

THE FRIENDS OF OLD ST. THOMAS at Ivy Mills

Volume 10, No. 1

Spring 2003

NEWSLETTER

"History, Faith and Community"

(excerpts from a lecture given by Claire Valente in honor of the 150th anniversary of Old St. Thomas Church.)

History is important for the Catholic faith because Christ came into the world as a historical figure in continuation of God's direction of the Chosen People. This shapes the Catholic world view: by doing so He not only revealed Himself and provided a model for human life but sanctified human existence, filled human history with inestimable value.

History plays a special role in Catholicism, which relies not only on the Bible but on the life of the Spirit-guided Church since then in formulating dogma and doctrine. As Cardinal Newman argued in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, it is in the Catholic Church that the historical Church of Christ and the Apostles subsists most fully and continuity of doctrine persists. The abandonment of history is in effect an abandoning of Catholicism, while "to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant."

History has played a key role in the formation and nurturing of Catholic communities of worship, beginning with the use of the catacombs, burial places of martyrs, as sites of worship. A renewed sense of history's potential in this regard is especially critical today, because of the need to nurture the faith of younger Catholics who lack the long-standing devotional practices, religious stories and objects, and life experiences of older Catholics.

History gives us roots. As the parable of the sower (Matt: 13) reveals, many things are necessary for Christians to bear fruit, including a willing ear, an understanding heart, and the fortitude to put faith into practice. But at the base is good ground, deepness of earth, roots; these allow faith to be more than just superficial sentiment and to persevere in the face of tribulation. That ground, that deepness of earth, those roots, are the history and tradition of the body of Christ on earth, the Church. Without a knowledge and understanding of the history of Christianity, without the models and answers provided by saints, popes, doctors of the Church, and generations of the faithful, it is all too easy for faith, however initially enthusiastic, to wither away at the first sign of trouble, be it peer pressure or rationalism, or to be choked by the thorns of materialism.

The perseverance of the Friends of Old St. Thomas in honoring the past and in celebrating the long roots of Catholicism in Pennsylvania as a means of building parish and local community is a model for how Catholics, especially American Catholics, should be dialoguing with history. Their work in evangelization is to bring today's Catholics to an appreciation not just of the physical locality but of the spiritual community that has been here for some 275 years.

Our Catholic Heritage

The spiritual community of the parish here has much to celebrate. St. Thomas the Apostle Parish can be rightfully credited as being the cradle of Catholicism in the Archdiocese

of Philadelphia. Although it was likely Mass was celebrated at Ivy Mills earlier, 1729 is the official date for the founding of the parish, since this was the first time it could be determined with certainty that Father Joseph Greateon, S.J. offered Mass for the Ivy Mills congregation.

We are fortunate to have many original artifacts, including religious articles that were used when liturgical services were conducted in the Willcox homestead. The 1852 church is the oldest original Catholic Church in continuous use in Delaware County, and the outbuildings located in the historic complex have been described by preservation experts as a "unique Victorian complex."

William Penn's experiment in religious toleration was implemented in this very area. The history of the parish mirrors in many ways the changes that took place through the centuries in the Commonwealth. Initially, Irish immigrants settled in this locality to work in the mills. In the ensuing years, Italian stoneworkers and many others emigrated here and were welcomed into the St. Thomas parish community. Through the hard work and dedication of our early parishioners, the 1852 church was constructed, a legacy that reminds us how important it was for the congregation to have a proper edifice for worship and one that would accommodate the growing Catholic presence in this area.

Spreading the Word

All FOST activities aim to fulfill our mission "to promote and perpetuate parish history." Some samples of recent activity:

FOST has joined with Concord Township Historical Society to plan summertime historic site tours. Guides will be on hand at each of ten or more sites, including Old Saint Thomas. Tours are scheduled for the fourth Sundays in June, July and August. Watch for more information in the Bulletin and in the local press.

Over 100 fourth-graders from two eastern Delaware County Catholic schools visited Old Saint Thomas this spring. Individual students often visit during Delaware County "Passport to History" tours.

On March 30 the Villanova Singers took their place in parish history by performing selections of church music, including a piece newly composed in honor of the 150th celebration. The last time such a concert took place in the old church was in 1939, when the von Trapp family performed, standing in the choir loft.

On April 27, the Friends sponsored a tour in conjunction with the 150th anniversary celebration, "Three Miles, Three Faiths: Founding Sites of Religious Toleration in Concord". Along with other historical buildings, three significant houses of worship were included: Concord Friends Meeting, St. John's Episcopal Church and St. Thomas the Apostle at Ivy Mills. The ecumenical spirit that emerged centuries ago continues today.

Guest speakers for the old church 150th celebration lectures, William C. Kashatus, Rev. Joseph McNally, and

Claire Valente all validated the importance of understanding and promoting the history of Ivy Mills and Old Saint Thomas.

The Delaware County Historical Society has included a picture of the 1852 Church on their recently released poster depicting historical sites in the county.

**The Friends of Old Saint Thomas
at Ivy Mills
PO Box 19, Chester Heights, PA 19017**

MEMBERSHIP/DONATION FORM

Service Projects

FOST deeply appreciates the commitment and participation of our parish youth through service projects planned and conducted throughout the historic area. Prospective Eagle Scout, Anthony Lizza, recently organized and conducted a major vegetation cleaning of an area adjacent to St. Thomas Cemetery. A similar project is being planned by another prospective Eagle Scout for later this spring, A third scout is working on the monumental task of re-surveying the oldest sections of St. Thomas Cemetery and will draw up an updated plot plan for the parish. This will greatly facilitate visitors in locating gravesites. Aside from Scout projects, FOST and the parish have been the beneficiaries of other service requirements performed by parish youth. Please keep the work of the Friends in mind for any future service requirements. We can always use help!

Ceramic Church Replica

Originally, the ceramic replicas of the 1852 church were to be shipped in early 2003. The Friends were notified that due to unforeseen circumstances delivery would be delayed until June 2003. We are very sorry for the inconvenience.

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Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone # _____ E-Mail _____

New Member Renewal

Yearly Membership

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

Please mail completed form and your check to the address above.

All are invited to FOST meetings held in the old rectory on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:00 pm.

FOST wishes to acknowledge and thank the following donors for their financial support from May, 2002 through April, 2003.

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THE FRIENDS OF OLD ST. THOMAS
at Ivy Mills

Volume 10, No. 2

Fall, 2003

NEWSLETTER



Stress Solution

For many the one word that describes today's life style is "stressed". Are you tired of the rat race? Do you feel there is no quiet time for you? Would you like a few minutes to sit and meditate or pray uninterrupted? There is a solution! Join the ever-increasing number of parishioners and non-parishioners who find solitude in the 1852 church. Some visitors arrive every day, same time...same pew. Others stop by for a few minutes before or after work, and many commit to weekly adoration.

A recent visitor said, "It's like stepping back to a more peaceful time when I enter this church; I always feel so close to God here that for a while I forget my worries."

For 150 years the church has been a meaningful presence in our community, welcoming everyone who seeks the Lord's help in dealing with their problems and concerns. The invitation is extended, the door is open and God is waiting for you. Don't disappoint Him.

We Know the Enemy

Moisture! It is a serious problem in the 1852 church. When the church was built this was hardly a concern; however, over the years it has taken a toll on the interior of the building. Air conditioning is a remedy, but an expenditure The Friends cannot afford at this time. Experts have informed us the best method of controlling the problem is to **make sure windows are not open on rainy or humid days**, instead fans should be turned on for air circulation. With the onset of colder weather the problem is not as severe since the heat is on and windows remain shut.

We appreciate your cooperation. Complying with this request will help alleviate the debilitating deterioration caused by high humidity.

We might add that the condition of the stained glass windows warrants extreme care and caution when they are being opened and closed.

Family Day and FOST

Father Cauterucci did a wonderful job planning and coordinating Family Fun Day. Originally, the St. Thomas Fair was called "The Festival". Surely, this affair captured the spirit of the festivals of yesteryear.

The Friends appreciated the opportunity to be part of the festivities. Our thanks to all those who visited the Parish Historic Exhibit in the old rectory or took a guided tour of the church and outbuildings.

The rectory restoration of the two main first floor rooms is almost complete. The Victorian era rooms will soon be ready for use by FOST and other parish ministries. The Friends plan to name the rectory building in the near future rather than continue to refer to it as the "old rectory". Your suggestions are welcome.

Congratulations to the Winners

On May 18, the concluding luncheon of the ten month celebration "Written in Stone: 150 Years of Old St. Thomas Church" was held in the Concordville Inn. Awards were presented to the Art and Photography contest winners. Congratulations to Nicholas Brown, Olivia DiAntonio and Katherine Lizza for their artwork. Dan Brooks, Gerald Swiacki and Michael McManus were the winners in the photography categories.

This past June, Stephen Iacobucci was chosen to receive the Christian Legacy Award given by The Friends. This award recognizes the positive actions of an eighth grade student who is a member of our parish and who demonstrates Christian values through words, deeds and actions.

2004 Exhibit

Promoting the history of parish life is one of the goals of The Friends. Next year we would like to assemble a pictorial history exhibit. If we obtain enough material, we can go forward with the project. FOST is looking for all types of photographs, pictures and articles pertaining to the parish. These include family pictures taken during the reception of the sacraments (baptisms, confirmations, first communions, weddings, etc.), student and athletic team photos, pictures of parishioners, teachers, priests, (present and past), pictures depicting any of the parish buildings (interior/exterior), grounds or surrounding locality. Any printed memorabilia relating to the parish would also be appreciated. All items will be returned to donors. Additional details will appear in future issues of the church bulletin or you can call Kathy McNichol at 610-558-0182.

Can You Help?

If you like to be outdoors and work in the garden, perhaps you would be willing to donate an hour or two a month to help in the historic district.

God's house has to be cleaned, too! An hour of your time once a month would be a wonderful help.

Wedding Liaison: Help oversee details for weddings held in the old church.

If you are interested in any of the above, please call Bette Popiel at 610-358-4835 to volunteer.

Wow!

The parish undertook a major capital improvement this past summer paving the parking areas and drives, adding curbing and landscaping where needed. The thought that went into the striping configuration has aided immensely in traffic flow and parking. The results are impressive! Thanks to all who worked hard to make it happen.

**A special thanks to the following donors for their contributions to the 150th anniversary celebration
 "Written in Stone: 150 Years of Old Saint Thomas Church."**

Pagano Funeral Home	The Archer Family	First Keystone Federal Savings Bank
Commerce Bank	Jack J. & Dorothy Calderone	Iron Workers Bank
Sovereign Bank	Mr. & Mrs. George McNichol	C. Edward Scheivert, Realtor
Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence Wiechecki	Alliance Bank	Sun East Federal Credit Union
	Saint Thomas Thursday Morning Bible Study	

The Friends also wish to thank the following, who helped The Committee with advice, information, services and encouragement during the ten-month celebration. Thanks, too, to all who aided the effort with their prayers. Our sincere apology to anyone whom we may have inadvertently omitted from the list

Aston Florist	Vance Fritz	Michael Palita
George Beasley	J. William Frost	Carol Parton
Shirley Bolinsky	J. Mervyn Harris	Loretta Pietrangelo
Jan Bradley	Mary Ellen Harris	Grace Raak
Charlotte Brandford	Craig Hocle	Dorothy Rodzvilla
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Anne Fox		

Note: FOST Meeting Date Changed to Wednesday, December 3 at 7:00 pm in the old rectory. All are invited.

You Can Make A Difference!

Memberships and The Honor and Memorial Programs are the primary sources of income for the Friends. The monies derived from these programs enable FOST to continue to care for and maintain the old church and the historic campus. Why not join FOST today? Fill out the membership form and mail with your check to the address listed on the form.

Participating in the Memorial and Honor Gift Programs honors living or memorializes deceased individuals. For donations of \$10.00 or more individuals or groups may enroll the name of a living or deceased person in the Old St. Thomas Memorial Book, a part our permanent archives and displayed on special occasions. Recipients are notified by mail and donors receive a receipt.

**THE FRIENDS OF OLD ST. THOMAS at Ivy Mills
 PO Box 19, Chester Heights, PA 19017**

Family Membership \$15 _____ Individual Membership \$10.00 _____ Donation \$ _____

Name _____ Address _____

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Please contact me about volunteer opportunities with FOST _____

Thank you!
 St. Thomas the Apostle #097