For this issue of Gathered Fragments, the Board of the Catholic Historical Society decided to focus on parishes which would be celebrating anniversaries this year.

I wrote to these parishes asking for any history, significant fact, or vignette, that they could provide. The response was very good, with half of the churches responding and these histories are included in this issue. Those that did not respond include: St. James the Apostle (New Bedford), St. Joseph (Chicora) - 150 years; St. Joseph (Mt. Oliver), St. Mary of Mercy (Stanwix St.) - 125 years; St. Clare of Assisi (Clairton), St. Elizabeth of Hungary (St. Patrick-St. Stanislas) - 100 years; and St. Kilian (Mars) - 75 years. The history of St. Wendelin School (Butler), founded in 1845, will be included in the next issue.

I hope that the readers enjoy this issue of Gathered Fragments.

Kathleen M. Wasby, Editor

History of Holy Trinity Church, McKeesport, PA

Holy Trinity Parish was organized in 1893 and the first church was a former synagogue which was purchased in 1895. That same year the charter was granted. In 1893, there were only 96 families, but in 1895, the time of incorporation, the parish consisted of 150 families.

The first pastor was Fr. Emil Duchon, who served the parish until 1898. In November, 1898, Fr. John J. Jaskovitz became pastor and remained until March 1901. On April 21, 1901, the Reverend William Panuska was appointed pastor and under his direction the parish prospered, and in 1911, the present church was built under his supervision. Also, the present cemetery was bought in 1903.

At that time, it was the only Slovak R.C. Cemetery in Allegheny county. When the new church was built, the old church was used as a parish school. The first parish school began in 1902 and, in 1904, the first class to receive First Holy Communion consisted of 48 boys and girls. After Fr. Panuska resigned his pastorate and returned to his native Slovakia, Fr. Edward Duwell, who was pastor at Clymer, PA, was appointed pastor of Holy Trinity Church by Bishop H.C. Boyle in 1921. Under his pastorate, the parish prospered and grew in numbers, becoming the largest Slovak Church in the Pittsburgh Catholic Diocese.

Under his supervision, the present school was built in 1922, consisting of 12 classrooms, a large auditorium, a lyceum room and basement. In 1922, the sisters' convent was purchased, and then enlarged in 1953, to provide accommodations for 10 nuns. At that time the total enrollment was 400 children taught by the Vincentian Sisters of Charity of Perrysville, PA. The present rectory was built in 1931. The convent was sold in 1985 to Housing Opportunities, Inc.

After serving the parish as pastor for 42 years, Fr. Duwell died on June 20, 1963. He was buried on the day on which he was to celebrate his Golden Jubilee of the Priesthood.

On July 2, 1963, Fr. Michael A. Dravecky, pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Duquesne, PA, assumed his duties as pastor of Holy Trinity Church, McKeesport, PA, at the request of Bishop John J. Wright. Msgr. Dravecky served the parish from 1963 to May 30, 1974, when he was transferred to St. Barbara Church, Swissville, PA where he served until 1982 when he retired.

With the transfer of Msgr. Dravecky, Bishop Vincent Leonard assigned Fr. Edward P. Bunchek as pastor. He served the parish, undertaking various projects and renewal plans with the assistance of Sr. Irene Agnes Benyak, V.S.C. as pastoral associate. New parish offices were created in a classroom of the school (connecting with the rectory). A Slovak Day was held annually for ten years. Senior Citizen Recognition Days were held along with Christmas Vila Suppers and Slovak Easter Dinners. Extensive expansion took place at Calvary Cemetery, Port Vue, PA. The chapel was restored, new sections were opened, a mausoleum and lawn crypts were built, a new road and new water lines were installed. A Youth Group was begun, inviting all youth of the parish to learn more about their faith. The Ladies of Charity were formed to work with the poor and elderly. A Church Bus was bought to bring parishioners to Sunday Mass.

After serving the parish for 18 1/2 years, Fr. Bunchek was transferred to the newly organized Prince of Peace Parish on the South Side of Pittsburgh. Bishop Donald W. Wuerl appointed Fr. John Rushofsky to be the current Administrator of Holy Trinity Parish in October, 1992.

On October 30, 1993, Holy Trinity merged together with the parishes of St. Peter, St. Mary and Sacred Heart to form St. Martin de Porres Parish.

St. Agatha Parish

100 Years of Faith, 100 Years of Memories

St. Agatha Parish is located in the borough of Ellwood City which was incorporated in 1892, just three years before the Parish was founded. One of the early settlers was James J. Meneice who came with his family in 1890. At this time the Catholic people attended the mission church of St. Theresa in Hoytdale. Fr. Thomas Walsh was assigned to administer to this mission church.

At the request of Mr. Meneice and the other Catholics in Ellwood City, Fr. Walsh came to Ellwood quarterly, then monthly to say Mass and administer the Sacraments. It was in the Meneice home that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered for the first time in Ellwood City, about 1892.

Fr. Walsh, though not listed as the first pastor, led the ten Catholic families in organizing the parish. Early in 1895, the Catholic people began construction of the first church on land...
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donated by the Pittsburgh Company. Most of the $1000 raised for materials came from these same people. They celebrated and rejoiced in the fruits of their work and sacrifice at the first Mass offered in the new church on a Sunday in September 1895. Fr. William Dwyer had succeeded Fr. Walsh and had been appointed Pastor of St. Agatha Parish. Fr. Walsh returned to celebrate with the people and to offer that first Mass.

The town of Ellwood grew and with it the congregation of St. Agatha increased from the ten families in 1895 to 600 families in 1914. A new church was needed. This same year the Pastor Fr. Philip Brady died and Fr. Robert R.D.A. Wilkey was appointed to succeed him. With $4000 on hand, construction on the $76,000 church was begun in 1915. The new church was dedicated by Bishop J.F. Regis Canevin on July 28, 1918. That same day, Fr. Thomas Walsh celebrated the last Mass in the first church, and preached the sermon at the dedication of the new church. In addition to the dedicatory ceremonies, there were three baptisms and 82 people confirmed.

Many of the parishioners were from Italy and communicated in their native language. For this reason, Fr. Wilkey, ever mindful of the needs of his flock, requested the Bishop to send an Italian-speaking priest to minister to these parishioners. In 1916, approximately 300 families from St. Agatha’s formed the mission parish of Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Today, St. Agatha’s is a community of active parishioners, with three well trained choirs, eucharistic ministers, lectors, greeters, gift bearers, CCD teachers, and ushers who assist the Pastor, Fr. Paul Henne, with the liturgy. The Parish Social Club and a devoted cadre of workers plan and manage fund raising projects to augment the weekly offerings.

A Short History of St. Aloysius Parish

The first Mass celebrated in Wilmerding was by Fr. John F. McCrann, the first pastor, in the third floor room of the East Pittsburgh Bank Building. The first parish census indicates there were 100 Catholic families in Wilmerding. At this time, property was purchased midway in the 400 block of Westinghouse Avenue for a church and rectory. Entrance to the church was off Marguerite Avenue opposite the Jacob Mraz home where the priest’s vestments were stored during the period when Mass was offered in the Bank Building. Fr. McCrann resigned in December 1895 due to ill health and was succeeded by Fr. Michael H. Ward who remained as pastor until 1914.

During Fr. Ward’s stewardship the rectory was completed in 1896 at a cost of $4500. The new church was dedicated Sunday June 21, 1896, by Rt. Rev. R. Phelan DD. During succeeding years St. Aloysius had very successful Lyceum sports teams which competed with other groups in the area. After a number of years of steady growth the church building began to be overcrowded at Mass time.

Looking to the future Fr. McCrann and the church committee purchased the property between the rectory and Clara Street from a Fr. J.C. Oliver for $3,417. Plans for a new church building were received and accepted. Work on what was to be a church building of Gothic design costing $100,000 started prior to Fr. Ward’s departure in the Spring of 1914 when Fr. Michael A. McGarey was named pastor. The first Mass held in the basement part of the church was on February 18, 1915 with Msgr. Cunningham of St. Colman’s Church in Turtle Creek as the celebrant. This Mass was also the opening of the Forty-Hours Devotion which was always very well received by the parishioners of St. Aloysius.

It was determined during subsequent growth of the parish that a school was desperately needed. As a result, the monies available for the structure of the church were diverted to the School Building Fund. The school opened September 1922, staffed by Dominican Nuns from Columbus, Ohio with 365 students.

Memories of the period following the opening of the school are especially dear and vivid in the minds of many. They recall noontime soccer games, mission lectures by visiting missionary priests, Rosary Society, Holy Name Society, Young Ladies’ Sodality, Connubium Sunday and children’s Mass. These thoughts of the new Lyceum, St. Aloysius Dramatic Club, the High School Newman Club and other activities led by Fr. John T. Flaherty remind them that the social activities of the church are a part of their faith.

In our remarks we must recall the late Fr. Austin Staley, O.S.B. among other Benedictine Fathers of St. Vincent Archabbbey. Their contribution to the religious growth of our parishioners is fondly remembered.

Fr. McGarey was elevated to Monsignor in February 1964. Six years later on February 2, 1970 Msgr. McGarey resigned his pastorate. He remained at St. Aloysius where he was pastor emeritus until his death. Succeeding Msgr. McGarey was Fr. James A. Sites who had been Msgr. McGarey’s assistant pastor since July 7, 1961.

Fr. Sites was pastor during the period February 2, 1970 through June 16, 1972. St. Aloysius School was closed following the 1970-1971 school year. Fr. Cornelius J. Finneran was assigned the pastoral reins June 16, 1972 through February 14, 1978 when he died. Fr. William E. Harvey’s tenure was from March 8, 1978 to July 4, 1978 when he too died. Msgr. McGarey passed away May 29, 1978.

Handling the funerals of these three priests became the responsibility of Fr. Edward J. Strelinski who was assigned to St Aloysius November 15, 1976. Fr. Strelinski was assigned as pastor August 7, 1978. St. Aloysius was his first pastoral assignment. The statue “Our Lady of the Way” was erected in the space between the church and rectory during Fr. Strelinski’s stewardship. After a long fight against cancer Fr. Strelinski died on March 16, 1991.

Fr. John J. O’Malley, who had been assigned to St. Aloysius in January 1991 as Administrator pro-temp, became the Parish Administrator effective May 1, 1991. During a short two and one half year period Fr. O’Malley has lead the parish in its own revitalization program. In 1994, St. Aloysius was joined with St Leocadia, forming St. Jude the Apostle.

Bibliography: Michael McKenna family bible (courtesy Jack McKloskey); Pittsburgh Catholic Wilmerding Anniversary Book; Westinghouse Valley News; St. Aloysius Church Dedication Program Book; Msgr. McGarey program ’75 Years a Priest’; Diocese of Pittsburgh, Archives and Record Center; Diocese of Pittsburgh, Department of Clergy Personnel; St. Aloysius Parish records; Dominican Sisters, St. Mary of the Springs, Columbus, Ohio.

St. Hedwig

Located on a corner lot, in a residential area of the economically depressed city of Duquesne in the Mon Valley Region of Western Pennsylvania is a small red bricked church and adjacent rectory.
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whose parishioners are in the midst of celebrating 100 years as a faith community. They are to be congratulated on a century of the proud Polish spirit that has seen the light of faith that was St. Hedwig when it became an equal partner in the formation of Christ the Light of the World.

In the beginning, St. Hedwig Polish Catholic Church was located on 8 plots of land on William Street extension. The land, but not the title to the land, was acquired for the consideration of $1. (Clear title to the land was obtained in April, 1926, from Alexander K. McRae and Florence N. McRae for the sum of $2400). The first liturgy was celebrated on October 13, 1895, by Fr. Anthony Smelz, Pastor. Construction costs for the church that spiritually supported 75 families were about $2000. The parish cemetery, located in West Mifflin, was purchased for $3000 in June, 1915, and blessed on September 12, 1915.

On January 13, 1928, tragedy struck in the form of fire. The original structure and all church buildings were destroyed. Damages were estimated to be in excess of $44,000. Fire destroyed the building but did not purge the faith. Services were temporarily held in the St. Joseph Church hall.

In April, 1928, five lots on the corner of Fifth Street and Kennedy Avenue were purchased from Alice Vogelsand, Otto Vogelsand, Catherine Connelly, Vincent Connelly and Mary Harrington for $20,500. Under the leadership of the Pastor, Fr. Roko, the church committee, the committee of good will and several parishioners, the present St. Hedwig complex was constructed at a cost of $48,230. The cornerstone of the new church with a capacity of 200 was laid on September 7, 1930, and officially dedicated December 21, 1930. The Rectory, adjacent to the church was erected in 1931 at a cost of $10,760.

Following the death of Fr. Szczygiel, Fr. Robert Pietrzynski was appointed administrator until June, 1988. In June, 1988, Fr. Dennis Colamarino, pastor of nearby Holy Name Church was named the new administrator and remained until the suppression of the parish in February, 1994.

In 1991, the Diocese of Pittsburgh began a revitalization process in order to examine and evaluate its operation and its adaptability to current and future needs and directions of the Catholic Church. It was a time to look at trends in population movement, attendance at worship services, activities, participation, school and community involvement and interactions. It was also a time to re-evaluate the roles and responsibilities of the clergy and other religious; being sensitive to the needs of the people and of the church. This self evaluation program called for the combining of church communities, reassigning personnel, combining programs - essentially for the economically redefining and streamlining the daily operations of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

In 1993, the revitalization project caught up with St. Hedwig Parish. In February of 1994, St. Hedwig Parish and Holy Name Parish were suppressed (Canonically closed) and a new parish community, Christ the Light of the World Parish was established. The Canonical establishment of Christ the Light of the World Parish was celebrated on February 13, 1994. It combined the congregations of both churches, keeping both churches open and operational.

Many of the Church communities of the Diocese of Pittsburgh met news of parish suppression with a negative, sometimes belligerent attitude, not to with the people of St. Hedwig. The congregation which consisted of about 200 families accepted the new formation with a sense of anticipation that must have paralleled that of their ancestors who received the original charter in 1895.

To celebrate the first 100 years, St. Hedwig planned several activities. A breakfast was held in May; an ethnic style polka party in July; and Founders Day, honoring parishioners 80 years and older, in September. On October 15, Bishop John Tobin will officiate a liturgy, closing the celebration with a reception and a dinner dance to follow.

Beginning Madonna del Castello Parish

The early immigrants gathered together because of the bands of a common language and similar customs. People preferred to worship among those of similar backgrounds. Thus the formation of ethnic parishes was born.

The Italian families who settled in Rankin and a few who lived in Swissvale, did so because it was near Carrick Furnace where they were employed. As the number of Italian families increased in the area, the Bishop of Pittsburgh sent Fr. Francis X. Beneventant to begin a mission church. He opened a mission in what had been a pool room, but soon acquired a building in Braddock. Fr. Beneventano moved the mission to Braddock and organized a parish named Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. The Rankin area continued as a mission of the new church.

However, by 1920, the number of Italian families continued to grow and move towards Swissvale and thus began the building of a parish.

The Fr. Vincent Giovannini was sent by most Rev. J.F. Regis Canevin, D.D., Bishop of Pittsburgh. Fr. Giovannini began his work by celebrating mass on Easter Sunday, April 4, 1920, in the McKinley Italian club hall in Rankin, PA. The original church committee had 13 members.

The struggle began and continued for eighteen months, with Fr. Giovannini in the cross fire between Rankin and Swissvale residents: should the church be built in Rankin or in Swissvale. Finally, Fr. Giovannini was able to "charm" and convince the committee to look for property in Swissvale.

Domenico and Teresa Perrone donated two lots on Duquesne Avenue. The committee accepted the donation and on July 16, 1921, Bishop Hugh C. Boyle approved the recommendation of the site of a new Italian parish. Professor E. Lisono was appointed architect and Domenic Cimino, of Cimino and Mazza, was the contractor.

Finances were a problem for Fr. Giovannini, since economic conditions were not the greatest and he knew how hard his people were working, therefore he decided the basement would serve as the church until the parish was financially stable. Eleven parishioners thought otherwise and went to First National Bank of Swissvale and secured a loan with their personal notes as guarantee.

The plans which had been submitted to the Bishop to erect a basement which would serve as a temporary church were now changed because of the involvement of those willing to sign a note guaranteeing funds. Complete plans for the church were adopted in March, 1922.

The parishioners began to suggest names and the committee

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agreed to Madonna Del Castello, Our Lady of the Castle. The cornerstone was laid on the first Sunday of Advent, December 3, 1922, by Bishop Boyle.

The church was dedicated by Msgr. Martin Ryan, representing the Bishop on August 5, 1923. This was not the end, but the beginning of a community developed in the preservation of the faith of Italian immigrants and their children in the Rankin-Swissvale area. Today a wider sense of community has evolved which includes all people in the surrounding area.

In March 1927 the house adjoining the church was purchased and used as a rectory, and in 1945 the rectory was expanded with the purchase of the adjoining house.

Fr. Vincent Giovannini was a true Pastor and Shepherd to his flock. He looked after their spiritual needs when they were pressed to keep body and soul together during the great depression; he taught them how to keep their faith strong. In an increasingly and indifferent society. Fr. Giovannini led the people of Madonna Del Castello from the founding of the church until he was called to his eternal reward on June 21, 1961.

August 10, 1961, the leadership of the parish passed to Fr. Wilbur A. Farina. It soon became evident, the church on Duquesne Avenue was incapable of meeting the needs of 700 families. In 1963, the parish purchased the old McKelvey school property at the corner of Braddock and Westmoreland. On November 26, 1964, a groundbreaking ceremony took place and by 1966, the first regularly scheduled masses were being held in the new church. Bishop Wright presided over the dedication ceremonies on August 21, 1966.

In May 1971, Fr. Wilbur Farina resigned because of poor health and Fr. Nicholas Datillo was appointed pastor. With a $250,000 debt, Fr. Datillo's motto became "liquidate in '78." He initiated the old street fair and motivated the parishioners. In July, 1981, Fr. Datillo was transferred to New Castle and Fr. Philip Donatelli was assigned as pastor.

Fr. Donatelli oversaw the addition of an elevator shaft to the church. The elevator was dedicated on December 15, 1984. The statue of the patron saint was repainted and placed in the back of the church - it is an exact replica of the original.

In 1991, Fr. Donatelli was transferred and on September 30, 1991, Msgr. Daniel DeNardo and Fr. Paul Bradley were appointed as Co-Administrators. Fr. Pierre Sodini was appointed Administrator from 1993 until 1994, when he was named Pastor of St. Michaels in Avella. On May 23, 1994, Fr. John Casella became Pastor of Madonna Del Castello and still holds this position today.

The parish is celebrating this anniversary with a mass and a banquet on October 1. Bishop Dattilo of Harrisburg will officiate.

The History of St. Cyprian Church

In 1920, the Polish people of lower North Side, Pittsburgh, requested Most Rev. Bishop J. Regis Canen to have a church of their own. Permission was granted on March 6, 1920. Fr. Anthony Pniak, Pastor of Guardian Angels Church in the West End, was assigned the responsibility of directing the affairs of the newly organized St. Cyprian Church.

Property of the Concordia Club at 204 Stockton Avenue was purchased and the first mass was offered on March 23, 1920. The generosity and hard work of the Polish people kept the church solvent despite the depression and World War II.

In 1964, Urban Renewal determined that St. Cyprian Church be demolished to make room for Allegheny Center. The last mass of the old St. Cyprian Church was said on August 15, 1964. When a new site for St. Cyprian Church was sought, the most logical choice was to merge with the mission church of Mary Immaculate, the Italian offspring of Regina Coeli Church, North Side.

In 1981 due to the closing of St. Mary's, North Side, another merger had to take place. The parish of Mary Immaculate-St. Cyprian, the German people of St. Mary's formed the ethnic parish of Our Lady Queen of Peace.

In May of 1993, with the major reorganization of parishes throughout the diocese, Our Lady Queen of Peace reached out once again. This time with the Irish from St. Peter Church, North Side. Our Lady Queen of Peace Church and St. Peter Church, two separate worship sites, had become one parish. The new parish bears the name of St. Peter. A mass is held the first Sunday of the month in Polish for the members of St. Cyprians at Our Lady Queen of Peace Worship Site of St. Peter Parish.

† † †
Recently deceased, Bishop William Connare, former Bishop of Greensburg, and Fr. Henry McAnulty, former President and Provost of Duquesne University, were members of the Catholic Historical Society. We will miss their support.

Gathered Fragments: Contributors
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Anne E. Crowley, PhD, St. Agatha
Edward Deenihan, St. Aloysius
Patti Rarick, Christ the Light of the World
Angela Escher, Madonna del Castello

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