

A History of St. Joseph Parish
Middletown, Delaware; Chesapeake City, Maryland; and Warwick, Maryland
Compiled by Jake Vukich

1704

“St. Xaverius” established at the upper shore of eastern Maryland. This was later known as “the church at the head of the Little Bohemia River”, or simply “Bohemia”. It resembled in outward appearances the plantations of the parishioners it served. However, there were noticeable differences. For one thing, the proprietor of the land was a “bachelor” (Reverend Thomas Mansell), he was seldom at home, and there was a chapel within the house on the plantation. Neighbors began to protest the boldness with which “popery” was being practiced.



1708

It was reported that 49 registered Catholics reside in Cecil County, Maryland.

March 1868

Diocese of Wilmington established.

August 1868 Diocese of Wilmington statistics:

5,000 Catholics

9 Priests

17 Churches

12 Mission Stations

6,000 Square Miles

1871

One acre of land purchased in Chesapeake City, MD for \$475.

August 1874

On the feast of St. Rose of Lima, the cornerstone of the St. Rose of Lima Church in Chesapeake City is laid. The cornerstone was blessed in front of a crowd of 500 people. St. Rose of Lima is established as a mission of St. Francis Xavier Parish.



June 1875

St. Rose of Lima Church is dedicated.

1855

The railroad arrives in Middletown, DE.

1876

The first Sunday mass is celebrated for the new congregation in Middletown.

November 1878

Sunday mass attendance in Middletown was 15 people.

1882

A building lot in Middletown is purchased from Edwin Cochran for \$300 in order to erect a church.

October 1883

Contract for building the new church in Middletown is signed.

November 1883

Cornerstone and a 750-pound bell are blessed and St. Joseph is officially founded as a mission of St. Francis Xavier Parish.

October 1884

St. Joseph Church is completed, for a cost of \$3,500, and the Mass of Dedication is celebrated.

1886

Diocese of Wilmington is comprised of 18,000 Catholics. The large increase is due to the influx of immigrants.

1890

St. Joseph, St. Rose of Lima and St. Francis Xavier report 350 registered Catholics, with a yearly income of \$850.

1905

The trip from the St. Joseph in Middletown to St. Rose in Chesapeake City takes 2½ hours by horse and wagon.

January 26, 1906

Handwritten Certificate of Incorporation is recorded, establishing St. Joseph Church as a legal corporation.

1908

A rectory on Cochran Street is opened and St. Joseph Parish is established.

January 1912

St. Francis Xavier is nearly destroyed by fire; the stone walls were all that remained standing. The insurance reimbursement for the damage was \$3,500, and an additional \$850 was raised from donations. By October the rebuilding of St. Francis Xavier is completed, and the church is rededicated.

1930's

The farmland at "Old Bo" is sold to raise money during the Great Depression.

1947

New Stations of the Cross are installed at St. Joseph Church.



1949

New stained glass windows are installed at St. Joseph Church.

1954

St. Joseph has 96 registered families. The Old Bohemia Historical Society is formed.

February 1955

Two additional acres adjoining the St. Rose Church property are purchased.

November 1955

Land and building at the corner of Cass and Green Streets (behind St. Joseph Church) are purchased for use as a Parish Center.

September 1963

Three masses are established at St. Joseph – 8:00, 9:15, and 11:00am. A total of 350 people attended Sunday masses.

November 1963

Parish census is conducted. There were 120 families registered at St. Joseph and 45 at St. Rose – for a total of 571 people.

1963

The farmland at St. Francis Xavier which was sold during the Great Depression (177 acres) is reacquired.

June 1967

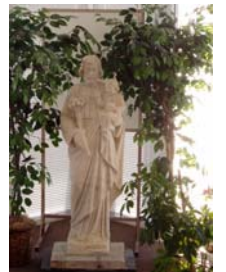
The Bishop of the Diocese of Wilmington celebrates the first yearly mass at St. Francis Xavier.

December 1967

First Pastoral Council is formed. The elected members of this Council were Ron Bice, Hap Fox, Bill Cross, Peg Gentile, Joe Cann, and Tom Semendinger.

1969/1970

A marble statue of St. Joseph was donated to the Parish by friends and family of Kathleen Clayton, a young lady who suddenly met her death in a tragic auto accident.



1973

The combined total of students enrolled in religious education programs at Middletown and Chesapeake City was 129.

1973

The first “May Fair” is held at St. Joseph in Middletown. This event “featured hand-crafted articles and turned out to be one of the most significant occasions of unity between the mission [St. Rose] and the home parish [St. Joseph]”. The May Fair eventually evolved into our Annual Parish Carnival.

1974

Centennial year is celebrated for St. Rose Church in Chesapeake City. Old Bohemia Council of the Knights of Columbus is founded.

1980

Parish census showed the parish had grown to 300 families in Middletown & 100 in Chesapeake City.

1983

Centennial year is celebrated for St. Joseph Church in Middletown.

1993

Ground is broken at our current location for construction of the Rectory, Parish Offices and Hall. The first liturgies celebrated in Price Hall in late 1993 were Masses on Christmas Eve.



January 1994

The pastor moves into the new Rectory. Sunday masses are held at Price Hall and at St. Joseph Church.

1994

Old Bohemia closed to visitors in order to install a new roof and ceiling, and restore the interior.

2000

Parish records indicate that there are 200 registered families at St. Rose and 1100 registered families at St. Joseph.

February 2001

Initial phase of planning for the new church completed. Some key points from this planning phase were:

- o St. Joseph Parish is projected to grow from 1,150 families in 2001 to 2,213 families by 2015, and 2,450 families by 2020
- o Price Hall will be undersized for Sunday Masses by 2003/2004
- o Growth projections indicate that a 700 seat church should be built

June 2002

Fr. Thomas Flowers is transferred to St. Polycarp Parish in Smyrna, DE.
Fr. Steven B Giuliano is appointed pastor of St. Joseph

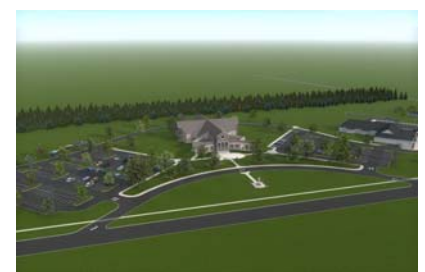
September 2002

The first Regional Parish Catholic School in the Diocese of Wilmington, Christ the Teacher, opens to serve the children of St. Joseph and three other parishes.

October / November 2002

Master Site Plan completed for the new church and the Parish property. Some key points from this phase of planning as established by the Building Committee:

- o Seating for 900
- o Daily Mass Chapel, with elements from old St. Joseph Church, to seat at least 50
- o Baptismal font with pool



June 2003

Recognizing the increased number of Spanish-speaking Catholics in the area, St. Joseph Parish and St. Denis Parish in Galena jointly hire a shared Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry.

July 2003

New Church Building Committee formed under the direction of Fr. Giuliano. The Committee interviewed architects and set the following criteria for the new church:

- o The appearance of the building must convey that it is a Catholic Church
- o The church should be of traditional design
- o Elements from the old St. Joseph Church (stained glass windows, the altar, statues, stations of the cross, etc.) must be incorporated into the new church

January 19, 2004

Martin A. DeSapio, AIA is chosen as architect for the new church and begins work.

January 1, 2005

As the number of Spanish-speaking parishioners increases, the Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry begins working exclusively for St. Joseph Parish.

May 29, 2005

Bishop Michael Saltarelli presides at formal groundbreaking ceremony for the new 900-seat St. Joseph Church.



October 2, 2006

Contract to build new church is awarded to W. S. Cumby & Son.

November 15, 2006

Construction of new church begins, with the first phase costing \$6.4 million. That same month, after having removed the liturgical items that will be used in the new church, the original St. Joseph church building is sold.

November 25, 2007

The first phase is completed and the new St. Joseph Church is dedicated. Future phases call for the installation of a tile floor, pews, and the expansion of the front wings. This celebration also marks the beginning of the Double Jubilee Year: 125 years since the founding of St. Joseph Church and 100 years since the establishment of St. Joseph Parish in Middletown.

April 2008

Following a special program for parishioners (Salt and Light), our Social Concerns Ministries are organized and expanded.

November 23, 2008

Jubilee Year is concluded with Bishop Malooly presiding at Mass and blessing the newly installed crucifix in St. Joseph Church.

June 1, 2009

A Spanish-speaking deacon is assigned to the parish, highlighting the increased needs of the Spanish-speaking parishioners. Weekly Spanish Mass will be moved to Sunday afternoons beginning in September.

September 5, 2009

A newly installed Allen organ is blessed in St. Rose of Lima Church.

January 2010

Installation of the porcelain tile floor in St. Joseph Church begins. Repairs to the steeple and roof are made at St. Rose of Lima Church.

October 2010

Pews are installed in St. Joseph Church.

June 2011

Parish youth hold a “Youth Work Camp” and complete several projects, including landscaping in front of St. Joseph Church, installation of a patio outside the Parish Hall, new entrance signs at the Parish Complex and painting the kitchen and bathrooms at St. Rose.

Parish records indicate that there are 2,606 registered families with 8,784 members. With 2,867 members under the age of 18, the average age of a parishioner is 32 years old. There are 777 children enrolled in our Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) Grades 1-8, with an additional 117 enrolled in Christ the Teacher Regional School and other Catholic Elementary Schools.

June 2012

As part of an Eagle Scout project, the statue of St. Joseph is installed on the lawn next to the church.

Fr. Giuliano is transferred to St. Peter the Apostle Parish in New Castle, DE.

Fr. David F. Kelley is appointed pastor of St. Joseph Parish.

In addition to the Parish Archives, additional sources for these facts include:

“The Seed Has Grown to Harvest: Centenary of St. Rose of Lima Mission, 1874-1974”, by Rev. Russell H. Perkins.

“1883-1983: St. Joseph’s Church; Middletown, Delaware”, Centennial Pamphlet printed by Custombook, Inc., Northvale, NJ

