

HISTORY OF BLESSED KATERI PARISH AND OUR HOUSE OF GOD + HOME FOR US BUILDING CAMPAIGN

1860 – St. Denis Church is built in Beekmanville as a mission of St. Mary's in Wappingers Falls.

1899 – St. Denis becomes an independent parish, with Fr. John Columba McEvoy pastor in 1903.

1904 – A mission church is established near the railroad tracks in Hopewell Junction.

1950s – Still a mission of St. Denis Church, St. Columba grows much larger, with an all-purpose hall (now the gym) built for Sunday Masses in 1960. St. Denis-St. Columba School opens in 1965.

1989 - Msgr. Joseph Meehan builds 750-seat St. Columba Church, and a new wing at St. Denis.

1993 - St. Denis and St. Columba are separated into two parishes, with Fr. William Cosgrove as pastor of St. Denis, and Msgr. Dominick Lagonegro continuing as pastor of St. Columba. Msgr. Lagonegro, with the advice of the Archdiocese of New York, purchases ten acres of land on Route 82 in LaGrangeville (part of the old Wright Farm) for a mission church and future parish. He chooses as patron and namesake Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, Lily of the Mohawks.

1997 – Ground is broken for a church that will seat 315 for Mass, and also have a large basement.

1998 - The first Mass in the incomplete and unheated building takes place at Christmas.

1999 -The church is finished and begins Sunday use. The priests come from St. Columba for Mass. Cardinal O'Connor blesses it on August 6, 1999 – one of his last public acts before illness.

2001 – Four classrooms are created in the basement, and religious education classes begin. Bishop Lagonegro sees that rapid growth justifies the creation of an independent parish sooner than expected, and moves ahead in consultation with Cardinal Egan to make this happen.

2002 - Bishop Lagonegro leaves St. Columba and switches places with Msgr. Gerardo Colacicco, pastor of Sacred Heart, Newburgh. Msgr. William Belford, pastor of St. Catharine in Blauvelt, is appointed to Blessed Kateri, which becomes an independent parish on July 1. A house at 1810 Rt. 82 is purchased for \$278,000 as a temporary priest's residence and parish office. Even with many blessings from St. Columba Church, parish debt at birth includes loans to the Archdiocese for the original ten acres, the church building, and the parish house, totaling about one million dollars.

2003 – With Mrs. Mary Biasotti as Director of Religious Education, attendance grows from 294 in 2001 to 585 in 2003 (and to 721 in 2005). Adult and Youth Choirs flourish with Mrs. Nina Ricci as Director of Music. Fr. Nimal Mendis, CHS, chaplain to prisoners in local jails, moves into the rectory. An increased giving appeal is heard, and the Sunday collection goes up significantly. We begin negotiations to buy more land for future buildings. Because of strict zoning rules to preserve open space, at least 35 more acres are needed to add to the original ten.

2004 - Fr. Joseph O'Hare, SJ, former president of Fordham University, begins coming for Sunday Masses. A 7:30am Sunday Mass begins. In June, having to buy all 71 acres or none, we purchase the rest of the Wright Farm on our side of Rt. 82 for one million dollars. This includes significant wetlands, but gives us 81 acres - enough for a large church and possible other buildings, such as a gymnasium - and thus insures our future on this site.

2005 – A) We accelerate our research for a larger worship space. In January, with the guidance of Mr. David Maddox, director of the Archdiocesan Building Commission, Msgr. Belford invites eight architects to submit their design proposal, site suggestion, and cost estimates for two projects, only one of which could be built at this time: a church that will seat one thousand people, with a residence and office attached, and with renovation of the existing church (upper floor) into classrooms; and, a gymnasium to seat 600 for Mass, with eight classrooms for religious education.

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B) The architects' responses show that the average estimate for the church project is about eight million dollars; the gym and classrooms would cost five and a half million dollars. In May, Msgr. Belford shares that information with the parishioners by mail and asks for a vote on what we should do. 245 out of 259 respondents vote for a church. Monsignor then invites everyone at Masses on June 5 and 12 to view all seven designs, tell him which they prefer, and why. The 133 responses show an overwhelming preference for the submission of architect Donald Swartz. He had been chosen by Msgr. Lagonegro to design our present building, and his work is highly regarded by the Archdiocese, so awarding him the commission for our new church is a very popular choice.

C) Simultaneously, our Parish Council and Finance Council were considering how we could afford to pay such a huge construction bill. After interviewing potential fundraising advisers, during the winter we selected Deacon Richard Kovacs and the Archdiocesan Office of Parish Fundraising. They have given us excellent service, at no cost to us, as part of the first phase of the 2008 Archdiocesan Bicentennial Fundraising Campaign. During this summer they conducted on-site feasibility interviews, leading to various parts of a major fundraising campaign that has received more than \$1.1 million dollars in pledges from our first 200 donors. We hope and trust that many more parishioners will decide on their contribution and make their intentions known in the near future as we strive to reach our campaign goal of two million dollars.

D) But what, you might say, is two million dollars, compared to a total estimated cost – for church, parish house, wider roads, triple the parking, renovation of the present church into classrooms, architect fees, etc. – of twelve million dollars? As Msgr. Belford explained in his bulletin letter of November 6, following a meeting with Cardinal Egan to show him our plans and get his blessing, we are being given tremendous help from our Cardinal. One third of the construction budget - \$4,000,000 - will be an outright grant from the Archdiocese, to help us get established on a larger scale to meet future needs. A second part will be a loan of \$4,000,000 from the Archdiocese. This is what our building campaign will start to repay. Everything pledged by us now and by new members who join us in the next few years will go to pay off this loan. Finally, a loan for \$4,000,000 is being given by the Archdiocese as a long term obligation. We will not start paying off that loan for years to come. And, happily, no interest will accrue in the meantime.

2006 – In the immediate future, we will focus on construction plans, continue to seek necessary approvals from local government planning boards, and examine bids for work on the site, the church, and the parish house. A Mass and groundbreaking will be scheduled in the spring. Site work and church construction should begin in the summer, and can be expected to take about 18 months to complete. New roads and additional parking spaces will be a priority for the fall.

2007 – By the end of the year, if things have gone well, we may begin Masses in our new church, and move into the new parish house. The present residence/office at 1810 Rt. 82 will be sold.

2008 – Religious education classes, with additional sessions or days, will have to continue in our present four rooms for two more years: September 2006 to May 2007, and September 2007 to May 2008. It would not be safe to renovate the upper church while children go to classes below, so building new classrooms will begin in May 2008, and be completed for September of that year.

If you would like to read more about this subject, you can go to our parish website www.blessedkateriparish.com and click on the link called Parish Expansion. That section, the weekly bulletin on-line, and the bulletin archive will help you catch up on information and stay current on developments.