



St. Walter Parish History

St. Walter Parish has a 66-year history of faithful, dedicated parishioners who have generously contributed their time, talents and financial support to build a vibrant Catholic Community of Faith on the northern boundary of the Diocese of Joliet. It has grown from a small rural Mission Church of about 50 families to a large suburban parish serving over 3,800 registered families. These thousands of parishioners, along with the many priests, sisters, brothers, deacons and seminarians who have served the people of St. Walter Parish through the years, have truly been a wonderful example of what it means to be Church, the Body of Christ.

According to the first Pastor, Father Joseph E. Wagner, in the early 1940's "a small group of Catholics in Roselle desired a Catholic Church and Parish here. Property was available and a used portable church building was promised. Before the building could be dismantled and moved, the Catholic Pastor who had promised it, died. The building was wrecked and the plans fell to the ground. It was not until early 1946 that the Holy Ghost gave the inspiration and provided the workers and the means" to begin the process of creating a new parish.

Our present parish history began as World War II ended, and the suburban areas experienced growth as people moved to the area seeking affordable housing. Farmland was subdivided and plotted into individual lots attracting new Catholic families to Roselle (which was originally a German Lutheran farming community). The Catholic families in the area traveled over gravel roads to St. Isidore Church in Cloverdale (now Bloomingdale) for Sunday Mass, Baptisms, Weddings and other parish functions.

Father John Ott, Pastor of St. Isidore, concurred with the Roselle members of his parish that they should begin the process of establishing their own parish in Roselle. With Father Ott's guidance a committee was formed to confer with the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Chicago, the Right Reverend Monsignor George Casey, in order to obtain permission to organize a new mission parish. The Archbishop of Chicago, His Eminence Samuel Cardinal Stritch, agreed to permit this if two very important conditions were met. The committee first had to "prove that there were enough Catholic families in the area to warrant a separate legal status as a Mission" and secondly, "that they were able to financially support it."

By going door to door in the spring of 1946 and taking a census of the Catholic families, the committee determined that both conditions could be met. The advice and financial aid of Mr. Nicholas Lies, who had helped organize St. Isidore Parish in 1924, was most helpful to the committee. After receiving Archdiocesan approval for establishing a Mission, they had to raise enough money to purchase property on which to build their church.

Father Ott, whose encouragement and help had been invaluable in getting the Mission Church started, felt that his advancing years would not allow him to assume any additional responsibilities. Therefore, in October 1946, the Catholic Mission of Roselle was attached to the newly organized Holy Ghost Parish of Wood Dale, and Father Joseph E. Wagner was appointed pastor of both.

Though the Catholic Mission of Roselle had purchased property on which to build, there was no place in which to celebrate Mass. So, according to Father Wagner, "In this emergency, Mr. and Mrs. Max Geiselhardt offered the use of their Annex Hall, on Irving Park Road and Prospect Street, in the center of Roselle. The first Mass ever said in the Town of Roselle was offered there on All Saints Day, November 1, 1946."

The Roselle Catholic families pledged \$20,000 for the building of the church, and plans were begun in January 1947 for a building that was to be completed in the fall of that year, but a number of problems caused construction to be delayed. Father Wagner explained these as "the serious illness of Mr. Jules Urbain, the architect, unexpected legal restrictions on the use of the property, rising costs and difficulty in obtaining building materials."

Parishioners sought the help of the Right Reverend Monsignor Walter Fasnacht, a member of the Archdiocesan Board of Consultors, which was responsible for overseeing the formation of new parishes. Monsignor Fasnacht, familiar with DuPage County, was able to provide assistance in working through the legal construction barriers. Because of his assistance, the church building was completed in March 1948. In appreciation of his untiring efforts, Father Wagner requested that the new Mission Church be dedicated to Monsignor Fasnacht's patron, St. Walter of Pontoise.

During the 18 months of planning and construction of the church, the children of the St. Walter Mission attended CCD classes and received the Sacraments of Initiation with the children of Holy Ghost Parish.

Father Wagner celebrated Mass every Sunday in the Annex Hall, visited the sick of the Mission area and oversaw the building of the first church at 140 West Pine Avenue.

Mass was celebrated for the first time in the newly constructed St. Walter Church on Easter Sunday; March 28, 1948. The church, seating 96 people, accommodated all the parishioners at the two Sunday Masses.

In order to assist Father Wagner, Monsignor Fasnacht encouraged Father Joseph A. Wagner (no relation to Father Joseph E. Wagner) to move from Chicago to reside at the Roselle Mission Church. He thought Father Joseph A. Wagner's German heritage and fluency in the German language would enable him to relate and communicate well with Roselle's German community.

Monsignor Fasnacht as the representative of the Archdiocese of Chicago formally dedicated the original St. Walter Mission Church on the Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1948. Four months after the Mission Church was dedicated, Pope Pius XII established the Diocese of Joliet on December 11, 1948. The Diocese of Joliet was created by acquiring Kendall County from the Diocese of Rockford, Ford and Iroquois Counties from the Diocese of Peoria, and DuPage, Grundy; Kankakee and Will Counties from the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Although the decree establishing the Joliet Diocese was issued in December of 1948, the diocese was not canonically erected until March 24, 1949. On that day, His Eminence Samuel Cardinal Stritch, the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago, installed The Most Reverend Martin D. McNamara as the first Bishop of the new See, the fifth diocese in the State of Illinois.

Then, on June 6, 1949, Bishop McNamara issued a decree canonically erecting the Parish of St. Walter as the first new parish in the newly established diocese, and the seventy-fifth parish in the seven county area of the Diocese of Joliet.

On June 9, 1949, Bishop McNamara appointed Father Joseph A. Wagner as the pastor of the new parish, freeing Father Joseph E. Wagner for his duties as Pastor of Holy Ghost Parish. Bishop McNamara also appointed Father Joseph A. Wagner (who was named a Very Reverend Monsignor in 1950) to also serve as Superintendent of Schools and as Director of the Diocesan Mission Office. Because additional space was needed for these Diocesan Offices, as well as for the Parish Offices and Rectory, the building on the southeast corner of Maple and Hill Streets was purchased.

In 1949, St. Walter Church was a small building (the east half of today's Ministry Center Building at 140 West Pine Avenue) standing in the middle of open fields. There were not many homes in the area and many of the roads were not paved. Father Wagner and the faithful parishioners worked hard to build a caring parish. Though still paying off the debt on their own church, in June 1950 St. Walter parishioners generously pledged \$10,000 toward the building of the Diocesan Cathedral of St. Raymond Nonnatus in Joliet.

Because it was difficult for the parish children to travel to Holy Ghost School in Wood Dale or St. Isidore School in Cloverdale, the parishioners determined they needed a Catholic School of their own, and they pledged \$34,000 to provide a school for the parish children.

On June 10, 1951, ground was broken and on July 10, 1951, a foundation was poured for a building 13 feet west of the church. A 16' x 28' frame building was purchased in Cloverdale and moved over the new foundation providing a parish hall in the basement area. The space between the buildings was roofed over and made into an office for the school Principal as well as a vestibule for the church. The new building (currently the Ministry Center Chapel and Preschool room) was divided into two classrooms. Two School Sisters of St. Francis traveled daily from their convent in Glen Ellyn to teach in the two-room school. Sister Mary Hilarion served as both Principal and teacher for grades four through eight. Sister Mary Lola taught grades one through three. Parents supported the staff by taking turns preparing lunch in the kitchen in the Lower Hall.

During construction of the school building, the parish children continued to attend Holy Ghost and St. Isidore Schools and CCD classes. They also received the Sacraments of Initiation with the children of these two parishes. Then, on October 12, 1952, Bishop McNamara officially dedicated St. Walter School after administering the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Parish.

Before school opened in September 1953, a convent was added on the north end of the school building to provide a residence for the four sisters now teaching at St. Walter School. In addition, the basement area was expanded to provide more space for the Parish Hall (today's Kindergarten classroom in the Ministry Center).

The rapid growth of the parish caused overcrowding at Sunday Masses, and increased school enrollment presented a need for more classroom space. So, in July 1955, the basement hall was refurbished to provide a larger worship space for 240 people. The vacated church area was then partitioned for classrooms for the growing student population.

The parish growth continued, and the six Masses that were offered in the Church each Sunday could not accommodate all the parishioners. Therefore, in 1956 a fund drive was begun for the building of a larger Church. Over 400 families of the parish accepted the challenge and pledged \$137,000 to build a larger church seating 650 people.

Ground was broken and construction was begun on the new church in 1956. On January 6, 1957, the cornerstone for the new church was set in place. In June, Father William Koch was assigned as Monsignor Wagner's associate, and the building on the northeast corner of Pine and Hill Streets was purchased for additional office and rectory space.

On the Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1957, the first Mass was celebrated in the new church. Bishop McNamara presided over the official dedication of the church when he administered the Sacrament of Confirmation on November 10, 1957. Meanwhile, in September, the vacated basement

church space was partitioned into three additional classrooms after the school enrollment had grown to 273 students.

In 1958, the diocese made the final purchase of the land comprising the current parish property, which had been acquired lot by lot as each one had become available since 1946.

The number of children in the parish school grew to 340, and in November 1958, a fund drive for the building of a larger school was begun. The cornerstone of the new school building at Maple and Hill Streets was laid in the spring of 1959. Father John Prelo replaced Father Koch as associate pastor in June of that year.

The two-story brick building was completed by September, and 433 children began the school year in the eight classrooms on the first floor. The second floor was used as a parish hall. Bishop McNamara formally dedicated the school building when he officiated at the Confirmation rite and the Graduation ceremony of the charter class on June 5, 1960.

Enrollment in St. Walter School continued to grow and it became necessary to add four more classrooms on the second floor in 1961. The other half of that floor was still used as a parish hall. Additional enrollment necessitated making four more classrooms in 1964. The original church area (today's Parish Staff offices) then became a parish hall.

In addition to providing for the ongoing parish needs, St. Walter parishioners cooperated in a Diocesan Building Fund Drive for a seminary and a new high school. St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Romeoville and Driscoll Catholic High School in Addison were built with the help of the generous people of St. Walter Parish.

In June 1964, Father Francis McDonald was assigned as the associate pastor to Monsignor Wagner, replacing Father Prelo. Then, in July, Monsignor Wagner was appointed pastor of St. Pius X Parish in Lombard, and Father William Smith was named pastor of St. Walter Parish.

In accord with the directives of the Second Vatican Council, extensive renovation was done in the church interior in 1965. The side altars were removed, and a new free-standing altar table was placed in front of the old altar and tabernacle, enabling the priest to celebrate Mass while facing the congregation. The velvet drapery behind the crucifix above the altar was replaced with walnut panels decorated with symbols depicting the Seven Sacraments. Similar panels were placed behind the statues of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. The pulpit was replaced with a lectern, and chairs were placed in the sanctuary for the Presider and the altar servers.

Bishop McNamara, the first Bishop of the Diocese of Joliet, died in 1966 after a long illness. Pope Paul VI named the Most Reverend Romeo R. Blanchette as his successor.

In June 1967, the parking lot was paved and fenced, lights were installed and landscaping was added to the parish property. The men of the Holy Name Society installed playground equipment for the younger children. Father John Rini replaced Father McDonald who was then appointed Vocation Director for the Diocese.

The convent was remodeled again in July 1967 for the School Sisters of St. Francis who resided at St. Walter. At the same time, the kitchen and Band Room adjacent to the Lower Hall were remodeled.

Father James Dougherty replaced Father Rini in June 1970. Father James Nunan and Father Patrick O'Sullivan ministered at St. Walter for only a short time. Father Joseph Arackal was also assigned to the parish in 1970, and Father Denis White was assigned in October 1971.

During these years Father Smith began the process of electing a St. Walter School Board and set up the initial St. Walter Parish Council. He also encouraged the formation of a Liturgy Committee to include the laity in a more active liturgical role in the parish.

In the fall of 1973, the Lower Hall was remodeled and named Wagner Hall in honor of the former Pastors. At the same time, a Library/Learning Resource Center was constructed on the second floor of the school above the School Office, and the Faculty room was enlarged. The school enrollment had grown to over 550 students and the CCD program was also steadily increasing.

On June 16, 1974, Monsignor Wagner returned to celebrate a special Mass in honor of the Silver Jubilee of St. Walter Parish. After the Mass, parishioners were invited to Wagner Hall for refreshments and an opportunity to browse through a display of parish history; including photographs and artifacts from the original church.

Along with the rest of the country, St. Walter Parish celebrated the Bicentennial Year of 1976 by participating in civic events. The St. Walter School Band, Scout Troops and students in colonial costumes marched in the Rose Parade with the beautifully decorated St. Walter float. Also in 1976, two new associate priests were assigned to the parish. Father Anthony Nugent replaced Father White in February; and Father Herb Essig took Father Dougherty's place in July. In 1979, Father Phillip Dedera was assigned to St. Walter Parish.

Bishop Blanchette resigned because of illness in January 1979. Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Kucera served as Apostolic Administrator until a new bishop could be appointed. The Most Reverend Joseph L. Imesch was named the third Bishop of the Joliet Diocese on June 30. His Eminence, John Cardinal Cody; Archbishop of Chicago, installed him as Bishop on August 30, 1979.

A new parish facility was erected on the west end of the present school building in 1979. It was named St. Francis Hall in recognition of the many years of service to the parish by the School Sisters of St. Francis. It was officially dedicated by Bishop Daniel Kucera on October 4, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

Also, in 1979, a stained glass effect was added to the church windows using a process created by artist Thomas Ullo. The colorful windows depicted the Scripture story of Pentecost, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the symbols of the Holy Eucharist and the Parish patron, St. Walter of Pontoise. The word Peace, written in twenty-six languages, was inscribed on the six entrance doors of the church. Other liturgical renovations were completed in the church at this time. The Altar Railing was removed and new carpeting was installed in the Sanctuary; The confessional boxes were removed and the former cry room was renovated and converted into a Reconciliation Room. A new Baptismal Font was placed in the Sanctuary.

In 1981, the former kitchen and band room adjacent to Wagner Hall were remodeled to provide space for the newest addition to the St. Walter School program, Kindergarten classes.

In June 1981, Father Roger Morin replaced Father Nugent. In September, Father Smith, after seventeen years of dedicated ministry as Pastor of St. Walter, was transferred and named Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Gibson City. Most Reverend Bishop Raymond J. Vonesh served as temporary administrator until Father Stanley A. Orlikiewicz was appointed Pastor in March 1982.

In July of 1981, Father Kenneth Zigmond, a Benedictine monk from St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle, left St. Walter after 24 years of service as weekend associate to become an associate at St. Joan of Arc Church. Since its founding as a Mission church in 1946 St. Walter Parish had been served by the monks from St. Procopius Abbey until Father Ken was transferred. And, since our patron, St. Walter of Pontoise, was a Benedictine monk, it gives us yet another reason to be grateful to the Benedictines for their faithful service to our parish. Through the years, St. Walter Parish has also been blessed with weekend assistance from Diocesan priests, two Franciscan Friars, as well as seven priests from other countries who resided here for a short time.

In June 1983, after thirty-one years of faithful service, the last of the School Sisters of St. Francis left St. Walter School. Sister Joan Gardner, C.S.J. took Sister Therese Thoenen's place as Principal. Sister Therese had served as Principal for seventeen years. In September, Father Robert Collagan took Father Essig's place as associate.

By 1983, the former Rectory-Office buildings were no longer adequate for the rapidly expanding parish. In an effort to provide office space, conference and counseling rooms, meeting space, as well as a residence for the priests, plans were made for the construction of a Parish House. Father Stan officiated at the groundbreaking following the Sts. Joachim and Anne Mass on July 26. Father John Kosmol was assigned here in August as Father Stan's associate.

From 1983-1985 Father Stan promoted the Diocesan program of parish renewal based on small Scripture sharing groups. The RENEW program emphasized the involvement of parishioners in Liturgy planning, Scripture Study and small group Faith sharing as a way of revitalizing and building community in parishes. In addition, he reorganized the Parish Pastoral Council and began the R.C.I.A. program at St.

Walter. Father Stan was also very involved in an Ecumenical Council with churches of other Faiths in the Roselle area.

In June 1984, Father Michael Ginter and Father David Hankus replaced Father Dederer and Father Collagan.

Father Francis McDonald, returning to full time Pastoral Ministry after eighteen years of teaching and administration in Catholic Education, was appointed Pastor in October 1985. Father Stan then became the Rector of the Cathedral of St. Raymond in Joliet. On November 24, 1985, Father McDonald was installed as the fifth Pastor of St. Walter Parish.

In June 1986, Mrs. Patricia Weis replaced Sister Joan as the St. Walter School Principal. Father Mark Jendryk replaced Father Ginter as associate priest in June 1988. Mrs. Mary Lloyd became the Principal of St. Walter School and Father Don McLaughlin replaced Father Hankus in June 1989.

The Early Childhood Program in the parish school expanded in 1989 to include four pre-school classes for three and four year old children, again increasing the school enrollment. (Two more pre-school classes were added in 1992.)

By 1989, it had become evident that the church building constructed in 1957 was no longer adequate for the rapidly expanding parish. In early 1990, Father McDonald and the Building Committee contacted architects requesting plans for renovating and expanding the church building to accommodate 1,000 people, providing for a larger gathering space and connecting the church to the school building. Father Thomas Paul brought his expertise in liturgical art and architecture, as well as his experience in church renovation, to St. Walter Parish when he replaced Father McLaughlin in June 1990.

A major building project was proposed in 1991. The "Stone Upon Stone" Building Fund Campaign was begun to raise money for the necessary expansion. The project was to be completed in three phases. Phase One would provide for the renovation and expansion of the Church. Phase Two would allow the parish to build a multipurpose/ gymnasium building. Phase Three would provide additional space for other parish and school needs to be constructed where St. Francis Hall is located.

On April 25, 1993, Father McDonald, Father Paul, Architect Randy Fielding, Roselle Mayor James Rak and parish representatives participated in the groundbreaking ceremony beginning the major renovation of St. Walter Church.

Father McDonald celebrated the last Mass in the old church building on May 2, 1993. It was a bittersweet experience for all those who participated. After Mass, the altar was carried out of the church by the Knights of Columbus, followed by Father McDonald carrying the Blessed Sacrament. They processed to the Ministry Center Chapel to place the Blessed Sacrament where daily Mass would then be celebrated. Until the new worship space was completed, the Sunday liturgies were celebrated in St. Francis Hall and at Lake Park High School's West Campus auditorium. During the seven months of

construction, weddings and funerals were celebrated in neighboring parishes, while baptisms were celebrated in St. Francis Hall.

As construction continued, the children's window on the east wall of the school adjoining the church was blessed on May 7. On June 16, the time capsule from the cornerstone of the 1957 Church was opened by Father McDonald, revealing memorable items from that time. Also on that day; the bell tower, a significant addition to the Hill Street entrance of the church, was raised into place. Father Robert Noessen was assigned to St. Walter Parish in June replacing Father Jendrysik.

After a ceremonial blessing on July 9, a beautiful Celtic cross was placed at the top of the bell tower. The Celtic cross from the top of the old church was relocated to the front of the Parish House. The St. Paul bell, named in honor of the church from which it came, was cast in St. Louis, Missouri in 1887. One of eighteen bells originally installed in St. Paul's Church In Jersey City; New Jersey; the bell was in use there until 1988. The 1,400-pound St. Paul bell was blessed and raised into place in the tower on September 2, 1993. Its resonant peal now calls the Parish Community of St. Walter to prayer.

A time capsule containing items of historical interest was sealed and placed behind the redesigned cornerstone in the church narthex on September 7. Father McDonald blessed the cornerstone in a special ceremony on November 21. At that time, Father Tom Paul noted ". . .the shape of the narthex ceiling led the architect to design the unusual shape of the cornerstone. To our amazement, the outline of the cornerstone was the same as that of the original boundary lines assigned to St. Walter Parish by the Diocese of Joliet in 1949."

Previously; on September 23, the children from St. Walter School had participated in the unveiling, dedication and blessing of the bronze statue of St. Walter in the center of the circular drive at the church entrance. The base of the statue is inscribed with Aaron's Priestly Blessing: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord's face radiate with joy because of you; the Lord look upon you with kindness and give you peace."

The newly renovated church of St. Walter was officially dedicated by Bishop Joseph Imesch during a special Liturgy on December 12, 1993. In a very moving ceremony, a beautiful vocal rendition of "Surely the Presence of the Lord is in This Place" preceded the blessing and dedication of the 1,000 seat worship space, which the ever-generous parishioners of St. Walter had made possible.

The quiet reverence of the Chapel of Reservation for the Blessed Sacrament, the beautiful simplicity of the carved wooden screen and Holy Family statues in the Narthex, the exquisitely carved Stations of the Cross and statuary in the Worship Space, the simple design of the Altar and Sanctuary furnishings, the subdued splendor of the stained glass windows, the symbolism of the flowing water in the granite Baptismal Font, the beautiful grand piano and magnificent pipe organ accompanying the prayerful singing of the faithful all give the parishioners an opportunity to appreciate the unique talents with which God has endowed His creatures by demonstrating the many ways these gifts can be used for His greater honor and glory.

A special dedication concert was given on February 6, 1994 to introduce the parishioners to the new pipe organ, donated by the Quirk Family; as a wonderful addition to the musical component of our Divine Worship. Father Peter Jarosz and Father John Guiney came to St. Walter Parish in June of 1994 replacing Father Paul and Father Noessen.

With the theme of "Cherish the Past; Celebrate the Present; Courage for the Future," the Fiftieth Anniversary of St. Walter Parish was celebrated throughout 1996, beginning with a parish mission in March, and concluding with a joyful Mass of Thanksgiving and a dinner dance in November. Throughout the year, we enjoyed a concert by the Niles Symphony Orchestra, special liturgies, a parish picnic, historical displays in the Narthex, as well as a large patchwork quilt showcasing Parish ministries and organizations. Mr. Michael Fiddick composed a song, "Guidance of His Hand," celebrating the theme of the anniversary; An anniversary book depicting the history of St. Walter Parish in narrative and pictures, commemorative "magic" mugs and decorative candles were available for purchase as memorabilia. On November 3, 1996, Bishop Imesch concelebrated the Fiftieth Anniversary Mass with Father McDonald, Father Guiney; Father Jarosz and Father Philip Horrigan as well as other priests who had served St. Walter parish in the past. It was a beautiful culmination of the reason for the celebration - "50 years of Serving God's People."

In 1996, plans were discussed for making improvements to the school and building a multi-purpose center as part of the "Courage for the Future" capital campaign, which once again called on the generosity of the people of St. Walter Parish. From 1997-1999 the parish received enough pledges to begin construction on the new multi-purpose center/gymnasium. Groundbreaking for this new project, a \$2 million, 12,800 square foot facility was on June 13, 1999.

In 1999, the Diocese of Joliet celebrated its Golden Jubilee. This Fiftieth Anniversary celebration culminated in a Mass of Thanksgiving concelebrated by Bishop Joseph Imesch, His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago, the Apostolic Delegate, and forty other bishops, archbishops and priests at the Cathedral of St. Raymond for the people of the Diocese. At the same time, Bishop Imesch celebrated the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of his ordination as a bishop and his Eighteenth Anniversary as Bishop of the Diocese of Joliet.

Two seasons of RENEW 2000 emphasizing the importance of the full, active and prayerful participation of the laity in the celebration of the Sunday liturgy were conducted during Lent and Advent in 1999. Father Doug Hauber was assigned to St. Walter Parish replacing Father Jarosz in June 1999.

On the Feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 2000, Bishop Joseph Imesch presided over the dedication of the new St. Walter Multipurpose Center. In addition to an athletic office, locker rooms and a fully equipped gymnasium, the building also features a raised stage with curtains, sound system and lighting. Father McDonald noted, "The long awaited facility will serve the parish's 35 organizations and ministries, its school of religion and its parish school." The formal dedication of the new building was followed by a magnificent St. Joseph Table prepared by grateful parishioners.

Father McDonald celebrated the Fortieth Anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood on May 28, 2000 with a Mass concelebrated by Bishop Imesch, Bishop Kucera and many of his brother priests. The entire Parish happily celebrated with him and with his family on this joyful occasion, asking God to continue to bless him and his pastoral ministry here at St. Walter.

After his ordination in June 2002, Father Dennis Spies was assigned to St. Walter Parish replacing Father Hauber and Father Guiney.

Bishop Imesch presided over the St. Walter School Fiftieth Anniversary Liturgy on October 12, 2002, fifty years to the day that the original school building was dedicated by Bishop McNamara. After Mass, the school held a reception in the multipurpose center where historical school memorabilia were displayed. Also on display were the items retrieved from the time capsule placed in the cornerstone of the school when it was constructed in 1959, including a list of donors, a ring, a medal, holy cards, photographs and a child's rosary.

June 2005 brought another change to our Parish. Father Charles Joseph returned to St. Walter from his home parish in India. He replaced Father Dennis Spies who assigned to St. Mary Immaculate Parish in Plainfield.

Building and renovation projects continued in 2004 with the renovation of St. Francis Hall, a new roof on the school, installation of air-conditioning and a fire sprinkler system along with new lighting and ceilings in the classrooms. The physical appearance of the parish buildings may change, but the spirit of community and shared faith keep the parishioners together to form even closer bonds of friendship.

Future plans are for St. Francis Hall to be torn down and replaced by two-story addition to the school, providing classrooms for kindergarten and pre-school as well as other space for parish offices. When the funds are available to construct this new building, it will be connected to the multi-purpose center. When this construction is completed, the Ministry Center building will be razed to allow for required parking spaces.

Since 1946, St. Walter children have had religious education classes conducted by dedicated teachers. Using the updated school building on Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays for classes, today's School of Religion program continues to provide an excellent religious education for over 800 students from pre-school through junior high. When the proposed addition to the school becomes a reality, more space can be provided for religious education classes.

The liturgical and sacramental life of the parish is sustained in daily Masses, weekend liturgies, monthly 24-hour Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, preparation programs for and opportunities to receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Reconciliation and Matrimony; Communal Sacramental Anointing of the Sick is offered during special liturgies and is provided by the priests to the sick, elderly and homebound at anytime.

The Christian mission of the parishioners continues through meals prepared for families in need and in donations of goods to the St. Vincent DePaul Society. Collecting food, clothing, household goods and money for many worthy causes, including missionaries and disaster victims, conducting blood drives, and providing meals and shelter for the homeless through the PADS program are some of the St. Walter Parish actions which reach out to those in need.

As part of a loving, caring Parish Family, St. Walter parishioners work to build a sense of community by providing opportunities for each person to serve others and to grow in faith, and, as the cornerstone reminds us, to welcome all who enter our parish church inviting them to share the love of our community.

If St. Walter Parish is to continue to be a Faith Community Cherishing its Past, Celebrating its Present and Showing its Courage for the Future, we will have to ask for sacrifices of Time, Talent and Treasure from you. With God's help and the cooperation of our parishioners we have accomplished much. We definitely need Courage to make God's Kingdom better known here. Please have the Courage to be a Part of the Body of Christ at St. Walter's now by our active participation.

Anticipating his retirement in June 2006, Father McDonald prudently provided a way for the parishioners and the new pastor to prepare to meet some of the challenges facing the parish in the coming years. He engaged Mr. Emile Fair of Catholic Development Services to conduct a yearlong program that would empower the parishioners to draw up a comprehensive plan which then could be implemented to provide solutions for the many challenges facing our parish.

After adopting the theme, "Continuing Our Mission: Planning the Future for St. Walter", parishioners, guided in the process by Mr. Fair, have been meeting monthly since June 2005. After a series of meetings during which people were invited to voice their opinions, concerns and positive ideas about the parish, seven areas of interest were highlighted by parishioners after the weekend masses.

Interested parishioners were then invited to be members of Parish Planning Teams addressing the seven areas of interest. They were asked to choose an area of particular concern to them, and to commit to five meetings over five months to consider perceived strengths, weaknesses, threats, challenges and solutions in each area.

A convocation involving the entire parish will be held in March 2006. At this time, every member of St. Walter Parish will be given an opportunity to offer any ideas, suggestions or solutions to any of the challenges which were identified by each of the seven Parish Planning Teams. Following the convocation, teams will work to formulate possible ways to implement the proposed solutions.

At that time, the completed "blueprint" for the future of St. Walter as envisioned by the parishioners, will be available for the new pastor. It is a labor of love by caring people hoping to be actively involved in "Continuing the Mission" and implementing the "Plan for the Future of St. Walter."

As it has through the years, St. Walter Parish continues to be a vibrant, active, and growing Faith Community dedicated people eager to share their love of God and neighbor with all who choose to be a part of a loving and caring Parish Family.