

Holy Trinity Parish History

Holy Trinity Parish was formed in 2006 by merging the parishes of St. Agnes, St. Timothy and St. Matthew. Rev. Leo A. LeBlanc became the first pastor of the new parish. We have also been privileged to have Deacon Michael Guy helping with the pastoral duties in the parish.

Of the three parishes that were merged, St. Agnes in Ashland is the oldest. The history goes back to the 1860's when Rev. Isidore Noiseux came from Lancaster once a year to hold services in private homes. In 1871 Ashland members were enrolled in St. Joseph Parish in Laconia with Rev. John Murphy as pastor. Then, in 1891, when Rev. John Finen was appointed pastor of Tilton and Ashland, services were held in the Ashland Town Hall. He also had missions in Plymouth and was responsible in 1899 for building the original church and rectory in Ashland; the buildings still stand today.

Twenty Catholic families supported this effort. The March 1901 issue of Granite Monthly called it "a pretty frame structure of Roman design with a Campanille tower...beautifully furnished in mountain ash and hard pine...walls and ceilings are buff and terra."

The land east of the church was acquired on October 4, 1923 for a church hall, and on September 18, 1927, the church bell, purchased from the Knights of Columbus Council of Laconia, was blessed by Bishop George Gertin.

In February of 1910, Rev. John A. Casey acquired land on Squam Lake. A summer chapel was built and Mass was attended by campers, counselors and summer residents who came by boat and path to enjoy the serenity and simplicity. By 1968 the St. Agnes Parish church census recorded 141 families or 602 members. In 1992, under the direction of Rev. Jean M. Lemay, a massive renovation project was taken on to "repair, restore and renew" the church and rectory. The chairs that were added were custom made and parishioners learned to weave the rush seats. In 1991, with Rev. George H. Robichaud as pastor, 200 families and 475 persons celebrated their 100th Anniversary. Father Robichaud was the last priest to live in the rectory. After

he left Ashland was twinned with Plymouth. In Fr. Lemay's words Ashland had a mission of truly being "A home for our church where people will be welcoming, hospitable, prayerful and which will not be complete without us, the gathered assembly."

Missionaries from Tilton conducted the first Catholic services in Plymouth in 1901 at the home of one of the pioneer families of the parish, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Coffee. Three years later, the newly established St. Matthew Parish became a mission of St. Agnes Parish, just a few miles to the south.

The congregation increased in numbers and the Universalist church, which was closed at that time, served for parish Masses during the next three or four years. A lot was purchased in 1911 on School Street in Plymouth and a year and a half later, on October 12, 1912, Saint Matthew Catholic Church was dedicated by Bishop Albert Guertin.

The first pastor, Rev. John Brewen, was appointed in the summer of 1916. Father Brewen fell ill and died during the influenza outbreak of 1918. From October 1918 to July 1919, St. Matthew was administered by Rev. P.J. McDonough, pastor of St. Agnes.

The Rev. Michael Griffin was appointed second pastor of St. Matthew, and on July 19, 1919 the rectory was purchased. By 1940 Plymouth was being served by Rev. Adrien Verrette. He renovated the Plymouth rectory in July of that year. An Orgatron Organ was presented to the church in memory of his mother, Virginie Verrette. A new furnace, redecoration of the sanctuary, including a bronze tabernacle, and redecoration of the interior was completed between 1946 and 1950. Fr. Verrette ran a vibrant parish between the two campuses and started many organizations and fund raising events.

Women of the parish helped the Red Cross prepare clothing and surgical dressings for World War II victims. A Seton Club was organized on November 5, 1940 for Catholic students attending Plymouth Teachers College, now Plymouth State University. In one photo 38 students are pictured with Fr. Verrette at a meeting. Annual banquets were held.

Throughout the years various college chaplains have worked with these students. Remembered were Sister Rosemary Burnham, RSM, Sister Helene Higgins, CSJ, Maura Daugherty and currently Kathy Tardif.

In 1953, Fr. Verrette was transferred after 14 years of serving Catholics in Plymouth; Rev. Hubert Mann was appointed pastor of St. Matthew Parish. During the 1960's the parish hall was built in the back of the church parking lot. The Knights of Columbus painted it inside and out. Three years later the floor was redone. Several Associate Pastors served over the years and in 1984 Deacon Rev. W. J. White served the parish. In 1985 Rev. Robert Cole was appointed pastor and served St. Matthew Parish for the next 13 years. This time is described as a very vibrant time in the parish. During his time an addition was made to the parish hall and a new front entrance put on St. Matthew Church.

After Fr. Cole left, St. Agnes was twinned with St. Matthew. Rev. Joseph Mahoney was pastor for a year, then in 1999 Rev. Gerald Timmerman arrived, followed by Rev. John Loughnane. Rev. Eddy Bisson served all three parishes before Rev. Leo A. LeBlanc became pastor in 2004. Christopher Clarke was ordained a Permanent Deacon on April 27, 2002. A professor at Plymouth State College, Deacon Clarke gave lectures on Catholicism, The History of the Church, Love and Respect for Life, as well as many other lecture topics which local Catholics attended. He was a Deacon at the parish until his death in 2007. The parish was fortunate to welcome Deacon Michael Guy in 2008 from the Diocese of Fall River.

St. Timothy held its first services in the Bristol Town Hall with a priest from Franklin as celebrant. In 1875 a priest came to Bristol from Lebanon. Regular monthly meetings were held at Robie's hall. In August of 1899, Rev. Timothy Coakley arrived in Bristol from Nashua and rented an apartment in town. He was responsible for purchasing the corner lot and building St. Timothy Church. It was dedicated on August 26, 1900 as a mission church.

Fr. Coakley then moved on to Enfield and continued serving St. Timothy from Enfield. Bristol's mission status was changed from Enfield to Plymouth when Rev. John Brewin was appointed pastor of St. Matthew. In 1942, Fr. Verrette, pastor at Plymouth, had extensive repairs done to the "small

wooden church" in Bristol and a rededication was held on May 12, 1942. The Mass schedule at that time included two Masses at Plymouth, one at Beebe River and one at Bristol. Beebe River Community Hall was used for Sunday Mass.

On June 9, 1953, St. Timothy became a separate parish and Bishop Brady appointed Rev. Gilles Simard as its first pastor. In the summer of 1954 a rectory was built on the lot next to St. Timothy Church and the basement of the church was renovated into a meeting room. Stairs were put in which entered into a new room added on to the church upstairs.

Fr. Simard then used his expertise to build a chapel at the foot of Newfound Lake to accommodate the large number of summer worshipers. This was dedicated as Our Lady of Grace Chapel in 1958.

The first parish board was formed under Rev. Nelson Perreault in 1969 which assisted him in the decision making of the Parish. He was responsible for purchasing the "Casino" property across the street from the Chapel for additional parking. In the early 1970's, Monsignor Lawrence Gardner refurbished the interior of both the rectory and the church. In 1976, Rev. Eugene Pelletier succeeded him and under his leadership the "Casino" property was turned into a social center and the cottage behind the center was remodeled for summer priests. Monsignor John Russell served as the fifth pastor, and for 15 years and was responsible for freeing the church of its financial burdens.

In June of 1996 Rev. William L. Quirk became the pastor. He made improvements to the rectory and to the churches, and in the fall of 1998 Our Lady of Grace Chapel was winterized and Mass was celebrated there year round. The small church was used for weekday Mass. The 100th Anniversary of the St. Timothy Parish was celebrated in 2000. Fr. Quirk assisted Plymouth and Ashland during some of their transitions. He retired from St. Timothy Parish in October of 2002 and served his last days at St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Bedford. He was replaced by Rev. Eddy Bisson, the final pastor of St. Timothy Parish. Fr. Eddy also helped at St. Matthew Parish during transitions. Finally in 2004, Fr. Leo LeBlanc arrived as pastor of St. Agnes and St. Matthew. St. Timothy Parish was merged into Holy Trinity

Parish in 2006. Rev. Eusebio Silva (Fr. Zeb) became the resident priest in Bristol assisting Fr. Leo. In the summer of 2010, Fr. Silva left for an assignment in Belgium. He was the last priest to live in the Bristol rectory. The Masses in both Ashland and Bristol were reduced to accommodate the schedule of one priest.

In the winter of 2008 the weight of the snow collapsed the Social Center in Bristol. With the insurance proceeds a new, year round building was built with a "great hall" for functions, a catering kitchen, an oratory for morning Mass, an office for the secretary and an office and study for the priest. It was named Marian Center and dedicated on March 25, 2011. With nine buildings in the parish to repair and maintain and the construction of a new building, the decision was made to sell St. Timothy Church, the Bristol rectory and the parking lot.