

# THE HISTORY OF ST. SEBASTIAN PARISH: 1894 - 1994

## *The Situation in 1894*

The year was 1894. It was the year Thomas Edison opened America's first cinema, the Kinetoscope, in New York. War broke out between China and Japan. In France, Capt. Alfred Dreyfuss was convicted on a false treason charge. "Coxey's Army" of the unemployed marched on Washington. President Grover Cleveland was halfway through the second of his two discontinuous terms as President of the United States. It was two years after the quadricentennial of Columbus' discovery of America. Major league baseball was rapidly establishing itself as the "national pastime" with the current National League champion, Baltimore, beating out the teams from Brooklyn, New York, and Boston. The City of Greater New York did not yet exist, awaiting its creation in 1898 by the merger of the cities of New York, Brooklyn, and Long Island City, the county of Richmond, and the towns of Flatbush, New Utrecht, and Gravesend in Kings County and Flushing, Jamaica, Newtown, and the part of the town of Hempstead known as Rockaway in Queens County. And in May of that year, Bishop Charles McDonnell, the second bishop of Brooklyn, established our parish, the second of the Queens parishes he founded. We take for granted the existence of our parish as it is now. But Woodside, Queens, and the Catholic Church itself were very different entities in the nineteenth century and earlier. We need to look at history to understand better how we got here.

## *The Christian Faith Comes to Queens*

The history of Catholicism on Long Island is of relatively recent origin in terms of the universal Church. The earliest settlers were the Maerack tribe of the Delaware Indians, who referred to Long Island as "Seawanaka" or the "island of shells." Europeans approached with the 1524 arrival in New York Harbor of Giovanni da Verrazano, who did not, however, explore Long Island. According to some historians, Estevan Gomez, a Portuguese navigator for the King of Spain, also entered the strait and sighted Long Island on June 29, 1534, the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, thus naming it "the Island of the Holy Apostles." However, true European colonization of the area began only with the arrival of the Dutch in 1609. In 1640, English colonists from Connecticut began to settle in eastern Long Island.

Later, in what was to become Queens County, English settlers established the village of Newtown: unsuccessfully at Maspeth in 1642; successfully at today's Elmhurst in 1652. Newtown embraced today's Woodside. Later came the villages of Flushing (1645) and Jamaica (1656). Far Rockaway was settled as part of the town of Hempstead, established in 1644. The English took the city of New Amsterdam from the Dutch in 1664, renaming it "New York." In the period from the English takeover until the American Revolution, Queens enjoyed very slow growth, with farming and fishing the chief occupations. Since New York City extended only up to about the City Hall area during most of this time, Queens would have been considered "way out in the country" to most Manhattanites.

Queens was slow to be settled particularly because of its swampy terrain, frequently broken by numerous streams. As late as 1800, there were only 6,000 settlers in all of what are today Queens and Nassau. Federal Census figures of 1790 indicate large farms were operating in Woodside and Sunnyside at this time.

## *Woodside Begins to Develop*

Early settlements were near the site later chosen for St. Sebastian's Church. Joseph Sackett built a farmhouse at Woodside Avenue and today's 58 Street, near the Snake Woods. Thomas Cumberston owned a house and tannery along 58 Street, near Rattlesnake Spring. Not far away, Thomas Morrell owned property in the Maspeth Kills. The Sackett farm was bought in 1826 by John Andrew Kelly and his sister (or perhaps sister-in-law), Mrs. Catharine Buddy. Kelly's son, John A.F. Kelly, coined the term "Woodside" in the column he wrote for the *Independent Press*, a Brooklyn newspaper. The Sackett-Kelly home was the site of the current school of St. Sebastian.

## *Transportation Causes Woodside to Grow*

The crucial events in Woodside's growth pertained to transportation. In 1860, the road we know as Northern Boulevard was opened to connect the town of Flushing with the 34 Street ferry to Manhattan. In 1861, the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) built a route from Hunter's Point and opened a station at today's 60 Street

and Woodside Avenue. In 1867, Woodside was laid out as a village. In 1869, a train station was built by the Flushing and North Side Railroad at 58 Street and 38 Avenue. In 1868, a developer named Benjamin Hitchcock became interested enough to drain the swamps and become one of the earliest real estate agents to promote the sale of plots of land (972 of them, to be exact) on the "installment plan." The first Woodside post office came in 1864 and the first public school in 1872. The first church was St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal in 1873. By 1888, many old farms had disappeared, but some continued into the twentieth century.

Business development came early to Woodside.

In 1864, Gabriel Marc purchased land for his plant nurseries at Woodside Avenue and Northern Boulevard. In 1874, the Woodside Wine Company was founded to process Long Island grapes. Around this time, Baker, Hudson and Company was founded for the canning of neighborhood garden produce, soon turning out 8,000 cans of tomatoes daily.

Of special note is the founding of the first fire company in Woodside, the Hook and Ladder Company #3 in 1878, with William Cameron, a member of an old local family, as its first foreman. The firehouse bell, originally cast for an East River steamboat named the *Sylvan Dell*, became the church bell of the original St. Sebastian Church and now is proudly displayed in front of the rectory.

### *Catholic Presence in Queens and Brooklyn*

Where might the Catholics of early Woodside (if indeed there were any) have attended Mass? Before 1822, they might have traveled by carriage and ferry to the parish of St. Peter's on Barclay Street or old St. Patrick's Cathedral on Mulberry Street in Manhattan. In 1822, the first parish of what would later become the Diocese of Brooklyn was officially established at St.

James. It was near the recently established U.S. Brooklyn Navy Yard, which employed many immigrant Catholic workers. The second pastor of that parish, Fr. John Walsh, began riding out to the small number of Catholics scattered in the rural county of Queens and celebrated the first Masses in Queens at Flushing (1826) and Astoria (1835).

The gradual growth of Queens called forth a response from New York's Catholic leaders. The first mis-

sion established in Queens was in Flushing in 1833 at what was to become St. Michael's Parish. In 1841, the Rev. Michael Curran, a Harlem priest, crossed by boat to say Mass and hear confessions where Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish was later established in Astoria. The year 1853 saw the establishment of the Diocese of Brooklyn, comprising all of Long Island's 1,000 square miles as a separate ecclesiastical entity.

### *Catholic Parishes in Woodside*

We cannot say with certainty where any Catholics in this part of Newtown might have attended Mass until 1854 with the establishment of St. Mary's parish in Winfield, the "mother church" of Woodside. The industry that was the first to attract large numbers of workers, among them Catholic immigrants, was the Winfield Foundry, founded in 1849 at what is now 69 Street and 47 Avenue. Its chief products were sewing machine parts and cast-iron caskets. It may be presumed that the proximity to Calvary Cemetery, established by the Archdiocese of New York in 1848, contributed to the success of this factory. It is well documented that the town of Newtown generated a substantial part of its revenue from a burial tax levied on the numerous cemeteries within its borders.

The pastors of St. Mary's came to be founders of several other missions and new parishes, including the parishes of St. Anthony in Greenpoint (1856), St. Margaret in Middle Village (1860), Our Lady of Sorrows in Corona (1871), St. Ignatius in Hicksville (1872), St. Stanislaus in Maspeth (1872), St. Joseph in Astoria (1879), and St. Adalbert in Elmhurst (1892). Later, St. Sebastian's was carved from its territory (1894).

### *The Founding of St. Sebastian's*

A local newspaper serving Woodside at that time recorded that on Sunday, April 22, 1894, "a largely attended meeting was held in Ariel Hall ... and a committee was appointed to enter into negotiations with real estate owners to procure an available site" and "to confer with Bishop Mc Donnell in relation to obtaining a priest." In May, Bishop Charles Mc Donnell of Brooklyn established the parish of St. Sebastian and asked the pastor of St. Patrick's Parish in Long Island City, the Rev. William Mc Guirl, to celebrate Mass in Woodside periodically until the appointment of the first resident pastor. The following October, Fr. Edward Gannon was named pastor and celebrated the first Masses in Ariel Hall on today's 56 Street, near Woodside Avenue.

Masses were also offered in the Woodside volunteer Hook and Ladder Company #3 House on 9 Avenue, which later served as the American Legion hall and is now a Korean church. He later rented a large hexagonal room for services in the home of Mrs. Anne Collins, also on 56 Street, where many baptisms were performed. Fr. Gannon was 35 years old at this time and found in the parish 53 Catholic families comprising 350 individual souls, a figure thought to be about one-half the population of the village, comprising mostly German and Irish people. *The Newtown Register* of October 1, 1894 announced that Fr. Gannon would celebrate Mass every Sunday, at 8:00 and 10:00 A.M., with a High Mass every first Sunday at 10:00 A.M.

Fr. Gannon faced a difficult task. In his own words:

At the commencement, the aspect of things was not very bright. There was no building site, no church, no home, and, what was most deplorable, no money. That God has blessed the work is evident from the fact that, after months of toil, \$11,400 has been collected, a building site has been bought, and the new church is almost completed.

He had purchased 16 lots for the new parish. In addition to the usual fund raisers-- entertainments, waltz parties, festivals, and a bazaar-- a contemporary newspaper account of the church's opening recounts that Fr. Gannon would walk through the village every evening after dinner with his dog, a St. Bernard named Flo collecting a dime from each of the 200 households of his congregation.

Even before the construction of a church, the social life of the parish commenced. The first child baptized in the new parish was James C. Liddell on October 21, 1894. The first marriage was that of Stephen Kobell and Agnes Molloy on November 17, 1894.

The dedication of the new church occurred on Sunday, June 14, 1896 at the 10:15 A.M. Mass. Bishop McDonnell presided and Fr. Gannon was the celebrant,

and the choir sang a newly composed Mass in honor of St. Sebastian

accompanied by a full orchestra. The architect of the church was F.J. Berlenbach, the builder was E.J. Coles, and the masons were Messrs. Roden and Wise.

By 1902, the authoritative *History of Long Island* by Peter Ross reported that the congregation of the parish had increased from 300 to more than 1,000, and the number of Sunday school children from 153 to 240.

According to the archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph, originally the Josephite Sisters taught religious instruction here, from about 1895 until 1925 traveling in each week from the former motherhouse in St. Michael's Parish in Flushing. From 1925 until 1928, the Sisters came here weekly from Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in Corona. The "iron lady" of this effort was Sister Marie de Lourdes Mallen, who worked 40 years in Flushing and for nearly 30 of them spent every weekend teaching catechism at St. Sebastian's. She was helped by a succession of younger sisters, including Sister Josephine Marie Boutin, Sister Francis Ambrose Daly, and Sister Mary Dulcissima Lavin. Also involved here were Sister Dolorine Maria Finnan, Sister Agnes De Montfort Werner, and Sister Teresa Agnes McArthur. The Josephite connection here ceased when the parish school opened in 1928, only to resume in 1993 with the arrival of Sister Dolores Ryan, C.S.J., as Director of Religious Education.

Fr. Gannon died in February 1911 of Bright's disease, having built the original church and the rectory, which is still used to this day. At his funeral, several pastors of Brooklyn parishes assisted. The celebrant was the Rev. Thomas Carroll of St. Vincent de Paul Church, the deacon was the Rev. John T. Woods of Holy Cross Church, the subdeacon was the Rev. John F. O'Hara of St. Matthew Church, and the eulogist was the Rev. Matthew Tierney of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. The Rev. Charles Doyle of Newark was the master of ceremonies. Upon the death of Fr. Gannon, Fr. John Wythe was appointed administrator of the parish for several months, until the appointment of Fr. Walter Kerwin as the new pastor in January 1912. Fr. Kerwin had been here for only two years when he was made pastor of the Shrine Church of Our Lady of Solace in Coney Island.

#### *First Recorded Parish Society*

The earliest reference to a parish society here comes in the September 13, 1894 edition of *The New-*

town Register, which alludes to the "Young Peoples' Aid Society" of the Catholic church in Woodside. It consisted of 30 members, including President Louise Borges, Vice-President Richard Lawlor, Secretary Mary Gavin, Treasurer Mary Gorman, and Sergeant-at-Arms Peter Kelly. It seems fitting that from its very inception, the parish should have been interested in promoting the welfare of its young people.

### *Twentieth-Century Growth*

St. Sebastian's was not a heavily populated parish until several transportation changes. In 1896, the New York and Queens County Railway Company erected its main barns at Woodside Avenue and Northern Boulevard, bringing trolley lines into Woodside. Other openings soon followed: in 1909, the Queensboro (often referred to as the "59th Street") Bridge; in 1910, the LIRR East River tunnel; in 1917, the opening of the #7 train station at 61 Street and Roosevelt Avenue. The population of Queens quadrupled between 1910 and 1930, and St. Sebastian's grew with it.

The establishment of the City Housing Corporation in 1924 to promote private home and apartment building encouraged the rapid growth of Sunnyside. Soon came the Mathews homes along Skillman Avenue (1925). The Christy Gardens at Roosevelt and Woodside Avenues were an early example of co-op apartments in 1925. In 1931 the Phipps Garden Apartments, designed by architects Stein and Wright, opened at 39 Avenue and 50-52 Streets. These award-winning designs have been nationally recognized as a model for elegant urban housing. A major housing development was the opening in 1963 of the "Big Six" towers by the New York Typographical Union #6 at Queens Boulevard from 59 to 61 Streets. These seven buildings of 15 to 18 stories and 982 units, located on more than 12 acres of land, are unique in their possession of private power generators, which provide both economy and reliability. In 1962, the first units of the Berkeley Towers opened on a portion of the old Windmuller estate near P.S. 11, providing Manhattan-like apartments only 10 minutes from midtown. Skyview Towers on 59 Street between 47 and 48 Avenues hold 233 units on the former site of Consumers' Brewery and Park, a nineteenth-century concern. The special needs of the elderly were partly met by the construction in 1982 of 77 units of Sunnywood apartments at 64 Street off Queens Boulevard, under the auspices of Woodside on the Move and Sunnyside Community Ser-

vices.

### *The Pastorate of Rev. Michael J. Walsh*

Fr. Walsh was the pastor of St. Sebastian's for 23 years, from 1914 until his death of heart disease in 1937. By 1915, the parish's growth merited the assignment of a second priest, Fr. Terence Sharkey. The need for a parish school was clear. Fr. Walsh began the fundraising efforts and ground was broken on October 3, 1926. The sixteen-room school was opened on September 10, 1928 under the capable direction of the first principal, Sister Mary Alexis, S.C.H. It was dedicated by Bishop Thomas E. Molloy on September 23, 1928. The Sisters of Charity of Halifax, who taught in the school, lived at first on the top floor of the school, but as their numbers increased a convent became a necessity. Construction began in the spring of 1931, under the architect Henry V. Murphy of Brooklyn. The Sisters moved in on January 9, 1932, and Bishop Molloy formally dedicated it on May 11, 1933.

Fr. Walsh presided over the first great growth period of the parish, seeing the parish membership increase to 8,000 within ten years. Immediately upon construction, the school auditorium was converted into the parish church. A third parish priest was assigned in 1926, and it became necessary to have weekend help in the person of the Capuchin Friars from Garrison, New York. *The Tablet* reported in Lent 1930 that nearly 2,000 people each week attended the parish mission conducted by the Albany Diocese Mission Band.

The growth of the parish was reflected in the growth of parish societies. *The Newtown Register* of November 12, 1921 reported that Fr. Walsh was the spiritual director of a club known as St. Sebastian's Lyceum, which just had elected Joseph Markey as president along with twelve other officers. It was noted that:

The football committee reported on the team record to date, which showed that three victorious home games had been played. The basketball committee reported marked progress, having two practice sessions during the past week. A committee of which Michael Kimmel was the chairman was appointed to arrange for the decoration of the clubhouse on Armistice Day.

Within a few years, however, more familia parish organizations had emerged. The Rosary Society celebrated its golden jubilee in 1975, indicating that it was founded in 1925. *The Tablet* reported in January 1931 that Francis R. Wenzel was reelected president of the Holy Name Society, indicating it was already in existence by that time. By December 1935, it was reported that "large numbers" of men attended the election of new officers that month, including W.J. Murphy as president. In June 1936, the society filled the school auditorium for a lecture on "The Church and the Social Order" by M. John Splain. In June 1940, it held its third annual Communion Breakfast at the Hotel Commodore in Manhattan, featuring the national president of the Holy Name Society as the guest speaker, the Rev. Henry Graharp, O.P.

Nor were the youth of the parish neglected. In 1922, a national organization known as the Catholic Boys' Brigade had been founded, and on December 6, 1935, a branch was founded in St. Sebastian's by its first spiritual director, the Rev. Thomas J. Dunnigan. Two hundred and forty-three boys were accepted as cadets, according to *The Tablet*. Co-commanding officers were Harry R. Matthews and John G. Musgrave, assisted by John Donovan, Robert Fenton, Raymond Bake, J. McLean and Joseph Markey. The Catholic Boys' Brigade ceased operation in 1942 when World War II took away the young men who were its leaders. With the help of the local Catholic War Veterans Post #870, it was re-established in January 1947, led by Frank Keane, and today continues to enroll nearly 300 boys for its weekly events. Ed Fowley, K.H.S., has served as the chairman for most of that time. On the distaff side, parishioners remember a Girls' Brigade in existence in the 1930's under the direction of Mrs. Flynn. The current Girls' Brigade was established around 1984 for similar purposes, replacing the local Girl Scout troops that had flourished for many years with the help of devoted leaders such as Eileen Quinn. Both Brigades have benefited from the acquisition in 1968 of Camp Edward Lodge Curran, eight and one-half acres of rustic retreat near Highland Lake, New York.

A notable landmark was achieved on June 6, 1925 with the first ordination to the priesthood of a parish native.

Richard J. Egan, who was later to become a captain and chaplain in the United States Army, was ordained on that day for the Diocese ofavenport,

Iowa.

At Fr. Walsh's funeral Mass, his brother, the Rev. John F.X. Walsh, pastor of St. Anthony's Church in Bretna, Louisiana, was celebrant. He was assisted by a cousin, the Rev. William Keane of Schenectady, New York, as deacon, and the Rev. Daniel Dwyer, pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Brooklyn as sub-deacon. The Rev. James Bennett, pastor of St. Stanislaus in Maspeth, preached, with the Rev. John Michalak (a former curate here) of Our Lady of Consolation as master of ceremonies. Bishop Molloy gave the final absolution, with 125 priests attending.

#### *The Pastorate of Rev. Thomas Fenarty*

Fr. Thomas Fenarty assumed his duties in the parish on February 15, 1937 and immediately began to carry out the plans of Fr. Walsh which had been interrupted by his sickness and death. Necessary repairs and improvements to the parish buildings were made. Additional Masses were added to the schedule. A Perpetual Novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal was begun. By September 1938, the school enrollment stood at 877 pupils, taught by 19 Sisters. The Sisters of the school also helped run the teenage girls' society, The Children of Mary Sodality, which even published its own newsletter known as "The Chimes." The moderators in 1948 were Fr. Francis J. O'Hara and Sr. M. Katherina, S.C.H.

A significant part of the parish life has been the Catholic War Veterans (CWV). Founded nationally in 1935 by Msgr. Edward Higgins of Astoria and the Rev. Edward Lodge Curran, St. Sebastian's Post #870 was founded on July 8, 1946 by the Rev. Clement J. Walsh, a curate here, who served as a military chaplain in World War II. The Ladies Auxiliary of the CWV also came to play a prominent role here. On Easter Sunday night in 1947, over 300 members of CWV posts in Woodside picketed the Sunnyside Gardens Arena during a rally sponsored by the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, which was alleged to be a Communist-front organization. In February 1948, the CWV sponsored well-attended lectures here and throughout Queens on the evils of Communism. A featured lecturer was a future pastor of St. Sebastian's, the Rev. Edward Lodge Curran.

It seems appropriate that the CWV should have played so prominent a part in our parish history, for St. Sebastian's and Woodside have contributed a great deal

Meanwhile, the parish school enrollment reached a peak in the late 1950's: 1,292 students filled the school. Sister Mary Justa, S.C.H., the principal then, was assisted by 20 Sisters and 5 lay teachers.

The fund-raising campaign for the new church had exceeded the goal and left the parish with a surplus. The old church was torn down in 1956, and a house was purchased as a residence in anticipation of the arrival of religious Brothers who would teach in a projected parish high school. Circumstances were to ordain otherwise. Archbishop Molloy's death in 1957 occasioned the division of the Diocese of Brooklyn to create the new Diocese of Rockville Centre from the counties of Nassau and Suffolk. With the arrival of Archbishop Ryan J. McEntegart came a major diocesan effort to build a number of Catholic high schools. The idea of a strictly parish high school was no longer in favor. By the time of

Monsignor Moran's death from cancer on February 7, 1962, a new need had surfaced: that of a Parish Center.

Fr. Moran had been made a monsignor within a short time of his death. He was widely mourned, not only by the parish, but also by the community of St. Francis College in Brooklyn, of which he had been a great benefactor. The Rt. Rev. Msgr. Ricyard B. McHugh, the pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Istantia, was the celebrant, assisted by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph P. Wiest, V.F., the pastor of St. Augustine's Church in Brooklyn, and the Rev. Thomas Dunnigan, the pastor of St. Clare's Church in Rosedale, as deacon and subdeacon, respectively. The Rev. John H. Walker, long CYO director, was the master of ceremonies, and the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Thomas F. Little, executive secretary of the National Legion of Decency, was the eulogist. More than 100 priests attended, including 21 monsignori and 3 auxiliary bishops. Bishop McEntegart gave the final absolution.

#### *Pastorate of Rev. Edward Lodge Curran*

On March 23, 1962, Archbishop McEntegart appointed the nationally known Rev. Edward Lodge Curran pastor of St. Sebastian's. A controversial figure, a civil lawyer and radio commentator, he was the president of the International Catholic Truth League and participated in numerous anticommunist and communist rallies, lawsuits and actions in the 1930's and 40's. A spellbinding orator, Fr. Curran was also the author of numerous books, pamphlets, and poems on religious and patriotic topics. He promoted the bishop's

desire to build a parish center and oversaw a successful fund-raising drive (chaired by Ed Fowley) that resulted, along with the monies left from the 1952 campaign, in the opening of the parish center with no debt at all on June 8, 1968. In that same year, he facilitated the purchase of the Boys' Brigade camp in upstate New York, which would later bear his name. Despite his stern reputation, Fr. Curran was a particular benefactor of the parish youth, even financing numerous Catholic school tuitions from his own pocket. The parish CYO grew ever stronger with twelve activities under the direction of a CYO Board of Directors.

He took pride in the 1,232 students who attended the parish school, often complimenting the principal, Sister James Catherine, and the 15 Sisters and 10 lay teachers who staffed the school. It should be noted that from the opening of the school in 1928, the teachers of the parish school continued to conduct the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) religion classes for the public school children of the parish, with a parish school Sister serving as the CCD principal.

One of the notable parish societies founded during Fr. Curran's pastorate was the Catholic Daughters of America (CDA) on June 22, 1964, with the aims of "the promotion of Catholic Action, support of the missions, and help to young men who wish to enter the seminary." The first Grand Regent of the parish CDA was Mrs. William Shea, and there were 54 charter members.

The year 1969 saw the founding of the parish drama society, the Sebastian Players, which began a nearly unbroken string of annual or semiannual productions with *You Can't Take It With You* in 1970.

One of the innovations permitted by Vatican II was the notion of retirement of priests from the active ministry. Fr. Curran was among the first pastors of the diocese to make use of this procedure when he became *pastor emeritus* in 1973. His death on February 14, 1974 was widely mourned, and he was one of the few pastors of the Brooklyn Diocese to merit an article on the obituary page of *The New York Times*.

#### *The Pastorate of Msgr. John T. Egan*

Fr. Curran's successor as pastor was the Rev. John T. Egan, who had been the rector at Cathedral Pre-

paratory Seminary in Elmhurst. He brought not only impeccable academic and administrative credentials, but also a priestly pastoral sense, very much in tune with the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. In addition to the various physical changes such as the renovation of the daily Mass chapel in 1974 and the modernization of rectory offices in 1975, he began to broaden the pastoral staff to meet specific needs in the parish. In 1973, he hired a Religious Education coordinator and First Sacraments programs directors, Sisters Kathleen Finan and Mary Parry, O.P., and Patricia Dixon, R.S.M. Miss Maureen Friss became principal of the Junior and Senior High School Religious Education Program. In 1974, Sister Jeanne Elaine, O.P., was brought on staff to coordinate elderly homecare, a position held in subsequent years by Brother Joseph Moore, C.F.X., and since 1989 by Mrs. Eileen Quinn. Sister Bernadette Fortier, O.P., worked with the charismatic prayer and liturgical groups and the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Senior citizens' needs were met with the founding of two social groups during this time. The St. Sebastian Senior Group (1969), which meets on Wednesday, and the Leisure Club of Woodside (1979), which meets on Friday, assemble in the Parish Center and have over 400 members. The two groups arrange numerous trips, parties and social events under their current director, the Rev. Sabino Estrada.

In accord with the teachings of Vatican II, lay people and religious began to exercise the liturgical ministries appropriate to them. The year 1977 saw the installation of the first extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist to bring Holy Communion to the homebound assist at the Sunday Masses. Those pioneers were: Bishop, Jeanette Mc Shane, Mary Trainor, Mary Columbe, Robert Puppa, Joseph Ferguson, Eleanor Gundlach, Owen Mahon and Dominican Sisters Mary Parry, Kathleen Finan, Kathleen Thomas, Jeanne Elaine, Maureen Burke, and Eve Gilchrist. Today our parish has more than 70 lay members assisting at weekend Masses and many daily Masses as well. In addition, they visit nearly 100 homebound parishioners regularly. Parish lectors also made their appearance in the 1970's and now number about 40.

Ethnic ministries began to emerge in a full way during Fr. Egan's pastorate. Spanish services began to show up in the baptismal records of the church in increasing numbers in the early 1960's. As the

sacraments were offered only in Latin until 1967, little need was felt for a Spanish-speaking apostolate at that time. Fr. Egan saw to it that Mass in Spanish was initiated in 1973, offered by the Rev. Thomas J. Ryan and the Rev. Said Sanchez. A census taken at the Spanish Mass in March 1973 showed the following points of origin: Colombia (141), Dominican Republic (28), Ecuador (26), Cuba (25), Puerto Rico (13), Peru (9), Bolivia (5), Panama (4), Spain (4), Paraguay (3), and Honduras and Mexico (1). In the ensuing years, the Spanish Mass outgrew the chapel and was moved first into the school auditorium and then into the main church. In addition, a committee known as the *Apostolado Hispano* was organized to coordinate the various events in the Latino community. In 1983, the annual Mass in honor of Our Lady of Chiquinquirá was celebrated in honor of the patroness of Colombia. In 1984, a charismatic prayer group was formed. Later, under Fr. Paul Sanchez, the *Cursillo de Cristianidad* was organized. Bible classes in Spanish have frequently been offered over the years.

Other parish societies over the years have been: the League of the Sacred Heart, the Antone Guild, Parish Council, Ushers' Society, and Teen Club. The Choir, after flourishing for many years under Rita Kaljian, was later directed by Lisa Kelly and Jim Schaefer, and is currently under the direction of Matt Murray, who had been song leader at St. Patrick's Cathedral and for Pope John Paul II in his 1979 Mass at Yankee Stadium.

The parish school went through a period of great change during this difficult period for Catholic education, adjusting to the changing face of both Church and society. After a period of 15 years with several lay principals, the Sisters of Charity of Halifax signaled their high regard for this early Queens outpost of their community by reassuming in September 1999 the principalship (a most unusual step) in the person of Sister Kathleen Michael, who retains that position in this our centenary year. Under her careful guidance, the parish school achieved accreditation by the Middle States Association of Elementary Schools in October 1991.

Monsignor Egan died suddenly at the Jesuit Retreat House in Auriesville, New York, of a heart attack on June 14, 1990. The homilist at his Mass of Transferral was the Rev. John E. Delendick. The funeral Mass homilist was the Rev. James J. Haggarty.

## Most Recent Years

In September 1990, Bishop Thomas Daily named Msgr. D. Joseph Finnerty as the eighth pastor of St. Sebastian's Parish. It was one of the first appointments

made by the newly appointed bishop of Brooklyn and Queens. Monsignor Finnerty had just completed his first six-year term as the pastor of the neighboring parish of St. Teresa. He was born in Brooklyn and grew up in the

parish of St. Saviour in Park Slope. Monsignor Finnerty prepared for ordination to the priesthood at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, the oldest seminary in the United States. Here he studied theology while the Second Vatican Council was taking place in Rome. Ordained by Archbishop Bryan J. McEntegart in St. James Cathedral on June 1, 1963, he began his priestly ministry with the

implementation of Vatican II's call for renewal in the church at his heart. He worked as a newly ordained priest in St. Paschal Baylon Church in St. Albans where, besides his

duties as a parish priest, he taught religion in the parish school. St. Paschal's Parish was a predominantly African American neighborhood and under the direction of his first superior, Msgr. Archibald V. McLees, young Fr.

Finnerty was involved with Protestant and Jewish leaders in the civil rights struggle of the 1960's.

For his next assignment, Archbishop McEntegart sent him as a theology professor for college seminarians to the newly opened Cathedral College in Douglas. It was there that he met college students James F. O'Sullivan, Sean Ogle, and Kenneth Grande, who would later

join him as priests in the ministry at St. Sebastian's. After teaching at the college for ten years, Bishop Mugavero assigned him to St. Brendan's Church in Lynbrook. At St. Brendan's, he was involved in the liturgical renovation of the church and the restoration of other parish buildings. This experience prepared him for major restorations that he would be called upon to do at St. Teresa's and at St. Sebastian's. During these

early years of his priesthood, our pastor served the diocese as a member of the Priests' Senate, the Liturgy Commission, the Ecumenical Commission, and the Art and Architecture Commission of the Diocese. His graduate studies in theology at Fordham University prepared him to become a part-time visiting lecturer in theology at College, the Diocesan Pastoral Institute, University, and various diocesan

For workshops for priests, religious, and laity.

His first pastorate was at the neighboring parish

of St. Teresa. His first years as pastor saw him involved in efforts to meet the many different groups of people that make up that large urban parish in the midst of Queens County. While at St. Teresa's, Bishop Mugavero appointed him to be the first Coordinator of the Irish Apostolate of the Diocese, serving the needs of the new wave of Irish immigrants who settled in our diocese during the 1980's and 1990's. Ever sensitive to the fact that he was everyone's pastor, Monsignor Finnerty spent the summer of 1985 in the Dominican Republic to study Spanish so that he could minister more effectively to the many Hispanic parishioners. Here at St. Sebastian's, his desire to foster greater devotion to the Santo Nino de Cebu, the patron of the Philippines, and St. Lorenzo Ruiz, the first canonized Filipino saint, encouraged deeper bonds of love and affection with our large Filipino community.

When he became the pastor of St. Sebastian's, he devoted all his efforts to fostering new lay leadership and to strengthening the parish school and religious education programs. Soon after his arrival, the new pastor of St. Sebastian's was forced to make decisions regarding the restoration of aging buildings that were in need of extensive repairs. Hearing the story, the people responded with generosity of time, talent, and treasure. Together with the pastor, parish priests, religious, and dedicated lay leaders, the parishioners restored the interior of the chapel, the church, the rectory, the convent, and parish center with a generous response to each of these campaigns, work supervised by John Gillooly, Director of Buildings and Grounds. At a time when the economy of the nation was at a low ebb, the people of St. Sebastian's contributed more than a million dollars for their parish. At a Mass of Thanksgiving on September 11, 1993 in the newly restored church of St. Sebastian's, Bishop Daily came to express his admiration and gratitude for the quality of Catholic life and commitment that the people of St. Sebastian's give to the diocese.

Monsignor Finnerty, his associate priests, the religious, and staff rejoice in the ethnic diversity of St. Sebastian's, which makes it such an exciting place to minister to God's people from so many different countries. Indeed, the pastor frequently reminds the parishioners that "the whole world is represented here in St. Sebastian's." This commitment to Christian hospitality and genuine welcome, so important for the parish, is not lost on visitors and new members of St. Sebastian's who are happy to call our parish their spiritual home.

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to our nation's armed forces in this century. A plaque on the front of the school commemorates the 119 parishioners who fought for our country in World War I, and especially the six who died in that conflict. A monument to the dead of World War I, World War II and the Korean War stands in the plaza at Woodside Avenue and 60 Street. And at the corner of the parish property at 57 Street is the notable Vietnam War Memorial, commemorating the fact that more young servicemen from Woodside died in Vietnam than from any other postal zone in the United States. The memory of all our war dead is still honored every year on Memorial Day with special services and a parade which ends at the famous "Doughboy" statue in Doughboy Park.

Nor was our parish out of touch with the latest in Catholic social teachings in the thirties and forties. A noteworthy event in American Catholicism during this era was the creation of a few "labor schools," designed to teach Catholic social doctrine to unionized workers. The earliest labor school in the Brooklyn Diocese was the Jesuit-run School of Social Studies in Crown Heights. St. Sebastian's Holy Name Society sponsored a lecture series here in early 1946, presented by notable experts such as Dr. George A. Brenner and Jesuits William J. Smith and Philip Dobson.

These lectures proved to be the forerunners of further social justice activity here. In October 1946, Bishop Thomas Molloy established the Social Action Department of the Diocese of Brooklyn. In 1947, this department established the Brooklyn Institute of Labor Relations, and in 1948 the Queens Institute of Labor Relations, with the Rev. William F. Kelly as director. The purpose of the labor institutes was, as *The Tablet* noted at the time, to "present the Christian point of view on modern social and economic problems, and to develop Catholic awareness of the need for justice and charity in the social order." These institutes instructed thousands of workers for several years via eight regional centers, including one at St. Sebastian's. These courses were offered for a nominal fee and were affiliated with St. Francis College.

Fr. Fenarty began plans for the building of a larger church, a better rectory, and an extension on the school. Unfortunately, the reality of the Great Depression and of World War II delayed these plans. After the war, only the school extension moved ahead. By the

time of Fr. Fenarty's transfer to the pastorate of Holy Cross Parish in Brooklyn, the situation was again radically changed. The plans for an 850-seat church were rendered inadequate by the burgeoning postwar population. This was the dilemma facing the new pastor, the Rev. Edward Moran.

#### *The Pastorate of Msgr. Edward Moran*

Fr. Moran needed a larger church, but had inadequate land and funds to build the 1,500-seat church that the parish population demanded. Providentially, on February 1, 1952 a Federal antitrust suit against several of the largest of the Hollywood filmmakers required them to get out of the business of theatre ownership. This fact, combined with the impact of television upon movie attendance, resulted in the availability of the Loew's Woodside movie theatre, which had opened in September 1926. A fund-raising drive under the direction of chairman Eugene Cavanagh exceeded its goals. Thus, in March of 1952 Fr. Moran was able for \$250,000 to purchase the theatre, which then required another \$422,000 in renovations, a total probably one-half the price of building an equivalent church from scratch. Several storefronts were also acquired to create the daily Mass chapel. The architect for the conversion project was William J. Boegel, and the church designer was Harold W. Rambusch. Douglas Persich designed the chapel. The church was dedicated on October 23, 1955 at the 11:00 A.M. Mass, with Bishop Thomas Molloy presiding. The new church was said to be the first airconditioned church in the Brooklyn Diocese and to have the longest center aisle of any Catholic Church in Queens.

Parish societies continued to flourish. In 1950, the Holy Name Society reached out to the youth of the parish with the establishment of the Junior Holy Name Society under Fr. James McInenly, assisted by Ed Fowley. The year 1950 also saw the creation of the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), with Ed Fowley as the chairman and Jimmy Scalfaro as the coach of the first boys' basketball team. Other "first team" coaches in subsequent years were: Frank Kehoe, Sr. (baseball), Bill Strack (boys' track), Ann McCourt (girls' track), Marty O'Kane (boys' swimming), Helen Coyne (girls' swimming), Ian Gillespie (soccer), and Jeanne Connelly (cheerleading). The St. Vincent de Paul Society, caring for the immediate needs of the parish's poor, was headed by Joe Bostwick. The parish organist for many years was Mrs. Rita Kaljian.