



Catholic Parishes of Northeast Vermont

St. Mary Star of the Sea 1909-2009

As we are celebrating 100 years of worship within the walls of St. Mary Star of the Sea Church, we have attempted to bring forth the highlights of the history of this magnificent building.

The first Mass in Newport was said at Indian Point in the year 1840 by a priest from the Province of Quebec. At this Mass, about 30 Catholics were present: 25 French and five or six Irish. The Rt. Rev. DeGoesbriand, the first Bishop of Burlington, said Mass in Derby on his visits to the area.

Rev. J. S. Michaud was named the first pastor in September, 1873; he said his first Mass in a little schoolhouse with a wooden box for an altar.

The cornerstone of the first church named 'Star of the Sea' was blessed July 4, 1875. The completed church was blessed on August 22, 1877. The church building, capable of seating 250 persons, was erected during the period 1875- 1877. When the parish was established, there were about 90 families; 70 French Canadian and about 20 Irish scattered in the Towns of Salem, Derby, Derby Line, Newport and Coventry.

Rev. Antoine P. Clermont was designated pastor after the death of his predecessor. Rev. Clermont assumed his first pastorate in the Village of Newport, Vermont.

In 1896 there were about 360 families, including those residing in Coventry and Derby. Children were not permitted to attend Mass on Sunday in order to make room for the adult congregation. The glory of God and the salvation of souls, in the mind of this zealous servant of God, could not be accomplished under such conditions. There was but one answer: build. The construction of a magnificent temple must be undertaken to provide a fitting home for the God of Gods. In this temple souls would be brought to God, and sustained in an inspirational house of beauty and prayer.

Father Clermont acquired several parcels of land above the first church on Prospect Hill, the highest point of the peninsula upon which Newport was built, in addition to the land upon which he had already erected a large wooden parish hall, named Green Mountain Hall. This hill at the top of Prospect Street, now designated as Clermont Terrace covered with pine trees was to become the site of our present church. It would be built of local Vermont granite, Romanesque in style, flanked by twin massive granite towers in which would be hung bells of silver high above Newport, overlooking the beauty of Lake Memphremagog and the houses scattered along its shores. Such was the plan of Father Clermont.

Men who dare to dream do, of necessity, encounter the opposition of logic, business judgment and stability. The logic of his Excellency, Bishop Michaud, conflicted with Father Clermont's burning desire to build a church for the glory of God. This desire may have overcome Fr. Clermont's better business judgment. Both priests of God sincerely performed

their duties as seemed right to them and were so strong in their respective positions as to make inevitable a meeting of the minds upon the single purpose they wished to accomplish. Let us leave the past without judgment, charitably enshrined in the granite walls which have brought and held a strong people within its perimeter. If the logical businessman and the man who dared to dream had not been leaders in their own right at the time, the parish, St. Mary Star of the Sea, might never have had the magnificent edifice now standing some hundred years later.

Excavation commenced in 1903. The cornerstone of the church above the foundations was laid in May 1904. Little work could be performed in the winter. This fact, coupled with work stoppage due to lack of money prevented the church from being fully constructed prior to 1909. The massive granite rectory with its own tower, situated to the west of the church, was constructed between 1906 and 1908. Throughout the construction period Fr. Clermont for some seven years personally supervised the work, often engaging in manual labor with the men.

The month of January, 1909, witnessed the arrival of the Rev. J. M. H. Bastien who, during the next twelve years, was to bring order out of chaos. When he arrived the parish treasury was empty; the church was unfinished and unfurnished; there was not even wood to start a fire to warm him or heat the church. He had to break up a wooden fence in back of the church for firewood. There was even no rope to sound the bell in the belfry. The construction of the church which had been at a standstill during many months was rushed to completion and furnished by gifts of parishioners and from Father Bastien's personal funds. Soon the interdiction would be lifted and the new church occupied. Joy replaced sorrow in the hearts of the parishioners. On June 22, 1909, a beautiful summer evening, the silver statue of our Blessed Mother was raised into its present position between the granite towers. As it was being placed into position, the statue appeared to take a half turn so as to be exposed to a view of most of the then Town of Newport before being fixed into place overlooking the lake. Many of the crowd witnessing the event considered this to be an omen, a sign of blessing and approval. At night, lights have illuminated the statue of our Blessed Mother providing a sure directional beacon to those who travel upon the lake in the dark of night. Could there be a more certain guide than Mary Star of the Sea?

August 1, 1909, was to be the day of days - the dedication of St. Mary Star of the Sea. The granite monument was to become a place of worship, the House of God. At 9:30 a.m., August 1, 1909, the greatest procession ever witnessed in Newport and the surrounding area formed at the old church and began its pilgrimage to the new church. The Express & Standard reported, "The procession which formed at the old church and marched to the new edifice began its pilgrimage at 9:30 a.m. Never before in the history of Newport was such a spectacle presented to the populace who beheld it; probably never again in our Village will its equal in triumph and splendor be looked upon with the admiration and wonderment that greeted this army of followers of the cross - indeed the array seemed like that of the crusaders who went to rescue the Holy Sepulcher from Moslem ascendancy".

Civil dignitaries of all ranks were joined by Bishops and clergy, fraternal societies, parishioners and fellow Newporters. The Host was carried by the Rev. N. Proulx, assisted by Rev. Joseph LeBlanc of Barton. When the procession reached the front of the edifice, Benediction of the church was solemnized by the Most Rev. P. Larocque, Bishop of Sherbrooke, Quebec, as the bells of the Protestant churches rang out sending the message of triumph and joy. Within a short time, the doors of the edifice were thrown open to the parishioners who entered their church for was one of reverence, awe, pride and rejoicing. A Pontifical High Mass was celebrated by the Most Rev. Z. Racicot, Bishop of Montreal at the main altar, which had been transferred from the old church. Later in the day Vesper service

was held followed by Benediction in the evening. Bishop LaRocque of Sherbrooke was present as a special delegate of the Rt. Rev. M. Cloarec, administrator of the Diocese of Burlington. Various societies from Newport, the St. Johnsbury Harmony Band, the Civil Guards from St. Johnsbury and Barton, resplendent in colorful uniforms, swelled the crowd who rapturously listened to the choir, orchestra and organ music preceding and during the Pontifical Mass. The church was so filled that hundreds of persons had to remain outside while the services were in progress.

Those who entered for the first time marveled at the church decorations, especially the work of Mr. N. O. Rochon, the outstanding artist who lived for many years in Newport. He had obtained permission to recreate original paintings of the French artist Tissaud. Working alone, setting up his own staging, a gigantic task in itself, Mr. Rochon painted Biblical scenes from the Old and New Testament upon the ceilings and walls of the sanctuary and nave of the church. Thousands of visitors were to come to St. Mary's in the succeeding years to gaze in amazement and admiration at this superb artistry. After 100 years, the paintings still reflect the genius of this man; they have edified generations of the past, the present and, we hope, the generations to come.

The one and only First Communion to be held during the Midnight Mass on Christmas occurred in 1910. The congregation increased rapidly during the twelve years of Father Bastien's pastorate. Fr. Bastien left Newport December 4th, 1920.

In December of the same year the Rev. Norbert Lachance came to Newport from the Alburg - Isle La Motte parish to become pastor. During his pastorate in 1923 he brought Father Clermont back to Newport from Richmond, Vermont to live on the ground floor of a house located to the East of the Church. Father Clermont lived there for about four years prior to his death. When Father Clermont could walk, he would take the few steps to his beloved church, and when he was no longer able, he would lie in a room where he could view the light of the sanctuary lamp. Like Moses in sight of the Promised Land he was kept by his infirmities from participating in the offices of the church he built. Father Clermont died in this house beside his dream, and was buried on March 8, 1927 in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Father Lachance promoted the retention of the French language. Sermons were given in French and English every Sunday. He especially instilled among his parishioners the frequent reception of Holy Communion; this practice still flourishes today. During his pastorate, in his quiet manner, he attracted the profound respect of all creeds and groups in the Newport area. The two carillon bells now in the bell tower, gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Bouffard and Mr. Jacob Morin, were blessed by the Most Rev. Matthew Brady, Bishop of Burlington on May 4, 1941. The solemn ceremony of the blessing was attended by approximately 1,000 persons. During the twenty-four years of his administration, the longest in the history of our parish, Sacred Heart High School was established, the first Catholic Boy Scout Troop was chartered, Gibbons Council No. 2285, Knights of Columbus, and Clermont Circle No. 313, Daughters of Isabella, were formed. The parish societies which flourished from the late 1800's were the Union St. Jean de Baptiste, the Catholic Order of Foresters, the Ladies of Ste. Anne, and the Children of Mary. Sunday afternoon Benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Hours, novenas, and other practices long since forgotten. March 18, 1944, after a long illness, Father Lachance passed to his eternal reward. Like his predecessor, Father Lachance is also buried in St. Mary's Cemetery.

In April, 1944, the Rev. Damase Carrieres became the next pastor. In 1945 was elevated to Monsignor. Msgr. Carrieres possessed among his multitude of talents that of being a keen businessman. He set about to clear the Church debt. Two years after his arrival, with the magnificent cooperation of the parishioners, the final payment was made, 37 years after the

formal opening of the Church. The parish church, as he stated, is man's second home; the first being his family home and the second his spiritual home. During his years in Newport, Msgr. Carrieres and his curates witnessed perhaps the highest number of converts to the faith than before or since his pastorate.

To the ever edifying paintings and illustrations, he added the beauty of the stained glass windows we now admire. Four of the large windows in the church nave depict the Annunciation, the Presentation, the Assumption and the Crowning of the Blessed Virgin. The large windows in the sanctuary depict the Nativity and Gethsemane. In the nave over the side entrances near the Communion rail, the stained glass windows are entitled Our Lady Star of the Sea and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The other four windows in the nave are Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of LaSalette and Our Lady of Guadalupe. The subject of the two smaller round windows in the nave is Mary, Star of the Sea. The two windows over the front door are the original windows. The Communion rail, speaker rostrum and the padded kneelers were installed by Msgr. Carrieres. Msgr. Carrieres was called from his beloved "paroisse" of Newport to receive his heavenly reward in 1961. He left a parish thriving in faith and financial stability.

Another leader, Rev. Leopold Bastien, the nephew of Rev. J.M.H. Bastien, became the new pastor. Msgr. Bastien continued the spiritual and material work. His pastorate was to last only five years (1961-1966).

The era of ecumenism was in its infancy when the Rev. Joseph Dussault became pastor of the parish, January 13, 1967. The parishioners would participate by the word and song of a Mass said in the English language. The ornate main altar was to be replaced by an unadorned altar. Simplicity replaced the former richness of vestment and ceremony. White vestments representing the joy of the resurrection replaced the deep black vestments at funerals. These are but a few rubric changes which came so suddenly. The English language had for some time, of course, been the only language used in sermons. Again, the parishioners of St. Mary Star of the Sea rallied around their pastor in acceptance of the new order.

THE CHURCH STRUCTURE

The church is approximately 114 feet long and 72 feet wide. The two towers are 105 feet high. The sanctuary is 44 feet by 34 feet. The nave is 104 feet long by 70 wide. About 556 persons may be seated in pews. Another 196 persons may be seated by the use of folding chairs, and the choir loft. The sacristy is 70 feet long and 22 feet wide. The floor of the nave is sloped downward from the main entrance toward the sanctuary which is elevated above the level of the nave. The slope or slant is two feet. This feature provides unimpeded view of the celebrant at the altar and is not common in most churches. The interior walls, arches and columns are of plaster finish. In the transept, part of the cruciform design there were altars, one in honor of St. Anthony; the other Ste. Anne. These two altars were removed and at one point occupied by confessionals, there are now empty. The main altar in the sanctuary was removed and replaced by the table facing the people. The two side altars, one dedicated to St. Joseph and the other dedicated to the Blessed Virgin were also removed. The paintings that were located behind the statues of our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph were painted over. The Stations of the Cross were gifts from parishioners still remain. Above the location of the former main high altar is the Calvary scene. The three dimensional painting of the city of Jerusalem behind the cross was the work of Mr. Rochon. This painting was also painted over. A massive lovely sanctuary lamp formerly hung from the ceiling, burning day and night in front of the tabernacle containing the mystical body of

Christ. Although the lamp is now gone, the divine presence remains ever constant. The sanctuary lamp still burn day and night but is located on the side.

The foundation, walls and the two towers of the church are constructed of local granite. Local craftsmen helped in the construction of this building. These men and many more either donated granite or worked at the church site to shape the rough hewn stone into blocks of the required size, with hammer and chisel. Blocks, in place, were measured and found to be 33 inches thick. The names of the early skilled stonecutters, over the span of years, have been lost in time. Other craftsmen of a forgotten art volunteered their skills as granite workers, masons and carpenters.

The two huge granite pillars supporting the arch at the exterior main entrance were donated to the church. The twin towers were capped with copper; a large wooden cross was erected upon the top of each tower. The architect was a Mr. Seguin of Montreal. The work was supervised generally by Mr. Charles Tetreault, who also planned and supervised the landscape terracing in the front of the church.

A pipe organ was installed in the choir loft. The bellows for this organ were inflated by the use of a hand pump before being electrified in the late 1920's when the organ was renovated. Time passes and the organ is no longer in use. Its days of grandeur and charm have faded away. In 2006, the new organ was purchased and dedicated to the memory of Sr. Edmond of Jesus.

The interior of the church has sustained many changes in the last 100 years. The pews are the originals placed there in 1909. The kneelers have been refurbished and the padding replaced in 2004. The interior lighting system, of course, has been completely changed. A few years ago the electrical wiring was updated and fire alarm system installed. Also sound system was replaced. The confessionals are now located on each side of the main doors. The stained glass windows replaced the original tinted glass windows given by various parishioners. The stained glass windows have been repaired within the last five years. The patterns appearing on the original windows were designed by Mr. Rochon and placed upon the glass by the use of lead which was shaved onto the glass with a sharp knife by Mr. Rochon' son, and Mr. O.C. Rivard. The efficacy of this method and the clarity of the object depicted may still be seen on the two windows over the main entrance to the church.

The interior of the church has been beautifully decorated on many solemn occasions, but never more so than on the celebration of the canonization of St. Theresa of Lisieux - the Little Flower in 1925. Over 2,000 paper roses were made by the Sisters, pupils and parishioners; these hung in garlands throughout the church and were the subject of a postcard widely distributed at the time. The work involved in the making and wiring and stringing is almost unbelievable.

There have been, as must be expected, changes in the manner and method of expressing our recognition of and dependence upon Almighty God. As we approach the coming of a new century the faith of our fathers remains undimmed; may the hope and promise of our Lord, Jesus Christ lead all of us to a more full complete acceptance of His teachings and love so that in Him and with Him in the unity of the Holy Spirit those who have gone before us and we who are to follow will experience the joy of the Resurrection. May the solidity of the granite in St. Mary's exemplify the faith of the coming year? To all persons who have contributed so much during the past 100 years we owe an eternal debt of gratitude. If we profit by their example, the dream of Father Clermont will stand safe and secure for the coming generations. Let us hope and pray that the past 100 years have been the hardest so that the next century will be the brightest.

**These statistics are taken from the registries of St. Mary Star of the Sea
1909- 2009**

Baptisms: 6241
Confirmation: 4182 (children and adults)
Marriages: 2188
Deaths: 3044

**St. Mary Star of the Sea
Pastors and Associates since the beginning of the parish
1879- 2009**

As of July 1, 2009 His Excellency, The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano, Ninth Bishop of Burlington has entrusted the Vocationist Fathers with the parish of St. Mary Star of the Sea. Rev. Fr. Michael Reardon, SDV has been appointed as the 16th Pastor and he will be joined by two priests from India. Rev. Fr. Rijo Johnson, SDV is temporarily assigned to help Fr. Reardon until they arrive.

(Names were collected from old records. We regret if priests that served were missed.)

Pastors

Bastien, J.M.H.
Bastien, Leopold
Bilodeau, Leopold J.
Carrieres, Damase
Clermont, Antoine P.
Davignon, Charles
Dussault, Joseph H.
Harlow, Lance
Kerlidoux, J.M.
Lachance, Norbert
LaFlamme, Julien J.
Proulx, Norbert
Reardon, S.D.V., Michael
Rouelle, Forrest W.
Royer, Yvon J.
Yvenec, Francois

Associates

Baltz, Albert	Dussault, Joseph H.	Leclerc, Gerald	Ridgley, Lawrence
Beauregard, James	Giroux, William	Leroux, Roger	Ronnseau, Robert A.
Bessette, Conrad	Hahr, Karl	Messier, Bernard	Roy, Maurice
Blais, R.E.	Hamel, J. Arthur	Milanese, John	Ryan, James
Boulanger, W.	Hammond, William	Mulligan, William	Savary, Emile
Branon, Philip	Haskins, J.C	O'Leary, Peter	Skaza, S.J.
Bransfield, Thomas A.	Imasnhak, Harold	O'Shea, Eugene	St. Peter, Dallas
Brochu, G.	Johnson, S.D.V., Rijo	Paulin, George	St. Pierre, M.J.
Citti, Paul A.	Jordan, Daniel	Prive, Francis	Trottier, Robert
DeForge, R.I.	Lagor, Joseph	Ragis, Gerald	Ventura, Anthony
Duquette, L.G.	Lavery, Raymond J.	Richardson, Robert	Williams, Robert