

## History of Nativity Faith Community

Nativity Parish was established in 1905 as the church at the crossroads of the communities of Snowden Township (South Park) and Baldwin, as people who have come together to grow into a community of faith centered in Jesus Christ. We are challenged to be a people of God offering hospitality and welcome to all who come along the roads leading to our church.

Our parish family reflects a great diversity of ethnic backgrounds, economic resources and lived experiences. We strive for unity in the diversity as we pool our talents and resources to respond to the needs of the local and global community. Drawing upon the example of the Holy Family, we keep our families at the center of our parish life.

Love, Justice, freedom and peace are the Gospel values that mark the roads we travel to reach a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ and His Church. Through worship, education and service we seek to build the kingdom of God as we pass our faith on to our children and all who receive it.

Invoking the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit we strive to be a holy family to today's world, celebrating and rejoicing in the gift of God's love.



It all began more than 100 years ago when Father Francis J. Hertzog was appointed the First Resident Pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Finleyville, Pennsylvania.

Father Hertzog requested and received permission from the Pittsburgh Catholic Chancery in May, 1905, to establish a Mission Church in Broughton named Nativity. This new mission obtained some congregation from St. Anne's and Holy Angels Catholic Churches.

In September, 1905, Keeling Brothers, who owned a mining company on the South Side of Pittsburgh, built the community's first two room schoolhouse on vacant ground which is now our parking lot and school playground.

Father Hertzog was appointed pastor of the Nativity Mission and served from 1905-1910. He came to Broughton every other Sunday to celebrate Mass in this two room schoolhouse, traveling by horse and buggy or by horseback. Roads were made of mud and the winter months made travel difficult, but Fr. Hertzog always came. He was a small slender man who always greeted everyone with a smile. He worked continuously for the people of this community, but often took time to play baseball with the children.

Nativity was a very poor parish. Parishioners worked in the mining industry and work was not steady. But the parishioners persevered with their goals and dreams, and began raising money to purchase property to build a new church. Disputes occurred as to where the church should be built.

An original offer of three acres of ground in the area known as Granish Hill was turned down as it would have been difficult to reach because of the steepness of the hill. It was finally agreed to buy the ground where the Little White Church was built in 1908. It is where our Church Hall now stands.



Most of the parishioners traveled from Large, Gill Hall, Snowden, Whitehall, Gardenville, Weber (now called Brownsville Road) and from homes in the area that is now the Allegheny County South Park. At that time in history, traveling from some of these areas was considered a haul.

With the Catholic population around the area of Broughton expanding rapidly, Father Hertzog helped Nativity become an independent parish and in September 1910, when the mission was raised to parish status, Father Charles Joseph Hintzen was appointed pastor. The statistics for the year 1910 were: 4 marriages, 88 baptisms, 100 families. 526 parishioners and 28 deaths.

Prior to being appointed to Nativity Parish, Father Hintzen was Assistant Pastor at St. Peter's on the South Side. He and his sister, Josephine, rented a second floor apartment on Old Brownsville Road. The church seated about 200 people and on Sundays, Masses were at 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.

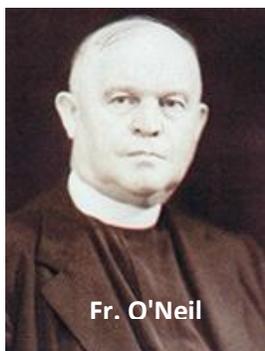
Father Hintzen worked very hard and had everyone's cooperation. Along with his religious duties, he founded a Harvest Picnic which became an annual event for area farmers who came to share their food. All of the parishioners, especially the farmers, brought everything that was needed. Nothing had to be bought. To raise money, the parishioners constructed a large fancy booth to display their beautiful hand-made scarves. Non-Catholics helped also. Charles Kirschman, the town butcher and non-Catholic, always donated all the meat that was needed. Mr. Harry Goldman, a Jewish merchant, always made substantial donations to help the parish. Being poor made little difference to the people - everyone seemed to enjoy working for the church they wanted so much. This picnic was always a big family event, even though there were times that some people were really too poor to even come.

In 1911, a new brick rectory was built, one that has served many uses over the years. The church and the parish house continued to thrive for a number of years. However, tragedy struck on Monday, February 25, 1918. At 2:30 a.m., a neighbor discovered that the church was on fire. He awakened Father Hintzen who rushed over to the church only to find the frame building was a mass of flames. In trying to reach the Sanctuary, Father Hintzen was burned on the hands and face. The Blessed Sacrament, Vestments, Sacred Vessels and the church furniture were all destroyed.

The roof of the rectory also caught fire. It was saved from destruction only through the work of the Volunteer Fire Department of Broughton. Parish books and records were saved but there was considerable fire damage to the rectory.



Father Hintzen obtained temporary shelter at St. Basil's Rectory in Carrick through the courtesy of Father Stepling, the Pastor. Mass was held in the Moose Hall and Lambs Hall for several years. In June, 1918, Father William Speigel became the next Pastor of Nativity and a new brick church was built under his direction. However, it only had a capacity for 300 people.



Fr. O'Neil

In 1922, Father Charles Fehrenbach from St. Joseph's Parish, Mt. Oliver, was assigned as Nativity's next pastor.

Father Edward A. O'Neill came to Nativity Parish in 1930 and he was pastor till his death in 1957. He served our parish for 27 years which was the longest assignment of any pastor at Nativity. He did little during this time to improve the church property, but he devoted much of his time to the needy people of the parish. He truly helped those that he knew did not have enough to eat or those who had no clothes to wear. He even spent his own money to help the needy.

Following Father O'Neill's death, Father Henry J. Donabedian became pastor of Nativity Church. He served from March 1, 1957 until September, 1965.

Father Donald J. Stoney came to assist Father Donabedian in June, 1958, followed by Father Ralph E. Roos as assistant on October 20, 1959. Father Francis A. Siler was assistant pastor from 1963 until 1970.

In 1957, a new gas furnace along with roof repairs, plastering and painting were needed in the Church. There were now 1100 families in the Parish and the church only sat 300 people. For these reasons, it was time to consider building a new larger church.

The undertaking of this project necessitated the signatures of a Parish Council or of a Church Committee. Under the direction of Father Donabedian, a Church Committee was formed. The men involved in making these monumental decisions were Harry Armany, Peter Maracini, John Cleary, Frank Zupancic, Norman Meisinger and Sigmund Jaworksi.

In 1958, Nativity purchased the Graham-Beerbower Lumber Yard that was adjacent to our property. The following year, the parish bought the Gerbic property that was adjacent to the rectory. Plans could now move forward to build a new church that would seat 800 people, along with the construction of a 16 room school. The Annual Festival in August, 1959 was held in the new parking lot/playground. On November 1, 1959, the ground breaking ceremony was held for the new church and school. Dedication of the new church and school took place October 22, 1960. Bishop John J. Wright officiated at the first Mass on November 27, 1960.



Bishop Wright invited the Sisters of Divine Providence to be the teachers in the new school. Two sisters were assigned to Nativity School and they were to register students for the first and second grades only. School opened September 5, 1961 for these two grades. The first Principal was Sister M.I Pius and the teachers were Sister Martha, Sister M. Aniceta and Mrs. Geraldine Smith.

As there was no convent, the nuns lived temporarily at Saint Sylvester and commuted daily to the school. Plans were developed to convert the rectory into a convent. In order to do this, property was purchased in 1962 at 5637 Brownsville Road to be used as a temporary rectory. Renovating this building for use as a rectory was completed early in 1963 and the priests moved into this location. After the renovation of the existing rectory, the nuns had a convent of their own.



In 1962, the property located directly across from the church and school on Brownsville Road was purchased for additional parking. Also in 1962, third grade was added to the school and it was decided that the students would wear uniforms.



In September, 1965, Father Joseph E. Drumm became Pastor of Nativity. At a Church Committee meeting on March 27, 1966, the decision was made to tear down the old brick church that had been used as the school cafeteria and plans were approved for a new activities building and cafeteria. The Church Committee was composed of the following men: William Griffith, Howard Kiefer, John J. Bruce, Henry Gitnik, Harold Holsinger, Frank Zupancic and Dr. Charles Martin.

This second phase of the building project began in January 1967. By September of that year, all grades of the school were in place. The new building was completed late in 1968. Blessing of the activities building and cafeteria took place December 29, 1968.



Father John D. Brennan began his assignment as assistant pastor at Nativity in 1970 and was here until 1975 at which time Father Stan M. Gregorek became the assistant pastor.

In 1978, a motion was made at a meeting of the Parish Council, presided by Mr. Charles Eperthener, to buy the property on Curry Road and to build a new Rectory. Parish Council acted favorably on the motion. Approval was then requested and received from Bishop Leonard to proceed with the building of the new Rectory. The winning bid was \$200,000 and this beautiful Rectory was completed in May, 1980, in time for our 75th Anniversary. Father Arthur R. Merrell came to Nativity as an additional assistant pastor in October of 1979. By 1980, our parish had grown to 1253 families with 4895 parishioners.

Father Stan Gregorek left Nativity in June, 1980. With Father Merrell the only assistant, Father F. J. Regis Ragan was assigned to Nativity but was here for just a short time - July until October, 1980. Father F. Terrence Fedigan was then assigned as an assistant and he, too, was only here a short time - October, 1980 until February, 1981. In February, 1981, Father Donald N. Buchleitner became an assistant pastor and stayed through mid-July of 1985.

Extensive renovations of the new church began in 1983 and were completed the following year. In June of 1984, a new roof was installed covering the entire complex - school, activities building and the entrances. For a time in 1984-1985, Father Michael Ojabor, a priest from Africa who was studying at Duquesne University was in residence and helped with Masses in the parish. In January of 1985, Father Drumm was named Pastor Emeritus until his death in December, 1985.

Father James E. Somma was named pastor in May, 1985. Father Thomas R. Miller arrived as assistant pastor in June of 1986 and Father Merrell left Nativity in August, 1986. From 1988 through 1992, Father Felix Onuora, another priest from Africa studying at Duquesne University, was in residence and helped with Masses in the parish.

In 1989 Church Bells, Carillons and Remote Control System was installed. This wonderful feature was a Christmas gift from Genevieve Maracini Gitnik in memory of her husband, Henry J. Gitnik and from Mamie C. Maracini in memory of her husband, Peter B. Maracini.

The Nativity Shrine was dedicated in 1991. In January, 1993, Father Somma left Nativity and Father F. Terrence Fedigan was installed as pastor on March 1, 1993. Father Miller left Nativity in July, 1993 and was replaced as assistant pastor by Father William P. Siple.

In 1994, after immense parishioner support, we reached our goal of \$38,000 to purchase a new organ. Some of the money was donated by parishioners who brought their pennies to Church and dropped them in large containers housed in the vestibule.

The dedication for the new organ was held at a special ceremony in January, 1995. David A. Billings, a well-known organist held a recital followed by a reception.

Father Siple left Nativity in September, 1995 and was replaced by Father Robert P. Connolly who was at Nativity for less than a year. From 1995 through 1999, other priests from Africa who resided at Nativity while attending Duquesne University were Father Innocent Jooji, Father Paschal Kabura and Father Ambrose Ameh Ejeh. They were instrumental in helping with Masses as there was no assistant assigned to Nativity for a period of time. In 1996, another major project was completed with the installation of air conditioning in the church at a cost of \$30,000.

In March, 1998, we received permission from the Diocese to install stained glass windows in the Church at a cost of \$2,500 each. The parishioners paid for all of the windows in memory of their families and loved ones. In December of that same year, some of the windows were installed. In June, 1998, the roof of the church and school needed to be repaired at a cost of \$21,000. fence and gate.

On March 1, 1999, Father Fedigan, having completed his 6-year assignment as pastor was named the Administrator of Nativity Parish. Father James R. Gretz was named assistant pastor in April, 1999. Dedication of the stained glass windows was held on September 19, 1999 at the 12 Noon Mass. During that year, air conditioning was installed in the cafeteria.

On April 10, 2000, Father Richard A. Infante was assigned as Pastor of Nativity Parish. This was the beginning of a new and extremely successful era for Nativity. Father Gretz left at the end of April, 2000.

In 2000, a new courtyard was constructed in the area between the convent and the school. Some large trees were removed, the area was landscaped, and a picnic table was installed. The entire area was then enclosed with a beautiful wooden fence and gate.

Father Thomas J. Kram was in residence from July of 2001 through August of 2002. Although no longer in residence, he continued to assist by celebrating Masses on the weekends and at other times when needed.



In 2001, the empty convent was completely refurbished to become the new Parish Center. It now accommodates Religious Education Offices, a Library, Reading Room and other functional needs. That same year, Father Infante organized a spectacular flea market utilizing all three floors of the activities building. This flea market was so successful, it was held for subsequent years.

Also, in 2001 a parish picnic was held at the Knights of Columbus Grove in Bethel Park. The picnic was free to parishioners and has continued through 2004.

A Memorial Garden was established in 2002 to honor the unborn. Blessing of Animals annually continues on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi each October. In the year 2000, the parish debt was \$666,000. Under Fr. Richard's direction, the debt declined yearly and was paid off in June, 2004.

In the past few years, statues of the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph and St. Anthony were refinished. Nativity's religious store opened in one corner of the cafeteria.

Father Richard initiated the concept of celebrating our 100th Anniversary by having the history researched and written. He appointed James E. Scanlon to this task in 2002.

During Holy Week of 2003, Father Richard had a valve replacement and quadruple bypass surgery. During the time of his recovery, Father Thomas J. Kram, who was retired, assumed the responsibility for Father Richard. He performed extremely well and was much appreciated by the parishioners.

On June 21, 2004, Father Richard was assigned as the new pastor of Our Lady of Grace Parish in Scott Township. Rev. Thomas R. Wilson was appointed as the new pastor at Nativity effective July 5, 2004.

Father Tom made numerous physical changes in the church and to the property around the church. He moved the existing Nativity Scene to the area adjacent to the school and had a larger Nativity Scene installed at the front of the church complete with wooden stable and lights.

Father Tom also continued with the Anniversary Celebration and arranged for Busson Company to photograph all interested parishioners to be in the new publication.



Father Tom was assigned as Parochial Vicar at St. John Vianney Parish, one of the largest parishes in the Pittsburgh Diocese.

Father John E. Hissrich from Guardian Angels Parish was assigned as pastor at Nativity in March 2005.

## Former Pastors



Rev. John Bayer  
2012-2018



Rev. John E. Hissrich  
2005-2012



Rev. Thomas R.  
Wilson  
2004-2005



Rev. Richard A.  
Infante  
2000-2004



Rev. Terrence  
Fedigan  
1993-2000  
Administrator  
1999-2000



Rev. James E. Somma  
1985-1993



Rev. Joseph E.  
Drumm  
1965-1985  
Pastor Emeritus  
1985 till death in  
December 1985



Rev. Henry J.  
Donabedian  
1957-1965



Rev. Edward A. O'Neil  
1930-1957



Rev. Charles F.  
Fehrenbach  
1922-1930



Rev. William Spiegel  
1918-1922



Rev. Charles J.  
Hintzen  
1910-1918



Rev. Francis J.  
Hertzog  
1905-1910