

December 11, 2021
St. Michael's Church 100th anniversary of its consecration
A brief history.

At the turn of the 20th century and shortly after, a new wave of Slovak immigrants came to America and the Slovak community in our area grew rapidly. St. Michael's Church was not the first church to be built by Slovak immigrants in Trenton. It was preceded by Saints Peter & Paul Church, which was built in 1896. For some, it was too far to come to that church in the southern part of Trenton. Therefore, in 1919, plans were made to build a new church on the other side of the town. Following the purchase of the land and the approval of the plans by the bishop, construction began in September 1921. St. Michael's Church was built at a cost of \$20,000 and consecrated by Bishop Thomas Walsh on December 11, 1921.

In its early days, St. Michael's Church did not have a permanent priest. Holy Masses were served there by Slovak and Polish priests from the surrounding area. Finally, in 1926 Fr. Michael J. Kallok arrived. He significantly strengthened the unity of the Slovak community. During his tenure, a social hall was built under the church in 1927 and the construction of the rectory was completed in 1929. The plans became even bolder. A larger, more majestic church was to stand on the site of today's church parking lot and the building of the current church was to be rebuilt into a Catholic School. However, everything was stopped by the Great Depression of the 1930's. Financial income decreased and the parish eventually did not have sufficient funds to keep the priest.

An important role in the history of the Church of St. Michael was played by Fr. Ladislav J. Rakvica, who became the administrator of the church on December 3, 1936. The Slovak community under his leadership grew spiritually and materially. He supported various parish activities; and, debts of the church were paid off in a short period of time. As a thank you for his miraculous recovery from a near fatal illness, Fr. Rakvica initiated the Solemn Novena to St. Jude on October 20, 1939. The first novena lasted nine consecutive days. Afterwards, people began to attend the Solemn Novena every Thursday. The novena earned great respect and popularity and attracted people from near and far. Several testimonies and letters were received regularly at the church rectory, outlining many healings and recoveries from desperate cases after praying the Solemn Novena to St. Jude. Strong devotion to St. Jude remains in our church to this day. In 1945, extensive repairs were made to the church and the rectory building. A choir loft was built; the entire roof was raised and remodeled; and, the electrical wiring and heating systems were rebuilt. Everything in the interior of the church was replaced: altar, pews, statues, organ, etc. Fr. Rakvica retired in 1972, but for another 10 years came to the Church of St. Michael as an assistant priest to celebrate the Slovak Masses. He died on October 20, 1982, and with him the Slovak language disappeared from St. Michael's Church for the next 20 years.

In 1974, the new administrator of the church was Fr. Louis W. Kralowich. He can be best remembered for creating the motto, "No one comes to St. Michael's as

a stranger and leaves us that way."

Fr. James G. Innocenzi was appointed administrator in 1982 and became pastor in 1986. In 1986, the sanctuary was completely remodeled and the church was formally dedicated on July 12, 1987. Monsignor Innocenzi's pastorate was a time of growth and innovation.

In 1989, a year long celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Saint Jude Novena was observed.

In 2002, Bishop John Smith of Trenton accommodated a long awaited renewal of the celebration of weekly Masses in the Slovak language. Msgr. Innocenzi, with open arms, welcomed the Slovak community back to St. Michael's Church and was of great guidance and assistance in the process.

Fr. Vladimir Chripko, a native Slovak priest, stood at the renewal of weekly Slovak Masses in the modern history of St. Michael's Church. On November 3, 2002 the first Slovak Mass in over two decades was celebrated. With his arrival, the Church of St. Michael once again became the center of the spiritual as well as cultural life for Slovaks in the wider area.

Msgr. Innocenzi left St. Michael's Church in 2005, when the parish was merged with the parish of St. Ann's in Lawrenceville. At the same time, there was also a reduction in the frequency of Masses at St. Michael's to only Sundays and Holy Days.

On April 2, 2006, the Church of St. Michael was enriched by the Korean community. Today, the Americans, Slovaks, and Koreans form the tri-community parish of St. Michael's.

In August 2015, Fr. Peter Bujdos replaced Fr. Vladimir Chripko and began his ministry to the English and the Slovak communities. During his tenure, in 2019, several repairs were made to the church building and the rectory. The heating system and the roof on both buildings were replaced. To allow for the streaming of live Masses, an internet service and a camera system were installed in the church.

We pray that St. Michael's Church will serve many generations to come.