



Our Golden Anniversary
1955 - 2005

Ss. Simon and Jude Parish
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Creative non-fiction.

Building a dream in Greentree

Saints Simon and Jude Parish celebrates golden anniversary

(Published in parish anniversary booklet in 2005.)

By **SUSAN K. MAZUR**

SCOTT TWP. — “If you build it, they will come.”

In the 1989 movie “Field of Dreams,” Kevin Costner’s character, Ray Kinsella, stands in his cornfield and hears a voice use these words, urging him to follow a dream.

It’s probably the most popular line from the movie. We’ve heard countless variations of it countless times over the last 15 years, yet it never seems to get old or tired.

Truly, these seven words speak volumes about the power of faith and our reverence for the traditions of the past.

Father Ignatius A. Koller, the first pastor of SS. Simon and Jude Parish, died 13 years before the release of “Field of Dreams,” but it would be easy to imagine him

whispering those words as he stood in an empty field in Scott Township, surveyed the brambles and blackberry bushes, the rocks and stumps, and dreamed of the parish he would help to create.

The year was 1955, and the area called Scott Township — just beyond the Mon and up the hill from Pittsburgh’s Golden Triangle, between the towns of Green Tree and Carnegie — was a quickly growing community. Its Catholic residents, eager for a church that could better serve the faithful, went out among their neighbors with census papers and petitions in hand to help demonstrate their need to the bishop of Pittsburgh. On June 16 of that year, the Most Reverend John F. Dearden granted their request, and SS. Simon and Jude Parish was formally established.

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Bishop Dearden establishes SS. Simon and Jude

On June 9, 1955, the Most Reverend John F. Dearden, Bishop of Pittsburgh, issued a decree that formally and canonically established SS. Simon and Jude Parish in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. His decree read in part:

“In order to provide more efficaciously for the welfare of souls, it has become necessary to establish a new parish for the faithful residing in the district of Charter Oaks (Scott Twp.), Greentree Borough, and the City of Pittsburgh along Greentree Road. Accordingly, with the counsel of the Diocesan Consultors and the Pastors of the adjoining parishes, we do hereby decree the erection of a new parish, under the patronage of SS. Simon and Jude, perpetually separated from the parishes surrounding it, according to the norms of the code of Canon Law, effective Thursday, June 16, 1955.

“The boundaries of this newly established parish begin at a point on Greentree Road where the Greentree Borough and Scott Township lines meet; along these borough lines to the Pittsburgh and West Virginia Railroad south to Hope Hollow Road; then along Hope Hollow Road to the Junction of Swallow Hill Road, to Greentree Road extension to the Junction with Cochran Road; then along Cochran Road to where Cochran Road meets the Scott Township and Mt. Lebanon lines; along these township lines to the City of Pittsburgh line to Banksville Road; then north on Banksville Road to its junction with Potomac Avenue; along the west side of Potomac Avenue to Greentree Road to the place of the beginning.”

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Now the hard work could begin.

Father Koller and about 50 men of the new parish rolled up their sleeves and dug in. The volunteers arrived in that empty field with their picks and shovels, their axes and rakes, to clear the rocks, pull up the stumps, cut down the blackberry bushes and prepare the land for their church.

Undoubtedly, Father Koller was heartened and humbled by the determination and faith of his new parishioners. They were willing to work hard to realize the dream of SS. Simon and Jude Parish. But it would be some time before the church proper would be ready for its first Mass, and Father Koller knew he must attend to the needs of his flock without delay. So he moved his belongings into the rectory of a neighboring parish, borrowed an army Mass kit from its priest, and transformed The Fern Garden Nightclub into a place fit for Sunday morning services.

While the men of the parish readied the land for the church, its ladies went to work as well. They began forming “women’s circles” to bring in needed building funds and strengthen friendships. They conducted card parties, sponsored luncheons and banquets, and joined in the planning for the parish’s first Fall Festival.

On Sunday, August 14, 1955, Father Koller and his parishioners began to realize the fruits of their labors. That day at 3 p.m., the congregation of SS. Simon and Jude attended the formal groundbreaking ceremony for their new church. By month’s end, Father Koller and the building committee approved the modern, cost-efficient design of Pittsburgh architects Schell, Deeter and Stott, and awarded the construction project to D. Carapellucci Company. Work began as the dog days of August transitioned into a crisp September.

Even without a formal structure at its base, parish life flourished. An Altar Boys Club was established, the ladies continued with their women’s circles and groups, and Father Koller set up an interim Parish Advisory

New parish comes together to plan its first fall festival

Just a few short weeks after SS. Simon and Jude was officially established, the new parishioners — most of them probably still strangers to each other — banded together to begin raising funds for the building of their church.

Their first major fund raiser would be a Fall Festival, and on July 7, 1955, almost 100 parishioners met to discuss the plans. The duties of general chairman fell on the shoulders of George Jelly. Mrs. Robert Gordon and Mrs. John Gnazzo became co-chair ladies.

Planning continued throughout the summer months until the days set aside for the festival finally arrived. From September 19-24, parishioners and members of surrounding communities enjoyed food, games, and fun for the benefit of SS. Simon and Jude Parish.

That first festival made a profit of nearly \$10,000.

In 1978, the tradition of the Fall Festival was renewed, and it continues today.

Committee. And although the parish was in a rather makeshift state, it’s population grew. Louis and Mary Jean Cardamone baptized their son, Marco Anthony, in July of that first year, and James Shorkey married Caroline Ginter just a few days later. Though these first ceremonies were held at nearby St. Joseph Church, the parishioners never considered themselves as anything other than members of SS. Simon and Jude. Indeed, the congregation grew so quickly that after only three months, the Fern Garden Nightclub proved too small to hold it, and Sunday Mass was moved to the new auditorium at Foxcroft School.

It’s almost inevitable with any building project that delays and missteps will occur, and the SS. Simon and

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Jude project was no exception. Bouts of bad weather and delays in material delivery pushed back the project's time line, and it wasn't until November 6 that the congregation was able to gather for a ceremony to commemorate the laying of the church's first bricks. The parishioners contributed small religious articles and keepsakes for the event, which were placed in a box and sealed in the building's cornerstone.

Even before these first walls were completed, parishioners began fundraising for additional projects and collecting items for their new church. On November 20, 1955, a drive began to raise money for the purchase of an electronic Wurlitzer, and the "100 Club" was formed. Each contributor to the Club was asked to donate \$20 to buy one key on the new organ, and the needed 100 pledges were secured in record time. Churches from all around the area were helpful as well, offering SS. Simon and Jude church pews and other furnishings when their own renovations made these items available.

A scant eight months after SS. Simon and Jude Parish was formally established by the Bishop of Pittsburgh — and barely three months after the cornerstone was laid — the parishioners celebrated the completion of their church with a blessing service and Mass on February 11, 1956.

Father Koller took up residence in the modern ranch-style rectory in June of that same year.

Even as the church and rectory were in the planning stages — really before even one spade of earth was turned — parishioners began asking about the construction of a school. Encouraged by promises from the Diocesan administration, the parish launched the SS. Simon and Jude School Building Fund Drive just one year after the dedication of their church. The Drive was a phenomenal success, raising \$40,000 in only two weeks. With the approval of an additional \$265,000 loan from the diocese, design and construction of the school

began, but it would be three years before its completion.

In the meantime, the children of SS. Simon and Jude were welcomed to attend the Catholic schools of their neighboring parishes. The only problem? How to get them there. Again the parishioners and Father Koller demonstrated the depth of their faith. Funds were secured to purchase a used bus. Parishioner Robert Hostert, along with Father Koller himself, obtained licenses to operate a school bus, and both men accepted the responsibility of transporting their students to those nearby Catholic schools.

Back at SS. Simon and Jude, plans were drawn up for their own parish school. The chosen design, created by architect Charles J. Pepine, was fairly modest. The plans called for five rooms accommodating grades one through four (two rooms were allocated for the first grade). Sisters from the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, along with one lay teacher, welcomed the first students in September 1958, and the school was formally dedicated on September 21.

Just three years later in 1961, construction on the school began once again as Father Koller and the congregation saw a need to expand. Classrooms and a large auditorium were added to the original footprint so that, by 1962, students were being taught in grades one through eight.

In June of 1963, SS. Simon and Jude Parish bid farewell and good luck to its first eighth grade graduating class. But those students would not be the only parish members to embark on new adventures.

After eight years of unceasing labor for the love of his parish, Father Koller had reached his limit. His health was failing, and he understood that this still new parish needed more than he could give. He requested and was granted a transfer. Bishop John J. Wright allowed Father Koller to swap places with Father Thomas F. Carey, who was serving the faithful at St. Hugh Parish

The heart of our parish school

Four Sisters from the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception arrived in Scott Township in 1958 to teach the youngsters of SS. Simon and Jude Parish.

The order was founded in 1873 by Mother Mary Ignatius Hayes from a one-room log cabin in Belle Prairie, Minnesota. With a novitiate headquartered in Rome, the Missionary Franciscan Sisters spread their charism throughout the world, with a special emphasis on teaching and on helping society's poor and rejected.

These first Sisters, from the Immaculate Conception Province in Newton, Massachusetts, were: Sister Anna Marie Ford, who served as principal and taught fourth grade; Sister Mary Eustace, who taught second grade; Sisters Mary Donald and Mary Realina, both first grade instructors; and Sister Mary Nolasco, who worked in the convent.

The only lay person to complete this first group of grade school teachers was Marlene Ward, who taught third grade.

All of these women understood the importance of "values-based education" long before that term became fashionable, and they surely touched the hearts and minds of countless in our parish and our community.

in rural Carmichaels, Pa. Father Carey would remain at SS. Simon and Jude for the next 25 years.

The parish continued to grow, and the original church, which was built to accommodate about 200 families, was expanded in the late 1960s to seat about 850. The last Mass in the original structure was held on December 8, 1967. Father Carey surprised the congregation by inviting them to carry home a used pew from those that were originally donated in 1955. The first Mass in the expanded church as held on Palm Sunday 1968.

Once again, the parishioners' love for their church manifested itself in their generosity toward the

expansion project. Costs were addressed as construction proceeded, old debts from the first construction were finally paid and, in June 1977, Bishop Vincent M. Leonard was on hand to help Father Carey burn the mortgage.

The school continued to grow right along with the church. Enrollment reached its peak of 700 students around the time of the church expansion project, and today the school still maintains a solid enrollment of about 200 students each year (due in large part to a very successful Kindergarten program, which plants the seeds for continued attendance). In 1989, the few remaining Missionary Franciscan Sisters were reassigned so that today, the school is staffed by lay personnel and one religious principal, Sister Norma Zanieski, CSJ.

Father Carey was a selfless and dedicated shepherd to his flock at SS. Simon and Jude until he retired in 1988. Each day of his 25-year tenure, he demonstrated his love and reverence for the Eucharistic Presence, his great devotion to the rosary, his dedication to the sick, and his unceasing love for the congregation of his church.

Knowing how well Father Carey has shepherded his parish, the Most Reverend Donald W. Wuerl, Bishop of Pittsburgh, looked for a strong successor to lead SS. Simon and Jude forward into the 1990s. He appointed as pastor Father Richard E. Ward, STD, who brought a diversified background to his new assignment.

During Fr. Ward's first few years at SS. Simon and Jude, the Diocese of Pittsburgh embarked on a massive Reorganization and Revitalization Program — a program that would result in the streamlining and restructuring of the entire diocese. Some churches closed due to dwindling financial support and membership, some became workshop sites of larger, more sound parishes, and many were consolidated into entirely new entities. Father Ward, the parishioners, and the members of the many committees that had guided

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the church through the past 35 years, understood the important role their church played in the spiritual and temporal lives of their community. They were able to convince the bishop (through responses to surveys and questionnaires distributed during the program) that SS. Simon and Jude was a vital part of Scott Township. A new era began for the church.

While Father Koller oversaw the initial building of the church and Father Carey its expansion, Father Ward would be responsible for its renovation. It was 1995, and like most 40-year-old structures, the church was in need of repair. Once again, the parishioners stepped up with financial support. A \$560,000 renovation project began in earnest. Father Ward made repairs to every building in the parish, converted the old convent to the rectory, and the old rectory into the administration building.

With the physical needs of his parish in good order, Father Ward turned all his attention to its spiritual needs, and they remain the focus of his ministry today. At the top of his list is the Liturgy. “The Liturgy is the center of the parish,” Father Ward says. He believes that an active participation in the Liturgy results in an active, lively parish.

And so, Eucharistic Ministers were trained to assist in the distribution of Communion, and the Lector Program was expanded to include women and high school students. Parish missions and adult education courses were continued and further developed.

The need for Catholic education remains a priority today for Father Ward. Despite the spiraling costs, more than half the teenagers who graduate from our parish school attend a Catholic high school. Knowing that evangelization is a never-ending concern, Father Ward continues to identify areas vital to the spiritual and social needs of his parishioners, such as programs for the elderly.

Many different groups are active in the parish today.

Among them are: The Ladies of Charity, St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Knights of Columbus, Scouts, the Christian Mothers and Ladies Guild, the Bereavement Group, Senior Citizens, Scripture Study Groups, the square-dancing “Peanut Squares,” the food bank, the PTG, and the Athletic Association.

The laity are very involved in every aspect of parish life, and this is especially seen in the work of the Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council. We now have a social outreach minister (Carol McAninch) and a business manager (Daniel Stover). While there is no longer an assistant pastor at the parish, the laity have assumed new and vital roles in the life of SS. Simon and Jude.

Our parish family also rejoiced this past year as one of our own — Daniel Straughn — was ordained a priest in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

We thank all the parochial vicars, religious, lay teachers, visiting priests, and past parishioners who, through their sacrifices, dedication, talents, and God’s abundant grace, have strengthened our faith and have helped to light the pathway on our journey to the Lord.

Fifty years ago, a handful of men in Scott Township convinced the Bishop of Pittsburgh that a Catholic church could grow and prosper from a dusty, weed-choked plot of land. Two hundred and eight families pulled together to plant that seed. Over the years, SS. Simon and Jude Parish has grown, both physically and spiritually. Today, our church has branched out to include almost 1,600 families. We remain a “Church of the People,” a church that actively involves the entire parish family as we gather to love and serve the Lord.

As we celebrate our golden anniversary, we look back on the achievements of our founder, Father Koller, his successor, Father Carey, and our pastor, Father Ward, whose tireless work transformed a dream into a shining symbol of the power of faith in God and in each other.