

ST. MARY'S ASSUMPTION (GERMAN) CATHOLIC CHURCH "A BRIEF HISTORY"

The founding of Saint Mary's Assumption Church preceded the establishment of Pittston as a City by 31 years. The congregation was organized on October 1, 1863, six weeks before President Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous Gettysburg Address during the height of the American Civil War. The parish was founded to serve the spiritual needs of a growing German population in the area. Between 1845 and 1885, scores of families left their native Germany to escape the harsh military government. These early immigrants found employment in the Anthracite coal fields of Northeastern Pennsylvania and became a vital and contributing part of the community.

During these early years, without a Church of their own, many early German families attended Church as they could. At times, a missionary priest from Philadelphia or Honesdale would come to Pittston to serve their spiritual needs. Some attended Saint Mary's Church, the first Catholic Church in Pittston, which was erected on Chapel Street in the Junction (North) section of Pittston in 1851. During these early years, Father Peter Conrad Nagel, a German priest and fellow immigrant, was sent by Bishop John Neumann, S.S.S.R., Bishop of Philadelphia, (Canonized a Saint in June 1977), to Shepherd the German Catholics in this region. Father Nagel visited Pittston a few times each month and celebrated Mass and administered the Sacraments in private homes of the growing German community.

Following the founding of the Congregation on October 1, 1863, plans for the building of a church were advanced. The first Church was built on land purchased from the Pennsylvania Coal Company of the lower north side of William Street, (the former site of Saint John the Baptist (Slovak) Catholic Church). On September 4, 1864, the cornerstone was laid and Father Peter Nagel preached the dedicatory address. The first name of the Church was: "The Roman Catholic Saint Peter's Church," named in honor of their beloved missionary priest, Fr. Peter Nagel. It was later changed to Saint Mary's Assumption Church.

It is interesting to note that the first group of officers elected to take charge of parish rules stated "that every member of the church will have to speak and understand the German language, otherwise they cannot belong to the parish." They further stipulated that "For our benefit, we are putting money in this church and all the things that belong to it, so that we can help our members as well as possible, when they are in need. We resolve that this shall ever be, now, and in all the years and centuries to come!" There could be no more fitting words to stamp the resolution of these dedicated men who knew they built for the future.

The beginnings of a Catholic School were begun in 1868 and located in the Church Sacristy. The first teacher was Henry Baumeister. The Diocese of Scranton was founded on March 3, 1868 with Most Rev. William O'Hara, D.D. as the Founding Bishop.

The first Resident Pastor was Rev. Peter C. Christ. He was appointed by Bishop O'Hara on December 1, 1883. During his brief tenure, the land for the parish cemetery in Hughestown was purchased. Although his tenure was also very brief, it was during this time that Saint Mary's Assumption School was formally established and the first Convent for the Sisters of

Christian Charity was built. The parish was served from its earliest days by Sisters who traveled to Pittston each week to teach the children. The first Sister of Christian Charity, who arrived on May 1, 1877, was Sister Henrica Bickman, S.C.C. She would travel each day by train from Wilkes-Barre with Sister Natalie Termier, S.C.C. to teach the children in the parish. This arrangement continued until January 1885, when the first Convent, located on Carroll Street was purchased and three nuns took up residence. In January, 1885, Saint Mary's Assumption School was officially opened with an enrollment of 70 students. The need for a new school was recognized and ground was broken in October, 1890, at the corner of Church and Sand Streets. The wooden frame building was completed and the first classes were held in September, 1891.

The current Church was built on the Corner of Church & Carroll Streets in 1893. Father William Brehl broke ground and the new structure was dedicated on January 1, 1894. The building adjoining the Church was built as the Rectory in the same year. It now serves as a Kindergarten Center for the School with rooms for remedial instruction and a teacher's lounge. The new Convent was built in 1910 and still serves as a residence for two Sisters.

Plans for a new school building were advanced under the direction of Father George T. Schmidt. Ground was broken on March 26, 1924 and On February 22, 1925, the new three story brick building was dedicated. It has been remodeled and updated several times since and now serves as an elementary school for the Holy Redeemer School System of the Diocese of Scranton.

In 1934, Father Henry A. Diehl instituted the Miraculous Medal Novena. This devotion grew in popularity, and at one time twelve separate novena services were conducted on Mondays to meet the spiritual needs of those attending from throughout the area. This devotion continues to the present day. His devotion to the Blessed Mother was so great, that during World War II, Fr. Diehl always saw to it that each boy departing from the parish was equipped with a rosary packet. He commended the boys of the parish to her keeping and he always credited her with the fact that only one parishioner, William Smith, was killed in the conflict. Father Diehl served the parish for 32 years.

Father Gerald J. Bischof was appointed pastor on May 11, 1961. It was during his tenure that the parish buildings and properties were restored and the Centennial (1863-1963) was held. Many other priests have served St. Mary's Assumption Church as Pastors, Administrators, or Assistant Pastors.

On May 19, 1986, due to a shortage of priestly vocations and a decrease in the population of Pittston, Bishop James C. Timlin, D.D., Bishop of Scranton, merged Saint Mary's Assumption Church with Saint Mary, Help of Christians Church, North Pittston. Father William Blake served briefly as Pastor from 1986-1988. During his Pastorate, the interior of the Church was renovated, new pews installed and the 125th Anniversary of the founding of the Parish was celebrated. Father William Karle succeeded him and also served for a brief tenure, 1988-1990. He was succeeded by Father Richard J. Polmounter who served from July, 1990 through November, 2006.

Father Polmounter oversaw the renovation and restoration of all the parish buildings. During his tenure, the parish debt was paid off through a Capital Fund Drive. The 100th Anniversary of the dedication of the current church building was celebrated in November, 1993 and included the burning of all bank notes.

Father Louis Kaminski served from November 2006 through June, 2007.

In June of 2007 Blessed Sacrament, Hughestown, St. Mary's Assumption and St. Mary, Help of Christians, Pittston, were linked. Father Thomas J. Maloney was appointed pastor of all three parishes. The three parishes began to come together in the Parish Community of Blessed Sacrament † St. Mary's.

In December, 2007, a diocesan parish reconfiguration process, "Called to Holiness and Mission: Pastoral Planning in the Diocese of Scranton", was announced. Since that time Core Teams from each parish, in conjunction with the Pittston Area Cluster Team, spent much time in prayer, study and dialogue regarding the presence of the Church in the area. A recommendation was sent to the Diocesan Planning Commission in May, 2008.

The final decision for parishes in the diocese was announced by Bishop Martino on January 31, 2008. The decision regarding our parishes stated that *Blessed Sacrament Parish, Hughestown, St. Mary's Assumption Parish, Pittston, and St. Mary, Help of Christian Parish, Pittston would all consolidate into a new parish at the St. Mary, Help of Christians' site. The church buildings of Blessed Sacrament and St. Mary's Assumption will close. Called to Holiness and Mission*

As we approached the close of St. Mary's Assumption parish and church building, an agreement was entered into with the Holy Redeemer School System to allow St. Mary's Assumption School to use the church building as a chapel for the school.

On Sunday, November 7, 2010, at 2:00 p.m., a closing liturgy is being celebrated at St. Mary's Assumption. Following the liturgy and the closing of the church, the Blessed Sacrament will be taken to the site of our new parish, ***Our Lady of the Eucharist***, at the church of St. Mary, Help of Christians. Benediction will be celebrated there, followed by a reception in the church hall.

The new parish, ***Our Lady of the Eucharist*** will open on the First Sunday of Advent, November 28, 2010.

Our Lady of the Eucharist maintains the roots and traditions of all three parishes as we come together. The Eucharist is the center of our life as a Catholic Church. It has been the center of the life of our parishes. The name "Blessed Sacrament" holds a special meaning for all of us as we consolidate. Our Blessed Mother has also been a very important figure in the community life of the parishes, especially under the names "St. Mary's Assumption" and "St. Mary, Help of Christians."

Because the Eucharist and Our Blessed Mother are central elements of our faith life, we celebrate the newly consolidated parish of ***Our Lady of the Eucharist***.