

St Peter's Cathedral 200th Anniversary Talk  
2016-10-06-1800  
Gold Ballroom Hotel duPont  
Wilmington, Delaware

G. Gamble

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Father Klein,

Bishop Malooly, Reverend Clergy, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am greatly honored that Father Klein asked me to speak to you tonight about the Cathedral and its history.

Msgr. Rebman, a lifelong son of St. Peter's and its former Administrator, has warned me about lengthy after-dinner speeches, so let me say that, if you are timing this, relief is only 28 minutes away.

In putting together this talk - with the generous help of the Diocesan Archivist, Susan Kirk-Ryan, and her predecessor, Donn Devine - it dawned on me that my own life span is more than a third of the 200 year history of the Cathedral.

### First Visit

My first visit there was for a wedding in 1948. Afterwards, the Reception was held here in this room. I was bored out of my mind, and it is my hope that you do not have the same experience tonight!

### Canada

Last week, I went up to Canada for an Order of Malta ceremony. When I arrived at Immigration in Ottawa and handed in my entry card, the officer pointed out that I had neglected to put down my date of birth.

As I filled it in, I commented to him, "*You know, since my last visit to Canada, I am happy to say that I have become a septuagenarian!*"

With a straight face he replied, "*Transgender people are very welcome here in Canada.*"

So much for Latinisms!

## 5 Stories

What I want to do this evening is to engage with you in a bit of time travel - primarily through the stories of 1 family and 4 people that span the 200 year history of the Cathedral with some key dates in between.

These stories represent virtually hundreds, if not thousands, of others who have given so much to St. Peter's over the course of its two centuries and who must never be forgotten in our prayers and our gratitude.

But let's begin at the beginning.

### Early Catholicism in Delaware and the Peninsula

Catholicism, in our national history, is very often linked to 19th century immigration - almost like an inconvenient and unwelcome layer on top of the "real" American history.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The history of this region of the country is inter-wreathed with Catholicism.

Queen Christina - In whose name the Swedes colonized Delaware in the 17th Century [the Christina River, Christiana Mall, the Christiana Hospital System], was a Catholic convert. She abdicated her throne, and today lies buried in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome

Without Catholic George Calvert, the 1st Lord Baltimore, there would be no State of Maryland.

Without Catholic Charles II, who granted to William Penn the land of Pennsylvania in 1681, and his Catholic brother, James, later King James II, who that next year conveyed to William Penn the three separate lower counties that he, himself, had created, there would be no State of Delaware.

Spencer Compton, the Earl of Wilmington, and 2nd Prime Minister of Great Britain, for whom the City of Wilmington is named - although himself an Anglican - came from a Catholic family.

The family estate, Compton Wynyates, which they still own, contains many priests' hiding holes and a hidden Catholic chapel.

Even Wilmington, originally 'Win-el-tone' recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 AD, was named for St. Winifred by the Abbot of Battle Abbey who owned it at the time.

Where we live today, the Catholic Church is not an immigrant church at all, but at the heart and foundation of American history.

### *Anti Catholic Sentiment*

The 1st Lord Baltimore and his sons made religious freedom a keystone of their colony's foundation.

The State of Maryland [In its charter, Terra Mariae, "Land of Mary"] and its first capital, St. Mary's City, were both named for Our Blessed Mother.

Catholic Maryland's Act of Religious Toleration in 1649 made it the most liberal colony at the time and permitted any Christian denomination to be practiced there.

All this changed in 1688, when James II was overthrown, and his Dutch son-in-law took over as William III. In 1689, King William abrogated the Calvert's Charter and had Maryland revert to the Crown.

Automatically, the English National Church became established, and all Maryland inhabitants, including those on the Eastern Shore, had to support it.

Legally now all Catholics here in America were outlaws, as they were in England. They had no civil rights. After 1718, they could not vote.

They could not practice professions such as medicine, law, or have a military career.

They could not attend Mass publicly. Priests were forbidden them. If a Catholic taught school, he was liable to a year's imprisonment. If a Catholic employed a Catholic teacher, he had to pay 30 shillings penalty tax for every day he employed him.

If a Catholic sent his son or daughter to Europe to be educated, the fine was 100 pounds - about \$10,000 in today's money.

In 1754 a double tax was levied on all Catholics, and in 1760, it was proposed in the Maryland Assembly that all lands of Catholics be confiscated. Children who apostatized to Protestantism were authorized to take possession of their Catholic parents property.

There were some bright spots.

In 1701, after King William's death, Queen Anne, the Protestant daughter of Catholic James II, allowed Mass to be said in a chapel that was part of a living house. This was the so-called 'Queen Anne's Rule' which resulted in configurations such as St Joseph's Church down in Cordova built in 1764 - a huge church attached to a little house that could only be entered through the house. The same was true of the original church and rectory at Old Bohemia near Middletown, built in 1704, and remodeled with an outside door in 1798.

In 1734, Reverend Joseph Greaton SJ acquired property for Old St. Joseph's at Willing's Alley up in Philadelphia. Although the door was not on the main street - a practical concession to anti-Catholic feeling - he was able to offer public Mass.

The Governor and Council of Pennsylvania met to review the situation. They decided that since Queen Anne had approved William Penn's 'Law of Liberty of Conscience' in 1706, Catholics had the same religious standing before the law as any other Christian denomination and were entitled to use St. Joseph's as a public church.

This was the first time a legal public Catholic Mass was celebrated in any part of the British Empire since the Reformation.

So we have Old Bohemia down in Cecil County and old St Joseph's in Philadelphia, and in between on the circuit made by traveling priests was the Borough of Wilmington.

### *The French in Wilmington*

#### *Revolutionary War*

Most histories tell us that the first Masses in Wilmington were celebrated in the 1790/s when French refugees arrived from Haiti. But Catholicism had made its appearance a decade earlier than that during the Revolutionary War.

French Soldiers in 1782 were billeted in the Wilmington Academy, roughly where the Grand Opera House now is. Catholic army chaplains said Mass there.

Because the French were on the side of the Americans, the populace became a little more comfortable with Catholic practices. The four French soldiers who died during their stay in Wilmington were buried out at Coffee Run with Catholic French Army Chaplains officiating.

#### *Haiti Rebellion*

The Haitian Revolution brought fleeing plantation owners and their families, including some of their slaves, in the 1790/s to cities and ports up and down the East Coast. One group intended to settle in Philadelphia, but, because of an outbreak of Yellow Fever there, decided instead to come to Wilmington.

These refugees settled together on what has been known to this day as French Street near the Railroad Station. Mass was regularly celebrated at the home of the Keating Family. Other families along the street were the Garesche' s, the Bauduys, the Deschappelles, among others.

The Keatings, themselves, with their Irish name, were one of many families that fled Ireland after the overthrow of James II, joined the French military service, and were then rewarded with land for a plantation in Haiti.

## NOEL FAMILY

Another, quite different family, were the Noels, who were African - American and instrumental in the founding of St Peter's Parish.

Their's is a remarkable story.

Andrew Noel "a practical Catholic" ["practical" in those days meant 'hands-on' or 'active'] was born a slave in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 1774, and was ethnically a member of the Mandingo tribe - very important in the pecking order in Haiti - and he was one of nature's noblemen.

After his arrival here in Wilmington in the 1790/s he fell in love with Laurette, who was a slave of the Jean Garesche' Family and had come to Wilmington with them. Inspired by the Quaker abolitionist movement, the Garesche' s freed Laurette, and she soon married Noel.

Children came along. Here now was a black family living in Wilmington who's head was a barber, highly respected, at a time when Delaware was a slave state. Laurette became a mid-wife, who was known to be skilled in difficult births.

By 1814, they had a house and garden at 190 Market Street [now about where Morris Jewelers is located].

It was across the street from the house of the famous John Dickinson which gives us a hint as to how well the community accepted them.

The Noel home was a haven for Catholic itinerant priests. It was a frequent stopping place for the Reverend George Carrell, the first resident Pastor of St Peter's, who became a Jesuit and then went on to become the first Bishop of Covington, KY.

The Noels led the movement to establish St. Peter's in 1816.

When Andrew Noel died in 1822, remarkably both Wilmington newspapers ran his obituary. *The American Watchman* wrote that Mr. Noel, "a man of colour has died and been buried in the Roman Catholic burying ground near this town attended by a train of respectable white inhabitants as well as colored people."

The *Delaware Gazette* added that "his uniform obliging disposition and suavity of manners during a long residence in this town secured him the respect and esteem of all his acquaintances."

This might not seem like much to us today, but remember that Delaware was a slave state until December of 1865, and the idea of an African-American former slave having an impact on virtually all levels of society was unheard of.

As the years passed, Andrew's widow, Laurette, became interested in the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore, an order founded by Mother Mary Lange and devoted to the care and education of African-American children. Mother Lange was born in 1817 in Cuba of Haitian parents and so was part of the larger Haitian immigrant community.

In the 1830/s Mrs. Noel, her daughters Laurette, Marie Louise, and her adopted daughter Athanaise, who had all been educated in the Quaker school in Wilmington, just a block from St. Peter's, became members of this order.

Mrs. Noel, known as Sister Chantal, became assistant superior and died in 1841 - four years after the untimely death of her daughter Laurette, known in the order as Sister James.

Her youngest daughter, Marie Louise, was elected superior in 1844, and held this position on and off until her death in 1885.

#### REV PATRICK KENNY [1804-1840]

One frequent guest in the Noel's home was the Reverend Patrick Kenny, who was the first true pastor of St Peter's.

There had been titular pastors of "Wilmington" before him - Reverend Etienne Faure, appointed by Bishop John Carroll before 1796, and the Reverend Cibot, "vice

*prefect and superior general of the missions of the North of Ste. Domingue (a refugee) deputed by Bishop Carroll* in 1799, but they were not here on any permanent basis.

Kenny was born in County Dublin in 1763, and spent his seminary days at St. Sulpice in Issy, a suburb of Paris, where he learned to speak fluent French.

He disembarked in Wilmington in 1804, and shortly thereafter established himself at the Jesuit Farm at the White Clay Creek Plantation or Coffee Run - 5 miles out on what is today Lancaster Pike across the street from the present day Cokesbury Village.

Robust, less than average height, usually dressed in suits memorable for too-short too-wide trousers, he had long white hair, and smoked lots of cigars. He also had an ulcerated leg that never healed and caused severe pain, the aftermath of "spotted or putrid fever" contracted in 1799.

He was saintly, generous, possessed of a great sense of humor and served God with singular devotion for almost 40 years. During those years, he labored mostly alone and laid the groundwork for what has become the Diocese of Wilmington. His "parish" covered 3 counties.

In 1816, land near Hanover [now 6th Street] and West Streets was leased from Whitelock Estate for a church, and construction began. The earliest tombstone ever excavated from the now defunct cemetery around what was to become the St. Peter's Church dated from 1810, so some of the acreage must have been conveyed earlier.

In 1818 the Reverend Kenny celebrated the first Mass and performed the first baptism in the new 30 by 40-foot tin roof brick church designed by Pierre Bauduy. It was where the transept of St. Peter's is today and faced West Street.

From the foundations still existing beneath the current Cathedral, it looks as if the original church consisted of a ground floor partially in the earth with light wells for the windows and the main sanctuary stood on the floor above it, reached by wooden steps.

There would have been 3 windows on each side with clear glass to let in light, but likely no windows on the West Street front. The 1816 "cornerstone" was likely at that time not a cornerstone at all, but put up above the door on the front eave much like the similar stone seen today high up on the nearby Quaker Meeting house, also built in 1816.

Mass was celebrated in the new church only twice a month until arrival of Reverend George Carrell in 1829. Poor Reverend Kenny could not be in two places at once!

In 1829, the church was extended to the East making it then 30 by 60 feet and additionally, a "bell tower" was erected - not the same one that exists today.

In 1830, at the invitation of the Reverend Carrell, the Daughters of Charity, opened an orphanage nearby.

#### 1840 Reverend Kenny's Will:

We all get a little 'confuzzled' in old age, and the Reverend Mr. Kenny was no exception. His Will was somewhat non-sensical. In it, he set up a Trust for his favorite Cow and Cat so long as they remained virgins.

Unfortunately, the Cat, at the remarkable age of 40, fell from grace and had a litter of kittens.

The State of Delaware successfully moved to have Kenny's whole estate escheat to the State. They alleged that his Will was invalid because he was mentally incompetent, and that, accordingly, he had died without heirs.

This presented a problem, since title to St. Mary's Coffee Run was held in Kenny's own name - unlike his other church, St. Peter's, title to which was held by its Trustees. But Coffee Run's 200 acre farm provided food and income for the priest at St. Peter's, not to mention housing in the Rectory built out there in 1812, so it was a serious issue.

In the anti-Catholic Know-Nothing Era, the State of Delaware had no intention of giving the land back to the Roman Catholic Church.

Victor du Pont, then in the Delaware Legislature, came to the rescue. With great effort, he cleverly succeeded in getting the very anti-Catholic General Assembly to give the title of St Mary's Coffee Run to the Daughters of Charity at St. Peter's, the only Catholic entity popular among Protestants because of their teaching and nursing skills. Actually, they still technically own the cemetery out at Coffee Run to this day. The cemetery is all that is left of the once-large farm.

#### Reverend and Father

You may wonder why I keep calling Patrick Kenny 'the Reverend Kenny'. In his whole priestly career the Reverend Kenny would never have been called "Father".

Before the Reformation, priests in England and Ireland were given the courtesy title of called "Sir" - as in "Sir Patrick Smith". After the Reformation, Catholic priests



were called simply “Master” or later “Mister”, or sometimes “Reverend Mister” or, if they had a degree, “Doctor”.

When the Catholic Church hierarchy was restored in 1850, in England, the new Primate of Westminster, Nicholas Cardinal Wiseman, instructed Catholics to begin calling priests “Father”. Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Dublin at the time, supported the idea.

And, thus it was that the Irish immigrants in the 1850/s brought the custom to the US.

Also, Reverend Kenny would never have worn clerical garb in public. Far too dangerous. Only Anglican ministers were allowed to do that in Britain, and that carried over to the US. Instead, he would have worn a dark suit.

In 1844, four years after his death, the Know-Nothings up in Philadelphia burned St Augustine’s Catholic Church to the ground. Anti-Catholicism and anti-immigrant attitudes had taken hold in America.

*Rev Jeremiah O’Donohoe [1851-1855]*

In 1852, under the Father Jeremiah O’Donohue, St. Peter’s was reoriented with the altar at the South, instead of the East, end, and a new brick school and a rectory were built along 6th Street on either side of a new church tower with the silver belfry - all attached to the church, itself.

BISHOP ALFRED CURTIS

We come now in our time travel to one of the saintliest prelates who ever lived at St Peter’s: Bishop Alfred Curtis, the 2nd Bishop of Wilmington.

Like his predecessor, Bishop Thomas Becker, Curtis was a convert.

Born in Somerset County, Maryland in 1831, and Baptized a Methodist, his ancestors had settled on the Eastern Shore in the 1600/s

He became an Episcopal priest and Rector of Mt. Calvary Episcopal Church in Baltimore. Robert E. Lee had once been a parishioner there.

Robert E. Lee’s cousin, Monsignor Thomas Sim Lee, of the Maryland branch of the Lee Family who were Catholic, built what is now St Matthew’s Cathedral in

Washington DC with his own money. He was one of the Reverend Curtis' closest friends.

Curtis was converted to the Catholic Faith in England by Blessed John Henry Newman in 1872, and entered St Mary's Seminary in Baltimore to become a Catholic priest.

He bore good naturally having to "start over", so to speak, as a 41 year-old with his fellow seminarians in their 20/s. Upon his ordination he was assigned to the Cathedral in Baltimore.

When he was appointed Bishop of Wilmington in 1886, many of the Irish here were not too happy about yet another Protestant convert being sent as their shepherd - especially one of English descent.

When he arrived, Bishop Curtis organized a lecture at St Peter's entitled "*Something the Irish Don't Know*", and had placards advertising it placed all over the city. The appointed day came, and the Cathedral was filled with hundreds of curious but guarded Irishmen, the entire membership of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, who had paid 25 cents each to attend the lecture.

Bishop Curtis mounted the pulpit and a hushed, conspiratorial voice began:

*"This evening, I am going to share with you something the Irish don't know, something of which they are completely unaware! - snakes!"*

He then proceeded, for the ensuing hour and a half, to give an erudite lecture on all kinds of snakes from small ones to pythons. The crowd was delighted, and his take for the evening reached \$300, which went towards refurbishing the Cathedral.

He was utterly unassuming and humble. On weekends he would fill his pockets with apples, crackers and cheese and hop a train with his bicycle and travel down the Delmarva Peninsula. At a station, he would leave the train, mount his bicycle, and peddle off on his missions.

Occasionally, he took a young priest with him. We have the memoirs of one of them.

They were in a small Catholic country chapel as evening closed in. The young priest was hungry. Bishop Curtis noticed this and suggested that the priest go to a nearby inn for dinner. The priest asked if he were coming, and Bishop replied that he had his crackers and cheese and that was enough.

When the priest returned from dinner, he told Bishop Curtis that he had arranged for two rooms for the night at the inn. Curtis smiled and said, "You go on. I usually curl up in one of the rugs by the altar and use my cassock for a pillow."

Alfred Curtis was an early believer in the saying "*If you build it, they will come.*" Every month he would doggedly take the train South to the town where the railroad line then ended and celebrate Mass for the two or three Catholics in the area. Eventually he was able to build a chapel there.

Today, that town is Salisbury, Maryland, and the parish that grew out of that small chapel is St. Francis de Sales.

### *Saints Names on Churches*

Speaking of names, did you ever wonder why so many churches in our diocese have the same saint's name? [St Peter's Cathedral, St Peter's New Castle, St Joseph's Middletown, St Joseph's-on-the-Brandywine, St Joseph's Cordova].

You would think there are enough saints to go around and that there was no need to double up! The reason was that it was the custom in our region in the 18th and 19th Centuries to let the workmen who built the church give it the saint's name. Since St. Joseph is the patron of carpenters, you can imagine that this name was the most popular.

### *Pro-Cathedral*

Between 1870 and 1905, St Peter's underwent extensive remodeling. Frescos were added, the roof was raised with a vaulted ceiling featuring the coffers and rosettes which you see today, and a cupola placed over center aisle transept.

Also, a marble baptistry was installed, three marble altars erected, a chancel railing added, and stained glass windows installed along the nave. [attributed to Franz Xavier Zettler a well-known Bavarian glassmaker (1841-1916)]

The time finally came to have the refurbished Cathedral officially dedicated. The year was 1905.

The Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Diomedede Falconio, arrived from Washington by train and, when he saw the building, refused to designate the church as a Cathedral, because it needed to be free-standing and debt free.

One can almost hear him as he rounded the corner of 6th Street:

*[Cos'è questo? Impossibile! Una cattedrale non deve essere collegato a qualsiasi altro edificio.]*

With hundreds in attendance, this created a bit of a crisis. Canonical embarrassment was averted by a telephone call to Cardinal Gibbons.

He suggested that St. Peter's be designated a "pro-cathedral". A "pro-cathedral" was a parish church used as a cathedral.

James Cardinal Gibbons, was the Archbishop of Baltimore, who had made many visits to St Peter's and gave tremendous support to the Diocese of Wilmington. Cardinal Gibbons was arguably the greatest American Catholic churchman of the 19th century.

Talented and capable, he was not without humor.

When he returned to the US from the First Vatican Council in 1870, reporters greeted him at the Baltimore wharf and asked him about Pope Pius IX and the new Dogma of Papal Infallibility.

Gibbons shrugged and responded: "*Well, he still calls me Jibbons!*"

#### BISHOP FREDERICK KINSMAN

Now I want to mention someone seldom heard of. His name is Frederick Joseph Kinsman. In 1907, he happened to meet Bishop Curtis just before the latter's death. They had much in common. Both had been ordained Episcopal priests and both shared an extraordinary reverence and belief in the True Presence of Our Lord in the tabernacle on the altar.

The following year, 1908, Kinsman was elected the Episcopal Bishop of Delaware. Keep in mind his name.

#### *Msgr John Dougherty [1916-1948]*

In 1919, under Msgr John Dougherty, the Austin Organ was built and installed in the Cathedral at a cost of \$8,000 [\$112,000 in today's dollars]

Beyond all the beautiful upgrades and additions, the true Presence of God in our Cathedral has always had a powerful effect on those who come before it.

Will M. S. Brown, a Presbyterian and the Organist at Westminster Presbyterian Church up on Delaware Avenue, was hired to play at St. Peter's Cathedral.

It was Brown who wrote melody for our State Song, “*Oh Our Delaware*”. His time at St Peter’s had its effect. In 1925, he converted to Catholicism and was received into the Church by Msgr. Dougherty.

The next year, 1926, the school and rectory attached on either side of the tower on 6th Street were demolished. A new rectory was built on 5th and West in 1927. Freed of its attachments, St Peter’s was at last free-standing as required and officially became our Cathedral.

Land was acquired on Tatnall Street, and a new school was built on 6th and Tatnall and dedicated in 1925.

In 1940, the orphanage on the northwest corner of 6th and West was razed and replaced by the sisters’ convent.

## BISHOP EDMUND FITZMAURICE

The Irish weren’t the only immigrants to Wilmington. They were followed by the Germans, Poles and Italians at the beginning of the 20th Century. National parishes for the Poles had been created: St. Hedwigs in 1904 and St. Stanislaus Kostka in 1913. The Germans had their church, Sacred Heart.

In 1920/s there were two church centers of Italian immigrants: St Peter’s Cathedral in Wilmington and St. Peter’s in New Castle, but no church of their own. There was pressure to create an Italian ethnic parish.

An informal compromise was reached with the powers that be in Rome [who happened to be Italian] that if another Irish-background bishop were appointed, the Wilmington Italians could have their church - which ironically came into being under the pastorate of an Italian-speaking Irishman, Father Francis Tucker, as St Anthony of Padua.

The newly elected Bishop, Edmund J. Fitzmaurice, was born in County Kerry, Ireland, and had become Rector of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary outside Philadelphia.

He was a cultured and sophisticated man who knew the Church and its traditions inside and out. The Diocese of Wilmington lacked a coat of arms, and he wanted it to have one.

### Diocesan Arms

He turned to one Pierre de Chaignon LaRose [1871-1940] who was a sometime Harvard English teacher, fervent Catholic, and a heraldist and artist to boot.

In 1926, LaRose designed the arms of the Diocese which were based upon those of the Lords de la Warr: A red shield, and golden lion rampant on a field of silver crosses known as cross-crosslets bottonny fitchy.

*[In heraldic language: Gules, a lion rampant Or on a semé of cross-crosslets bottonny fitchy Argent.]*

Arguably the most beautiful diocesan arms in the world. LaRose also designed the coats of arms for many Catholic prelates, dioceses, and monasteries from 1900 until his death in 1940, and additionally all of the Harvard graduate schools as well as the coats of arms of Princeton, Yale, Radcliffe, and Rice.

### Walking

Bishop Fitzmaurice walked everywhere. After he was made bishop, but before he was installed, he would walk from St Charles Borromeo Seminary in Overbrook, north of Philadelphia, down to Wilmington. As Bishop he often walked to the City of New Castle to say Mass.

Perhaps his most famous walk occurred in August of 1945. Bishop Fitzmaurice had gone down to Ocean City to look over the small Catholic mission there. He decided to stretch his legs with a long walk along the shore.

It grew dark and, in retracing his steps up the beach, he was confronted by two soldiers with fixed bayonets who came over a sand dune. In those days during the War, there was a curfew at sundown on all Atlantic beaches.

When asked for positive identification, he could not produce any. Bishop Fitzmaurice never traveled with anything in his pockets, even money. Thereupon he was taken into custody and put in the Provost Marshal's jail. He asked that Father Eugene Stout be sent for. He was the the Pastor of nearby St. Francis de Sales Church.

When the telephone rang, Father Stout was just about to sit down to a delicious roast chicken dinner - chickens in this days were highly prized and, during the War, seldom seen. Annoyed at being pulled away from his meal, the good Father went down to the military outpost and carefully looked at the man in the cell without being seen.

Stout then turned and said in his West Virginia accent, "Colonel, I have never seen that man before in my life!" He then quickly went home and finished his dinner.

About 10 in the evening, he returned to the Provost Marshal's Office and said he might have been mistaken and thereupon identified His Excellency the Bishop, who was released into his custody.

Bishop Fitzmaurice, himself, recounted this story. He must have been a good sport because, in 1949, he recommended the Father Stout become a monsignor. Fitzmaurice, himself, was made Titular Archbishop of Tomi when he retired in 1960.

Many will tell you that Wilmington was different in the 1940/s and 50/s, and there is some truth in this. The 2 square blocks around the Cathedral during those decades produced no less than 8 vocations!

Bishop Malooly has commented that we need more of those kind of square blocks!

#### MSGR PAUL TAGGART [1982- 1994]

We are approaching the end and now come to the edges of our own era. The 1960/s brought us Vatican II and a period of great transition.

There was one man, Pastor and Rector of the Cathedral, who was instrumental in helping the Diocese weather the storms of that decade and the two that followed. His name was Monsignor Paul J. Taggart who many of you knew.

He was Valedictorian of the first graduating class at Archmere in 1936, where the yearbook notes that "*his love of puns and jokes has branded him one of Archmere's wits.*"

He served in World War II as a Lieutenant in the US Navy and participated in the Pacific Campaigns with the 3rd and 5th Fleets.

As a seminarian Paul Taggart once asked the Bishop's permission to be godfather at a baptism at St Peter's.

Bishop Fitzmaurice replied: "*My dear Paul, Though I seriously doubt that you are qualified, due to imperitiam, ignavism, desidiam, defectum bonae voluntatis to render this unfortunate child the spiritual services that are expected from a sponsor, nevertheless ad majora mala vitanda you have the expressam Ordinarii licentiam to act in the foregoing capacity.*"

When integration came to Delaware in 1954, Bishop Fitzmaurice and Father Taggart, through pastoral letters and leadership, accomplished Catholic institutional

racial equality without incident. Even as early as 1948, down the Peninsula, the new St Francis de Sales Parochial School open as integrated. Salesianum soon followed suit.

Msgr. Taggart, as Vicar General in 1966, was instrumental in implementing the reforms of Vatican II.

It may be difficult for us today to appreciate just how extraordinary the Vatican II changes were to all of the faithful at the time. The 1960s were a world on fire.

Paul Taggart was Diocesan Administrator after death of Bishop Hyle in 1967, and served in that important role again after the death of Bishop Mardaga in 1984.

He never lost his wit. One of the best pieces of advice he ever gave me, personally, was to *“Never lend a book to a priest. You’ll never get it back.”*

More to our purpose tonight, he was the Pastor of the Cathedral when the interior was updated and remodeled in accordance with Vatican II standards in 1981, and also when it was found to need serious construction remediation in 1991, saving the walls, arches and some columns from collapse.

In the words of a medieval epitaph, Monsignor Taggart was a lion among the powerful, a lamb among the lowly, and an eagle of inspiration to everyone who ever came his way.

## CONCLUSION

Beyond nuns, priests, monsignors, bishops, and one archbishop, who have been part of the life of the Cathedral, we must never forget the laity who have sustained St. Peter’s over 2 centuries. People at its beginning, such as Andrew Noel and, in our day, like George Callahan, and many, many others.

The famed Christian writer, C.S. Lewis, once corrected one of his colleagues who had said, *“We all have souls”*.

*“No”, said Lewis, “each of us IS a soul. We HAVE a body.”*

The same could be said of the Cathedral. Its parishioners, and those who love it, ARE a Church. We HAVE a building.

Each of you is a brick in that living Church, bonded together by the Sacraments, which are the outward signs of the Holy Faith we share.



## *Finis*

As we end, I want to take you back in time for one more brief moment - to Wednesday, May 14, 1919. It is the afternoon of the day that very same Bishop Frederick Kinsman, who, having converted to Catholicism, was officially deposed as the Episcopal Bishop of Delaware.

Remember in those days that the Protestant Episcopal Church was at the height of its power and influence both in Delaware and Maryland, indeed, across America.

Kinsman is alone in St. Peter's Cathedral before the Blessed Sacrament. He has given up everything - his income, his office, his home, his prestige, and the affection of most of his colleagues and friends.

As have so many converts before and after him, he has undergone, in the moving words of Cardinal Gibbons:

*“that test, proof of religious faith next to martyrdom: that uprooting of himself from dear lifelong surroundings, that tearing of tendrils and breaking asunder of interlacing branches of personal friends and religious bonds”*

Kinsman has confronted those two last great self-imposed barriers to the full joy of God's salvation: grief and regret.

The amber afternoon light from the west pours through St. Peter's stained glass windows bringing color to the pews and the floor. In the quiet stillness he gazes up at the red tabernacle light.

Just then, something happened that brought a smile of contentment to his lips.

As he later wrote in a letter to the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Visitation - *“I felt at that moment that I was exactly where God wanted me to be.”*

That same tabernacle light, enkindled to proclaim the true presence of God, still burns in our beloved Cathedral, as it has for 200 years, and will, by Divine grace, burn for hundreds of years to come.

And in between the past and the future,

my wish for each of us here in the present,

is that, tonight, tomorrow, or somewhere further along the corridor of time,

may we all find ourselves exactly where God wants us to be!

Thank you