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New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission

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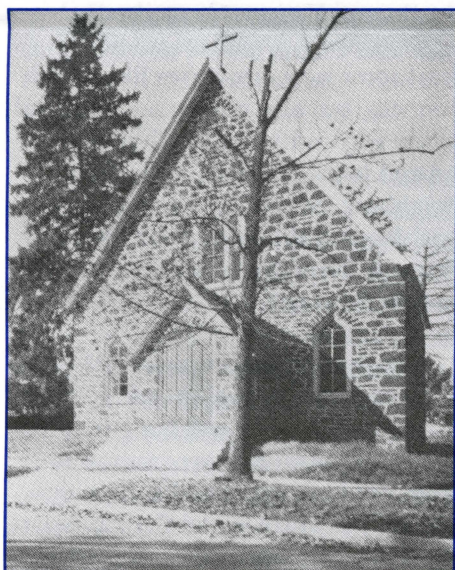


# New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter

VOLUME XVIII NO. 2

WINTER 1999

## Two Anniversaries Celebrated in Camden Diocese – Sacred Heart, Vineland (125) and Holy Family, Sewell (25)



*The first Sacred Heart Church, Vineland, 1874*

"What a difference a day makes," the balladeer sang. And in individual lives it is often true. Institutions, however, usually require longer time spans before their development is evident and the differences between them apparent. When comparable institutions develop in different periods, their differences sometimes give the observer clues to how the periods differed. Two parishes in the Diocese of Camden this year celebrate the anniversary of their foundation: Sacred Heart in Vineland, established in 1874 and Holy Family in Sewell, erected one hundred years later in 1974.

Vineland had been laid out in 1861 by Charles Landis, a wealthy

land speculator who recruited settlers wherever he could, most notably in Italy. Catholic settlers had been ministered to by Reverend Martin Gessner, pastor of Saint Mary's, Millville, who said Mass in private homes or later in a room above the railroad station.

By 1874 the number of Catholics in Vineland justified a separate parish. Bishop Michael A. Corrigan of Newark appointed Father Peter Vivet, a young French priest, to lead the parish and by Christmas Day, 1874, the parish had a stone church in which Mass was celebrated, although the interior was still unfinished. Father Vivet's account showed the cost of the church to have been \$1,806.80.

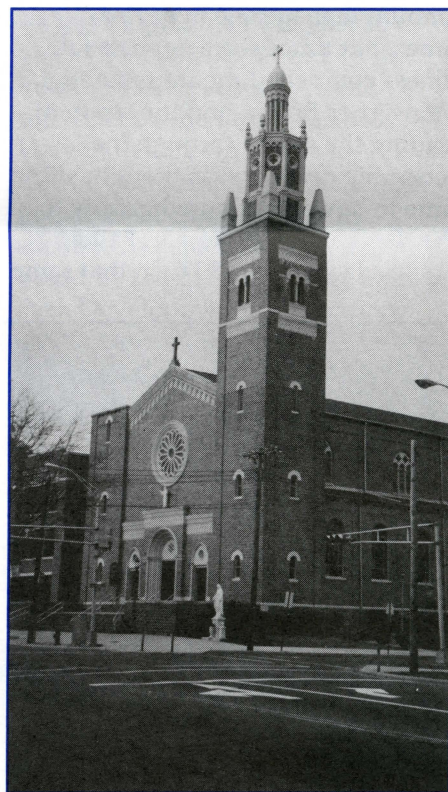
In the 1870s and 1880s the parish attempted to start several parish organizations and also a parochial school. For reasons not altogether clear, none of these lasted very long. Slow transport, the farmer's need for children to help in the fields, the isolation endemic in living on 19th century farms, all may have been contributory.

In 1883 Bishop Michael O'Farrell, first bishop of Trenton, gave charge of the parish to the Fathers of Mercy, who in addition to caring for the parish, established Sacred Heart College on the outskirts of Vineland. This venture, too, was ahead of its time and the college closed in 1894. In the following year the Fathers of

Mercy left and the parish returned to the care of the diocesan clergy.

By the end of World War I, commercial and industrial development in Vineland had led to further growth of the population and to increased concentration in the town. Ventures which earlier had failed might now be tried again with greater hope of success.

In 1919 when Monsignor James A. Bulfin became pastor of Sacred  
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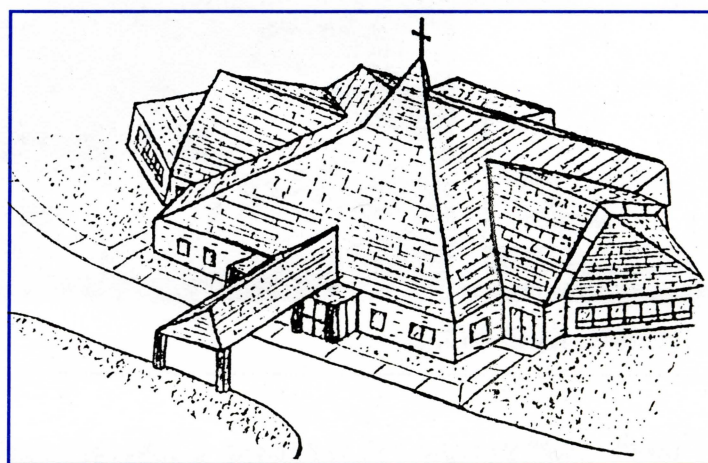


*Sacred Heart Church today*





*The first Church of the Holy Family, 1929*



*Remodeled Church of the Holy Family, 1996*

Heart the parish needed both a parochial school and a new church. The pastor insisted "school first, church second," and the parish built a new school building and staffed it with Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill. It opened in 1921 with 235 pupils. Next came a new church building, which was dedicated in 1927. This was followed by expansion of the school building to provide high school classrooms. All of this was followed by the Great Depression.

In October, 1929, the parish debt amounted to over \$200,000, an amount manageable in normal times, but times were not normal. Illness compelled the retirement of Monsignor Bulfin, and the strain of leading the parish through the economic disaster was thought at the time to have contributed greatly to the death of his successor, Father Francis Jackson in 1937. In that same

year, Father William Hickey became pastor, and the Holy See created the Diocese of Camden from the southern counties of New Jersey.

These developments were overshadowed, however, by the approach of war and then Pearl Harbor. Over a thousand men and women of the parish served the nation in World War II; a score made the supreme sacrifice. Those at home served in bond drives and USO and Red Cross activities until the war ended.

After the war new challenges and opportunities arose. In the 1950s a new high school building was erected, then expanded; a new convent was built; and the parish welcomed the first large numbers of Spanish-speaking immigrants. In the 1960s, two new parishes were established from the territory of Sacred Heart, St. Francis of Assisi (1961) and St. Isidore the Farmer (1963).

Most challenging of all, perhaps, the Second Vatican Council called for *aggiornamento*, which meant at the least some new structures like parish councils, but also reform and renewal of the way individual Catholics related to the Church and to their neighbors. Sacred Heart, like other parishes, continues to work its way through these changes and to adapt to new circumstances.

As the parish completes 125 years of service, its original church is still used as a chapel of ease for parishioners, its educational program runs from pre-kindergarten through high school, a Spanish Social Center assists the many Hispanics in the parish and a number of organizations reach out beyond the parish to the wider community.

One hundred years after the founding of Sacred Heart, Vineland, in an essentially rural area, Holy Family, Sewell, was established in 1974 in an area already densely populated by the movement of urbanites and suburbanites into what had been, until the 1960s, farmland. The Church of St. Jude, Blackwood, served the incomers until 1973, when SS. Peter and Paul, Washington Township, was established.

Growth was so rapid that in the following year Holy Family parish began, with Father Clarence Fisher as administrator. At first the parish celebrated Sunday Mass in the Grenloch Volunteer Fire House – affectionately dubbed "St. Grenloch's"



*Latest addition to Sacred Heart parish facilities, the social hall behind the original church*

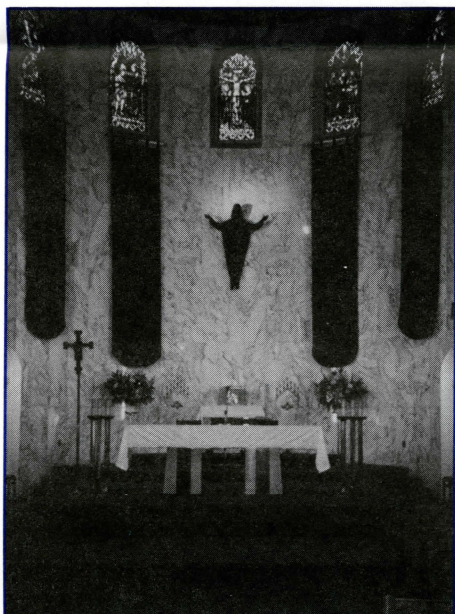


by a parish wit. Daily Mass, baptism and other religious ceremonies took place in the "chapel" – the converted two-car garage of the parish house. The first floor of this converted one-family residence housed offices and CCD classrooms, and the priests resided on the second floor.

The parish began to develop plans for a new church in 1975, but construction could not begin until 1978 after Monsignor Joseph Downing had succeeded Father Fisher. Bishop George Guilfoyle dedicated the building on November 10, 1979. In 1982, a bigger parish house replaced the earlier one-family residence. The new building housed three priests, parish offices and, as one parish historian wrote, "one very overused parish meeting room."

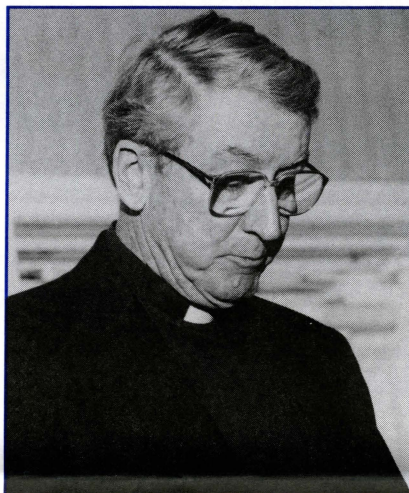
Because Vatican Council II and the American 1960s preceded the establishment of Holy Family, a parochial school was not built. The support of a parish school, absent the services of the large number of women religious who staffed parochial schools before 1960, is beyond the resources of most parishes, even if the school building is already there. Most parochial schools now participate in some kind of regionalization, as is the case of Sacred Heart, Vineland.

Religious education, however, was not neglected. When Monsignor Joseph  
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*Sanctuary of Sacred Heart Church*

## Meet the Commission



*Reverend Daniel A. Degnan, S.J.*

Daniel A. Degnan, S.J. was born into a large and politically active New Jersey family, his father having served West Orange as mayor for 17 years, and his maternal grandfather having run publicity for Woodrow Wilson's 1910 gubernatorial campaign. Young Daniel attended Our Lady of Lourdes grade school in West Orange, and then Seton Hall Prep, graduating from the latter in 1944, just in time to serve a hitch in the U.S. Navy aboard the *U.S.S. Livermore*.

Discharged in 1946, he entered Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., where he graduated *cum laude* in 1950, with a bachelor's degree and a major in history. He then returned to Seton Hall, this time to its new law school headed by Miriam Teresa Rooney, the first female dean of an American law school.

Having received his degree in the first graduating class from Seton Hall Law, he practiced law in Newark for five years before he decided to enter the Society of Jesus in 1958. He continued study with them at Loyola Seminary in Shrub Oak, New York, and at Woodstock College in Woodstock, Maryland, and was ordained to the priesthood in June 1966.

Since then much of his ministry has been involved with legal education. In 1969-70 Father Degnan served as a Teaching Fellow at Harvard Law School and from 1970 to 1975 he was a professor at Syracuse Law School. For the following two years he served as a visiting professor at the Georgetown University Law Center and in 1977-78 he was academic vice president of Loyola College of Maryland in Baltimore. From 1978 to 1990 he was professor of law at Seton Hall University and for five years of that time served as dean of the law school and associate provost.

In 1990 he became president of Saint Peter's College in Jersey City and led that institution until 1995. Since then he has been occupied with pastoral ministry, has served as an adjunct professor at Seton Hall Law School, and has continued his writing career.

Father Degnan has contributed frequently to professional law journals and to popular magazines on legal topics over the past 30 years. He has also served on the boards of several colleges and universities, including Fairfield University, the University of Detroit and Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. In addition, he has served on the Board of Trustees of Liberty State Park Development Corporation, on the New Jersey Supreme Court Advisory Commission on Judicial Conduct, and chaired the New Jersey Criminal Disposition Commission in 1982-83.

His services have been recognized by, among other awards, the Papal Benemerenti Medal and by admission as a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation. The New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission is very happy to have his counsel and advice in support of its efforts.

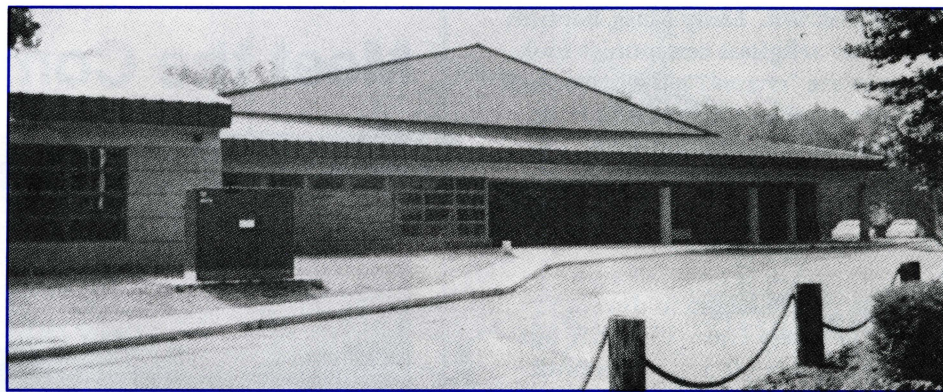


## Anniversaries

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Joynes arrived as pastor in 1988, the parish numbered 2,100 families, and 1,000 children were enrolled in a CCD program conducted in private homes. In 1992, construction began on a parish center to house all religious instruction as well as to serve the numerous other activities of the parish. Completed in 1993, the new facility was dedicated by Bishop James McHugh.

It may not appear immediately evident, but Holy Family was proceeding on the motto of Monsignor Bulfin of Sacred Heart back in the 1920s – "school first, church second." It was abundantly evident in 1990 that Holy Family needed more space both for its educational activities and for its liturgical celebrations. They first provided the parish center for educa-



*The new parish center at Holy Family nears completion, 1993*

tion, and then turned to the church building.

In this, too, there is evidence that the development was post-1960s. When a larger church was needed before 1960, almost invariably the solution was to build a new, larger building and turn the old building to other uses, or dispose of it. But mod-

ern construction materials and techniques and an increasing willingness to abandon the traditional rectangular church shape have over the past 30 years led to different actions. In the case of Holy Family, the existing church was incorporated into a structure which expanded in four directions. The remodeled church seats more people, has a separate baptistery, an enlarged chapel, and much more space for altar and sacristy. Bishop McHugh dedicated the new building on June 29, 1996.

Parishes are comparable institutions – their corporate and canonical character are the same, and they have the same purpose. How they set about attaining the purpose is shaped in part by the circumstances of time and place, and the surrounding culture. The courses of action parishes choose often indicate to the observer what the circumstances surrounding parish life at the time were.

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