

He would walk up and down the single aisle on Sunday coaching his congregation in the use of the missals. He outfitted the choir loft and worked with the men's choir as they prepared for the golden jubilee celebration.

The 50th anniversary of the parish was commemorated by a special midnight Mass on December 25, 1931.

In 1931, St. Virgilius parish numbered about 800 parishioners and the school had 166 pupils. Between 1907 and 1931, there were 452 baptisms and 169 marriages at St. Virgilius. This growth demanded additional assistance for the pastor. Dr. Burke was the First St. Virgilius pastor to have an assistant. Our first curate was Fr. Thomas Padian, who had come to Morris Plains in 1929. Dr. Burke and his assistant continued to administer the sacraments to Catholic patients at the State Hospital, the County Welfare House and Tuberculosis Hospital.

But Dr. Burke is remembered for much more than his hospital visits and his building renovation. One parishioner recalls:

"He was a very easy man to talk to. He was very kind. He was kind to everyone – a soft spoken, sedate gentleman." He is remembered walking up and down the grounds reading his breviary. He is described as having been "very punctual" and quite a businessman." It is recalled that the good man had difficulty driving through the stone pillars in front of the church. But Fr. Burke left a much more permanent mark on his parish than he did on the pillars, which are long gone. His influence and memory remains in the hearts and souls of many St. Virgil's parishioners.

Fr. Phillip Henebry Great Sense of Humor

In 1933 Fr. Phillip J. Henebry succeeded Dr. Burke. Shortly after Fr. Henebry was appointed pastor, St. Virgil's school received its eighth principal when Sr. Lucy replaced Sr. Ursula in 1934. Sisters Gemma and Rose had also served as principals during Dr. Burke's tenure as pastor.

The four-room school house still had small classes. Only 10 students made up the graduating class of 1934. But just four years later the graduating class numbered 24.

Fr. Henebry had the present rectory built in 1936, despite the financial difficulties of the Depression. The pastor, who had studied architecture, supervised the laying of every brick in the building, which was constructed on the site of the old rectory.

Fr. Henebry was from County Waterford and is described as having been a typical Irishman. He was tall, handsome and a practical joker who played the fiddle and who loved games and parties. He was quietly charitable to many of the people of the Plains during the heart of the Depression.

Fr. Henebry is fondly recalled as a great raconteur with a marvelous sense of humor. He regaled

committee meetings with tales and was not above shaking hands while armed with a hand buzzer. He would regularly get together with men of the parish in the basement of the rectory and entertain them with his fiddle.

In fact, Fr. Henebry is remembered primarily as a pastor who loved to be with his people, whether enjoying salami-on-rye lunches in the rectory with the local postmaster, or chatting with everyone who passed by the little summer house he built in back of the rectory. "If anybody came by in the summer time or in good weather, he would have to go and visit with the pastor," one parishioner remembers.



Organist Mary Byrnes remembers Fr. Henebry's beautiful voice, which he would use "only for God. He would never sing any place but in church."

Fr. Henebry died in 1939, the first pastor to die while serving at St. Virgilius.

(The Holy Name Society was a mainstay of parish activity during the 1930s and 1940s through 1960s)

The Tracy Era 30 Years of Growth

Fr. Henebry was replaced by a priest from Mt. Hope named John Tracy, who was to be the pastor of St. Virgilius for nearly 30 years. These were the years of the Second World War, the Korean and Vietnamese conflicts. They were marked by construction of a new church and a new school, and by the skyrocketing post-war growth of the parish. Morris Plains changed from country town to suburb. The church, too, began its era of change brought on by the momentous events of Vatican Council II.

Fr. Tracy was appointed to St. Virgilius by Rt. Rev. Thomas H. McLaughlin, first bishop of the Diocese of Paterson. St. Virgil's became part of the new diocese when the counties of Passaic, Morris and Sussex were separated from the Archdiocese of Newark in 1938.

Sr. Rosemary joined Fr. Tracy at St. Virgil's when she replaced Sr. Lucy as school principal in 1940. Her first graduating class numbered 17 in 1941. At the beginning of the Second World War, St. Virgil's School still had the same four classrooms, and students were taught entirely by the Sisters of St. Dominic. Although class sizes increased slowly, the major school expansion was still a decade in the future.

Shortly after Fr. Tracy reported to St. Virgil's he was joined by the newly-ordained Fr. Stanislaus Durka, an Ohio native who grew up in Delaware, went to school in Michigan and had never heard of Morris



The 1943 St. Virgil's Girl Scout Troop, the first of a vital, continuing scouting program in the parish.

Plains. But he had an immediate and long lasting impact on his new parish. Fr. Durka is most fondly remembered as a big project man, and his first project in his six years at St. Virgil's was scouting.

Scouting Begins at St. Virgil's

Parish boys were already active in the Presbyterian Church's Boy Scout Troop 39 when Fr. Durka began the St. Virgil's troop.

As inexperienced with scouting as he was, the first thing Fr. Durka did was form a troop committee. "We had the man from headquarters come down and give us training courses. In fact, I think we had more men on the troop committee than we had scouts," Fr. Durka says.

The first charter for St. Virgil's Boy Scout Troop 57, which was sponsored by the Holy Name Society, was signed on December 1, 1941. "We got along, and little by little we started building up," Fr. Durka remembers.

Art Repsher from Morristown, not a parishioner, was the first leader of the Boy Scout troop. The group grew slowly during the war, but had an active outdoor program.

The troop's first tent was purchased with \$200 donated by Thomas Moore. One former scout remembers that tent: "It was a huge big thing with long, heavy poles and it took forever to put it up."

Fr. Durka recalls the first time the tent was used: "I will never forget the first time we went camping overnight. The first night we had a heavy rain. The rule was don't touch your tent from the inside, because the water would come in.' Naturally, boys will be boys, and some of them came out soaking wet. I was wet myself. But we managed."

The Boy Scout troop naturally led to other scouting programs, and in 1943 Fr. Durka helped organize St. Virgil's first Girl Scout troop, with Mary Byrnes as troop leader.

St. Virgil's has been instrumental in Catholic scouting in the county and diocese from Fr. Durka's days, when he was county chaplain for both the boy scouts and girl scouts, until today, when nearly every elementary school grade has a girl scout troop and our

boy scouts specialize in gathering food for the InterFaith Food Pantry,

Besides their other programs, St. Virgil's scouts were active in the annual weekend retreats, first at Delbarton and later at St. Paul's Abbey, Newton. St. Virgil's always had a number of boys who received the Catholic scouting award and produced a number of Eagle scouts. This productive scouting tradition continues and, in 1982, five Girl Scouts and six Brownies received diocesan Catholic scouting awards.

Scouting continued to grow at St. Virgil's and a Senior Boy Scout troop was formed under Fr. John White and Senior Scout leader Daniel B. Myers, Sr., in 1945. Cub Scout Pack 57 followed in January, 1958, and the first parish Brownie Troop was organized in 1962, the same year that Cadette Troop 1 began at St. Virgil's.

The senior scouts under Scout Master Pat Belcastro remodeled the back room of the old horse barn behind the school. They created a scout club room, giving the older boys of the parish a place all their own.

Sports Expand With CYO Basketball

Scouting was just one of the projects Fr. Durka undertook. He was also active with the St. Virgil's sports program. The parish continued its long tradition of championship baseball teams. St. Virgil's boys took on public school teams because "there were no Catholic teams at the time," according to Fr. Durka. He recalls Bobby Winters pitching a one-hitter against Vail School in 1948, a feat that merited a big write-up in the Morristown Record.

Fr. Durka also started the boys' basketball team in 1940. "We had no gym. We went over to the old school. There wasn't much room in the basement hall because the ceiling was low. But at least we had a little dribbling and a little passing until we began using the Borough School. We got started little by little. And then we became involved in the CYO in the diocese."

The first CYO basketball game in the Paterson Diocese was held in 1941 and the parish team quickly became involved in CYO competition. But St. Virgil's did not become a powerhouse in the CYO basketball organization until later.

At first, St. Virgil's basketball squad was predominantly a school team, playing Thursday nights in Borough School under the coaching of Harold "Gunboat" Williamson. (Williamson was a well-known boxer who fought under the name "Gunboat" - a nickname he got as a boxer in the Navy.) This grammar school team played other Catholic schools, but was not a member of an organized league until later.

High school boys also played weekly pick-up games without a regular team. In the mid-1940s, George Marinaro became involved with the sports program with Williamson, William Lewis and Fr.

Durka. Nearly forty years later, George is still deeply involved.

The basketball program grew in popularity during the 1940s, and the program took off in the 1950s. By this time, St. Virgil's was a member of the highly-structured and very competitive Diocesan CYO Basketball League, with a junior grammar-school team, and an intermediate high-school team - both with cheerleading squads.

St. Virgil's started slowly in the CYO competition. "We did badly when we first started. Marinaro recalls. "We took our lumps. But when we got organized, people began to know that St. Virgil's was around."

St. Virgil's boys did well in their district, which included Denville, Dover, Morris Plains, Morristown, Madison and Chatham, but didn't become a diocesan powerhouse until the late 1950s and early 1960s. The St. Virgil's junior team was diocesan champion in 1961, 1962 and 1963, with 49 straight wins, retiring the Bishop McNulty Trophy for the first time.

The intermediate teams won a number of county and district titles during the same period and the 1960 cheerleaders were also diocesan champs.

Both the junior and intermediate teams continued to have success on the county level. St. Virgil's has always been known for its powerful basketball program, producing a number of local, collegiate and even professional sports stars. Both Rick Sofield, of the major league baseball Minnesota Twins organization, and Tom Brown, member of the Seton Hall University basketball team, were products of the St. Virgil's sports program.

St. Virgil's sports program expanded beyond the competitive CYO teams in the mid-1950s, with the Friday night intramural program beginning in 1955. Everybody played in this program, which was run for years by the Morris Plains chapter of the Knights of Columbus.

CYO Continues to Grow

The CYO program also expanded beyond basketball in the 1950s under Fr. White and Fr. Louis Gallo, and later under the direction of Fr. Peter McBride. Beginning with a Wednesday night CYO social program, the CYO youth concept expanded into a four-phase program: social, cultural, religious and athletic.

The social and cultural programs were run largely by the young people, who elected their own officers and staffed their own committees. Both the social and cultural programs were very successful in the 1950s and 1960s. The socials drew 40 to 50 young people every week. They even "produced a few marriages," according to George Marinaro. The cultural program produced the best one-act play in the Paterson Diocese in 1973.



The 1941 boys basketball team and the 1961 CYO cheerleaders represent the long-standing tradition of sports at St. Virgil's. Top: Bill O'Connor, Jack Doody, Fr. Durka, Carl Knazik and Jim Monahan, seated Bob Winters, Bud Kapinos, Charlie Turner, Jim Dacey and Al Ciampaglia. Standing cheerleaders: Diane Trullo, Cheryl Grimm, Linda Cottam; kneeling, Margery Wheat and Cathy Manning.

The CYO program was promoted and supported by the CYO Parents Association, which helped finance and supervise the youth activities.

The CYO's religious education role was gradually taken over by the CCD program in the 1970s, but the basketball program and the CYO Parents Association continue to be active in the parish.

The parish sports program is still highly successful. Friday night intramural basketball continues, two basketball teams are represented in the CYO, and St. Virgil's School fields both a boys' and girls' team. The girls' team has continued the championship tradition of the parish, winning the Dominican League title three years in a row and retiring the trophy in 1981.

Much of the success for Fr. Durka's projects must be ascribed to the pastor, "Fr. Tracy always backed us up," says Fr. Durka. "No matter what project I started, he always gave me 100 percent support. He was very encouraging."

Fr. Durka was transferred to St. Joseph's in Passaic towards the end of World War II because the

parish needed a man who knew the Polish language. The long-lasting effects of Fr. Durka's projects, especially the scouting and CYO programs, are a living testament to his foresight and his "can-do" philosophy. "I had a lot of fun. I enjoyed it. My policy was always no matter what kind of obstacle, it will work out if you take a chance at it."

Fr. Durka's chances are still working out for the youth of St. Virgil's.

The immediate popularity of his expanded youth programs ran counter to the trend of parish life. As happened in World War I, parish life suffered from the hardship and restrictions imposed by World War II.

All parish activities and programs slowed as the young men went to war and the women lifted the twin burdens of family support and wartime industrial production. Many of the parish women worked in the nearby defense industries.

Even those activities that continued, such as scouting, were hampered by shortages. Girl Scout leader Mary Byrnes remembers, for example, the difficulties caused by gas rationing.

The parish was hard-pressed by war-time rationing. One parishioner recalls: "We couldn't even get butter. We got those little pills and we used white "butter" (like lard) and mashed up the little red pill into it until it looked like butter."

St. Virgil's joined the rest of the country in celebrating first VE Day and then, on August 14, 1945, VJ Day. But the joy of victory was tinged with the sadness of loss, for some of St. Virgil's men did not return.

The parish erected a memorial plaque to those who served in World War II. This memorial, along with a similar plaque for those who served in the First World War, was apparently lost when the old church was razed.

Post-War Morris Plains

Post-war Morris Plains was still "the boondocks" to some, including a young priest named John White, whose first parish assignment was to assist Fr. Tracy. St. Virgil's was considered a desirable assignment by many newly-ordained priests because of the patience and guidance of pastors like Fr. Henebry and Fr. Tracy, and because of tremendous support from parishioners. But Fr. White says the appointment was a bit of a disappointment at first because St. Virgil's had responsibility for the State Hospital and two county institutions. "So it meant that if you went there, the Bishop expected you to die at your post because of all the patients, and Greystone alone had 6,100 patients in those days."

Fr. White remembers Morris Plains mostly for its openness and quiet. And he remembers the St. Virgil's parish facility for its smallness: "St. Virgil's then had a little wooden church on the corner where the present one now stands. It had a horse barn which was used as a garage. It had a four-room schoolhouse with a



Drama was a special interest of post war St. Virgil's. Here is the cast of "To Tell the Truth" in 1950.

basement hall and a little outhouse."

That outhouse was a problem for some of the modern parishioners who refused to send their children for a Catholic education because they objected to the bathroom – a small building heated by a small furnace. And the facility was starting to get crowded, as the school grew. Twenty-seven students graduated in 1949, the largest graduating class yet in the school's history.

But, mostly, Fr. White remembers the people of his new community: "There was a lot of love in St. Virgil's. That's the secret . . . that's why St. Virgil's was such a great parish. Because the people were not pulling in opposite directions. They were really pulling together."

St. Virgil's also impressed Fr. White as a busy parish. Monday nights were especially active. First, there was religious instruction for the high school youth; the Miraculous Medal novena, which was always crowded; and the weekly veneration of the relic of St. Theresa of Lisieux. St. Theresa was a special patron of Fr. Tracy. Later, when the building fund drive for the new church was launched, the project was placed under her care.

Parish activity picked up in all areas after the war, with a special interest in a traditional St. Virgil's specialty: drama. Musicals and minstrel shows were popular in the parish from Fr. Brown's day at the turn of the century through the 1920s and 1930s, but it was after the war that the St. Virgil's Dramatic Club was formed. The club was led by Harold Benz, Russ LaRoux, Mary Fran McCarthy, William Mahon, Helen Benz, Harry Young and Mary Monahan.

The club presented the Broadway play "Freshfields" in 1947, followed by "You Can't Take It With You" and "Sixteen in August" in 1948. These shows were performed at the Borough School or at Alfred Vail. "Peg of My Heart," a big hit in the early 1950s, was presented in the new St. Virgil's School Auditorium.

The Drama Club had been encouraged by Rev. Henry Koevoets, but after his transfer in 1949 interest declined. Local drama suffered from the competition of television, which was beginning to become a major leisure-time activity among American families.



The new school auditorium hosted Masses while the new church was being built in 19XX

A New School. . .

The 1940s was a period of growth for the parish. There were 457 baptisms during the decade. This growth put pressure on both the little wooden church and the four room schoolhouse with its outdoor plumbing. Fr. Tracy saw the need for a new school to provide a Catholic education for the postwar influx of new parishioners, and the baby boom that followed the war.

St. Virgil's parish had more than doubled. From about 250 families when Fr. Tracy came in 1939, the parish enrollment reached 525 in 1948. The number of children registered in the parish increased from 314 in 1938 to 476 in 1948. Even though not all of these 476 children attended St. Virgil's School, the old school was beginning to feel the crunch. And the baby boom had not yet hit the parish! The number of children registered in the parish was to jump nearly 300 per cent in the next ten years, from 476 in 1948 to 1,410 in 1958.

Although Fr. Tracy probably couldn't anticipate this rapid a growth, he began to plan for a new school in 1949. He asked each parish family to donate \$250. The pastor planned a modern, up-to-the-minute, single-story building with an exit for each classroom. The building was to contain eight classrooms, a kindergarten, and a large, modern gymnasium-auditorium. There was some discussion at the time about adding a basement, but Fr. Tracy felt that the auditorium was sufficient for parish activities. Besides, the slab construction kept the cost of the building down to \$250,000.

Ground was broken in 1949 on the corner of Speedwell and Fairchild Avenues – the land that had been acquired by Fr. Culliney 23 years earlier. A year later the school opened. All eight grades were taught by Dominican Sisters and Mrs. Josephine Strongman, St. Virgil's first lay teacher, taught kindergarten. Sr. Barbara's class of 1951, numbering 19, was the first to graduate from the new school.

Fr. Tracy filled the new classrooms with every student who wanted to attend St. Virgil's, fulfilling his longtime dream of providing a Catholic education to as

many youngsters as possible. Enrollment increased dramatically. The class of 1953 was the first to graduate more than 30. By the mid-fifties, some graduating classes numbered 40 students or more.

. . . And New Church

Although educating the parish youth was one of Fr. Tracy's priorities, he was, of course, always mindful of the liturgical needs of his parish. By the early 1950s the parish had outgrown the small wooden church.

Fr. White recalls the building he came to in 1948: "It was a tiny, wooden frame church. You just had the altar and the little platform, a tiny little sanctuary. There was no room for a pulpit. You just turned around and stood there and held onto the air for dear life. I can remember grasping the floor with my toes out of fright."

The tiny church, much-loved for its beauty and charm, was too small for the ever increasing number of parishioners. The building-fund campaign flyer described the need:

"Today (the small wooden church) is no longer able to offer the proper facilities for our rapidly growing parish.

"This has been quite evident for sometime, with crowds overflowing, at Masses and devotions, into the tiny sacristy and down the front steps onto the path. On Holy Thursday or during Forty Hours, the narrow aisles would not permit a fitting procession of the Blessed Sacrament.

"More recently, with the opening of our new school and with the ever-increasing growth of the community, the facilities of our beloved church have become more and more overtaxed. Today, our problem is acute. No longer are we permitted the privilege of holding Sunday Masses in our present Church, so large is our congregation."

(At this time, in 1954, all Sunday Masses were held in the school auditorium, with only weekday Masses in the church.)

"We must now use the school auditorium so that all may attend the sacrifice of the Mass on Sunday. It is obvious that an auditorium is not a liturgically proper place to celebrate Mass. We must, therefore, make provisions so that the parishioners can once again worship with devotion and reverence. There is a compelling need to erect a fitting House of God to take its rightful place in our thriving residential community."

The construction of a new church, especially so soon after the building of the new school, was a tremendous burden on the energies and resources of even a thriving community. Nevertheless, St. Virgil's undertook a major campaign to raise funds for the projects.

On January 2, 1955, Bishop James A. McNulty of Paterson visited Morris Plains to help launch the



The fall of 1954 and winter of 1955 was a period of demolition and construction at five corners, as the old church came tumbling down and the new one arose in its place.



parishioner recalls.

building-fund campaign. Long-time parish and community leader Michael J. Doody was the drive's general chairman. The cost of the new church was estimated at \$350,000 and the drive set a goal of \$150,000. Each parish family was asked to pledge a "fair share" donation and memorials were sought for most church furnishings, from \$12,000 for the main altar to \$500 for the holy water fountains.

The drive received the wholehearted support of most parishioners, with "everything pretty nearly subscribed to before the church was even started," in the words of one parishioner. The school children even donated to the fund, each giving 50 cents for a brick. The drive netted \$178,000, enabling the pastor, who was now a monsignor, to achieve his second dream: a new St. Virgil's Church to stand beside the new school.

Fr. Tracy had been elevated to Domestic Prelate and made a monsignor on October 19, 1954 - a year after the end of the Korean War and the same year that "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance.

The new church was planned for the same site as the old church. Both the wooden church and the old school behind it which had been used for meetings after the new school was opened - were leveled. The school was demolished six months before the church was torn down.

Before the old building was razed, most of the furnishings - altars, pews, stations of the cross and draperies - were removed and given to other churches. Much went to St. Lawrence's in Chester, where the old St. Virgil's main altar is still being used as a side altar. The statues of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph are now at the Mt. Rose Nursing Home in Gladstone.

The Chester church even used the floor: "The planking on the floors became the flooring of the new church in Chester. It was about three inches thick. On a Sunday morning, a group of men came down from Chester and very carefully picked it up," one



After the building was stripped, it was levelled and the new church was built on top of the old. Masses continued in the school while the church was being built.

Bishop McNulty presided at the blessing and opening of St. Virgil's Church on Saturday, February 9, 1957. The modern, airy church, designed by architect Neil J. Convery, had seating for 750.

This spaciousness was far-sighted. At the time, the parish was accommodating all Sunday Mass goers in the 370-seat school auditorium. But the population growth of the area continued through the 1960s and 1970s, filling those extra pews.

The most rapid growth period was probably in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the 300-home Butterworth development in Morris Township and the 200-home Holiday Ridge development in Morris Plains inundated the parish with new families. Between 1953 and 1968, the number of families registered in the parish increased from 665 to 1,470. At the time of the parish's diamond jubilee in 1956, there were approximately 800 families registered in St. Virgil's. Today, there are more than 1,700.

St. Virgil's parish celebrated its 75th anniversary while the new church was being built in 1956. The highlight was a Diamond Jubilee Dinner and Dance held at Mazdabrook Farms, Parsippany. The diamond jubilee committee, under general chairmen John F. Morgan, Mrs. Helen Hurley and Michael J. Doody, published a diamond jubilee commemorative book after the 1957 dedication of the building, which listed the contributors to the new church.

Fr. White was the historian for the celebration, although he was no longer assigned solely to St. Virgil's. He had been appointed the first full-time chaplain to Greystone State Hospital in 1954, but continued living at St. Virgil's.

Greystone was a big job for the St. Virgil's priests. "You were on constant call. It never ceased. Twenty-four hours a day," according to Fr. White.



The new St. Virgil's Church was dedicated on February 9, 1957 at this Mass. The decorative altar was moved to the center of the transept of the Church in accordance with Vatican II changes.

The bishop recognized this burden on the growing parish when he assigned Fr. White to the hospital. In 1960, Fr. White moved onto the hospital grounds, ending the 80-year link between St. Virgil's and the state hospital that had played such a key role in the founding of the parish and the duties of its priests.

The parish maintains its ties with Greystone through volunteer work, much of which is organized by the Women's Guild.

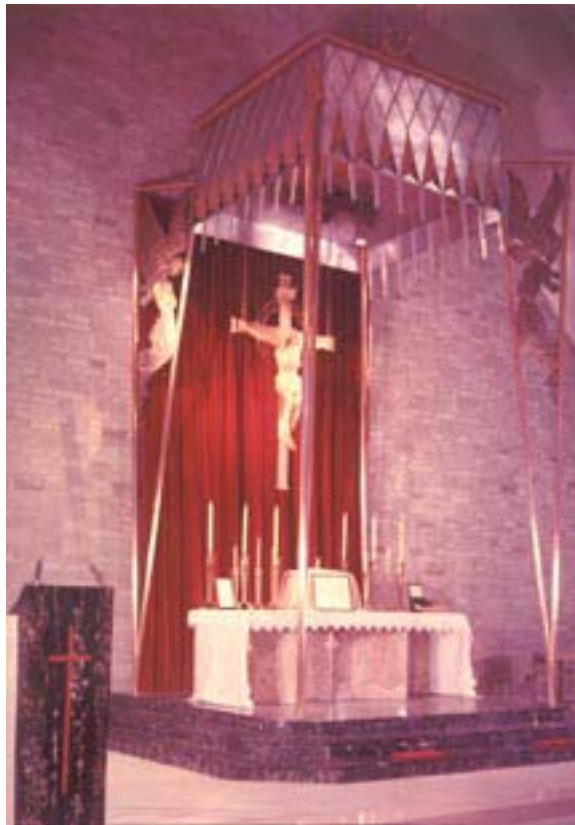
This eight years of St. Virgil's building boom sorely taxed the parish's finances. Msgr. Tracy was not a man to dun his parishioners for donations. He had a policy of talking about money only once a year, when he presented the parish financial report.

But the parish debt remained. To help ease the burden, shortly after the new school opened with its large auditorium and before work began on the church, St. Virgil's started regular weekly bingo games.

Actually, bingo has a long St. Virgil's history. The game was a major attraction during parish bazaars held during Dr. Burke's time in the 1920s. There was a bingo game every night of the week-long fair. The prizes given the winners included items such as alarm clocks, lamps, dishes, summer blankets and glasses and pitchers, each of which only cost \$1.00.

During Fr. Henebry's pastorate in the 1930s, bingos were held weekly in the basement of the old school for a few years, but the war put an end to these. Again, prizes were given instead of money.

The new school building provided the impetus for bingo as we know it today; the auditorium and the cafeteria provided plenty of room and the building presented the parish with a debt and increased expenses for staff and maintenance. The men of the Holy Name Society, with Rev. William Wall, began weekly bingos in the early 1950s. Organizers remember some confusion about licenses at first, and the games were interrupted twice for short periods. But, before the new



Church was built, bingo in the school was established as a weekly event. It has been running continuously for more than 25 years, run for a long while by the men of the Holy Name and the women of the Rosary Society.

The Holy Name Society

During his 28 years at St. Virgil's, Msgr. Tracy continued the practice of his predecessors, leading the annual October Holy Name Parade. The men of St. Virgil's gathered at the church and marched up Speedwell Avenue to the train station. They took the train to Morristown, where the county Holy Name parades were held for a number of years. They then marched up Morris Street, around the Green and to Morristown High School, escorted by Monahan's Memorial Band.

Monahan's Band was a Morris Plains tradition, beginning in 1887 as the Morris Plains Cornet Band. One of the founders was St. Virgil's parishioner Laurence Monahan, who became the leader. Band membership in the early 1900s read like a who's who not only of Morris Plains, but also of St. Virgil's.

When the band celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1912, members included: Laurence Monahan, his son Laurence A., and brother John; George Morris, who worked in Monahan's blacksmith shop; Farquhar and John Fraser, mason contractors; George Meyers and Thomas Williams, engineers at Greystone; William McNeill, a blacksmith at the Monahan shop; Matthew Coss, who worked for Jersey Central Power and Light; and John Gilligan, a mason. Six of these 11 were St. Virgil's parishioners.

Since 1906 the Holy Name Society had been one of the most active parish organizations. The society received Holy Communion monthly as a group, and had regular Sunday morning meetings. There was a Junior Holy Name Society for grammar school boys. In the 1950's, the Holy Name Society started a Nocturnal Adoration Society. Beginning with 8 p.m. Benediction, or, in later years, Mass, the men assumed hourly watches of silent prayer during the night until the 6 a.m. Mass on Saturday mornings.

The Holy Name Society was traditionally the group called upon whenever the pastor needed assistance. Dr. Burke asked the Holy Name men to enlarge and finish the school basement in 1928; Fr. Durka called on them to help sponsor the first St. Virgil's Boy Scout troop in 1941; and Msgr. Tracy turned to the Holy Name to run the regular bingo games beginning in the early 1950s.

Among the many activities run by the Holy Name Society, one of the most fondly remembered is the annual fathers and sons sports nights held in the 1950s and 1960s. The popular affairs packed more than 400 enthusiastic people into the school auditorium, and they featured entertainment, a casual meal, and famous sports personalities, such as New York Giants football star Roosevelt Grier.

The Holy Name Society also ran the early car raffles, and was responsible for the retreat movement in the parish, which still continues with the annual men's retreats held each January.

Although the last county Holy Name parade was held in 1964 the Society was active in St. Virgil's until the early 1970s.

Fond Memories of Msgr. Tracy

Msgr. Tracy is remembered by non-parishioners who saw him lead St. Virgil's in those fall Holy Name parades. He was a tall, imposing figure with white hair, tall top hat and walking stick. But he is also remembered for a great many other things, and he had as great an impact on the lives of St. Virgil's parishioners as he had on the parish's physical plant.

"I think they broke the mold after they made him. He was a saint to us. He was the kindest man.," according to Fr. John White.

Msgr. Tracy upgraded the parish management, hiring the first fulltime parish secretary, Mrs. Ruth Quick, in 1949.

The pastor's famous kindness made it difficult for him to say no. St. Virgil's School bulged with classes numbering 40 and nearly 50 in the late 1950s



The annual Holy Name Parade was a highlight of the year for decades. In these pictures, the men of Morris Plains gather in front of the train station after marching up Speedwell Avenue from the church, before taking the train to Morristown. In the top photo, Monsignor Tracy is marching around Park Place in Morristown, leading the St. Virgil's contingent. The last county parade was held in 1964. The St. Virgil's Holy Name Society, founded in 1906, remained a major part of parish life until the 1970s

and early 1960s because Msgr. Tracy wouldn't say no to any student who wanted a Catholic education.

The pastor managed to say no or to broach unpleasant subjects such as money with his parishioners through his curates. For example, in the 1950s the pastor had Fr. White tell the school P.T.A. that the organization was dissolved when the group was "getting out of hand," according to the curate.

Msgr. Tracy was a unique man in many ways. He was a "great gabber," who loved to meet his people. When Fr. White reported to St. Virgil's in 1948, the pastor told him, "Now we always stand at the front door and greet the people." This was very unusual at that time.

But Msgr. Tracy was a man of his convictions. When he was ordained, he took a pledge of total abstinence from liquor. His curates, Rev. Louis Gallo and Fr. White, finally convinced him to have one glass of champagne when they took him to Llewellyn Farms for his 70th birthday. The pastor said, "Well, I guess now that I'm 70, it's safe."

Msgr. Tracy's convictions made him a man ahead

of his times in many ways. As Fr. White recalls, "We talk so much about ecumenism. Msgr. Tracy practiced ecumenism before the word became popular, because he thought it as charity and love of neighbor. There was always a good relationship between Rev. Joseph Walsh (pastor of the Morris Plains Presbyterian Church) and the priests. We always went to their affairs and they always went to ours. In those days, it wasn't very popular."

One of the classic images of Morris Plains - one which perhaps catches the true spirit of the community better than most - is of Rev. Walsh walking down the avenue to the St. Virgil's rectory or Msgr. Tracy strolling into the Presbyterian Church. Msgr. Tracy was a regular at the traditional Presbyterian Church turkey dinner in October and the Walsh's were always invited to St. Virgil's harvest dinners.

This is a spirit of togetherness which hasn't changed. Rev. Thomas Wood, now assistant pastor of the Presbyterian Church, continues the tradition and is a regular at many St. Virgil's activities.

The death of Rev. Walsh in 1962 and of Msgr. Tracy in 1967 marked the passing of the old order in Morris Plains. Msgr. Tracy died while saying Mass on December 30, 1967, and is buried next to his beloved new church.

In his last few years, Msgr. Tracy had experienced many changes in the church. Pope Pius XII had died in 1958 and the beloved Pope John XXIII had called the second Vatican Council in 1962. The council's decrees and the turbulence of the 1960s were reverberating through the American Catholic Church when a new Pope, Paul VI, visited New York in 1965 - the first pope ever to visit this country. As Pope Paul was planning his historic visit, the people of St. Virgil's were honoring their pastor on the 50th anniversary of his ordination. On May 2, 1965, a solemn Mass of thanksgiving was followed by a jubilee dinner at the new Governor Morris Hotel.

The St. Virgil's community faced the new year of 1968 waiting for a new pastor- the first pastoral change in nearly three decades.

Fr. James Fallon and Vatican II Changes

Fr. James Fallon reported to St. Virgil's on January 23, 1968. He was transferred from St. Michael's in Netcong, where he had served for only 18 months. Before that he was the pastor of Christ the King Parish in New Vernon, which he founded in 1957. Fr. Fallon was no stranger to St. Virgil's, having had a long-standing relationship with Morris Plains from his years as curate at St. Vincent's in Madison. When he came to St. Virgil's, he found in the sports program the sons of some of the boys he had coached at St. Vincent's.

When Fr. Fallon assisted at Msgr. Tracy's funeral Mass on January 3, he had no idea that 20 days later he



The new pastor, Rev. James Fallon, faced many changes, but two constants in his pastorate were education and children, shown here in a pre-k ceremony in 1969.

would be replacing the deceased pastor. The new pastor's first memories of his new parish are of an ecumenical service held the evening he arrived: "We had a wonderful ecumenical service in which all four churches in Morris Plains participated. The church was almost full and I met the other ministers for the first time. It was a wonderful evening, a great way to start - on an ecumenical note." The Morris Plains ecumenical movement was very active in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with St. Virgil's leading the way under the enthusiastic guidance of our new pastor.

Fr. Fallon assumed the pastorate at St. Virgil's during a major transitional period for the Catholic Church. Vatican Council II had ended in 1964 and American Catholics were attempting to adjust to the drastic changes directed by the council. And it was up to the new pastor to implement those changes.

The first change mandated by Vatican II that Fr. Fallon dealt with was the repositioning of the altar. A temporary wooden altar had been installed in front of the main, marble altar so that Mass could be celebrated facing the people. It took Fr. Fallon two years to remove the temporary altar and have the "very beautiful marble altar" cut down and moved forward. The tabernacle was then moved to the side altar in a marble Blessed Sacrament Chapel as required by the Vatican II liturgical norms.

The final Vatican II - inspired altar move was made this year, 1982. The sacrificial table was moved even closer to the people, to the center of the church. The pews in the transepts were turned sideways and the nave shortened so that the congregation faces the altar on three sides.

Other changes suggested by Vatican II included moving the baptistry from the rear to the front of the church, replacing the Sacred Heart altar. Sr. Diane Papp, an artist and St. Virgil's teacher, designed the modern mural behind the baptismal font.

Fr. Fallon also air-conditioned the church in his first year and later had the building painted and redecorated with lighting and sound system changes.

Further changes took place this year: a new sound system was installed, paneling was added to cover the terrazzo tiles, and the sacristy moved to where the old baptismal font was in the campanile.

There were also major changes made in the school under the direction of Fr. Fallon early in his pastorate. The original kindergarten classroom was being used as a storage room. Fr. Fallon converted it into a school library.

Even the rectory saw some changes. The sun porch which had been the priests' common room became the parish office, and the secretary moved there from the school. The top floor was finished to make room for the deacons assigned to the parish. In the 1970s Deacons William Naughton, Robert Gordon, James Scott, Thomas Pivinski and John Tarrantino served St. Virgil's. Fathers Naughton and Tarrantino were ordained at St. Virgil's.

But many of the Vatican II changes Fr. Fallon dealt with were much more fundamental than building renovations. He says: "I think that when I first came here, Vatican II was a brand new idea, and for many people it was a dirty word. There were so many things people had to become acclimated to. Not only Mass facing the people, but even vocal participation. We had very little, if any, congregational singing at that time."

Implementing the changes mandated by Vatican II occupied Fr. Fallon right from the start in 1968. One non-Vatican II problem he was forced to deal with immediately was the poor state of parish finances. The huge building program of the 1950s had left the parish with a debt of \$135,000 in 1968. Msgr. Tracy had combined the debts of the new school and church. He was fond of saying, "Every Catholic Church has a respectable debt, and we have a very respectable one."

But Fr. Fallon, known for his financial acumen, had turned around the debt-ridden Netcong parish in 18 months and now he tackled St. Virgil's "respectable" indebtedness.

The new pastor instituted an annual assessments fund drive to pay the diocesan assessments. This drive was so successful that it became the model for the diocese's "Project Faith" fund drive. The assessment fund drive helped turn St. Virgil's from heavy debt to financial solvency in less than 10 years. Today, the parish boasts a surplus, despite the fact that Msgr. Fallon, like Msgr. Tracy before him, rarely mentions money needs to his parishioners.

CCD Program Changes With Time

If parish finances were a worry to the new pastor, the educational program was not. St. Virgil's School prospered under Sr. Mary Rose Fallon (no relation to the pastor). An extremely active CCD program was in full swing, capably managed by a well-organized CCD council with a council chairman and a principal for each session. Fr. Fallon remembers, "We

were kind of pioneers in the pre-school program, thanks to the hard work of devoted parishioners. These people had a fully organized, very fine CCD program going that was very well attended and functioning very smoothly."

This CCD organization was actually the forerunner of a parish council. In 1965, at the request of Fr. Peter McBride, Msgr. Tracy had authorized the formation of a parish executive board. Harold E. O'Neill, Jr., was its first president and Fr. McBride and later Fr. Patrick J. O'Reilly were the first directors. Other original board members included Ruth Zimmerman, Ernest Zseleczy, Patricia Goginsky, Sue Balbo, Patty Brill, Carol Blystrak, Edward Brill and Sr. Mary Rose.

By September, 1969, the "Schools of Religion," as they were called, had grown from three sessions in September, 1965, to nine sessions for all age groups. Two of these were the pre-school programs originated by Mrs. Goginsky in October, 1965 - the first such programs in the diocese.

The executive board ran programs expanding far beyond just religious education classes. There were committees on Adult Education, with discussion groups, lectures and "Sunday Night at the Movies" - a home film strip program; Parent Education, with home visitations to "arouse awareness to a Catholic household"; a Welcoming Committee, which greeted all new parishioners in their homes and published a parish directory; and a committee to develop programs for the High School of Religion.

Because of the success of the program, Fr. Fallon resisted the trend to a full-time director of religious education. But, gradually, the pastor saw the need for improved CCD teacher training and Sr. Christine Liegy, PBVM, was hired as St. Virgil's first DRE in 1975.



Sr. Christine Liegy was the first director of religious education hired by the parish in 1975, reflecting a Vatican II changes and increased professionalism of parish staffs.

One of Sr. Christine's major accomplishments was the Randolph home CCD program, with a separate organization of teachers and assistants providing

weekly religious education classes in neighborhood homes. At that time, there were about 1,400 children in all phases of the parish CCD program. Today, there are about 610 enrolled in the pre-kindergarten through eighth grade classes.

Today's CCD is family oriented, based on the concept that parents are the natural educators of their children. This approach is evident in all phases of instruction, especially in the sacramental training preceding Holy Communion, Penance and Confirmation, which is an educational program for parents as well as children.

St. Virgil's CCD had a long history before Fr. Fallon found the smoothly running program, with Sunday School classes held as early in the century as anyone can remember. The parish certainly provided religious education for its young people before St. Virgil's School was opened in 1910. Although it is not known when the name Confraternity of Christian Doctrine was first used here, Pope Pius X had ordered that The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine be "canonically instituted" in his 1905 Encyclical on Teaching Christian Doctrine.

From the Rosary Society To the Women's Guild

Another program Fr. Fallon found in excellent condition when he came to St. Virgil's was the Rosary Society.

This, the oldest parish organization, began with 30 members in 1892, and was one of the most active groups at St. Virgil's for 85 years. It sponsored card parties and rummage sales, had a merchandise club, and helped the sisters with whatever they needed.

For years one of the major responsibilities of the Rosary Society was financing Catholic high school tuition for St. Virgil's youth who attended Bayley High School on Madison Avenue in Morristown. High school tuition assistance is now funded through the annual car raffle, the only regular fund-raising event at St. Virgil's.

During Fr. Fallon's first years at St. Virgil's, the Rosary Society continued its tradition as one of the most active of parish organizations. Its members ran a full schedule of social activities and a wide range of charitable programs. They cooked and served Communion breakfasts and luncheons; they cared for the altar cloths and vestments. Their card parties, held three times each year, provided financial support for St. Virgil's School and for the Girl Scout Troop.

The society's annual report for the 1972-1973, under President Betty O'Keefe, exemplifies the traditional Rosarian involvement in parish life, with a square dance, tea, theater party, Fall dance, Christmas party and card party.

Volunteer work was done throughout the year at Morris View and Greystone. Baptismal robes made by



The Women's Guild replaced the traditional Rosary Society at St. Virgil's in 1977. Pictured above is the first Women's Guild Board, with Suzanne Klug, president, third from the left.

society members were given to all babies baptized in the parish and get-well cards were sent to all hospitalized parishioners.

The society also sponsored two Girl Scout camperships for summer camp and donated money to various parish programs.

The Rosary Society was the parish liaison with the National Council of Catholic Women, the umbrella organization for parish and diocesan women's groups. The NCCW was started in the Paterson Diocese in 1944, with St. Virgil's women active in the county group. When Msgr. Tracy became county moderator in the 1960s, St. Virgil's women again became active in the NCCW and they continue their leadership roles in the organization today.

The Rosary Society continued its traditional functions through the mid-1970s, when an effort was made to expand the appeal of parish activity to more women. And so it was that in 1977 the Rosary Society ended its 85-year existence at St. Virgil's, replaced by a new organization with an expanded program.

The first board meeting of the new group, called the St. Virgil's Women's Guild, was held on August 29, 1977, with Suzanne Klug as first president. The guild incorporated many of the Rosary Society's programs, but greatly expanded its scope, attracting a wider range of women parishioners. The guild's program includes religious activities such as bible study and prayer groups, a variety of day and evening sports programs, a self-improvement program, craft activities, social and charitable activities and programs to benefit patients at Morris View Nursing Home and Greystone Park.

The guild's structure allows it to generate interest groups in almost any area, with new circles added recently for young mothers and senior citizens.

The guild gained instant popularity, with 90 women enrolled in the first year and 220 in 1981. The guild also provided a focus for parish women already involved in specific activities such as the pro-life movement.

One of the first Women's Guild interest groups formed was the pro-life circle. St. Virgil's parishioners were active in pro-life activity as soon as such organizations were formed - shortly after the January

22, 1972, U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. Parishioners have been leaders in Right-to-Life, Birthright and other pro-life groups on various levels and active in organizing the annual March on Washington protesting the court's decision. On Friday, January 22, 1982, more than 20 parishioners participated in the march, which reached President Reagan with their appeal for pro-life legislation.

St. Virgil's pro-life activity has been supported by the Morris Plains Chapter of the Knights of Columbus as part of the national pro-life program of the Knights.

Although parishioners' involvement in right-to-life activity goes beyond the Women's Guild's pro-life circle, the guild did provide a focus for such interest and concern. (The parish Adult Education Committee has also sponsored pro-life programs.)

One traditional parish organization still in existence is the Legion of Mary. The international Legion of Mary began in Dublin, Ireland, in 1921, and the first St. Virgil's Legion "Presidium" dates from the 1940s.

The legion is structured along military lines, based on the premise that we are all called to be soldiers of Christ at Confirmation. This army of lay men and women prays and works under the banner of Mary to glorify God through personal sanctification and to labor in the parish under the guidance of their spiritual director.

The current legion members work at Morris View Nursing Home, make personal visits to the hospitalized patients, are Eucharistic Ministers and CCD teachers and do other personal charitable work. They meet weekly to pray the Rosary, meditate and pray the Magnificat daily, and perform at least two hours of apostolic labor each week.

Another parish group, the St. Virgil's School Booster Club, was also organized in 1977. Jerry Loughman was its first president.

The Booster Club took over the Rosary Society's annual card party and fashion show to help support special programs and projects at St. Virgil's School. It promotes athletics and academic programs at the school, runs activities for school children, and sponsors a year-long schedule of parish social activities. The club has become one of the most active of parish organizations in its short, five-year history.

New Groups Mark Parish Life Change

The evolution of the Rosary Society into the Women's Guild and the creation of the Booster Club indicate the change in parish life from the decades-long tradition of Rosary and Holy Name societies. Today, most parish activity centers on various Parish Council committees as well as the Women's Guild and the Booster Club.



This picture shows the second council, with John Twomey, seated second from left, as president.

These council committees and other organizations offer a wide range of varied programs which make St. Virgil's a busy parish, with continual activity offering something for almost everyone.

In addition to the many Women's Guild circles, the Booster Club sponsors a year-long social program with dances and parties; the Family Life Committee runs seasonal pot luck suppers, pancake breakfasts and get-acquainted wine and cheese parties, as well as their family-oriented programs; the Adult Education Committee has a regular, year-long program of lectures and films; there are continual spiritual programs including retreats, days of recollection and renewals as well as regular Marriage Encounter and Prayer Group activity; and there is a wide range of youth activities, with the St. Virgil's Youth Group running an active program for teenagers as well as the traditional sports and scouting events.

In the words of one longtime parishioner: "Some of the organizations may have changed, but St. Virgil's is just as active as ever. It seems that there's always something going on anymore. It's exciting."

The formation of the Booster Club was only one of the changes affecting St. Virgil's School during the 1970s. With declining vocations there were fewer nuns, so more lay teachers were hired. The first lay teachers were hired at St. Virgil's in the 1950s, but it was not until the late 1960s and the 1970s that lay teachers became the rule rather than the exception.

Today all of the classes are taught by lay persons. The first lay principal of St. Virgil's School, Mrs. Joyce Middleton, was hired in 2002, and the end of the 2002 school year saw the end of the Sisters of St. Dominic's presence at St. Virgil's.

Enrollments in St. Virgil's, and all Catholic schools, began to decline in the 1970s. Although this trend may be reversing in the 1980s, the 1970s saw the first St. Virgil's graduation of fewer than 30 students since 1955. The Class of 1981, with 25 students, was the smallest graduating class in 27 years.

The Parish Council And Lay Involvement

One of the major post-Vatican II changes has been the increase in the involvement of the laity in running the parish, especially through

the formation of parish councils. The inaugural meeting of the St. Virgil's Parish Council was held on May 8, 1972, in the school library. At the next meeting the first officers were elected: Peter Rudden, president; John Twomey, vice president; and Jeanne MacEachern, secretary.

This first St. Virgil's Parish Council consisted of: members-at-large John Geary, MacEachern, Cathleen Earl and Joseph Flaherty; regional representatives Helen Hurley (Region 1), John Twomey (Region 2), Leonard Contarino (Region 3), William Catterall (Region 4), Daniel Myers (Region 5), Joseph Selitto (Region 6), Peter Rudden (Region 7), James Boonstra (Region 8),

and Arthur Plantamura (Region 9); parish trustees Michael Doody and James McErlane; Fathers Fallon, Patrick Browne and Peter Doody; Sr. Ellen McMahon; Deacon Robert Gordon and youth representatives Timothy Halloran and Debbie Polise.

Fr. Fallon describes the St. Virgil's approach to a parish council: "It was designed to be democratic in the sense that there would be an elected portion as well as an ex officio part, and it was one of the few council constitutions which did not give the pastor veto power. It was a very liberal constitution and its purposes were very clearly set forth."

The basic purpose of that first council and the present council is consultative and advisory: to consult with and advise the pastor on parish issues and to provide a channel of communication with the parish.

The council constitution was revised in 1978 to include all committee chairpersons as members.

The council has acted as a sounding board on a number of parish issues, including hiring a director of religious education (1976), continuation of the CYO basketball program (1976), plans for the Adult Center (1977), discussions about remodeling the church and moving the altar (1979-81), and the need for a kindergarten (1980).

The council has been responsible for the implementation of a number of new programs. The Oasis, the parish newspaper, was begun under council auspices by Jane and Steve Karr on September 22, 1974. But The Oasis was not the first parish newsletter. The St. Virgil's Parish Digest began publishing in 1942 and continued through the early 1950s. The Rosary Society also published "News and Views," a newsletter for all women of the parish from 1972-1974.

The council reinstated a traditional St. Virgil parish activity, the parish picnic, in 1974. The picnic became so popular that it outgrew the parking lot in 1978 and moved to the county parks.



Charitable giving, always a hallmark of St. Virgil's, was a special focus in the 1970s, from Thanksgiving food drives to adoption of St. Joseph's Parish in Paterson. Above, the Brady family donate Thanksgiving dinners. Left, St. Virgil's Brownies deliver Christmas gifts to St. Joseph's.



Another parish tradition revived by the council was the parish carnival, but with a new twist. Carnivals were held in May, 1980 and 1981, with all proceeds going to charities outside the parish as part of an "Operation Outreach" program first discussed by the council. In 1980, \$9,200 was donated to St. Francis DeSales School and Mission in Abaco, the Bahamas, staffed by the Sisters of St. Dominic from Caldwell. In 1981, \$9,000 was split between Abaco and St. Joseph's Parish in Paterson.

St. Joseph's became a special project in the late 1970s, with St. Virgil's helping out the inner-city parish with staff salaries, heating bills, and many different kinds of donations by various parishioners and groups, including the Women's Guild and the Brownies.

The inner-city parish was just one of St. Virgil's charitable projects. From Thanksgiving food baskets and clothing drives, to Christmas gifts for the elderly and regular "Fruit Sundays" for Greystone, and ongoing programs at Morris View Nursing Home, the people of St. Virgil's are busy caring for others.

On July 1, 1978, the Randolph Township area of St. Virgil's was made part of the newly-formed Resurrection parish, with 366 St. Virgil's families transferred to the new parish. But St. Virgil's rebounded quickly, and now, four years later, there are 1,711 families registered - more than before Resurrection parish was created.

This parish growth and increased activity, especially with more than a dozen Women's Guild interest circles meeting regularly, sorely taxed the parish's meeting facilities. To provide more space and add comfortable adult meeting surroundings, a new Adult Center was constructed. The Adult Center, which



The Adult Center, later named for Monsignor Tracy, was completed in 1978 to help accommodate the increased parish activity.

can be divided in half to accommodate two simultaneous activities, was opened in September, 1978. The building, which cost \$67,000, was financed entirely from parish funds. The Eucharistic Minister program was started at St. Virgil's in 1977, with John Twomey and Ralph Wilcox the first lay ministers of the Eucharist in the parish. By year end, Sr. Diane, Sr. Joyce, Sr. Joanne and Daniel Myers were also distributing the Eucharist.

Active Music Program Gets Fulltime Minister

The parish added a new staff member on November 9, 1978, when Mrs. Jane Rufino was hired as the first full-time music minister. Before Mrs. Rufino was hired, Dorothy Caccio had been serving as part time music minister.

The new music minister expanded the parish music program, adding a children's choir and folk group to the existing adult choir.

St. Virgil's has always had an active music program as far back as anyone can remember. Mrs. David Cronshey had been the organist at St. Virgil's (and at the Presbyterian Church) before 1910. When the Sisters of St. Dominic came to St. Virgil's in 1910, they regularly led the adult choir and formed various children's choirs, beginning with the first principal, Sr. Clementine, and continuing under Sr. Ethel Marie, then Sisters Gemma and Agnes, as well as other nuns. Under Sr. Clementine, St. Virgil's developed an excellent choir which sang at the church and at Greystone with Kathleen Rochford Quimby as organist.

The nearly 100 years of continual success for the St. Virgil music program must be credited to the devoted volunteers who gave willingly and freely of their time, especially organists such as Mrs. Quimby and, for the past 30 years, Mary Byrnes.

Down through the years, various nuns, pastors and curates organized the music program. Music education, both through choir membership and through



When Mrs. Jane Rufino was hired as our first fulltime music minister, she found a dedicated group of volunteers, including organist Mary Byrnes, honored by the parish for her more than 50 years of service.

formal classes in St. Virgil's School, has always been stressed in the parish, with many accomplished musicians, such as Miss Byrnes, getting their start and perfecting their talents in the St. Virgil's choir loft.

With the Vatican II change to the use of English in the liturgy and the emphasis on congregational singing, the music program expanded to include regular leaders of song for all Sunday Masses.

This post-Vatican II emphasis on lay participation in the liturgy has also produced large numbers of lectors and Eucharistic Ministers, as well as two permanent deacons: John DaSilva was ordained in 1974; Sylvester Mazzocchi was ordained in 1975; and parishioners Joseph Quinn and Daniel Scrone were ordained permanent deacons on March 27, 1982.

Not only has the post-Vatican II Church stressed volunteer involvement in the parish and liturgy, but it has also increased professional specialization with new full time staff positions, such as minister of music, director of religious education, and youth minister. Sr. Joanne Marie, who had been teaching in St. Virgil's School, was assigned as St. Virgil's first coordinator of religious activities in September, 1981. Sr. Linda Delgado replaced Sr. Christine as DRE in 1980.

On December 17, 1978, the St. Virgil's parish community joined together for a very special celebration - honoring Fr. Fallon on the 35th anniversary of his ordination. A special liturgy was held, then a reception and dinner at the Governor Morris Inn - in the same ballroom in which the parish honored Msgr. Tracy 13 years earlier.

St. Virgil's at 100: A Period of Change

The post-counciliar church has seen many changes and movements: the cursillo, charismatic groups and various renewals. St. Virgil's parishioners have been active in all of these

with the enthusiastic support and leadership of Msgr. Fallon, whose first concern has always been the spiritual life of his parish.

The pastor cites one of these movements especially: "I think Marriage Encounter has done more for this parish than any other single movement because it gets to people where they are - in their homes. It changes their home life and therefore changes everything."

Msgr. Fallon sees the church in a time of change as St. Virgil's enters its second century: "This is a transitional period during which a lot of superficial, visible changes have taken place in the liturgy. The introduction of the laity in various new roles and ministries is especially visible."

He also cites this as "a period of declining vocations. Not only are people - priests and sisters - defecting at a tremendous rate in the church, but very few are entering into the fulltime ministry of the church. It is a time when everyone wants to keep their options open and therefore no one is willing to make a lifetime commitment to anything, including marriage."

This decline in vocations has affected St. Virgil's, a parish with a long and rich heritage of fostering priests and nuns. Alice Coss was the first of three Coss sisters to join the Sisters of St. Dominic in 1914. Since then, 10 other women have followed her into the sisterhood. Five young St. Virgil's men have become priests: John O'Connor was our first vocation to the priesthood in 1962; followed by Joseph Ciampaglio (1962); Paul Knauer (1964); Alfred L. Lampron (1975) and William Cramer, Jr. (1977).

Comparing the St. Virgil's of 1968, when he came to Morris Plains, with the parish celebrating its centennial, Msgr. Fallon sees the most marked change as "a different orientation towards the whole religious practice. It's much less obligation and much more community and relationship oriented, both as regards the Lord and as regards each other."

This community orientation is a much more accurate measure of Msgr. Fallon's ministry than a chronicle of change, for the pastor is more concerned with the spirit of his flock than the state of his buildings. The spirit of the parish, as it celebrates its centennial year, is best stated by some of its people, who explain what it means to them to be a member of St. Virgil's parish:

- "To me, St. Virgil's means belonging, being able to join with others, not only on Sunday, but any day of the week. I find a tremendous amount of sharing and caring happening in our parish."
- "St. Virgil's parish has always meant a great deal to me. I'm looking forward to raising my children in this atmosphere of love."
- St. Virgil's community made me feel like part of their family. I feel that my association with St. Virgil's has made me a better Christian. "

"Since I became a parishioner four years ago, I have continually been impressed by the generous, truly A



costumed ball was just one of the highlights of a year-long centennial celebration for St. Virgil's Parish in 1981. Pat and Jim Shiels show off their period finery.

- caring people of St. Virgil's - people who give of their sustance, of themselves."
- "St. Virgil's is a group of concerned, loving people."
- "To me, St. Virgil's is a very human place, like being in a family."
- "St. Virgil's is people - people who live, share, work, grow and pray together. St. Virgil's is family." This, then is the centennial spirit of St. Virgil's as fostered by our pastor: We Are Family.

As St. Virgil's faces its second century, Msgr. Fallon sees the parish's major strength as "a group of young couples in their 30s and 40s who relate to each other and to the parish and give of their time. I think these families are the backbone of our parish."

The pastor stresses the unique heritage these families have in the long-time parishioners still active in the parish who, along with a core of concerned, involved young people, provide a priceless, multi-generational chain of commitment to our parish community.

The strength of St. Virgil's is now, as it has always been, in the devotion of its people. From the first few families who crowded into Andrew Murphy's parlor on Christmas Day, 1881, to the more than one thousand families who attended eight Christmas Masses on December 24 and 25, 1981, this is a legacy of community love and sharing that makes the history of St. Virgilius Parish the story of a people.

(This is the end of the Centennial history book text.)

The Centennial Year

1981 was a year-long birthday party for the people of St. Virgil's.

Each month was dedicated to a different theme, leading up to the commemorative Masses of Christmas,

which marked exactly 100 years of worship for the Church of Morris Plains.

In January, the ministers of the four churches in Morris Plains and their combined choirs celebrated a century of Christian unity with an Ecumenical Service and social. The Family Life Committee held a get-

acquainted party as well as the weekly coffee Sundays; the Girl Scouts presented a cultural festival for area scouts, parishioners joined the annual March of Life to Washington.

February featured "Down by the Creek Bank", a down-home, knee slapping musical presented by the children of the parish to celebrate the centennial. Families crowded the gym for the annual pot luck supper sponsored by the Family Life committee and the Booster Club's Valentine's Dance was a huge success.

The centennial theme for March was vocations. The month was highlighted by Fr. Fallon's installation as monsignor.

April was a busy centennial month, highlighted by the "Our Town in 1880" gala sponsored by the Women's Guild, with the parish dressed up in 1880s costumes for a night of nostalgia. Also in April, the Booster Club's fashion show and card party raised nearly \$5,000 for St. Virgil's School, the Living Stations marked Holy Week, and Bishop Rodimer conferred diocesan Girl Scout awards at St. Virgil's.

In May, the Centennial Parish Carnival raised \$9,000 for charity while providing a fun-filled three days and nights of rides and games; and a Centennial Parish Bingo raised more than \$1,000 to create the Parish archives. May also included Confirmation, First Communions and the annual May Crowning.

September saw the centennial parish picnic begin the school year with Mass under the maples in Lewis Morris Park.

In October, a dinner dance formally honored our centennial with awards from the local mayors. The Family Life Committee sponsored an Italian Dinner and the Adult Education Committee began a series on Catholic Morality.

November was highlighted by a dual centennial celebration for St. Virgil's and the Caldwell Dominicans, again celebrated by Bishop Rodimer. November also included the annual Thanksgiving Food Drive and celebration of St. Virgilius' Feast Day.

In December, as the centennial year began to wind down, the Prayer Group hosted an 1880s Christmas party with handmade decorations and candlelit trees, and the booster club dance featured Hambone Kelly.



Parish children dress up for "Down by the Creekbank", a musical tribute to the Parish Centennial. Below, the Centennial carnival, a long-standing parish tradition dating from Fr. O'Neil's parish fairs time in the early 1900s and revived in the 1980s.



Every Christmas 1981 Mass celebrated the 100th anniversary of the first Mass in Morris Plains on December 25, 1881, and St. Virgil's Parish began it's second century.

This centennial year provides a snapshot in the life of a busy parish.

St. Virgil's Begins its Second Century

The parish barely took a breath as the people of St. Virgil's were energized by their centennial year. 1982 was nearly as active as 1981. Many of the Centennial activities were continuations of regular events, and some of the special programs proved so popular that they continued.

The first project for the new year was the completion of the Centennial Book, and the organization of the parish archives, which were gathered as part of the research for the centennial. Dan Myers, who directed the historical research for the



The library and pre-school addition was added to the school building when the church acquired additional property on Fairchild Avenue. This allowed the original kindergarten room, which was used as the library, to be converted back into kindergarten space and St. Virgil's School added the current pre-school and kindergarten programs. The library building was dedicated to Monsignor Fallon on the 50th anniversary of his ordination on December 18 1993

Centennial program, supervised the archives. Dan maintains the St. Virgil's archives at his home. Some of the St. Virgil's memorabilia and antiquities can now be found in the Plains Museum.

Parish activity continued at a fairly constant level throughout most of the 1980s. In 1985 the Parish census had 9 regions and by 1992 population growth had grown the census to 13 regions.

Major physical changes to the St. Virgil's plant were limited by parish property lines. Msgr. Fallon, always with an eye for the future, took advantage of real estate availability to purchase neighboring properties on Fairchild Avenue and later Hanover Avenue.

The 1990s saw the inclusion of girls as regular altar servers throughout the American Catholic Church, including St. Virgil's.

The Fairchild property was the key to school expansion – a longstanding vision of both the pastor and the principal. Using the additional property, Msgr. Fallon moved the Fairchild Avenue exit west and built the library and pre-school addition to the St. Virgil's School in 1987. This allowed the school to again offer a kindergarten program and to add pre-kindergarten. Kindergarten took over the original kindergarten room, which had been used as a library, and a pre-k and library were included in the addition.

The addition was dedicated to Msgr. Fallon on December 18, 1993, on the 50th anniversary of his ordination.

Msgr. Fallon also acquired the Lescher house, next to the parish property on Hanover Avenue. Most

of the back yard, along with some of the Fairchild property, was converted into much needed parking space.

The Knights of Columbus: New roles for a new era

Another significant real estate change affected one of the most dynamic forces in the parish when the Bishop McLaughlin Council 3495 of the Knights of Columbus sold their chapter building at 617 Speedwell Avenue.

St. Virgil's men originally joined the George Washington Chapter in Morristown. Many of the leaders of that chapter were St. Virgil's parishioners, including parish trustees James McErlane, Thomas Hunt and Michael Doody.

March 9, 1952, 40 men became charter members of the newly organized Morris Plains chapter, named for Bishop McLaughlin. The first meeting of the new chapter was held in the old St. Virgil's four room school. Later meetings were held at the Watnong Veteran of Foreign Wars building on Rt. 53.

On November 28, 1961, the Council bought Dr. McLeod's house at 617 Speedwell Avenue for \$26,000. Members bought shares to raise the purchase price. The house was completely renovated, removing walls to create a meeting room, the basement was air conditioned, a bar was installed and a pool table and shuffle board were added. The second floor was converted into a rental apartment.

Twenty two years later years, on March 31, 1983, the council sold the home because of increasing taxes and building upkeep and returned their meeting to the VFW building.

The council underwent a revitalization in 1987 under Grand Knight John Stabile.

The Council is currently one of the more vital elements of St. Virgil's Parish. They run the annual Monsignor Fallon Golf Tournament which raises money for financial aid for St. Virgil's School; are the leaders of the Right to Life movement in the parish and run the annual trip to Washington for the March for Life; annually raise funds for retarded citizens in collections outside local stores; run the annual pasta supper for the parish; sponsor an essay contest and basketball free throw shooting contest for students; and award the top male and female graduates of both St. Virgil's and Borough Schools.

The Knights also built the bell tower for the St. Patrick bell when that historic artifact was returned to the parish.

The Bishop McLaughlin Chapter celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2002, meet monthly at St. Virgil's, and remain one of the parishes key organizations.



The Oasis: A Newspaper for an active parish

One of the identifying characteristics during the 1970s and 1980s was the parish newspaper, *The Oasis*. Founded in September 1975 by Steve and Jane Karr, *The Oasis* grew to a 16–32 page letter-sized, monthly newspaper dominated by many pictures of parish activity. *The Oasis* bracketed the centennial celebration and corresponded with a period of intense parish activity, providing the original eight page paper with plenty of parish news to expand to its 32 page maximum.

The Oasis revived an older parish tradition of the *St. Virgil's Parish Digest*, published for 10 years beginning in 1942.

The Oasis continued publishing under the direction of Don and Jeanne McKenna and Jack Schultz for 10 years, repeating the earlier period of the *Parish Digest*.

The level of parish life coincides with the need for communication and, as St. Virgil's parish activity level increased beginning in 2001, the parish once again found the need for regular printed news and began publishing a quarterly newsletter in the fall of 2003.

Fr. John Andrew Connell, A Deeply Spiritual Pastor

A second major era ended for St. Virgil's when Monsignor James L. Fallon retired on June 15, 1993. Monsignor Fallon had turned 75 in April, and the Bishop accepted his retirement after serving nearly 50 years as a priest and slightly more than 25 years as pastor of St. Virgil's.

Msgr. Fallon had planned for his retirement years earlier when he purchased the Lescher property. On June 15, 1993, the parish threw a huge house party for our retiring pastor, helping him to furnish "Padre's

Parish offices were moved to this temporary office building and the rectory was remodeled to accommodate the Winston family, as St. Virgil's welcomed a married priest to our parish family.

Pad" where he continues to serve his people as pastor emeritus.

Fr. John Andrew Connell took over the pastorship of St. Virgil's as the Catholic Church was undergoing a period of significant change, marked by the declining number of priests. Fr. John Andrew still retained the traditional two associate pastors in St. Virgil's native son Fr. Alfred Lampron and Fr. Jeremiah O'Riodan.

Eventually, Fr. Al was promoted to pastor of Holy Spirit in Pequannock and longtime weekend associate Fr. Ron Sordillo joined St. Virgil's fulltime. Fr. Jerry was transferred and St. Virgil's began to experience the decline in priests which affected the entire American Catholic Church. To compensate for fewer priests, Fr. John Andrew hired Sr. Mary Larkin as director of pastoral care and opened the ministry to the sick to lay ministers. Fr. John Andrew, a teacher in the Deaconite program, also incorporated a growing number of deacons into the parish ministry.

Fr. John Andrew is remembered as a deeply spiritual man who was forced to deal with a major parish management crisis when the Sisters of St. Dominic notified the pastor that they could not continue to provide a principal for St. Virgil's School in 1995.

The principal crisis was a significant challenge to the parish, as school parents rallied around the sisters of the school in public opposition to the pastor. Ultimately, a compromise was brokered and the search committee chose St. Virgil's native Sr. Lena Picillo, who was followed by Sr. Ann Marie in 1999, to continue the 85 year tradition of Dominican leadership of St. Virgil's School.



Community prayer each morning, led by the pastor and principal, characterizes the revitalized spiritual life of St. Virgil's School and is part of the spiritual movement based on the rules of St. Benedict led by Fr. Bill.

Fr. William Winston, A Time of Cohesiveness Unity, and Comprehensiveness

Fr. William L. Winston replaced Fr. John Andrew on June 10 1999. Fr. John Andrew was granted a one year study sabbatical by the diocese and subsequently upon his return to the diocese was appointed pastor of neighboring Resurrection parish. Fr. Bill had come to Saint Virgil's from Assumption where he had served as associate pastor for 6 years.

Fr. Bill brought with him a mastery of modern management techniques, thanks to his MPA degree from Seton Hall University. He served as a member of the diocesan school financial procedures committee, the deaconate curriculum committee (chair) and on the diocesan liturgical commission. He also brought to Saint Virgil's his wife Janet and five children (Laura, William, Claire, Monica, Joseph).

Fr. Bill was an Anglican priest who transferred to the Roman Catholic Church as a result of Vatican decision in 1981 to permit married Episcopal priests to become Catholic priests, and to do so without further formal seminary education. Father Bill came to the Paterson Diocese in 1984.

Fr. Bill's appointment coincided with the next major impact of the priest shortage on St. Virgil's. The other shoe dropped when Fr. Ron was appointed associate pastor of Saint Peter's Parsippany, (and subsequently pastor of Saint Joseph, West Milford) and Fr. Bill did not receive a replacement. The new pastor was faced with major personnel issues as soon as he took the new job.

Fr. Bill turned to his close relationship with the diaconate movement, and hired St. Virgil's native and Deacon Merle Sisler as fulltime pastoral associate, filling some of the parish duties of an associate pastor. This marked the beginning of a staff reorganization which brought longtime parishioner Joanne Calafiore

to work as the Minister of Adult and Family Ministry and Sr. Marilyn Zaino to serve as Minister of Pastoral Care, including sick calls as well as homebound and hospital visits. These had increased by more than ten fold as St. Virgil's was now caring for more people at home and in institutions than at any

time in its history, including the peak periods of activity with Greystone and the County institutions.

Fr. Bill's vision of parish ministry crystallized for many the myriad of parish ministries and activities as the parish was organized around major ministry titles: Worship, Pastoral Care, Adult and Family Life, Religious Education, School, Youth Ministry and Service/Outreach. This same ministerial approach was utilized to organize financial administration, human resources and plant and equipment. Fr. Bill's management centralized many of the parish functions, including data management and finances. Better data management allowed the parish to introduce individualized direct mail communications, increasing service to various parish constituencies and to individuals.

Modern management streamlined the operation of the Parish Carnival, increased the success of fund raisers such as the Gift Auction, and generally upgraded the efficiency and productivity of many parish activities. Soon the parish had been experiencing deficits in its operations was breaking even and able to continue many parish ministries (including the school) which had been threatened with reductions or elimination.

Fr. Bill also confronted the school legacy of Fr. John Andrew's earlier problems and accepted the resignations of the last remaining Sisters of St. Dominic at St. Virgil's School with the end of the 2002 school year. The principal search, which was national in scope and involved a professional consultant, school parents and parishioners, finally selected Mrs. Joyce Middleton as the first lay principal of St. Virgil's School beginning in September, 2002.

With the departure of the last nuns, the Parish Convent, originally purchased in 1910 and renovated in 1928, was empty, and began to absorb some of the extra meetings and storage which the parish plant could no longer accommodate as the parish entered a new cycle of activity which sorely taxed existing meeting and function space.

In order to deal with some of these challenges, the pastor appointed a Parish Development Committee

which included five subcommittees on (1) stewardship and tithing, (2) capital development, (3) planned giving and estate planning, (4) corporate grants and matching gifts; and (5) parish fund raising and local business Contacts. The development committee undertook a six month needs assessment in early 2003, reported these needs to the parish and obtained considerable parish feedback on prioritizing these needs. The committee presented its final report in early 2004. In it, the Committee outlined the hopes of the parishioners and the desire for a gathering space at the entry to the Church with social and adult meeting areas adjacent and under one roof. Also parishioners responded favorably to the proposal to create a Blessed Sacrament Chapel and to renovate the present organ and console. Finally, the parish community embraced the idea of additional children meeting space for religious education, school and youth and for the elimination of the temporary office building in favor of a permanent office space for the ministers of the parish staff.

The development committee also launched a highly successful tithing campaign in October 2003 and St. Virgil's became a tithing parish.

A new marketing group was organized by the Parish Finance Council in September 2004 to deal initially with declining school enrollments. The committee, under the direction of marketing professionals within the parish, launched a school marketing campaign in October, 2003. School enrollment is perhaps the most serious problem faced by the parish in 2003. In spring 2004, the Marketing efforts paid off and 32 new families were enrolled for the following September. Unfortunately, the retention continued to plague school enrollment. School academic scores continue to climb with the school outscoring the average suburban parochial school in the diocese in every grade. Parish leadership continued to believe that the retention issues were a blimp on the screen and the combination of financial stability, academic success and enrichment opportunities could only give way in the future to a full school enrollment of 250 students.

Fall of 2003 also saw the beginnings of a new parish spiritual focus based on the spirituality and rules of St. Benedict, initiated and led by the pastor, who has a special commitment to Benedictine spirituality. The parish was called to reflect on the Benedictine roots of its parish Saint, Virgilius – an Irish monk from a Benedictine monastery in Agabhoe Ireland who left home and kin to journey to Austria to become the founding Bishop of Salzburg, the Abbot of Saint Peter's Benedictine Monastery and a missionary. The Benedictine Sisters of Saint Walburga Monastery in Elizabeth helped parish ministers in the effort leading days of retreat for parishioners, faculty and parish staff. The 2003-2004 brought the first year of Benedictine life to the parish: October retreat day, followed by a five week series attended by 80 parishioners on Benedictine Spirituality. An Advent Retreat Day prepared the way for a Monthly series to follow on the third Sunday of each month in January through May featuring a luncheon, a speaker, a discussion and Vespers. The year concluded with a retreat day for all staff, ministers and faculty of the parish at Saint Walburga's and spiritual planning by the ministry staff for the forthcoming 2004-2005 year.

(December 31, 2003)

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The Story of the St. Patrick Bell; and
The Parish Honor Roll.**