



Saint Mary Magdalene Parish, in the East End of Pittsburgh, PA was established on January 6, 2020. Rev. Thomas J. Burke is the founding pastor of our parish, which is a merger of three former urban parishes.

- St. Bede in the Point Breeze neighborhood of the city
- St. Charles Lwanga in the Homewood and Lincoln-Lemington Neighborhoods, and
- St. James in Wilkinsburg Borough.

Although Saint Mary Magdalene is very new, our former parishes have a rich history. The Pittsburgh regional population grew dramatically from the late 1700s through 1950 because of coal mining and the steel industry. Thousands migrated from multiple European countries for work in the mines and steel mills. Many came from predominantly Catholic countries and built catholic churches to meet the needs of their ethnic communities.

The area that encompasses our current Saint Mary Magdalene parish had one parish in 1870 (St. James in Wilkinsburg). By 1922 when St. Bede was founded in the Point Breeze neighborhood, there were a total of 8 separate parishes, most supporting one ethnic population in the territory that is now Saint Mary Magdalene.

Beginning in the 1950s a number of factors began to reduce the overall population of the region and especially the Catholic population of our east-end neighborhoods. As Steel industry jobs disappeared, the region's population fell. Many white families moved out of the city to the suburbs where they could purchase a home. African Americans who were both excluded from those opportunities and forced out of their own historic neighborhoods by urban renewal projects moved into Homewood and Wilkinsburg. The population of those neighborhoods grew poorer, more diverse, and with many fewer Catholics. White flight continued and poverty grew. Some committed parish members drove back to their home church but numbers and finances and a priest shortage moved the diocese toward mergers.

In 1992, the 6 parishes in the Homewood and Lincoln-Lemington neighborhoods were merged to form St. Charles Lwanga. The new parish gradually became one of only two primarily African American parishes in the Pittsburgh Diocese. Fr. David H. Taylor was the founding pastor charged with the responsibility of bringing together 6 very ethnically diverse communities, each with a rich history, to form St. Charles Lwanga.

The name, St. Charles Lwanga, was chosen by the bishop to reflect the diversity of the new parish. Over the next years, most of the church buildings were closed and sold. Currently, the parish owns only Holy Rosary church, a large gothic building, and Mother of Good Counsel, both in

Homewood. The only church still open for worship is Mother of Good Counsel, which was founded for Italian immigrants.

St. James was founded in 1869 in Wilksburg and was initially a mission church of St. Peter and Paul. The original St. James congregants were mostly Irish miners. The church received its name because the manager of the St. James Hotel in Pittsburgh made the largest donation and was allowed to choose the name. Less than 20 years later, in 1886, the Sisters of Charity opened a parish school, grades 1 - 8. It continued as St. James School until 2010, when it merged with Holy Rosary School, part of St. Charles Lwanga, and became Sister Thea Bowman Catholic Academy. The school is still located on the St. James campus and serves low-income families from the surrounding communities. It is supported by 'The Extra Mile Foundation which was developed by the diocese.

St. Bede Parish was founded in 1922 in the Point Breeze section of Pittsburgh. The neighborhood served by the new parish had previously been part of St. James, Holy Rosary, and other parishes. The bishop chose the name, St. Bede. St. Bede School founded a school kindergarten to 8th grade in 1926.

In 2018 it became clear that these three diverse communities would become one parish and we began the process of building relationships and coordinating programs. We are an urban parish with a diverse membership and a mix of seniors, families with children of all ages. We represent a wide cross-section of incomes and professions.

So our progression from one parish in 1869 to eight by 1922 and back to one in 2020 tells a story about our community and our people. We continue to worship in three churches and now support both St. Bede School and Sister Thea Bowman Academy.

Since both Wilksburg and Homewood neighborhoods are low-income communities, both St. James and St. Charles Lwanga had robust social ministry programs. We are very proud of Social Ministries and Community Outreach. This group came together before the merger. We have two pantries; support for families with children up to 5 years old; rental and utilities assistance; and services provided by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. These services have continued during the pandemic when they are very much needed. We also have global ministries and encourage engagement in justice issues through advocacy.

Our Name: Saint Mary Magdalene

During the merger process, parishioners submitted proposed names for our new parish. The pastoral council sent 4 potential names to the Bishop who chose Saint Mary Magdalene, one of our options. Many parishioners were pleased with the name. We have focused on Mary Magdalene as the Apostle to the Apostles and the first to witness the Resurrection and share the Good News. Sharing the Good News is what we are about as a community.

Because the pandemic shut down most activity only 2 months after our merger, we are only slowly exploring what Mary Magdalene means to us. This is something that we look forward to in the months and years ahead.