict Church and the people have become a second family to me. We have prayed together, laughed together, and cried together. So many wonderful times within these walls and we have seen some of the best priests in the beginning of their ministry and some ready to retire. With Jesus in the center of it all, we have been truly Blessed!”