

O God, who adorned Blessed Robert, your Bishop and Doctor, with marvelous learning and virtue, that he might overcome the deceptions of error and maintain the rights of the Apostolic See, grant, by his merits and intercession, that we may grow in the love of truth, and that the hearts of the erring may return to the unity of Your Church. Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

Robert Cardinal Bellarmine (1542-1621)

Roberto Bellarmino was born on October 4, 1542 into a noble family in Montepulciano, a town in the hills of Tuscany. He was one of twelve children born to Cynthia and Vincenzo Bellarmine. He was raised in a very devout family and lived to be almost eighty years of age.

In 1560, he joined the Jesuit order and began his studies at the Collegio Romano, the Jesuit college in Rome, presently known as the Pontifical Gregorian University. Because he was not a healthy person, he was transferred in 1563 to the Jesuit Seminary in Florence, Tuscany. After finishing his course of studies in Aristotelian philosophy and studying Thomistic theology at the University of Padua, Bellarmine became the first Jesuit professor at the University of Louvain (in modern Belgium) in 1569 and was ordained as a priest the following year. Situated in the Low Countries where Protestantism was growing rapidly during this period, the university of Louvain became a bulwark of Catholic orthodoxy. Bellarmine taught theology out of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and studied the Scriptures and the Church Fathers in preparation for a major work on theology. During his period at Louvain he wrote a Hebrew grammar and a work on the Church Fathers. He quickly earned the reputation for being an excellent preacher and often drew large congregations, sometimes thousands at one time. He often preached on the sanctity of the priesthood, human suffering, and the need for hope and the frequent reception of Holy Communion.

In 1576, at the age of 34, Bellarmine was called back to Rome by Pope Gregory XIII and appointed Chair of Controversial Theology. He taught theology to English and German missionaries at the Collegio Romano until 1588. It was here that St. Robert wrote his greatest works which included writings that identified the need to define Catholic dogma and outlined procedures for the defense of the faith. He shared these ideas with the Pope and the College of Cardinals.

Toward the end of this period, his most important scholarly work began appearing: *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei Adversus Hujus Temporis Haereticos* (Disputations about the Controversies of the Christian faith Against the Heretics of this Time) (3 vols, Ingolstadt, 1586-1593). In this work, Bellarmine brought order to the chaos of theological arguments between Catholics and Protestants. While the literature on this subject was normally marked by heated debates and intemperate statements on both sides, Bellarmine calmly and fairly reviewed the issues. These volumes became a remarkably effective weapon against reform theology, and it has been argued that they occasioned the return of many to the Catholic Church.

In 1588 Bellarmine became the spiritual director of the Collegio Romano. In addition to this appointment, he taught the catechism to students and lay brothers, and his lessons eventually led to *Dottrina Cristiana Breve* (Brief Christian Doctrine) (Rome, 1597), a small catechism for children, and *Dichiarazione piX Copiosa della Dottrina Cristiana* (A more copious declaration of the Christian doctrine) (Rome, 1598), a catechism for teachers. Approved by Pope Clement XIII, both catechisms became very popular and were translated into many languages. Their popularity lasted well into the twentieth century.

In 1590, Pope Sixtus V sent Father Bellarmine, along with two bishops and Cardinal Cajetan to Paris to preach the true faith in contrast to the heresy that was being taught by Henry of Navarre, a Calvinist King of France. They met with some success at the time but not enough to please Pope Sixtus.

Bellarmino served as rector of the Collegio Romano in 1592, which included 20 professors, 2,000 seminarians, and 200 members of the Jesuit community. In his capacity as Rector, he insisted in sharing in the household duties of cleaning and washing dishes even while receiving and hosting Cardinals and other dignitaries from throughout Europe.

Bellarmino also served as provincial of the Neapolitan province of the Jesuits in 1594, which encompassed half of Italy, and principal theological advisor in 1596 to Pope Clement VIII with residence at the Vatican. He was made a cardinal in 1599. From this time forward he was a member of the Roman Congregation and served on many commissions. At the time, Pope Clement said of Bellarmine that “we elect this man because he has not his equal for learning in the Church of God.” This was the third time that he had been nominated to the College of Cardinals, having twice refused the honor because of his aversion to “pomp and circumstance.” Bellarmine preferred poverty and humility in all things.

In 1601, at the request of the Holy Father, he authored a work entitled “Primary Duties of the Sovereign Pontiff” which outlined the Pope’s responsibilities with other bishops of the Church.

He was consecrated an archbishop in 1602 and sent by Pope Clement VIII to the celebrated diocese of Capua, which is twenty miles north of Naples where he concerned himself mainly with pastoral duties. He exhibited great pastoral zeal, visiting every town, village, and hamlet preaching the Word of God. In 1605, he was recalled to Rome by newly elected Pope Paul V to be his advisor.

Bellarmino spent much of his time in theological controversies, mostly involving papal power. He engaged in a public debate concerning the divine right of kings with James I of England. The issue of papal power revolved around the theory of the indirect power of the Pope. His spiritual power is direct and primary. The Pope is not, however, without temporal power because he might have to act with regard to temporal things which affected the spiritual ones. This was the Pope’s indirect power, which Bellarmine defended his entire adult life.

In 1616, Bellarmine became involved in the Copernican controversy, which was brought to a head by the publication of Paolo Antonio Foscarini's book defending the Copernican system from the charge that it clashed with the Scriptures. It was he who administered the controversial admonition to Galileo not to hold or defend the Copernican theory. In a time when cardinals maintained splendid courts, Bellarmine lived a simple and ascetic life, practicing self-sacrifice, poverty, and disinterestedness. Upon the death of Pope Sixtus V in 1590, the Count of Olivares wrote to King Philip III of Spain about possible candidates for the papacy: "Bellarmine is beloved for his great goodness, but he is a scholar who lives only among books and not of much practical ability...He would not do for a Pope, for he is mindful only of the interests of the Church and is unresponsive to the reasons of princes . . . He would scruple to accept gifts . . . I suggest that we exert no action in his favor." The King agreed.

In 1620, at the age of 78 and in poor health, Cardinal Bellarmine wrote his last book entitled "The Art of Dying Well" in which he emphasized spiritual thinking, constant prayer, self-denial, charity, and generosity of earthly possessions. By this time in his life, Cardinal Bellarmine had given every possession away and begged from the Holy Father for the funds to support Jesuit colleges throughout the world.

After the election of Pope Gregory XV, Cardinal Bellarmine requested to return to the Society of Jesus so that he could die a simple Jesuit. At first, his request was denied because the Holy Father thought his retirement would cause great distress in the Vatican, but eventually the Pope granted the request.

While spending his last days at the Jesuit Novitiate, Pope Gregory visited him, taking Holy Viaticum to him. As word spread of his illness and impending death, great crowds of cardinals, dignitaries, and bishops visited him. Cardinal Bellarmine was bewildered by this parade of people, feeling himself unworthy of this honor.

Cardinal Bellarmine died on September 17, 1621. At his funeral, the crowds were so overwhelming and pressing to touch his body, the Papal Guard was summoned to raise his coffin so that the mourners could see the Cardinal but not touch his sacred remains.

The process of canonization began in 1627, but he was not formally declared a saint until 1930. In 1931 Pope Pius XI finally declared Bellarmine a Doctor of the Church. St. Robert Bellarmine's body lies in the Church of St. Ignatius in Rome. His Feast Day is September 17.

Throughout his life, Cardinal Bellarmine exhibited superior intelligence tempered with a deep piety, charity, and humility. He is an excellent model for all and a powerful intercessor for the needs of people, especially fidelity to the Church and the Pope. His life of service and sacrifice should inspire all to serve one another.

The history of a parish community is really nothing more than a chronicle of major events occurring from its infancy until the present day. It would be impossible to record the sacrifice and generosity of its people or even begin to gauge the effectiveness of those priests assigned to the parish who were so much a part of its story. A history of the parish community of Saint Robert Bellarmine would be incomplete without mentioning the countless number of parishioners, past and present, who, seeking neither recognition nor reward, have always given generously of their time, energy, and treasure in any way possible. A parish community could never flourish without these people. Although not recorded in the annals of our history, their unselfish example is an important part of the heritage which we all share with justifiable pride.

The Catholic Church Comes to Philadelphia

Traces of Catholicism in the area of the original Diocese of Philadelphia can be found as far back as 1680 when priests would travel through southeastern Pennsylvania to and from New York. At the time, there was only one diocese in the United States. Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore had the sole responsibility for governing the Church in the United States. In 1805, Rome was ready to consider the division of the immense diocese and named Father Michael Egan as the Bishop of the newly established Diocese of Philadelphia, which included all of Pennsylvania and Delaware and parts of New Jersey. There were only five priests regularly present in Philadelphia at that time, however, by 1832, there were 38 priests ministering to about 100,000 Catholics in the Diocese. There were 50 parish churches and 50 adjoining missions, but only 5 churches in the city of Philadelphia.

The earliest recorded Catholic Mass in Philadelphia was in 1708. The first Catholic Chapel in Philadelphia was St. Joseph's Chapel located near Fourth and Walnut Streets. At that time, there were about 40 Catholics in the city. The open celebration of the Catholic faith was not common in the early years of the colonies as the English viewed Catholics with much suspicion and mistrust, so Catholic families would open their homes to be used as "mission houses" for the celebration of the sacraments. Around 1783, the first Catholic congregation in Bucks County was established at St. John the Baptist, Haycock in the Nockamixon area. The population in the area grew, prompting the establishment of more and more parishes to accommodate the growing Catholic population. In 1922, St. Joseph Church in Warrington was opened, which was adequate for the population for many years. After the Depression and World War II, thousands of Catholics moved from Philadelphia to the suburbs and created a demand for more churches in the area.

The parish of Saint Robert Bellarmine has a very humble beginning. With the population growing rapidly in Central Bucks County, the Archdiocese recognized the need for a new parish to alleviate the overcrowding of St. Joseph Church. "St. Robert Bellarmine parish, located in Warrington Township, Bucks County, was formed entirely from St. Joseph's, Hatboro [Warrington] of 333 families consisting of 1394 souls. The parish is bounded by the following parishes: Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Doylestown; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Jamison; Nativity of Our Lord, Warminster; and St. Jude, Chalfont."

(Catholic Standard and Times, May 31, 1968) In addition to this parish, two other parishes were founded on the same day: St. Vincent de Paul in Richboro and St. Thomas More in South Coventry. John Cardinal Krol, Archbishop of Philadelphia, appointed Reverend Michael F. Marley to be the founding pastor, or “rector”, of this new parish. At the time of this appointment, Fr. Marley was assistant pastor at Holy Innocents Parish located at L Street and Hunting Park Avenue, Philadelphia. Upon arriving in Warrington, all Fr. Marley had was 15 acres of real estate in the middle of a field at Euclid Avenue and Carriage Way, two streets which were not even connected at that time; the property was sold to the parish for \$60,000. Seeing that there was no residence for him, he rented a home located at 859 Euclid Avenue in Warrington, which became the first rectory. Because there was no church building, the first Masses of St. Robert Bellarmine Parish were actually celebrated in St. Joseph Church.

Masses continued in St. Joseph Church until Sunday, July 7, 1968, when the celebration of Mass was moved to the Barn Cinema on Easton Road in Doylestown. The movie house was donated, rent free, to the pastor through the generosity of the owner and the manager. The only stipulation, however, was that the theater was to be cleaned each Sunday morning before the celebration of Mass. Confessions were heard in the manager’s office. The new pastor was assisted in the celebration of Sunday Mass by Reverend John F. Nees, O.S.F.S. and Reverend Ralph Nuytten, C.I.C.M.

The CCD program for the education of the parish children was formed in August under the direction of Fr. Marley using a standard parish course for grades 1-6. This program was offered on Saturdays and generously taught by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who taught at St. Joseph School. There were six teachers and sixty students. A pilot course was also offered which was taught by lay people in their homes on Thursday afternoons. Classes for junior and senior high school students were offered at St. Paul’s Methodist Church at Shetland and Palomino Drives.

Immediately, two parish groups were formed to assist in the formation of this new community: the Men’s Society and the Women’s Guild. These two groups would meet in the basement of St. Joseph’s Rectory. In addition to fostering the community life of the parish, the groups worked tirelessly to raise funds for the building of a Church. The first fundraiser was a Christmas Bazaar in November 1968 run by the “Belles of Bellarmine” which realized \$1,800 in profit. In addition to the first parish bulletin being published in November, meetings began to study the new campus and the workings of the Cyrenian Society, under the responsibility of the Men’s Society, which would be responsible for soliciting donations for the new church.

In January of 1969, plans for the new church building were submitted to Warrington Township for its approval. In February, a meeting was held in St. Joseph’s Hall where the architect and the pastor discussed the new church buildings with the parishioners. Fr. Marley and the Cyrenian Society immediately began seeking financial support for this campaign. “Think back over the parishes you’ve lived in, the churches which you visited and worshipped in. Those churches are a tribute to the sacrifices of those of ordinary or less than ordinary means. Our parents wanted to build and leave a

testimonial of their faith for all to see. Their faith meant a great deal to them. They tried to reflect their faith in God and their love for Him in the edifices they had erected in His honor. They did an outstanding job. Why should we settle for less?" (Fr. Marley, April 27, 1969)

The first parish social was a Beef n' Beer run by the Women's Guild in St. Joseph's Hall on March 15, 1969. Admission was \$4.00 per couple! The parish was growing rapidly, and many new families had moved into the area.

The celebration of Daily Mass began on Monday, April 7, 1969 in the basement chapel of the first rectory.

On June 10, 1969, with the recommendation of the Zoning Board of Warrington Township, the Board of Supervisors approved the building plans for the new church and hall. Because a thirty-day waiting period was required before a building permit could be issued, Groundbreaking Ceremonies were scheduled for July 20 at 2:30 pm. However, due to the sudden death of Fr. Marley's brother, Father James Marley, on Friday, July 18, the ceremonies were postponed until the following Sunday, July 27.

Also in July of 1969, under the direction of Fr. Nees, the parish sponsored the first annual Picnic for the Physically Challenged off campus. This annual tradition continues to this day.

The building of the church and hall were scheduled to begin on Monday, September 22, but, due to various delays and bad weather, did not actually begin until the following February. At this time, the parish had grown to 653 registered families. By the end of April, the walls were constructed and the roof was being added. The original plans called for four rooms to serve for meetings, which would become classrooms for a future school. However, with monthly surpluses of about \$100, the plans had to be scaled back. The parish obtained a loan for \$129,000 for the construction. However, when Fr. Marley left his former assignment at Holy Innocents Parish, they presented him with a gift of \$20,000, which was used to install air conditioning in the new building.

Once the building project was underway, attention was focused onto the community and faith life of the parish, such as forming a collaboration with St. Paul's Methodist Church with Scripture Services. The Bellarmine Choir was organized on April 2, 1970, and the first meeting was held in the Rectory.

In August, it was announced that Edward Glanzmann, Jr., a young man from the parish, would to be the first to enter the priesthood from Saint Robert's. He entered the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The new church buildings were nearing completion in September, and in early October, were used for Baptisms and Marriages. Due to the urgent need for meeting space, parish organizations began meeting in the new building immediately, including

CCD classes, utilizing partitions on wheels to form makeshift classrooms. This proved to be noisy due to the acoustics of the hall.

The time came for the community to move from their first home, affectionately known as “The Barn” to its new “barn”, the new church building. In order to mark the occasion, the first parish function was the “Bellarmine Barn Raising”. The tradition of a barn raising dates back to the 18th century. When a farmer would go to build a new barn, he would enlist the help of the neighboring farmers to help put the structure in place. At the end of the day, when the barn was raised, the community would celebrate with a reception. St. Robert’s version of a barn raising was held Saturday, October 17, 1970.

The last Masses held in the Barn Cinema were held on Sunday, October 18, 1970, and the first Masses held in the new church were held the following Sunday, October 25. The new church building was dedicated on December 5 by John Cardinal Krol who then presided over the first Confirmation ceremonies held in the church. In order to raise funds for the new parish, the hall was opened for outside rentals. Fr. Marley moved into the new Rectory on the parish property on December 20. In total, the Church building cost \$400,000.

The building was divided in half with a wall separating the church from the hall. The lower portion of the wall was an accordion curtain that could be opened to the hall to accommodate the large crowds at Christmas and Easter. The top part of the wall under the triangular roof contained colored glass panels and a stained glass window of Our Lady of Sorrows. The top and bottom of the wall was separated by a laminated beam which ran between the roof beams on either side of the building.

With the new building came the responsibility to maintain it. In February 1971, a group of women was formed to care for and clean the church. Bingo arrived to St. Robert’s in March, which supplemented the parish income substantially. In April, the decision was made to have a weekly Latin Mass due to significant interest. September 1971 brought a new resident to the Rectory—a seven-week-old Collie named Prince. Two months later, another resident arrived to keep Fr. Marley and Prince company—Reverend John J. Kane took up residence on the property. Fr. Kane was assigned to the faculty at Bishop McDevitt High School and was to assist at the parish on Sundays.

The first parish carnival was held on the parish grounds in October 1971. The carnival was considered successful, with revenue of \$1,800, but the decision was made to move the carnival off campus the following year to Street and Easton Roads.

In March 1972, Fr. Ralph Nuytten received word that he was being transferred to San Antonio, Texas. Unfortunately, he was not replaced in the parish. That same year a Women’s Bowling League was formed and a Men’s Softball team was attempted. In the Summer of 1972, two basketball courts were constructed in the church parking lot and a summer basketball league was formed. The parish family was really starting to flourish! Parish membership in September of that year was at 800 families, which showed in the School of Religion with 600 students registered. The Carnival was attempted again this

year, but after only raising \$3,700, it was decided that it was not worth all of the work necessary, and so was discontinued. In October, the Teen CYO was formed.

In preparation for the 5th Anniversary of the parish, a parish family picnic was planned to replace the Carnival. The Bellarmine Festival was held on June 2, 1973. Food, drink, games, and prizes made for a very festive day. The parish realized \$1,630, and it was decided to keep this event the following year.

The next day, June 3, Fr. Kane was transferred to St. John Bosco Parish on Hatboro. He was replaced by Reverend Thomas J. Skindeleski, who was assigned to the faculty of Archbishop Wood High School for Boys.

There was more than just fun and games happening during this time at the parish. In addition to the festivals, most parish activities were always focused on fundraising to pay down the debt. The Cyrenean Society continued through these years, and a second collection was added on the 3rd Sunday of the month. Also during these years, Fr. Marley started discussion clubs in which groups of parishioners would gather and discuss issues of faith and morals.

Although the rental of the hall brought in valuable income for the parish, it also brought with it many problems and added maintenance, so in April 1974, it was decided that the hall would no longer be rented to outside parties.

A stunning blow struck the parish community on Sunday, May 26, 1974. It was announced that, at the personal request of John Cardinal Krol, Fr. Marley was being reassigned to St. Martin of Tours Parish in Oxford Circle, Philadelphia, the largest parish in the Archdiocese at 5,400 families. Warrington Township designated Saturday, June 1 as "Fr. Marley Day" due to the immense contributions he made to the community. Fr. Marley was replaced by Reverend James F. Cassidy, whose former assignment was Assistant Pastor at St. Alice Parish in Upper Darby.

Also in June, the 2nd Family Picnic was held, but due to a complete lack of interest, it was permanently discontinued. Later that summer, the St. Robert's Beautification Program was launched to beautify the campus.

On July 1, 1974, it was announced that St. Joseph School would be a consolidated school with St. Robert's "de jure as well as de facto" and would be called St. Joseph/ St. Robert School.

Many positive changes occurred in the life of St. Robert's in 1975. The Cardinal Archbishop of Philadelphia recognized the need for more help for the growing community, and so an assistant was assigned to help Fr. Cassidy. Reverend Lawrence J. Murphy became the first assistant. However, that same June, Fr. Skindeleski was transferred to Michigan. In September, the parish community held 40 Hours Devotions.

The parish was continuing to grow, and the parish priests were becoming busier and busier, and so in May 1976 the positions of housekeeper/cook and sexton/custodian were published in the parish bulletin in an effort to relieve the priests.

On Sunday, June 13, 1976, Cardinal Krol conferred the title of Monsignor on twenty-nine priests of the Archdiocese. Among those honored was Father Michael Marley, the founding pastor of St. Robert's. Two days later, Monsignor Marley celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Robert's for his former parishioners followed by a reception in the hall.

The outdoor summer basketball league was held again this summer. Bingo had grown so much that it now represented 35-40% of the parish income.

The property deed in 1968 stipulated that the property should be closed to traffic except for Sundays, so it was decided that the entrance from Georges Lane needed to be closed. After the theft of a chain, Warrington Township decided to install a permanent barricade. However, it wasn't long until this gate was ripped off of its hinges. Eventually a permanent structure was developed which impeded traffic from this direction.

In addition to the celebration of 40 Hours in September, the choir had a new director and became a much more formal organization in the parish. The parish debt in September 1976 was \$222,000.

On November 28, 1976, the first Sunday of Advent, the new Rite of Reconciliation, the Sacrament of Penance, was instituted throughout the Archdiocese. The changes in the Rite called for a more spiritual encounter with the Lord, and thus permitted the option of confessing sins face-to-face with the priest. This was the last of the sacramental rites to be reformed according to the directives of the Second Vatican Council.

Fr. Murphy was transferred in June 1977 and replaced by Reverend John T. Conway, a newly ordained priest.

In July, the parish was in a very serious financial crisis. The parish had already outgrown its facilities, the collections and donations to the parish were down, and the parish was suffering from a very serious debt from the building of the church. It was announced that in October of that year, a new program would be launched called the "Increased Offertory Program" sponsored by the Archdiocese, which called for the parishioners to prayerfully consider increasing their weekly giving. The campaign was successful!

The month of November saw a few changes in the life of the worshipping community. The 6:00 am Sunday Mass was discontinued, and the option of receiving Holy Communion in the hand was introduced. The Parish Calendar was discontinued. A few weeks later, the Offertory Procession during the Mass was instituted.

The parish once again started to rent the hall to outside parties in March 1978 in an effort to supplement the income.

In April, the confessionals were remodeled into "Reconciliation Chapels". The work was done by the newly hired sexton, John Cranney and was designed to offer the option of behind the curtain or face-to-face confession. The changes in the Rite of Penance were embraced at the parish, and while the confessionals were being remodeled, confessions were heard in the Sacristy. Also that month, the Parking Lot Expansion Project was begun. This was funded through Cyrenian Society donations.

In May 1978, an outdoor Mass was celebrated in honor of our 10th Anniversary as a parish community. Msgr. Marley was the celebrant. The Mass was preceded by a Dinner-Dance the night before.

At the end of the first 10 years, there were many groups functioning in the parish including the Women's Guild, the Men's Society, CYO, the School of Religion, Prayer Group, Marriage Encounter, the Home and School Association, and the Choir. Some of the major activities included Bingo, Donut Sales, Women's Bowling League, 200 Club, the Super Bowl Dance, the Christmas Bazaar, and the children's Live Nativity Scene.

During the week of January 29, 1979, the parish office was renovated and expanded to meet the demands of ministering to a growing community. At the time of its founding, there were approximately 450 families. In April 1979, the one-thousandth family was registered.

On May 3, 1979, Sister Regina Heilman, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Heilman, made her perpetual profession of vows as a Sister of the Holy Redeemer. Two days later, Edward John Glanzmann, C.I.C.M, son of Mr. and Mrs. Edward J. Glanzmann, became the first member of the parish to be ordained to the priesthood. Father Glanzmann was ordained a priest as a member of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in St. Robert's Church by the Most Reverend Gerald V. McDevitt, D.D., Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia at 1:00 pm. He celebrated his first Mass on Sunday at the parish at 1:15 pm. Coffee and cake were offered after Mass in the Hall.

In September 1979, the first Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion were installed to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion during Mass.

On October 3, 1979, Pope John Paul II celebrated Mass on Logan Circle and on October 4, he celebrated Mass in the Civic Center. On Thursday afternoon, October 18, 1979, Fr. Cassidy, with the assistance of two parishioners, went to 222 N. 17th Street to pick up the Papal Throne and then drove to Saint Charles Seminary where they picked up the Lectern and Altar. The Altar stayed in the garage overnight and the throne and lectern stayed in the recreation room. Two days later, on Saturday, the Altar, Throne, and Lectern were put on display in our hall. Only two Masses were celebrated on the Altar at that time-one by the Pope in the Civic Center and one by Fr. Cassidy at 9:00 am on

Saturday, October 20 in St. Robert's Hall. For an unknown reason, the lectern remained on the property and is in use even now in the sanctuary.

On February 3, 1980, a Building Fund Committee was formed to look into the possibility of expansion. 1980 was the "Year of the Family" and to celebrate this the parish published a family cookbook and held a family picnic in June.

On January 4, 1981, it was announced that there were plans to build a new church. The steeple had been removed the previous summer in order to restructure the roof, the larger part being paid for by the original builder. The steeple had been laying in the grass next to the Rectory garages since that time, and many parishioners were asking when the steeple would be going back on the roof. In light of this, the Capital Campaign for the new church was the "Raise Our Steeple Again" Fund. The idea was to build a new, larger shell and to move all of the furnishings from the present Church into the new Church. Due to the financial limitations of the parish at the time, discussions of a nursery school or kindergarten had to wait. The new Church was to be modest with a simplistic beauty. It was also to be energy conserving with new efficient HVAC units, lighting, and a daily Mass Chapel. In addition to requiring space for Sunday Masses, more space was also needed for meetings and CCD classes which could be held in the former church after construction. The budget for this new building was \$515,000, but the immediate goal was to raise a down payment of \$180,000. The parish responded very generously, and by April had raised \$94,900. Permission was granted by Cardinal Krol to begin construction. He wrote: "I am encouraged by the progress of your Fund Raising Campaign to date, and accordingly, am granting you permission to begin the arduous task of preparing to build a new church...with prayerful best wishes for great success in your attempt to build a new house to the honor and glory of God...".

September 1981 was a very busy month for the parish. Fr. Conway was reassigned to Stella Maris Parish and was replaced by Reverend Joseph Arnholt, who was coming from Stella Maris! The groundbreaking ceremonies were originally scheduled for September 20, but due to a legal technicality, the Blessing of the Ground was held and the area was staked out at that time. Groundbreaking finally occurred on November 11, 1981. On that occasion, St. Joseph Church, from which the parish was separated, donated \$1,000. On November 18 at 8:50 am, a bulldozer moved the first mound of earth where the new parking lot would be located on the hill. Also in November, the first annual Family Thanksgiving Mass was held on the Wednesday night before the holiday.

Work on the Church was well underway in 1982. In June of that year, the marble altar was dismantled. The Last Supper scene in the center of the Altar, upon arriving at the parish for the original church, was badly damaged, and so it was sent out to be repaired before it was permanently separated from the Altar and mounted in the new Chapel.

In July, parking lot lights were installed and the original stained glass windows were transferred to the new building. In August, the steeple was finally raised onto the

new Church. Parishioners came with folding chairs and picnic lunches to watch this momentous occasion.

In September, a Music Ministry was officially started.

The cornerstone was laid in the new building on September 18, 1981. The contents of the time capsule located behind the stone are: a prayer to Saint Robert Bellarmine, the first parish bulletin published on November 20, 1968, pictures of the construction of the original church in 1970 and of the construction of the new church in 1982, the latest bulletin of September 19, 1982, a copy of the parish activities calendar, a copy of the September 16, 1982 issue of the Catholic Standard and Times, a brochure seeking pledges for the down payment and the pledge envelope from January 1981, a letter to parishioners encouraging the purchase of memorials and a list of the memorials available from May 1982, a history of the first 10 years of the parish from May 1978, newspaper articles covering the installation of the steeple on the new church from August 20, 1982, a booklet of all parish activities given to new parishioners, and a flyer concerning the parish trip to the Bahamas to take place in November 1982.

On October 23, 1982, there was an organ concert with the new organ to celebrate the opening of the new church.

A triduum of prayer was held from October 25-27 to spiritually prepare the parishioners for the dedication. On October 31, 1982, John Cardinal Krol dedicated the Church.

Things were relatively quiet after the dedication of the new Church. In July 1983, the Handicapped Picnic was held for the first time on the parish grounds. After the success of the first organ concert, there was another one held in October 1983 to celebrate the 15th Anniversary of the parish. On November 26, 1983, it became permissible to have an anticipated Sunday Mass on Saturday evenings. Saint Robert's instituted a 6:00 pm Mass on Saturdays and the Sunday Masses were reduced from five to four.

In April 1984, following in the footsteps of Fr. Marley, Fr. Cassidy thought it was time for a companion. Bellarmine of Warrington, or Belle for short, a Golden Labrador Retriever puppy, became his new companion. Fr. Cassidy certainly needed the comfort at the time, as the Church debt had risen to \$915,000 due to the construction. He was not deterred by this and continued to foster the faith life of his people. Many adult education programs were held in the parish. The parish also started preparing casserole dishes for St. John's Hospice a social outreach program conducted throughout the archdiocese.

1986 was a big year for the parish. In January, Bingo was discontinued. It had become much too difficult to obtain the necessary 90 volunteers every month and the revenue had fallen 75% from 1978. In February, a survey was sent out to parishioners for input on the spiritual, financial status, activities, education, and community services aspects of the parish. In March, the parish was notified that Saint Joseph/Saint Robert School scored in the top 10% in the Archdiocese on standardized tests.

In May, Rev. Mr. Ralph Catanese, a parishioner, was ordained to the Permanent Diaconate and assigned to St. Robert's. In June, Fr. Arnholt was transferred according to Archdiocesan policy and was replaced by Reverend Robert P. Lepleiter. In September, being concerned about his health, Cardinal Krol reassigned Fr. Cassidy. Fr. Cassidy, not wanting to leave but remembering his promise of obedience, knew that he had to accept the decision. He was replaced by Reverend Joseph T. Kane.

Fr. Kane picked up right where Fr. Cassidy had stopped. Although a great parish, it definitely required some work. The parish debt alone was over \$900,000. At Fr. Kane's first 9:00am Mass, he made an announcement that he would like to meet the parishioners in the hall after Mass. He took two steps into the hall and remarked that it would be a great place for a gym for the kids, but at present, the area was not long enough to accommodate a full-length basketball court.

After putting out a survey, the Sunday Anticipated Mass on Saturdays was changed to 5:00 pm, and a 7:00 am daily Mass was added to the schedule. In November 1986, outdoor lighting was installed on the buildings because of all of the activities going on at night. In March 1987, a church cleaning group was formed known as "Christ's Housekeepers".

In December, planning was begun to add four classrooms in the old church to be used for meetings and for the CCD classes, and work on the hall expansion was begun. Motivated by Fr. Kane's desire for a gym, men of the parish assembled to assist with the reconfiguration of the space. Resources seemed to come together almost immediately. A local school was demolishing a gym, which turned out to be a source for basketball superstructure and bleachers. Taylor Rents in Horsham loaned the parish scaffolding and portable lighting to be used for the extraction work from that school. A parishioner from St. Joseph Parish loaned the parish a truck to haul the scaffolding and gym hardware, and an outside contractor installed the new baskets and superstructure. The stairs leading to the balcony in the hall were removed and the loft was enclosed, and the floor was lined for basketball and volleyball.

Demolition of the wall consisted of removing the accordion curtains and the glass panels above the laminated beam. The stained glass window of Our Lady of Sorrows was secured in a frame to allow it to be safely moved and saved. The scaffolding was again put into good use, allowing the men of the parish to move the laminated beam to the next set of roof beams in order to expand the gym floor area and the steel studs and the sheetrock wall was installed, provided at cost to the parish by a parishioner in the business. A parishioner, who was an electrical contractor, acquired the new lighting and did the installation. Following the completion of the entire project, a reception was held in the hall in appreciation for all who had worked on the project.

The classrooms were added in the summertime, again by the men of the parish. The space was dedicated as the Cranney Learning Center after John Cranney, the maintenance man of the parish for 10 years, who died suddenly in September 1987.

In addition to all of the construction, two new groups were formed—the Mothers of Young Children group and the Senior Citizen’s group, named the “Experienced Persons”. The parish Kindergarten began in September with both morning and afternoon sessions. The Sunday preschool program continued and a nursery program was initiated for children less than three years of age. In the fall, Fr. Lepleiter was transferred and was replaced by Reverend George J. Mazzotta.

The summer of 1988 was just as busy as the previous summer! Vacation Bible School for the parish children was held. Work began on the Marian Year Shrine to be installed outside directly behind the former sanctuary. The shrine was in honor of the Marian Year and was to have the statue of Our Lady of Fatima. The project cost \$12,000 and was dedicated to the youth of the parish on October 7, 1988. To help raise funds for these projects, the triangular corner lot at Euclid Avenue and Carriage Way was sold for \$33,000.

On September 25, 1988, the first annual Oktoberfest was held. The event was so successful that it was brought back for many years to follow.

In April 1989, the Legion of Mary was formed.

Once again, projects continued for the summer of 1989. A glass enclosure was added to the front of the Rectory to protect visitors to the parish office from the elements. New insulation and vinyl siding was added to the Rectory, and parking lot work was completed.

In June 1989, the parish hired the first full-time Director of Religious Education and the Junior CYO was formed. Also that month, it was decided that the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion were no longer to wear white albs while assisting at Sunday Masses according to the directives of Pope John Paul II. In September 1989, the Women’s Guild was disbanded. The first Blessing of the Pets occurred at the Marian Shrine in October.

In February 1990, Fr. Mazzotta was reassigned after just a short 15 months at the parish. He was instrumental in the formation of the RCIA program and the liturgy committee. He was not immediately replaced. At that time there were 1,400 active families, and it was realized that the Cranney Learning Center was not going to be a permanent solution for classrooms as there simply was not enough space.

At the Easter Vigil Mass in April, the parish welcomed its first ten Christian Initiation candidates into the Catholic Church.

In June, Reverend Joseph N. Accardi, a newly ordained priest, was assigned to assist Fr. Kane. Fr. Nees was reassigned to St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Horsham after 22 years of service to the parish.

Later that summer, the hall kitchen was remodeled and a new roof was put on the rectory. That fall, the storage room was built in the hall. The 20' by 50' structure was to house all of the tables and chairs needed to accommodate the hall functions. These improvements were accomplished while still being able to make payments on the loan and reduce the parish debt.

In February 1991, the Family Fellowship Committee was formed in an effort to enhance the community life of the parish. In addition, a parish pictorial directory was published in May. The Legion of Mary was formed and in November the Giving Tree was introduced to the parish for Christmas gift giving. Late that year, Fr. Lepleiter retired from active ministry and returned to St. Robert's for Sunday ministry.

In March 1992, there were 1,700 families and the parish debt had been reduced to \$560,000. In May, the parish held a Mass and reception as the opening celebration for the 25th Anniversary.

In the summer of 1992, the pews in the Church were refinished, a new floor installed in the hall, the stained glass windows from the original sanctuary transferred to the new sanctuary, and frames added around the Stations of the Cross in the Church. According to directives from the Archdiocese, a parish Pastoral Council was formed in November.

In 1993, a 25th Anniversary history book was published. The Anniversary concluded with a dinner dance and a closing Mass on May 30, 1993 at 4:00 pm. Msgr. Marley was the celebrant and Fr. Nees was the homilist.

In August 1993, the parish received a marble baptismal font from St. Michael's Church in Chester, which had closed that June. St. Michael's was Fr. Kane's first assignment as a newly ordained priest.

By the fall of 1993, the office staff had outgrown the Rectory basement and the family room, and so the Rectory garages were converted into office space. The shed next to the garages was demolished and replaced by new garages, for a total cost of \$49,000.

In 1994, the parish began a serious conversation about the lack of an educational building and the urgent need for one to exist on the campus. Discussions were held regarding the possibilities of a permanent structure, a modular building, or just portable classrooms, always keeping in mind the financial resources and parish debt. In August, plans were announced to build a school building, but the \$373,000 in debt would have to be substantially lowered before began any project could begin.

On June 5, 1994, the parish was blessed to have parishioner, Mr. George E. Morris, ordained to the Permanent Diaconate by Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua. Deacon George was assigned to serve at our parish. Another change in the liturgical ministers occurred in November, when Pope John Paul II granted permission to have female altar servers. In February 1995, 11 altar girls were commissioned for service at the altar, bringing the total number of servers to 72.

Also in February, Deacon Ralph retired from active ministry, and by April, the parish had grown so substantially that it was deemed time for another pictorial directory to be published.

Summer of 1995 brought many changes to the parish. In June, Fr. Accardi was transferred to St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Levittown. He was replaced by Reverend Joseph McDermott, a newly ordained priest. By July, the debt had been lowered to \$250,000. The side exit in the Church was added in October at a cost of \$23,000 and the Rectory meeting room was extended for \$25,000. Also in October, the parish began to study the campus to determine the most suitable location for a school building, which was determined to be in the field to the right of the Rectory. Before any building could start, the parish needed to obtain the necessary permissions from the Archdiocese.

In February 1996, Fr. Nees died. In order to memorialize Fr. Nees' contributions to the parish since its founding, a shrine was erected in his honor dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, to whom Fr. Nees held great devotion. The Rectory side of the Church was chosen for this shrine for security due to vandalism that had occurred at the main entrance.

In May 1996, the parish debt had been reduced to \$163,000. It had not been that low since April of 1979, three years before the construction of the new church.

In October 1996, plans for an Education Center were finally announced. The parish had outgrown the Cranney Learning Center almost immediately after its construction, and the neighboring parish, St. Joseph, was expecting a growth in the parish, and thus also a growth in the school. The building would become the Annex to St. Joseph/ St. Robert School, with grades 5-8 attending classes in this building. The facility would have twelve classrooms to be used for both the school and the PREP program. However, the parish only realized funds amounting to \$175,000 from the Catholic Life 2000 campaign in the Archdiocese. It became necessary to conduct a Capital Campaign in order to raise half of the required funds. The cost for this project was estimated to be \$3.5 million.

In April 1997, for the first time in its history, the parish was free and clear of all major debt! This was certainly a tribute to the generosity of the parishioners in supporting the parish throughout the years. However, this situation was short lived as the Capital Campaign for the Education Center began in May. Although it was going to be a sacrifice for the entire parish, it was necessary to begin construction at this time. "The

future of our Church lies in the education of our children” was the theme for this campaign.

In November, the Archdiocese granted permission to allow cremated remains at the celebration of a Mass of Christian Burial. In December, Fr. Kane decided to have the first Christmas overflow Mass for the 5:00 pm anticipated Christmas Mass in the hall. This alleviated the need to have parishioners standing in the nave of the Church and in the narthex.

By January 1998, half of the necessary funds, or \$1.6 million, had been raised for the new Education Center, with a 52% participation in the campaign. Permission to build was granted to build by the Archdiocese in April.

On April 29, 1998, Pope John Paul II conferred the pontifical honor of Prelate of Honor with the title of Reverend Monsignor upon Fr. Kane. This was a testament to the quality of leadership with which Msgr. Kane governed the parish community.

On July 19, 1998 at 7:00 pm, groundbreaking ceremonies were held for the new Education Center. Amazingly, only \$1.7 million out of the \$3.5 million cost would have to be borrowed. Before work on the building could be done, trees needed to be cleared, a parking lot added, and the retention basin moved.

In August, the Afghan Guild was formed to produce afghans for the needy. In September, the Rodgers Avenue entrance was widened in anticipation of the additional traffic on the property.

In June 1999, Fr. Lepleiter retired from Sunday Ministry in the parish when he moved into St. Jude Parish in Chalfont.

Also in June, the school building was completed. With the completion began the twenty-five year mortgage of \$1.7 million. An open house was held for the parishioners on July 11 from 1:00-4:00 pm. The stained glass window of Our Lady of Sorrows, removed from the original dividing wall in the hall and preserved, was installed in the entrance lobby. The school community began using the building for classes in September, and Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua officially dedicated the building on September 11, 1999 at 11:00 am.

In January of 2000, the Children’s Liturgy of the Word program was introduced to the parish, providing an age-appropriate option for the young to experience the Sunday readings. Also in January, Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament was offered to the parish on Mondays. In August, the parish began pastoral ministry to Neshaminy Manor Home, a new facility opened within the boundaries of the parish. Also in August, Reverend Henry Birkhead and Reverend Donald Mills began serving the parish on Sundays, although Fr. Birkhead was only able to assist until June 2001.

In April 2001, recognizing the number of groups and organizations that now existed within the parish, the first Ministry Fair was held. This year also brought more construction to the parish. In August, it was determined that the parish offices had outgrown their space and needed to move from the basement of the Rectory to the garage of the Rectory, which was to be converted. The conversion was complete by October. This was the first change to the Parish Offices in thirty years. The parish community was now at 2,200 families. In December, a new carillon was installed to replace the old one, which had broken two years prior.

The parish continued to develop in 2002. In January, discussions were held concerning the launch of a parish website. Talks were positive and the website was launched in May. Also in May, a Sanctuary Fund was established for memorials to be made to replace sacred vessels. The need at this time was a new monstrance for the newly instituted Monday Adoration. In June, after 32 years, the original roof on the Hall needed to be replaced at a cost of \$86,000. It was good timing because, after just three years, the school debt had been reduced to \$918,000. Also in June, the Bereavement Ministry is formed.

In September, Fr. Mills retired from Sunday Ministry in the parish. In October, the Parish Nurse Ministry was formed. In November, the parish published an updated Mission Statement to reflect its developed mission and the first annual Memorial Mass was held in the Church.

In January 2003, necessary repairs had to be made to the heating system in the Hall. The pipes buried under the concrete had deteriorated over the years and needed replacement. To celebrate the 35th Anniversary of the parish, a pictorial directory was developed and published in May. The first annual Ministry Fair promoting all of the varied groups and organizations of the parish was held in Bellarmine Hall. Also in May, Reverend William J. Cox began Sunday Ministry in the parish.

The parish experienced a stunning blow on May 7, 2003 when its founding Pastor, Msgr. Michael Marley died at the age of 90. Msgr. Marley had been the guiding force behind the formation of the parish community.

In November, there were changes made to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* which impacted the community. Beginning immediately, Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion would no longer be in procession in at the beginning of Mass; rather, they were to come from the congregation at the appropriate time for their service. This change was in closer conformity to the directives of Vatican Council II for the laity to take a larger role in the celebration of the liturgy with the participation of the congregation.

On February 26, 2004, the parish became free and clear of all major debt! This was especially significant given the fact that the final mortgage payment on the school was not due until September 1, 2024. Much like the Hall roof, the Church roof needed to

be replaced in May 2004 after 22 years at the cost of \$93,000. In June, paving repairs were made to the parking lots.

In June 2004, Fr. McDermott was reassigned to St. Ignatius Parish in Yardley after nine years, the longest tenure of a Parochial Vicar in parish history. He was replaced by Reverend Gary Kramer who had been previously assigned at Nativity of Our Lord Parish in Warminster. Also in June, the parish began having a larger partnership with St. Cyprian Parish in West Philadelphia, its newly adopted “sister parish”. Events to celebrate this partnership included spaghetti dinners and concerts by their choir at St. Robert’s.

2005 brought many changes to the parish. In January, in conformity with directives from the Archdiocese, the tabernacle was relocated to the center of the sanctuary and the Responsorial Psalm was sung from the ambo and not the cantor stand. An Increased Offertory Program was also instituted that month. In March, the interior of the Church was painted, new carpet was installed, and a new lectern and chairs were purchased for the newly reconfigured sanctuary.

In April, an announcement was made that Msgr. Kane would retire in June after nineteen years as Pastor due to health reasons. Msgr. Kane would be given the title of Senior Priest and would become the Administrator of Regina Coeli Residence for Priests in Warminster. On June 26, 2005, Reverend Monsignor James D. Beisel was installed by Justin Cardinal Rigali as the fourth Pastor of St. Robert’s while continuing to serve the Archdiocese as the Vicar for Bucks County.

Another clerical change was announced in September when Fr. Kramer was reassigned as the Parochial Administrator of Visitation BVM Parish in Philadelphia. He was replaced by Reverend Edward C. Kelly who came from St. Matthew parish in Northeast Philadelphia. Also in September, the statues in the Church were reconfigured to form the Holy Family shrine and the St. Robert Shrine.

In October, under the direction of Msgr. Beisel, the Chapel was rearranged by Fr. Kelly so that the parishioners could surround themselves around the stained glass windows from the former Church and the marble relief of the Last Supper during the celebration of Daily Mass. In December, the Sacred Heart statue was moved from the Chapel to the Narthex and the Christmas Crèche was expanded with additional figures and a stable built with old wood from the Carriage House at the Horsham Friends Meetinghouse on Easton Road.

Lent of 2006 brought about added spiritual practices in the parish. Morning Prayer was introduced before Mass during the week, Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament was extended into the evening on Mondays, and on Good Friday, Stations of the Cross were conducted outdoors.

Many improvements were also made this year. The parish website was redeveloped for increased functionality, a new exterior statue of St. Robert replaced the

former one which was deteriorated, and granite tops were added to the sanctuary furniture to protect them for many years. The lavatories in Bellarmine Hall were renovated at a cost of \$43,000, the CYO donated a new exterior Nativity scene, and the shrine to St. Joseph the Worker was dedicated in October in honor of Msgr. Kane, a fitting tribute not only to the mother parish but also to the third pastor who worked tirelessly for the parish.

2006 was also a year of firsts when in June, recognizing the nurturing culture of the parish, Reverend Mister Michael V. Marrone to the parish, a recently ordained transitional deacon in his final year of studies at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, was assigned to the parish. In September, the 1st Annual Family Picnic was held at Camp America. In December, the parish adopted as a major priority the intention of vocations by introducing the parish Prayer for Vocations at each Mass. It was also during this year that the St. Vincent de Paul Society was founded in the parish, offering assistance to the needy in the community.

In May, Deacon Marrone was ordained to the priesthood and sent to St. Katherine of Siena Parish in Northeast Philadelphia. In June, Fr. Kelly was reassigned as the Chaplain to the Holy Redeemer Health System. Reverend Stephen H. Paolino, a newly ordained priest, replaced him.

With 2,200 families and over 7,000 souls, faith formation became a priority for the parish. In July, a director of Adult Faith Formation was added to the staff to increase the number of faith formation opportunities at the parish. Also in July, extensive renovations to the kitchen in Bellarmine Hall began. These renovations were completed the following January.

In September 2007, the parish began its 40th Anniversary celebrations with an opening Mass. The theme for the year was “Rejoice, Celebrate, and Be Blessed.” The 2nd Annual Family Picnic was held at Camp America. In December, the first Live Nativity was held in front of the school building, complete with live animals.

Not to be outdone by the Live Nativity, On Good Friday 2008, the young members of the parish put on a production of the Living Stations of the Cross using the model of St. Alphonsus Ligouri, providing for a prayerful and dramatic close to the Lenten season. Sadly, a few weeks later in April of 2008, Fr. Cox died. He was replaced in Sunday Ministry by Reverend Francis J. Cornely.

May was a very busy month at the parish. Bellarmine Hall was painted and soundproofed, and the sound system was upgraded. The Pew and Kneeler Restoration Project was begun in an effort to preserve the furniture as well as to have it match the new sanctuary furniture. The Parish Youth Ministry, under the direction of Fr. Paolino, was also strengthened and restructured this month by creating a program with three distinct pillars—a Junior High Ministry, a Senior High Ministry, and an Athletic pillar.

The 40th Anniversary year was brought to a close on Sunday, June 1, 2008 when Bishop Joseph P. McFadden, Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia celebrated a Closing Mass

at 11:30 am. At the closing dinner later that day, Bellarmine Hall was officially renamed Monsignor Marley Hall in honor of the first Pastor who worked diligently to found the parish.

Also in June, Deacon Francis M. Cavaliere, a permanent deacon, was assigned to serve at the parish. That same summer, the hardwood floor was installed in the hall, a gift from St. Joseph's University in Overbrook, and the sound system in the church was replaced.

In September 2008, St. Joseph/St. Robert School began operating completely out of the Education Center on the property. This was in an effort to offer the best possible Catholic education in the most conducive atmosphere that could be offered. Later that month, the school community revived the tradition of Oktoberfest on campus. Despite the torrential downpours, \$15,000 was raised and used toward the purchase of a new playground for the school children.

As if the month of December is not busy enough, one of the 25-year-old heating units in the Church died and had to be replaced for \$25,000.

Again in June 2009, recognizing the unique gifts of this parish, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary assigned Reverend Mister James R. DeGrassa, a newly ordained transitional deacon for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, to the parish. In September, Deacon Cavaliere retired from active ministry, and in December, a railing was donated and installed the side entrance to assist handicapped parishioners entering the church.

In May 2010, Deacon DeGrassa was ordained to the priesthood and assigned to Our Lady of Grace Parish in Penndel. In June, Fr. Paolino was reassigned as School Minister of John W. Hallahan High School for Girls in Philadelphia and was replaced by Reverend Matthew J. Tralies, a newly ordained priest. In July of that summer, the Mothers Prayer Group was formed to pray the rosary for their children, the Parish Library was founded, and the Narthex and Chapel lighting was replaced with energy efficient fixtures. In September, under the direction of Fr. Tralies, the Teen Room was renovated. Additionally, the Parish Offices were cleaned out and painted and a sinkhole in the parking lot was repaired after a 28-year-old pipe disintegrated. These repairs totaled \$14,000. In October, the lighting fixtures in the Church were replaced with energy efficient models and controls were added. This was funded by the parish portion of the *Heritage of Faith, Vision of Hope* Campaign monies.

After the dedication of the hall to Msgr. Marley, the parish had just one more Pastor to honor, and so in November of 2010, the shrine of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus-The Little Flower was erected and dedicated to Fr. Cassidy, the second Pastor.

In April 2011, recognizing the need to acknowledge the many volunteers in the parish, it was decided to have a Parish Appreciation Dinner. Also in April, the community of St. Cyprian Parish was able to join St. Robert's parish for a 5:00 pm Mass at which their choir sang, followed by a spaghetti dinner to promote a sense of

community among these two parishes. Also in April, a completely new parish website was launched in an effort to make it user friendly and to expand the amount of information available to the community.

The Summer of 2011 again brought about the opportunity to conduct some renovations and enhancements on the property. The exterior lighting around the Church was replaced, three parking lots were sealed, and many of the walkways around the Hall and School buildings were replaced, eliminating any steps and making the entrances accessible for all.

In July 2011, recognizing the lack of personnel and the constraints that imposed, it was decided to change the Weekend Mass Schedule by eliminating one of the Sunday Masses and instead offering a 5:00 pm Mass on Saturday evening and Mass at 7:00 am, 9:00 am, and 11:00 am on Sunday.

In September, another transitional deacon was assigned to the parish, but this time from Lincoln, Nebraska. Reverend Mister Thomas Schultes spent the academic year at the parish.

In October 2011, the exterior doors in the Hall were replaced, and the “Why Catholic” program was launched parish-wide, promoting small, faith sharing groups. On the first Sunday of Advent 2011, the Third Edition of the Roman Missal went into effect, enhancing many prayers and responses in the celebration of Mass.

In January 2012, the parish began to offer the option of memorializing the weekly altar flowers and sanctuary lamp, providing a beautiful way of remembering a loved one during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In March, Reverend James Endres began Sunday Ministry at the parish, and in May, Deacon Schultes was ordained to the priesthood in Lincoln, Nebraska where he was assigned to a parish.

In June, the parish was assigned Mr. Sean English, an Acolyte preparing for the priesthood. Mr. English served the parish for the summer before returning to St. Charles Borromeo Seminary for further studies.

Also in June, the parish was blessed to celebrate with Msgr. Kane upon his return to St. Robert’s on the occasion of his 50th Anniversary of Ordination to the Priesthood. Msgr. Kane concelebrated and joined the community for a reception in the Hall.

In June 2012, the Parish offered a Summer PREP option for the students. Students attended classes in the summer for two weeks, fulfilling the required number of instructional hours. These students were then additionally required to gather several times throughout the coming year as a family at special liturgical functions. The program was highly successful.

In August, the statues in the church were refinished in an effort to preserve them. The windows in the Rectory were replaced in September, and in October, a new roof was

installed on the Rectory, all funded by *Heritage of Faith, Vision of Hope* Campaign monies.

In September, another transitional deacon from Lincoln Nebraska, Reverend Mister Steven A. Mills, was assigned to the parish for the academic year. In November, Fr. Endres retired.

In December, a program termed “Invitation for Faith” was launched in the parish. Approximately 40 volunteers were sent, in teams of two, to conduct door-to-door evangelization of parishioners of the parish by inviting them to the various programs of the parish. The volunteers were energized by the outreach, and after successfully visiting 374 homes in the Fall and 376 homes in the Spring, it was decided to continue this effort until all members of the parish were visited.

There were many additions to the parish hall in the Spring of 2013. An American flag was added to one wall and a crucifix, originally from Immaculate Conception Church in Germantown and obtained through the Ecclesiastical Exchange of the Archdiocese, was added to another wall. The lighting was upgraded by purchasing energy efficient fixtures, again being funded by *Heritage of Faith, Vision of Hope* Campaign monies.

In May 2013, Deacon Mills was ordained to the priesthood in Lincoln, Nebraska where he was assigned to a parish, and Mr. English was ordained as a transitional deacon. Fr. Tralies was reassigned as the School Minister of Conwell-Egan High School in Levittown and was replaced by Reverend John P. Stokely, a newly ordained priest. Also that month, a Youth Minister was added to the parish staff in an effort to promote youth programs in the parish.

That summer, the remaining two parking lots were sealed, internet access was added to the Church, Hall, and the Cranney Learning Center, the parish began live streaming the weekend Masses on its website, and the option of electronic giving was introduced to the parish.

In April 2014, the Holy Family and the St. Robert shrines in the church were renovated, and in June a new tabernacle was acquired for the Chapel. In July, a new porch was added to the front of the Rectory, replacing the deteriorated glass enclosure.

In September, another transitional deacon from Lincoln Nebraska, Reverend Mister Justin Fulton, was assigned to the parish for the academic year.

In September 2014, the “Building on Our Faith...Expanding Our Legacy” Campaign was launched. This campaign was to fund a building project in which the Cranney Learning Center would be renovated for more practical and necessary parish use. In addition, the vestibule was to be expanded to be more of a welcoming center as well as a Main Door to the worship space. The goal was to raise \$2.5 million out of the \$3.2 million cost.

In October 2014, the Children's Choir was formed.

In December 2014, approval for the expansion project was granted by the Archdiocese, and in January 2015, before construction was started, parishioners were invited after the Sunday Masses to "Coffee in Cranney" to see the space to be renovated and to inquire about specifics of the project.

In May 2015, Deacon Fulton was ordained to the priesthood in Lincoln, Nebraska where he was assigned to a parish. In June, Reverend Mister Mark J. Cavara, a newly ordained transitional deacon for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia was assigned to the parish.

Construction began in June 2015 with asbestos abatement followed by demolition in July.

In September 2015, several families opened their homes to host 80 pilgrims from the Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska who journeyed to Philadelphia for the World Meeting of Families and the pastoral visit of Pope Francis.

In May 2016, Deacon Cavara was ordained and assigned to St. Anselm Parish in Philadelphia.

Also in May, the parish was grief stricken as its beloved third pastor, Msgr. Kane, died at the age of 80. Msgr. Kane served for nineteen years as Pastor and for eleven years as Pastor Emeritus.

In June 2016, Fr. Stokely was reassigned to St. Elizabeth Parish in Chester Springs. Reverend Matthew K. Biedrzycki, a newly ordained priest, replaced him.

In July 2016, the cornerstone was laid in the new Narthex. The time capsule consisted of the following: a list of the members of the Facilities Committee, Finance Council, Pastoral Council, and Fundraising Committee, a list of the Lectors, Altar Servers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Sacristans, Daily Mass Adult Servers, and donors to the Campaign, the Builder's Project Proposal, the Architect's Proposal and Renderings, the Landscape Architect's Renderings, the Parish Seminarians, the 2008 40th Anniversary Parish Directory, the St. Joseph/St. Robert School 2016 Yearbook, the bulletin announcing the project, and the fundraising materials.

By August 2016, after several months of delays, the construction on the property was finally complete. The new construction consisted of an expanded Narthex including a Welcome Center, new lavatories, a vestry, a Prayer Garden which became home to the relocated statue of Our Lady of Fatima moved from the Marian Shrine erected in 1988, and a Family Room to be used as a Sunday Cry Room, a place for viewings, and a bride's room for weddings. It also consisted of a Parish Center in the former Cranney Learning Center including five professional staff offices, a secured reception area, a staff lavatory,

a large meeting room, a conference room, a lounge, added storage space, and upgraded HVAC equipment and electrical panels. Additionally, the Church was repainted to blend with the new construction, the HVAC equipment in the Church was upgraded, the organ speakers were replaced, and a new floor was installed in the Chapel. Permanent furniture was purchased for the dedicated Chapel as well. Very eager to start using the new space, the parish moved into these new facilities in just two days! Tours were offered to the parish in September.

In July, a violent summer storm arose knocking down one of the parking lot lights. While thankfully it was in the night and no one was injured, it was discovered that these fixtures were deteriorated and needed to be replaced. Four fixtures were replaced in September.

Also in September, a transitional deacon from Raleigh, North Carolina, Reverend Mister Edison de Jesus Urrego was assigned to the parish for the academic year.

On October 7, 2016, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, the statue of Our Lady of Fatima from the 1988 Marian Shrine was rededicated in the Prayer Garden.

At the start of 2017, the parish records indicated that there were 2,300 families consisting of 7,500 souls in the parish.

In April 2017, the H.O.P.E., or Helping Other People Everyday, program was launched in the parish. This program was intended for parishioners to help fellow parishioners with simple tasks, such as providing rides to appointments or to Mass, intended to further build community among the parishioners.

In May 2017, Deacon Urrego was ordained to the priesthood in Raleigh, North Carolina where he was assigned to a parish.

In July 2017, new Memorial Boards were installed in the Narthex which better blended with the new construction and also offered enhanced visibility. Also that month, two more parking lot lights were replaced.

Also in July, as components of the upcoming Jubilee Year, a 133-page parish cookbook was published containing favorite recipes of parishioners. A logo contest was also held for the Jubilee Year. The winning entry, submitted by a founding parishioner, boasted the motto "For the Greater Glory of God."

In September, a transitional deacon from Lincoln, Nebraska, Reverend Mister Luke Fleck was assigned to the parish for the academic year. Also in September, the parish website was again enhanced.

On September 17, 2017, the Patronal Feast of St. Robert Bellarmine, the 50th Jubilee Year of the parish was launched with an Opening Mass celebrated by Bishop

Michael Fitzgerald, Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia. To celebrate, there was to be a theme for each month complete with events.

In September, the parish *prays*; the Opening Mass was also the start to the annual 40 Hours Devotion in the Parish. In October, the parish *celebrates*; an Anniversary Oktoberfest was held. In November, the parish *remembers*; the Annual Memorial Mass was held and Founders' Sunday, a celebration of the founding members of the parish, was held with a Mass and Brunch with 80 people in attendance. In December, the parish *prepares*; a Christmas Concert was held featuring both the Adult and Children's Choirs. In January, the parish *teaches*; the PREP program hosted the "Cool-to-be-Catholic" family gathering, and the school hosted a former faculty Mass and brunch. In February, the parish *loves*; the annual Valentine's Mass for Married Couples was held. In March, the parish *grows*; the annual Parish Mission was held. In April, the parish *learns*; a special adult and youth conference and rally was held. In May, the parish *honors* Mary; the annual May procession was held on the parish grounds. In June, the parish *gives thanks*; Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap. celebrated a Closing Mass on June 3, and a closing banquet was held at 4:00 pm at the Spring Mill Country Club & Manor.

In October 2017, parish Christmas cards and ornaments are produced, and work on the Jubilee parish directory began.

In January 2018, the flooring in the Sanctuary was replaced with new tile. With this renovation and updating, a very interesting fact was discovered that was lost in the history of the parish. From ancient times, the relics of a saint were attached to the place where the community celebrated the Sacrifice of the Mass. These relics (or sometimes whole bodies) were placed in the altar of sacrifice. In the beginning it was an honor reserved for the early martyrs, however, the custom later expanded to honor any saint. This tradition of placing relics near altars has continued to this present day. For years, it was believed that the altar relic in the main altar was encased in the table portion of the altar, but what was discovered was that the relics were encased in the ground, under the floor of the sanctuary, directly under the altar. Two relics were discovered, one of Saint Robert Bellarmine and the other of Saint Pius X. Before enclosing the small opening to the ground, three additional relics were placed in the case. Now under the altar, in addition to Saint Robert and Saint Pius X, are relics of Saint John Neumann, Saint Thérèse of the Little Flower, and Saint Gerard Majella, canonized in 1904 by Pope Pius X.

The history of this parish is so much more than just dates and numbers; it is far more than the hundreds of baptisms and funerals, the varied groups and organizations, and the many projects. Rather, the history of this parish is the living faith of its parishioners. It is the thousands of souls who have, as part of their own journey of faith, passed through this campus. It is the collaboration of the faithful who work to "further Christ's mission to proclaim the Good News, to live in fellowship with others, and to serve the needs of those around us", indeed, those who work to build up the Kingdom of God here on earth.

As we bring the past fifty years to a close, we give praise and thanks to Almighty God as we celebrate the many accomplishments and good works of the faithful here in Warrington. Remembering for us, though, is more than just nostalgia. Our remembering makes the journey of our forbearers present as their work and dedication, their prayers and sacrifices, are linked to our own. For we proclaim the same Gospel, celebrate the same liturgy, and carry the same fire of Pentecost into the world just as they did—a fire that we all received when we became members of the Body of Christ in Baptism.

The richness of our heritage is found in the people who still gather for Mass each day in our Church, uniting themselves, their families, and all their endeavors to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. The grace of hospitality is found in the people who truly seek to belong to our parish community, and it is also found in the parish community that welcomes them. This fire is still being fueled by the generous example of a lived faith at St. Robert Bellarmine Parish, where all things are done *For the Greater Glory of God!*

Popes

Pope Paul VI – 1963 - 1978
Pope John Paul I – 1978
Pope John Paul II – 1978 - 2005
Pope Benedict XVI – 2005 - 2013
Pope Francis – 2013 - Present

Archbishops

John Cardinal Krol – 1961 - 1988
Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua – 1988 - 2003
Justin Cardinal Rigali – 2003 - 2011
Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap. – 2011 - Present

Pastors

Rev. (Msgr.) Michael F. Marley – 1968 - 1974
Rev. James F. Cassidy – 1974 - 1986
Rev. Msgr. Joseph T. Kane – 1986 - 2005
Rev. Msgr. James D. Beisel – 2005 - Present

Parochial Vicars

Rev. Laurence J. Murphy – 1975 - 1977
Rev. (Msgr.) John T. Conway – 1977 - 1981

Rev. Joseph M. Arnholt – 1981 - 1986
Rev. Robert P. Lepleiter – 1986 - 1988
Rev. (Msgr.) George J. Mazzotta – 1988 - 1990
Rev. Joseph N. Accardi – 1990 - 1995
Rev. Joseph M. McDermott – 1995 - 2004
Rev. Gary J. Kramer – 2004 - 2005
Rev. Edward C. Kelly – 2005 - 2007
Rev. Stephen H. Paolino – 2007 - 2010
Rev. Matthew J. Tralies – 2010 - 2013
Rev. John P. Stokely – 2013 - 2016
Rev. Matthew K. Biedrzycki – 2016 - Present

In Residence

Rev. John J. Kane – 1971 - 1973
Rev. Thomas J. Skindeleski – 1973 - 1975

School of Religion

Rev. Andrew Robberecht, C.I.C.M. – 1970 - 1987

Sunday Ministry

Rev. Ralph Nuytten, C.I.C.M. – 1968 - 1972
Rev. John F. Nees, O.S.F.S. – 1968 - 1990
Rev. Robert P. Lepleiter – 1991 - 1999
Rev. Henry Birkhead – 2000 - 2001
Rev. Donald Mills – 2000 - 2002
Rev. William J. Cox – 2003 - 2008
Rev. Francis J. Cornely – 2008 – Present
Rev. James F. Endres – 2012

Deacons

Deacon Ralph Catanese – 1986 - 1995
Deacon George E. Morris – 1994 - Present
Rev. (Mr.) Michael V. Marrone – 2006 - 2007
Deacon Francis Cavaliere – 2008 - 2009
Rev. (Mr.) James R. DeGrassa – 2009 - 2010
Rev. (Mr.) Thomas Schultes (Lincoln, NE) – 2011 - 2012
Rev. (Mr.) Steven A. Mills (Lincoln, NE) – 2012 - 2013
Rev. (Mr.) Justin Fulton (Lincoln, NE) – 2014 - 2015
Rev. (Mr.) Mark J. Cavara – 2015 - 2016
Rev. (Mr.) Edisson de Jesus Urrego (Raleigh, NC) – 2016 - 2017

Rev. (Mr.) Luke Fleck (Lincoln, NE) – 2017 - 2018