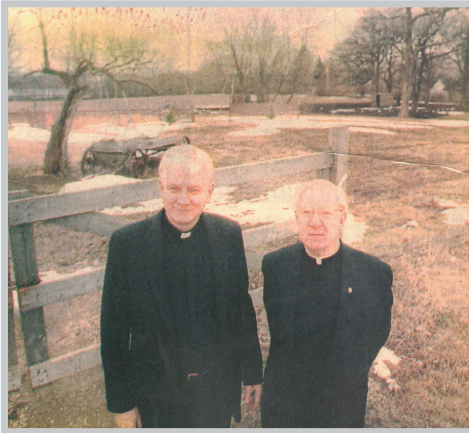


## ***Our Parish History: So Much to Celebrate!***

*March 13, 2022 by Mary Penich*

This year, we celebrate the Thirtieth Anniversary of our first Mass as a parish family. We have so much to be grateful for! Though my husband Deacon Mike and I have been a part of our parish since the beginning, I admit that I was amazed when I began combing through our parish archives in preparation for this writing. I've always considered life at St. Paul the Apostle to be both a blessing and an adventure. Still, even I am surprised by who we have become and all that we have accomplished during our relatively short life together.

### ***In the Beginning...***



In 1991, my husband-the-deacon served on a local archdiocesan committee charged with determining how the church might better serve Northeastern Illinois. Marion Henderson and Father Jim Merold also served. Early on, Father Merold shared news of a new parish planned for Gurnee. Mike listened carefully because we'd heard that the archdiocese owned land nearby. Father Merold added that the new parish would be located at Hunt Club and Gages Lake Roads, that Carmelites would staff it and that Father Farrell Kane would serve as pastor.

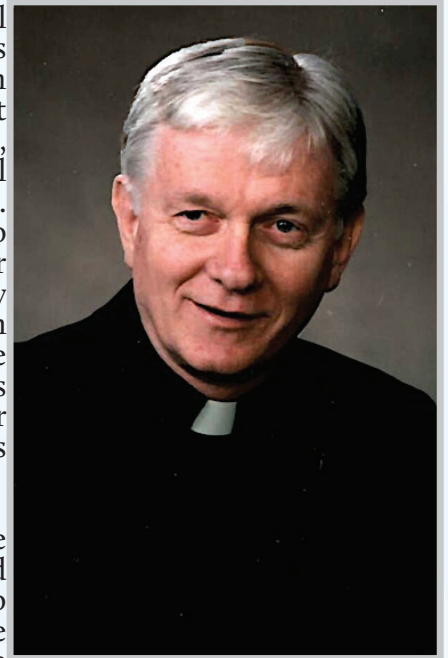
Mike learned that Father Farrell resided at the monastery at Carmel High School to be closer to his parish-in-the-making. Mike called Father Farrell, and their conversation led to a meeting during which Father Farrell invited Mike to join him at the new parish. Mike jumped at the chance and their work together began. I happily agreed to join in this endeavor. When I met Father Farrell and his associate, Father Phil Nessinger, Father

Farrell asked what I wanted to bring to the new parish. I responded immediately. "Welcome," I said. "I want it to be welcoming. Regardless of people's stories from their previous parishes and from their lives up to this point, I want them to know that this is a place where they're welcome just as they are." Much to my relief and absolute joy, Father Farrell smiled as he responded, "Me, too!"

### ***It's Official...***

Our parish became an official entity in December 1991, when Cardinal Joseph Bernardin named Father Farrell our pastor. Father Farrell began his work immediately. He persuaded Woodland School District to rent gym space to us for weekend liturgies. Because that rental arrangement didn't include the furniture and other items required to set up our worship space, Father Farrell purchased hundreds of folding chairs. Woodland School stored the chairs in exchange for free use of them throughout the week. In the meantime, Mike introduced Father Farrell to Father Merold who had been named pastor of newly formed Queen of Peace Parish. Father Merold offered us numerous church supplies from Mother of God, Holy Rosary and Holy Family Parishes in Waukegan which had merged to form the new parish. Our current funeral vestments, portable tabernacle and the censor our young Magi carry during our annual Christmas gospel pageants were among those items. Father Farrell also secured a van to transport our worship items each week. He conserved funds by also using that van as his personal vehicle.

While our priests secured a place to live with the help of then Vicariate Administrative Consultant Mary Hall, Father Farrell and Father Phil worked from Carmel High School. They and their new deacon planned ways to attract potential parishioners. The priests scheduled a meeting at the Gurnee Holiday Inn where they hoped to welcome anyone interested in the parish. They placed notices in local newspapers while Mike and I posted fliers in local businesses and other public areas. Wednesday evening, February 12, 1992, we gathered at the Gurnee Holiday Inn with more than two hundred people.



Father Farrell took the podium with a grateful smile to welcome all who were in attendance. After reporting what he'd already done to prepare, Father listed numerous other tasks to be completed and ministries to be formed if we were to function as a real parish. Much to our relief, sixty-seven families registered as

parishioners that evening. Deacon Bob Tomasso and his wife Gail joined as our second diaconate couple. Volunteers stepped up to coordinate the various ministries necessary to beginning our parish life together. Charmaine Fagan offered to chair the liturgy team. Joe Falotico offered to lector and to help to set up the gym every week. Several communion ministers and musicians also volunteered. Others offered to serve as ushers as well. The Tomasso's would provide baptism preparation. Dorothy Gasior served as our first hospitality chair, while her husband Art Gasior oversaw Art and Environment. Art was the creative spirit who added plants to the gym's basketball hoops to disguise them for Mass. Several Knights of Columbus in attendance joined various ministries as well. Sister Christine from St. Therese Hospital offered the services of their carpenter to build a portable altar. A group also volunteered to host a "housewarming" shower at the Heather Ridge Clubhouse to provide household supplies to equip our priests' temporary home. By the time we began celebrating Mass together, Tom Krissek had offered his voice and his pitchpipe to accompany singers. John Kane eventually used both his guitar and voice to lead other singers and instrumentalists as well.

Father Farrell left that meeting with pages of parish registration forms and volunteer lists in his hands. I wish I had those papers so I could thank everyone who stepped forward to lay the foundation for our parish life together,

## ***Our Life As A Parish Begins...***

Saturday, March 7, the first weekend of Lent 1992, we celebrated our first Mass as The Warren Township Catholic Community. Father Farrell chose that name to ensure that parishioners from throughout Gurnee and nearby communities felt welcome. In an effort to function as a real parish from Day 1, Father Farrell prepared our first parish bulletin and provided registration forms and contribution envelopes for those interested. It was while compiling the bulletin that Father Farrell approached me. "You're a teacher, so you can write! I've got a lot of white space. Can you put something together to fill it?" It was in response to this invitation that *Something To Think About* appeared for the first time.

Early that Saturday afternoon, a hearty crew of volunteers arrived at Woodland School to meet the priests, that van and Deacon Mike whose Camaro had the perfect trunk for "altar transportation". While we set up those hundreds of folding chairs, Art Gasior hung banners and arranged bouquets of flowers in the basketball hoops. Those present did everything possible to transform the gym into our church.



On tables in the school vestibule, we displayed stacks of our first bulletin, parish registration forms and contribution envelopes. While we worked, Father Farrell paced. Finally, he asked, "Do you think anyone will come?" We helpers responded with a resounding "Yes!" Then, as we waited to welcome our potential parishioners, they arrived. Still, I don't think Father Farrell believed our efforts were successful until a few minutes before 5:00 P.M. when he processed into that very full gymnasium to begin Mass.

At that time, I could not anticipate the journey which has become our parish life. For some, it wasn't easy to leave familiar churches to build a new faith community. For others, this opportunity offered hope in the face of pain which had made their former parish affiliations difficult. For still others, building a new parish was life-giving. Some who had given up on church embraced this new community which promised a new beginning. Some were simply thrilled to have a church in the neighborhood. Whatever their story, all were welcome to call this parish family their own.

## ***History In The Making...***

The second week we were together, we voted for our parish name. Kent and Carol Davenport prepared ballots which listed the options offered by the archdiocese. That list of parish names included St. Paul the Apostle, St. Luke the Evangelist, St. Clare, St. Timothy, and St. Augustine. The ballots were counted that week, and, on The Third Sunday of Lent, March 22, 1992, our parish bulletin featured our new name. That bulletin also listed contact information for our ministries whose members would meet in one another's homes or at Woodland School between Masses. We also had plans in place for baptisms, confessions, weddings, funerals, and religious education. Baptisms were celebrated in parishioners' homes. The priest or deacon arrived with vestments and a gym bag which held everything that was needed. Each family gathered to watch in their home, the place where the faith of the child to be baptized would be nurtured.



The priests heard confessions before the Saturday evening Mass and whenever requested. We borrowed other churches for weddings and funerals which were then recorded in our parish records. Some smaller funerals were celebrated in funeral homes. Parishioners who wished to meet with our priests did so between Masses and eventually at the priests' rectory/home located in a Gurnee subdivision. We celebrated daily Mass there until this became a nuisance to some in the neighborhood. Daily Masses continued in parishioners' homes and at Marsh Funeral Home. Happily, this development prompted the archdiocese to allow the building of our parish house on the church property even sooner than we had hoped. Religious Education began in Fall 1992. This included classes for our parish children and RCIA. Dolores and Herb Vogt took on the daunting task of overseeing the children's classes between



Masses at Woodland School. Deacon Mike and I held RCIA sessions in our home. Though we had rented the gym for liturgies, we didn't have access to classrooms. As a result, brave and creative volunteer catechists met with small groups of children in the hallways. I understood their challenges because I was one of them!

In May 1993, we happily celebrated our second graders' First Communion Masses. Confirmations for our older children followed every other year. Once again, I wish I had our class lists from that year so I could name every teacher who offered to share his or her faith with our parish children. I'd also thank each of the parents who placed their children in our care. What an honor that was!

## ***We Are Family!***

*Family* is what our founding priests had hoped to form, and *family* is who we became. Perhaps the first undeniable evidence of this transformation came in August 1992 when Hurricane Andrew assaulted South Florida. A parishioner had family who were devastated by that Category 5 storm. Father Farrell asked what was needed and then turned to our parish family for help. The following weekend, he and Father Phil made an appeal at all the Masses. Our parishioners responded with donations of money, clothing, and household items to help that Florida family and their neighbors through their terrible ordeal. That parishioner filled a van with the essentials and the cash we had collected and delivered them to those so desperately in need. She returned with an empty van and enough gratitude to fill all our hearts. At the time, none of us realized that this instance of our parish family's generosity would be repeated again and again over the years and decades to come. At the same time, our parish family ties and our impact on God's people were growing stronger!

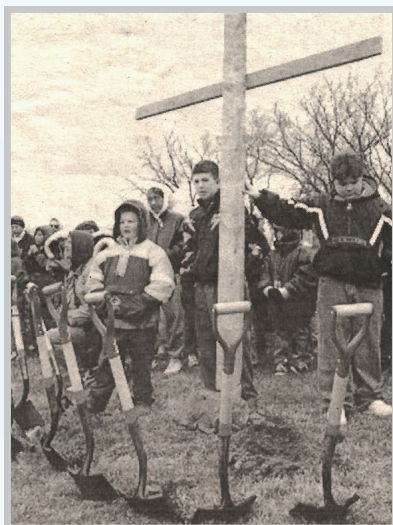
During those early days, additional ministries were established. Altar servers, Communion Ministers, musicians, and ushers grew in numbers. Father Farrell and Father Phil counted the collection between Masses with a few of us helpers. Baptism Preparation. Religious Education and RCIA continued. Though our ministries were not as plentiful as they are today, the seeds of these efforts were planted. Father Farrell or Father Phil did their best to support every effort in this regard.

Eventually, Deacon Bob and Gail Tomasso retired to Florida where they shared their talents with a new parish family. Deacon Mike and I continued here. Like so many of you, we remained. Together, we looked forward to the day we would have a church building to call our home. Truly, by the time we attended to the business of erecting a building, we had evolved into our parish family with numerous ministries at work and we had *become church*! That building would simply provide a permanent home where we would worship and continue our work.

## ***Building Our Home***

Father Farrell often remarked that this church was ours to build and that it would be built when our parish family was ready and able to do it. When the time came, our priests welcomed all who were interested to participate in the process. Father Farrell, a master at budgeting and demographics, made a convincing case to the archdiocese which resulted in our budget. With that in place, the priests and Building Committee members visited every new church structure possible. After considering all they had seen and our own parish needs, architects Hammel, Green and Abrahamson Inc. were selected to design the church building. The process had begun!

The Building Committee included our priests, Vicariate Administrative Consultant Mary Hall, and any parishioners who were interested in participating. Those who wished to render design opinions were free to do so if we had read a short paperback guide to the church building requirements at the time. When



we shared our thoughts, we were expected to cite supporting passages from the book. We did this for the first few meetings. After that, we checked that guide when important decisions had to be made. As a result, our meetings were sometimes lively, very productive, and always inclusive.

Our capital campaign unfolded smoothly as well. When it was suggested that a given amount be asked of each family, our priests disagreed. Father Farrell and Father Phil wanted every donor, regardless of his or her means, to feel that the offering or pledge made would be very helpful and very much appreciated. This approach resulted in our raising the required down payment of one million dollars in cash and one million dollars in pledges far more quickly than we dared to hope. Once again, I have no list of those building meeting participants. They did include parishioners who worked for the Village of Gurnee, engineers, businesspeople, our deacon and his wife, moms and dads, singles, the young and some of our most seasoned parishioners. Happily, many of these volunteers continue to worship with us today. To each and everyone of you, I offer our heartfelt thanks for a job truly well done!

Busy as we were with this process, our parish family and parish life continued to evolve. Religious Education and RCIA grew along with our parish organizations. By this time, the Knights had initiated their annual Christmas Tree sales and The Ladies Guild had hosted three annual Leprechaun Balls. We had added Boy Scouts, Faith Enrichment, The Gourmet Club, Respect Life and The Singletaries to our offerings. Did you know that Father Phil was a faithful supporter of The Singletaries, among whom numerous lasting friendships blossomed?

Hospitality provided donuts, coffee, and juice once each month. Volunteers staffed the information table before and after every Mass. Happily, Religious Education continued to grow due to the generosity of so many volunteers. Our music ministry was unlike any other thanks to the talented choir members and instrumentalists who gave their all at every Mass. All the while, our bonds as fellow parishioners grew. New friendships evolved and new parishioners were drawn to us. When we assembled our first Parish Directory, it featured 428 individual and family photos.

It was Sunday, April 6, 1997, when we gathered on Hunt Club and Gages Lake Road to break ground for the church building. Bishop Gerald Kicanas, Carmelite Provincial Father Leo McCarthy, Regional Provincial Father Ray Clennon, Carmelite Treasurer Father Daniel O'Neill, Father Farrell, Father Phil, and Deacon Mike gathered to overturn those first shovelfuls of soil. The blustery cold weather didn't deter the hundreds of us who had gathered to watch. The parish provided small plastic bags in which we were invited to save bits of soil as mementos.

The building process took more than one year. Planning meetings, where we shared our design hopes and watched them unfold, continued. Every drive past our parish property fueled our awe and our gratitude. It was just prior to the church's completion when Father Phil was assigned to assist at another parish. His extensive pastoral experience was needed to guide his new parish family as they weathered some difficult circumstances. While we truly missed Father Phil's warmth and generous spirit, we welcomed Father Ray Clennon. He had come as a Carmelite dignitary to participate in the church's groundbreaking. He returned to serve as our associate pastor.

## ***Dedicating Our New Church and Ourselves***

Cardinal Francis George celebrated Mass and dedicated our church, Thursday, October 15, 1998, at 7:30 PM. Though we had already prayed together and begun our parish life in that building, the cardinal's actions accentuated the holiness of who we had become. The chrism which anointed the altar also anointed us. At this table, we met as both our parish family and God's family. Though differences might separate us in other circumstances, at this table we stood together.

Beside providing a home for our worship, our church building allowed us to expand parish ministries. We added Vacation Bible School to our religious education offerings. Our high school program morphed into LIFETeen. By the time we celebrated our tenth anniversary as a parish, 1,642 photos appeared in our parish directory! Our Filipino Community introduced us to Simbang Gabi which enhanced our anticipation of Christmas. We hosted Bible Study and Faith Sharing. We added our own SPRED group, Ministers of Care, our Funeral Luncheon Committee, Prayer Chain, Celebrate Family, the Friendship Circle and Dinner Club. Over the years, Circle of Women, Men's Legacy, Meals and Services, Funeral Hospitality, The St. Vincent de Paul Society, Respect for Life, and more followed.



Father Farrell served as area Dean. Priests' deanery meetings and other activities were sometimes hosted here as were some Vicariate activities. We also became an official polling place. For ten years, we worked with Warren Township High School's FBLA Members to host Matt Wessel's annual *Concert for Life* with all proceeds supporting cancer research and cancer patient support programs. We also began our affiliation with Catholic Charities' Christmas Gift Program. Father Farrell opened our doors to these and many other outside activities. When we opened our parish home and our hearts to those around us, some responded by joining in these efforts and becoming parish members.

Once again, I am at a loss when it comes to naming all of those who did so much to help our parish family to evolve! However, I'm not at a loss for words when it comes to saying, "Thank you!" for all that you did to help us to become who we are today!

### *Those Who Have Followed*

As our parish family grew so did Mark Purdome's interest in serving. Mark had completed the RCIA Program here and hoped to do more. As a result, he and his wife Bridget completed the Diaconate Program. Mark assisted us here in the parish, while Bridget provided pastoral care to AIDS patients. It was at Mark's ordination celebration that Deacon Mike suggested to Ivan and Arlene Siap that they might consider the Diaconate Program. A few years later, Ivan was ordained. While tending to his responsibilities, Arlene took on wedding preparation to assist couples planning to be married in our church. Michelle Shaffer, once a parish volunteer, joined the staff and later studied to become our pastoral associate. Later, Deacon Bob and Yuki Birck, Deacon Rod and Rita Reyes, Deacon Andy and Kate Baker and Deacon Brent and Cassie Bertke have also embraced the opportunity to serve our parish family. I assure you that our dedicated deacons could not do what they do without the support of their own families. Our thanks to each one of you and to your generous families! How grateful and blessed we are!



After twelve years as pastor, Father Farrell became our associate and Father Ray Clennon became pastor. Father Bernie Bauerle provided weekend assistance, driving from Darien to be with us. As our parish family continued to grow, Father Farrell's health began to deteriorate. Father Herman Kinzler joined us to help. Though he was with us only a few months, Father Herman spent every weekend of those months in the gathering space. He was full of questions and hoped to get to know as many of us as possible as quickly as possible. Father Herman took his leave unexpectedly to become pastor of a parish in New Jersey where the Carmelite pastor had passed away suddenly.

Father Dave Genders began visiting on weekends to assist with our LIFETeen program. Father Dave related well to our teens, their families, and our teachers. When he was assigned to our parish, Father Dave's tech and artistic talents became great assets as well. More importantly, his generosity in caring for Father Farrell during his last months with us made a difficult ordeal bearable for his Carmelite brother.

Father Farrell passed away April 27, 2015, just a few months after he left us. In an amazing turn of events, the final check in payment of our parish church loan was sent to the archdiocese that morning. Father Farrell hoped to be here to see to that loan to its end, and he did!

One year after Father Farrell passed away, Father Ray retired. Father Gregory Houck was appointed pastor. Father Greg was familiar with our parish family because he had assisted with penance services and weekend Masses on occasion. As pastor, he shared much about his favorite saint, Therese of Lisieux, Carmelite life and much more. Father Greg invited Father Leopold Glueckert to join us for weekend Masses. Father Leopold persisted even after knee surgery which threatened his mobility. Despite his discomfort, Father Leopold always had a kind word to offer. Father Brad Zamora, a teacher at the seminary in Mundelein, also joined us for weekend liturgies. His vast knowledge of theology and worship was apparent in his encouraging and heartfelt homilies. Our local Bishop George Rassas also joined us for weekend liturgies both before and after his retirement. Today, Father John Guthrie, also from the Mundelein Seminary, generously assists us.

It is with deep gratitude that we thank The Carmelites for enriching our parish family. While Father Farrell and Father Phil witness our gratitude from above, we express the same to Father Ray, Father Bernie, Father Herman, Father Dave, Father Leopold, and Father Greg. The Carmelite Fathers have treasured their affiliation with us just as we have with them. Thank you, Dear Fathers!

## ***A New Beginning***

Three years ago, the Carmelites determined that they could no longer staff our parish. With much gratitude and sadness, our parish family bade them farewell. At the time, I wondered if it was possible to feel loss at the close of a quite remarkable era while also feeling joyful anticipation regarding the things to come. Deacon Mike and I chose to find out. We had heard that, July 1, 2019, Father Chris Ciastoń would take over as our new pastor and Father Joe Curtis would serve as our new associate pastor. Both were coming to us from deeply grateful parishes who would also have a difficult time saying good-bye. Mike and I knew of Father Joe and were thrilled to work with him. Because we didn't know Father Chris, we attended Mass at St. Anne's in Barrington where Father Chris was assigned. There, we discovered how fortunate our parish family would be. While Father Chris's demeanor was truly welcoming, his homily was even more so. When he shared a childhood experience which illustrated God's patience, mercy, and love perfectly, we realized how fortunate we were to have him join us.



Father Chris and Father Joe arrived with open minds and open hearts. They embraced our parish family as their own while they immersed themselves into our parish life. Weekend Masses and interactions in the gathering space before and afterward indicated that our joyful anticipation was well placed. Their end-of-Mass jokes became their trademarks as quickly as did their effective leadership, pastoral hearts, and good will. Weddings, funerals, baptisms, anointings, appearances at religious ed classes, confessions, and everything else we asked of them went well! None of us could have predicted that almost everything would change just eight months after their arrival when COVID 19 turned this world upside-down.

Father Chris led us through the trauma and mitigations tirelessly and wisely. At every turn, Father Chris and Father Joe remained calm and steady. Like any family weathering a storm, we remained together, held on tightly and did the best we could. How appropriate it is that our Thirtieth Anniversary coincides with our first steps toward end-of-pandemic normalcy!

## ***Our Hope For The Future***

Since the pandemic, many of us may have wondered if life as we once knew it will ever return. Perhaps the onset of the new school year and the anticipation that comes with every new beginning hint at the promise to be found in the things to come. It seems that the occasion of our thirtieth anniversary gives us reason to look with joyful anticipation toward year thirty-one and many more years afterward together. Our parish took root under the guidance of our seemingly shy and unassuming first pastor, Father Farrell. I write "seemingly" because Father Farrell wasn't at all shy regarding his hope in the people who would become St. Paul the Apostle Parish. Today, our pastor, Father Chris, and associate, Father Joe, aren't at all shy regarding their hope in our parish family. Each of us should be filled with hope as well!

So it is that once again I write, *Happy Anniversary, Parish Family!* Let's continue to celebrate by giving thanks for whatever part of these thirty years we have shared in. Let's continue the celebration by doing our best to make the days and years ahead brighter for us, for our community at large and for everyone we meet along the way. Once again, I am without a list of those who need to be thanked.

Perhaps the best place to begin is with all our parishioners. Though I won't list our names here, you are most gratefully appreciated. Even if you have been reluctant to formally register in the parish, your presence is important to us. Whether you participate in a ministry or not, whether you have children in our faith formation program or not, whenever you join us to pray and work together, you add to the goodness of the moment at hand. Thank you!