

A Brief History of the Parish of Saint Eugene Up to the 60th Anniversary



On Sunday, November 6, 1949, Father John Dougherty, Monsignor John Fearn and Father Roger Franklin offered four Masses at the Club House Inn on Tuckahoe Road, attended by a total of 378 members of the new St. Eugene's Parish. The official document establishing the parish and appointing Father Dougherty as pastor had been signed by Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York, and dated October 31, 1949. In choosing as the patron of the parish the seventh-century Pope St. Eugene I, the Cardinal was honoring his great friend Pope Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli). Northeast Yonkers, before World War II a more or less sparsely populated area, located between the urban west side of Yonkers and the established communities of Bronxville, Tuckahoe and Crestwood to the east, was by the late 1940s experiencing a period of rapid growth, typical of many suburban communities across the nation during the post-war years. The need for a new parish was clear. Cardinal Spellman had the right man for the job in Father

Dougherty, then spiritual director of St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie. Old-time parishioners speak with great affection of Father-later Monsignor Dougherty, a man of holiness, vision and zeal, to whom we all owe so much. Father Dougherty's dream of a church and a school would soon become reality. To that end, 5.6 acres of largely wooded land on the northeast corner of Tuckahoe Road and Central Park Avenue-diagonally across from the Club House Inn property-were purchased. Monsignor Fearn blessed the cornerstone of the church on July 16, 1951, using the same silver trowel that had been used for the laying of the cornerstone of St. Joseph's Seminary. Holy Mass was offered in the new church for the first time on August 15, 1951. St. Eugene School, staffed by the Franciscan Sisters of Hastings, opened its doors to 147 children on September 16. Sister Mary Anselm, OSF, was the founding principal. Cardinal Spellman blessed and dedicated the parish buildings on October 21. Father Dougherty and his flock had reason for both pride and gratitude for all that had been accomplished during the preceding two years. The mission of the new parish-the mission of every parish-was clear. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines a parish as a stable community entrusted by the bishop to its own pastor as its shepherd, where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist, which the Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) calls "the source and summit of the Christian life". It is the Eucharist that forms the members of the parish into a community of faith that teaches Christ's saving doctrine and practices the works of mercy, charity and justice. Under the wise pastoral leadership of Father Dougherty and the apostolic zeal of the Sisters, the new parish and school flourished. In recognition of his many outstanding qualities, Pope Pius XII in April of 1953 named Father Dougherty a monsignor. St. Eugene School held its first graduation in 1956, and the new wing was blessed by Cardinal Spellman on April 13, 1958. The new convent (now the parish center) was opened in October 1963. The rapid growth of the parish during its first two decades rendered the original church with adjacent auditorium inadequate. Monsignor Dougherty, who had built the church, now faced the task of re building it. The church and auditorium were reconfigured as a "church in the round": The new church was ready for Christmas 1970. Monsignor Dougherty retired to his beloved Stowe, Vermont, in July 1972. He had been pastor of St. Eugene's for twenty-three years. The parish history that appeared in the 25th Anniversary Journal said: "The parish will forever be a monument to him. His mark is indelibly imprinted on us all and he is forever in our hearts and prayers, as we are in his". These sentiments were echoed in the parish history that appeared in the 50th Anniversary Journal: "Senior members of the parish recall the legendary pastorate of Monsignor Dougherty, who made the name Saint Eugene's a pillar within the structures of the beautiful City of

Yonkers. His administrative abilities and personal sanctity gave the Catholic Church a meaningful stature in the civic community." Monsignor Dougherty was a true shepherd who tended his flock with devotion. He died on January 31, 1982.

Monsignor Dougherty was succeeded by Monsignor Raymond P. Rigney, who had been pastor of St. Ann's in the Bronx. Monsignor Rigney had spent the greater part of his priestly life in the field of education, serving as Archdiocesan Superintendent of Schools under Cardinal Spellman and his successor, Terence Cardinal Cooke. During Monsignor Rigney's tenure as Schools Superintendent, the Education Department of the Archdiocese earned tremendous respect on both the State and Federal levels. Monsignor Rigney's pastorate, like that of his predecessor, would be a long one. When he celebrated his last Mass as pastor on May 31, 1992, he had shepherded our parish for almost twenty years. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the parish in 1989, Monsignor Rigney had been asked to express the significance of the occasion. He said that the answer could be found in the thousands of children baptized and confirmed, the more than one thousand couples joined in matrimony, and the countless Masses offered. There could be no better answer.



Our third pastor, Father James Griffin, came to us after having served as pastor of St. Patrick's in Highland Mills. Father Griffin had spent many years on the faculty of Cathedral College, training young men for the priesthood. He had also served at the parishes of Our Lady of Mercy, St. Gabriel, and St. Margaret of Cortona, all in the Bronx, and had been a professor at the College of Mount St. Vincent. Father Griffin was a kindhearted man and a tremendously gifted one as well. Among the highlights of his relatively brief pastorate were our parish's enthusiastic participation in World Youth Day in Denver with Pope John Paul II in 1993 and the Holy Father's Mass in Central Park in 1996. A school annex was opened in the lower level of the convent, making it possible to introduce all-day kindergarten. A lover of travel, Father Griffin organized memorable parish trips to Alaska, Canada, Ireland and Rome. It was during a trip to Ireland in March 1996 that Father Griffin suffered a massive stroke while preparing to offer Holy Mass at

the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock. Parishioners stormed heaven for his recovery and return. Monsignor James Sullivan was appointed administrator of St. Eugene's by John Cardinal O'Connor in January 1997. Like Father Griffin, Monsignor Sullivan had spent many years in the work of priestly formation. Before coming to us he had been rector of the St. John Neumann Residence, and then located in Riverdale. Prior to that, he had been rector of Cathedral Preparatory Seminary in Manhattan and archdiocesan director of vocations. Monsignor Sullivan would remain with us only nine months. His appointment as principal of Cardinal Spellman High School in the Bronx stunned our parishioners, who deeply appreciated his zealous ministry among them.

Father Leonard F. Villa, who had served the parish as parochial vicar since 1992, was appointed administrator in October 1997. Father Griffin retired as pastor on December 1. While he never fully recovered from the stroke he had suffered, Father Griffin was well enough to return to St. Eugene's to celebrate Holy Mass on the occasion of his fiftieth anniversary as a priest in 1999. Father Villa became the fourth pastor of St. Eugene's in June 1998, as the parish was preparing to celebrate its 50th Anniversary. Having served under both Monsignor Rigney and Father Griffin, he was well prepared. Father Villa, an attorney who had served in the United States Navy in the Judge Advocate General's office and reached the rank of lieutenant commander before entering the seminary, is a uniquely gifted man who from the day he arrived at St. Eugene's



showed particular interest in the quality of our school and the religious development of our children. Like Monsignor Dougherty, Monsignor Rigney and Father Griffin before him, he was the right man at the right time. When asked ten years ago about the future of St. Eugene's, the new pastor responded: "It is our hope that the next millennium will mean an increase in the dedication of the parish to Christ in the Eucharist, to increased holiness of life, and the continued growth and well-being of our school".

As our parish family prepared to celebrate its 50th Anniversary, Father Villa welcomed to St. Eugene's a new parochial vicar, Father Richard Baker. Father Baker came to us from the St. John Neumann Residence in Riverdale. A gifted musician with a great love for the liturgy, Father Baker was also choirmaster at St. Joseph's Seminary. Father Baker dreamt of a new pipe organ for our church, and that dream came to fruition, the result of his own hard work and the great generosity of our people. Father Patrick Thawale, a priest from Malawi, had come to St. Eugene's in 1997 and would remain until 2001. He exercised a most fruitful ministry here while pursuing doctoral studies. From 2002 to 2004, Father John Saw Thun, a Burmese priest living and studying at St. Joseph's Seminary, was a great blessing to us. Father Baker was assigned as pastor of St. Malachy's in Manhattan in 2003- Father Michael Morrow replaced Father Baker.

Before coming to St. Eugene's, Father Morrow, a classmate and close friend of Father Villa, had served for nine years at St. Brendan's in the Bronx. He shares with Father Villa a particular concern for the clear and forthright proclamation of Church teaching on life and the family, so necessary today in the face of what Pope John Paul II called the "culture of death". (When Father Steven Clark, who had served us as parochial vicar with great distinction for four years, was transferred to Assumption in Peekskill in October 1994, he replaced Father Morrow, who went to St. Brendan's. The ecclesiastical world is a small one!)

Father Villa and Father Morrow were joined in June 2004 by Father Dennis Iddamalgoda, OMI, who would serve as a parochial vicar for the next two years. Father Dennis, a priest of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, came to us from Sri Lanka. Two decades earlier, he had been in residence at St. Eugene's for two years while pursuing graduate studies at Fordham University. Many old-time parishioners remembered Father Dennis well and some had remained in touch with him over the years-and were delighted at his return. He was greatly loved by our people, as would be his successor, Father O. Samson Imhangbe. Father Samson, a Nigerian, is serving as parochial vicar while pursuing graduate studies at Fordham. He certainly brings to the rectory and the parish his own youthful dynamism, and has plunged enthusiastically into the full range of parish activities despite his rigorous academic schedule. The presence of priests from other nations has been a great blessing to us, as it has been to so many parishes in recent years, not only on account of the shortage of priests

but also because of the different perspectives priests from other nations bring with them. Their presence bears eloquent witness to the universality of the Church and the great bond of priestly fraternity.

Our parish family has likewise been enriched by the presence of priests who despite the heavy demands of their own full-time ministries have been of great service to us. Priests of the Mill Hill Missionaries, who have a house in Hartsdale, have been weekend associates for some years. At present, we enjoy the presence among us of Father Terence Lee, MHM, Father Matthew Grier, MHM, and Father Brian Coffey, MHM. All three are Irishmen, as both their wit and their accents attest. Father Donald Haggerty, of the faculty of St. Joseph's Seminary, had also been with us each Sunday prior to the arrival of Father Dennis in 2004. Father Villa and Father Morrow are most grateful as well for the priestly service rendered to our parish at various times by their priest friends Father Andrew Pane, Father Robert Quarato, Father Peter Pilsner, Father Joseph Dietz, Father Brian Taylor, Monsignor Robert Trainor and the late Monsignor William Smith, highly esteemed friend and seminary professor of Father Villa and Father Morrow. Monsignor Smith's death in January was a great loss to the Church of New York.

Deacon Donald Quigley was appointed to exercise his diaconal ministry at St. Eugene's by John Cardinal O'Connor in the summer of 1997. He remained with us for ten years, preaching, baptizing, and witnessing marriages, distributing Holy Communion at weekend Masses and being of great help to the priests and people of the parish in countless ways. He is now assigned to St. Margaret of Cortona in Riverdale. Deacon Quigley has served for the past ten years as Priest Retiree Coordinator of the Archdiocese, an assignment he carries out with tremendous devotion.

As we began our sixth decade ten years ago, we had not only a new pastor and a new parochial vicar but a new school administration as well. "The two Mrs. Sullivan's"-our principal, Mrs. Dolores Sullivan, and her assistant principal, Mrs. Maryann Sullivan (no relation) - arrived together in September 1999. Though they had known each other only slightly before coming to St. Eugene School, they quickly forged not only a strong professional bond but also a close personal friendship. Mrs. Maryann Sullivan's death in May 2006, after a valiant struggle with cancer, was a great loss to our school faculty and students. Over the past decade, our excellent school has continued to grow and develop under the dynamic leadership of our principal and her outstanding faculty. Among the achievements of the past ten years are the introduction of pre-K, the expansion of the computer lab and the establishment of a school library. Middle States Accreditation, granted originally in 1992, was renewed in 2004 and again in 2007.

Early in the past decade, Sister Regina Rosaire Ruth, OSF, succeeded Sister Raymond Aloysia, OSF, as coordinator of our religious education program. Our pre-K center has been named the "Sister Raymond Aloysia Early Childhood Center"; a fitting monument to an exemplary religious Sister. Sister Regina Rosaire, who had previously taught in our school, is much loved in our parish. Though she retired this past summer, Sister Regina still teaches in the program and has been of great assistance to her successor, long-time parishioner Mrs. Marisela DeVictoria, who is doing a fine job continuing the great work of all those who preceded her. The retirement of Sister Regina Rosaire, together with that of her blood sister, Sister Theresa Ruth, OSF, as school nurse, marks the end of an era. These words from the parish history written for the 50th Anniversary Journal bear repeating: "The community of the Sisters of St. Francis is woven into Saint Eugene's parish history The achievements and reputation of the school are largely the product of their fidelity to their mission. They have shaped the lives of thousands of our parishioners and of our families:' Some of the Sisters who served here live in retirement in the motherhouse in Hastings. Many have gone home to God. We are forever in their debt. Please pray for their good souls.

In the past decade, we lost three priests, to whom we all owe so much. Monsignor Rigney, our second pastor, died on November 11, 2002; Father Thomas O'Keefe, whose twenty years of extraordinary service as parochial vicar (1970-90), touched the lives of countless parishioners, young and old, and will never be forgotten, on December 23, 2003; and Father James Griffin, our third pastor, on May 11, 2004. May they enjoy forever in heaven the reward of their labors in the company of the Lord Jesus, High Priest and Good Shepherd.

Anyone who had not seen our church during the past ten years would be both astonished and deeply moved at the transformation it has undergone. The cinder block walls have been covered with drywall, creating the illusion of plaster walls, and the windows and doors have been framed with decorative moldings, painted in gold leaf. The tabernacle, dwelling place of the Eucharistic Lord, is once again the church's focal point. Standing nearby is a "Pilgrim Virgin" statue of Our Lady of Fatima. The tan marble of the new sanctuary floor matches that of the altar, ambo and sanctuary furnishings. The sanctuary is flanked by magnificent frescoes, reproductions of Michelangelo's depictions of the Creation and the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel. Below the frescoes, gothic arches suggest the "rood screens" found in medieval English churches. There are three new stained-glass windows, one a memorial to the victims of 9/11, the other two in honor of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Sophia. New statues of St. Anthony of Padua, St. Patrick, St. Pio of Pietrelcina, St. Jude Thaddeus and, most recently, St. John Vianney (the Cure of Ars), have been placed around the church, while the original statue of Pope St. Eugene I has been restored to a place of honor. A striking photograph of Venerable Pius XII reminds us of the heroic virtue of this great modern Pope, in whose honor our parish was named. A new pipe organ greatly enhances the beauty of Divine Worship, while a beautiful new baptistery provides a reverent setting for the welcoming of new members into God's Family. None of this could have been accomplished without the marvelous generosity of our people.

At the same time, it must be said that more sacred by far than any building of brick and stone is what St. Paul, in the Letter to the Ephesians, calls "the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord": The true beauty of a parish can be seen in the piety of its people. We can thank Almighty God that in the face of a culture ever more hostile to Christian values our parish remains spiritually strong. It is heartening to see so many young families at Mass each Sunday. Confession lines have lengthened. Our thirty-six altar boys-twelve of them high school students-serve at the altar with great devotion. Our thirty-five lectors proclaim God's Word with great reverence. Our extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist generously make themselves available to assist the priests when necessary in the distribution of Holy Communion. The great St. Augustine tells us that "he who sings prays twice": Our adult and children's choirs add beauty and solemnity to the celebration of the sacred liturgy. We are grateful for the talent and service of Mrs. Bini Ramos, organist and director of the adult choir; John Sacco, cantor and director of the children's choir; our young organist, Miss Irene Martinez; and Miss Jennifer Cardoni, who has done marvels in teaching sacred music and particularly Gregorian chant to our school children. Our sacristans, Hank Treulieb, Marty Loftus, Jr., Charles Saumell, John Daly and John Consilvio, see to the preparation of the Sacramentary, Lectionary and sacred vessels for Mass. Jack Davis, though "retired" as sacristan, still prepares the sacristans' schedule each month, and remains always watchful about anything that may require attention. We recall with gratitude the humble service of Frank Erickson, a man of genuine holiness, who died in July 2004. The ladies of the Altar Guild, under the direction of Jennie Sepe, are responsible for the cleanliness of the sanctuary and the care of vestments and altar linens. Our parish is centered, as it must be, on the Eucharistic Heart of Christ. Attendance by so many at Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on the First Friday and First Saturday of each month, monthly Respect Life Holy Hours and the Forty Hours' Devotion each year is a moving sign of the faith of our people in the Real Presence of Christ in this most holy Sacrament. A few months ago, we marked with a Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving the tenth anniversary of our adoration chapel. Monday

through Friday, from 7:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., Our Divine Lord is exposed in the monstrance there, attended by "committed adorers"; who keep him company for an hour each week, praying for priests and for an increase of priestly vocations. There is also a corps of "substitute adorers": Many others stop by when they can during the course of the day. We are grateful to George Alessi and the members of the Serra Club for all they have done to honor Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament through the establishment of the adoration chapel.

Our Holy Name Society, St. Vincent de Paul Society and two praesidia of the Legion of Mary offer our people a great variety of opportunities to grow in holiness by sharing in the apostolic life of the parish. A weekly Bible study class, led by Andy Piacente, and a bereavement group, directed by Deacon Paul Hveem, have brought tremendous enrichment to many. A Parish Activities Committee (PAC) was founded in 2007. Under the leadership of Frank Giacoio, PAC has done a wonderful job in promoting a spirit of family in the parish and coordinating the work of the parish's various groups. St. Eugene's has been known for its commitment to the defense of human life. The Respect Life Society, founded in 2004, coordinates these efforts. Under the leadership of President Jackie Barton, the RLS sponsors the weekly Cenacle of Life and the monthly Respect Life Holy Hour; the archdiocesan Spiritual Adoption Program in both parish and school; an annual baby shower, which benefits local residences for expectant mothers; an annual Mass for Expectant Mothers; an annual Mass honoring couples married 25, 50 or 50+ years; Respect Life awards given each year to two graduating eighth graders; and the parish observance of World Priest Day. Working often behind the scenes to keep everything operating smoothly are our parish office staff: our parish bookkeeper, Mrs. Jean Capolino; our parish secretary, Mrs. Jo Ann Liberatore, and our part-time office staff, Mrs. Jean Caso, Miss Leona Faustina, Ralph Liberatore, Mrs. Anna Vedovino and Mrs. Mary Ann Vlad. Deeply missed is Mrs. Mildred Becker, who served as bookkeeper and secretary full-time, and in the last couple of years part-time, until her retirement in June 2008. A long-time and beloved member of our parish family, Mildred is gravely ill, and resides in a nursing home in Kentucky. Please keep her in your prayers. As our parish celebrates this 60th Anniversary Year, we can say with both confidence and gratitude that the hopes expressed by Father Villa ten years ago have more than come to fruition, thanks both to his own extraordinary dedication and to the goodness of our people.

On July 7, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI issued the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum*, authorizing the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass according to the Roman Missal published by Blessed John XXIII in 1962 (the last edition of the Missal originally promulgated by Pope St. Pius V in 1570) as an extraordinary form of the Roman Rite to exist side by side with the ordinary form (the Roman Missal promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1970). In so doing, the Holy Father was following in the footsteps of his predecessor, the Servant of God Pope John Paul II, who in his motu proprio *Ecclesia Dei* of 1988 had already directed bishops to make the so-called Tridentine Mass readily available to those who desired it. *Summorum Pontificum* authorized, effective on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14, 2007, the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass Latin according to the Missal in use up to the time of the Second Vatican Council Virtually without restrictions by any priest without prior permission of his bishop. Likewise, a pastor would be authorized, without any prior permission, to schedule one celebration of Mass according to the extraordinary form on Sunday, and to make Mass according to this form available also during the week. Father Villa offered the "traditional Mass" for our people on September 14, 2007, and it has been offered each Sunday since, usually by Father Villa, occasionally by Father Morrow or Father Taylor. Mass in the extraordinary form is also generally available two or three times a week. We are the only parish in our area to make the Latin Mass available each Sunday, and it has been a source of blessings to the priests who offer it and to the one hundred or so faithful who attend it each week. All our altar boys are learning to serve the Latin Mass. Many, in fact, are already proficient, as Father Villa and Father Morrow find themselves teaching the boys the skills they themselves learned as altar boys almost a half century ago. While traditional parish societies have virtually disappeared in many places, they remain strong and vibrant at St. Eugene's. This has been one of Father Villa's priorities as pastor. May the

Eucharistic Lord, Our Lady Help of Christians, Pope St. Eugene I and Venerable Pope Pius XII
continue to bless and guide us.