

THE FRIENDS OF OLD ST. THOMAS at Ivy Mills

Volume 8, No. 1

Summer, 2001

NEWSLETTER

New Approaches

The Friends of Old Saint Thomas has reorganized its schedule of activities. Replacing the committee structure, three parallel tracks will direct efforts more efficiently, and will focus on immediate needs. The three tracks are: Foundation/Network, Old Church, and Campus. The goal is to keep better track of essential tasks. Desirable, but less fundamental activities and programs will be set aside for the time being. The new approaches change nothing about the group's primary responsibilities, but allow us a refreshing new way to think about those responsibilities. They also give newcomers a better overview of what we do.

Founded in late 1990, the Friends of Old Saint Thomas has established a base on which to build toward its vision of a parish community that values its past in order to foster parish spiritual growth and participation, and to broaden awareness of its history to the wider community.

After a decade, the group has raised about \$45,000, and spent about half that amount in maintaining the parish's old church and historic campus. FOST has also raised awareness of the uniqueness of St. Thomas' historical experience as the first Catholic parish in William Penn's colony, through classes, lectures, exhibits, an awards program, and other activities that benefited the parish. Hundreds of persons, including parishioners, members of the community at large, and foundations, have enthusiastically supported these efforts, and thousands have enjoyed the results.

The past eighteen months, however, have been the most taxing by far because of roadblocks and difficulties with which the good Lord chose to challenge us. Among those are the loss of the icehouse without due process, and the realization that there are those who (in all good conscience, to be sure) reject out of hand the historical element in spiritual and parish life and thus reject the values and projects for which FOST has been working so diligently. It has been dispiriting in the extreme.

The best response now, however, is to rekindle our efforts, with renewed dedication to the notion with which we began: members of this parish are responsible for historic preservation and programming which spiritually and culturally benefits the parish itself, and contributes as well to the local community and the archdiocese; and because of St. Thomas's unique place in the history of religious freedom, to the nation.

Your help, either personal or financial, is needed. Please do consider it to help assure that this special place will survive to serve future generations.

Our Catholic Heritage

On March 7, 2001, Cardinal Bevilacqua unveiled plans for a new Archdiocesan Catholic Heritage Center in Philadelphia. The location is not far from Independence Hall and adjacent to Old St. Joseph's Church. The project follows Pope John Paul II's repeated challenge to dioceses to preserve and promote their cultural heritage. It is interesting to note that The Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, DC

has stated one of their objectives is to promote how faith impacts on culture and culture on faith.

When speaking about the Philadelphia Catholic Heritage Center, Cardinal Bevilacqua stated, "we want visitors to experience Catholicism from the 1700's to the present, to understand the changes that have shaped the church and its people. We want to display artifacts from the archdiocesan parishes and sacred treasures from some of our parishes...to tell their stories and to preserve their legacies. We want students and adults alike to learn more about their faith and the faithful people who came before them." Another goal of the center is to inspire Catholic youth with their legacy, showing examples of the sacrifices and faith of past generations.

In the early 1700's there were few Catholics in this area even though tolerance for religious freedom existed because of William Penn's 'Holy Experiment'. It was unlawful for Catholics to hold religious services in a church, but they were permitted to convene in private houses. A handful of Catholics gathered together for Mass in the Willcox home, thus establishing "The Concord" or "Ivy Mills" mission. The official date of the founding of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish antedates 1729.

Without the welcoming homestead at Ivy Mills, 18th century Jesuit Missionaries would have had much different experiences in William Penn's colony. Without Ivy Mills, Philadelphia seminarians and priests would have been without the sheltering haven so needed during the anti-Catholic period in 1840's Philadelphia.

We agree with Pope John Paul, II and Cardinal Bevilacqua that it is essential to learn more about our faith and the faithful people who came before us and to preserve their legacies because for a society to be whole, it needs to know its history.

Seminarians Visit Ivy Mills Again

Literally walking in the footsteps of their 19th century predecessors, seven seminarians from St. Charles Seminary attended Mass celebrated by Fr. Michael McNally, at St. Mary's Chapel in the Willcox Homestead in March. Along with local friends and visitors, the seminarians found this 'field trip' to be a unique, moving experience. Fr. McNally teaches Church History at the Seminary.

Historical Marker

On September 4, 2001 a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Historical Marker will be dedicated at 109 Ivy Mills Road to commemorate the Willcox Ivy Mills Paper Mill and the Catholic mission there, founded in the 1720's.

The Friends continue their effort to obtain a historical marker for the old church.

Recent Renovations

This past winter the dry lay wall in front of the church, damaged during school construction, was repaired. The rectory porch was rebuilt by Amish carpenters under the direction of Mark Willcox, and with the help of John Dunay and Trish Glessner. Bids are expected soon for gutters, siding repairs and painting. Finishing the horse shed (adding a gutter, trimming the tree overhang, and painting) is scheduled for this summer.

The Friends can always use volunteers to help with the maintenance and upkeep of the buildings and grounds in the historic district. (See form below.)

2001 Spirit Award Winner

Congratulations to Zachary B. Leahan, this year's recipient of the FOST Spirit Award. Zachary is an 8th grade student at Fugett Middle School. He has been an assistant teacher in the Little Church Sunday School program for the past three years. Over the past six years Zachary has helped with painting and set-up of the Country Fair. He has been an altar server for three years.

Zachary was presented with the Spirit Award and a \$100 savings bond on July 15th after the 12:00 Mass. His name has been added to the plaque which hangs in the Social Hall.

The Friends of Old Saint Thomas wishes to acknowledge and thank the following members and donors for their financial support during the calendar year from May, 2000 through April, 2110.

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Mr. & Mrs. Charles Worrall
Mr. Christopher Young

The Friends of Old St. Thomas meet on the third Thursday of the month at 7:30 p.m. in the Parish Center. All are welcome to attend our meetings. By joining the Friends you will help preserve our history for future generations.

The Friends of Old St. Thomas at Ivy Mills Membership

Name.....

Address.....City.....State.....Zip.....

Family: \$10.00 yearly _____ Individual: \$5.00 yearly _____ Donation: \$ _____

() Yes. I am interested in volunteering. Please contact me. Phone # _____

Please mail completed form and your check to **The Friends of Old St. Thomas, PO Box 19, Chester Heights, PA 19017.**

THE FRIENDS OF OLD SAINT THOMAS

at Ivy Mills

Volume 8, No. 2

Fall, 2001

NEWSLETTER

Work on the Old Buildings

Electrical service upgrade to the old church and to the rectory has begun. Directed by Phil Pociel, work is underway to bring a 3-phase, 200 amp line to the old buildings, a much needed improvement.

Pest inspection in the old church has taken place, with a clean bill of health regarding termites or other destructive critters. Mice, on the other hand, continue to visit. Appropriate steps are being taken!

The front two rooms of the old rectory are undergoing restoration. Mark Willcox is leading the effort to restore the rooms to their original configuration, removing the paneling and built-in desk and closets.

Plumbing repairs in the rectory rest room are planned for sometime in the next several months.



The Spiritual Dimension

The old church affords all parishioners and visitors a peaceful haven from the daily maelstrom. Stop in during a busy day, and spend some tranquil time in prayer. The old church is open for you.

Some Questions & Answers

Dear Ms. Askme:

I've heard that the bell in the steeple of the old church is just like the Liberty Bell. Is that true?

Puzzled in Penns Grant

Dear Puzzled:

Well, yes and no. It is about the size of the Liberty Bell. It is not cracked, and there's no inscription

tion it was ever removed from its perch about 20 feet above the choir loft. It has a full, mellow sound, and is rung occasionally for special events. It bears the date April 8, 1860, just before the Civil War. Along with the manufacturer, church and pastor's names, "Gloria in excelsis Deo" is inscribed on the bell.

Dear Ms Askme:

Why is this parish called St. Thomas at Ivy Mills? And I've always wanted to know why a bunch of Catholics would decide to live in the backwoods of a Quaker colony in North America and expect to amount to anything. How did that happen?

Sleepless on Smithbridge

Dear Sleepless:

Because they had a friend in Pennsylvania! Yes, in the 1680s William Penn set up religious freedom right off the bat in his resource-rich colony, so Catholics could feel right at home with their neighbors. That wasn't so in England or even in NEW England! In about 1729 English Catholic Thomas Willcox set up his very successful paper mill (just down the hill from the old church), and English Jesuits regularly visited Willcox's Ivy Mills home on their way to Philadelphia, hence the start of St. Thomas parish.

It's said that the ivy Willcox planted by his mill came from his home town of Devon, Wiltshire. There was a US Post Office "Ivy Mills" in the mill office from 1822 possibly until the mill ceased operating in the 1860's. At some point, the post office was moved to a site on Baltimore Pike, then closed altogether in 1911. But the mill office, and the ivy, are still there.

See the new State Historical Marker at Polecat & Ivy Mills Roads.

Dear Ms. Askme:

I just love the history of Saint Thomas at Ivy Mills, but I don't know much about it. How can I learn?

Feeling Out of It in the Neighborhood

Dear Neighbor:

Join the Friends of Old Saint Thomas (FOST)! Be an active member! It's just the group for you, because there are so many ways they connect with the parish's past, you can't help but soak it in. Right now is a good time to join & help, because they're planning the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the cornerstone laying of the old church building, carried out by none other than Saint John Neumann himself! Don't delay. Call today!

Join Now! Big Things Afoot!

There is lots to do to keep old Saint Thomas going! The Friends of Old Saint Thomas is looking for a few good folks to help out, especially now.

Life is going to get even more interesting around St. Thomas as the 150th anniversary of the old church building approaches in late summer.

The buildings of the historic campus will be spruced up as much as possible. Some special events (not yet firmed up) will take place. Much has already been done, much is in progress.

We need help in a number of areas:

⇒ **Some work is simple, but labor intensive:** keeping the old church clean and in repair, moving the stones behind the horse shed, gutting & cleaning up the old rectory, better grounds maintenance, moving old barn wood.

⇒ **Other restoration/maintenance work calls for more skills:** masonry, plastering, painting, & plumbing/electric, space planning & interior design.

⇒ **On-going work also includes the "paper" end of things:** research, records management, fund-raising, exhibits, program planning and management (for the celebration and beyond), school programs, tours (both on-site and "road trips"), writing. Some topics are quite specialized but extremely interesting – church bells and stained glass, for example.

If you can give even a little time to old Saint Thomas, please call or send in the form below. Your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and everyone who comes here will thank you for years to come. And your fellow parishioners will thank you right now.

But Wait, There's More!

If you are or become deeply interested in the work of the Friends of Old Saint Thomas, you should know that there are innumerable workshops and seminars in all of the topics listed (and others) available to FOST through our local, regional, and state-wide organizational memberships. You could benefit both yourself and your parish by attending them.

The Friends of Old Saint Thomas at Ivy Mills

Box 19 Chester Heights, PA 19017

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

I would like to Help with [please choose from above listings or indicate other interest]

Donate funds \$ _____

Please return this form to the address above. If you have questions, please call Trish Glessner at 610 459-3151 or Marianne Squyres at 610 459-8392.

Thank you very much for your interest.