

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

PARISH HISTORY

THE FIRST 30 YEARS



11401 LEESVILLE ROAD, RALEIGH, NC 27613

PREFACE

A Work in Progress:

The First Thirty Years of St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church of Raleigh, North Carolina

I've been chatting with the folks who founded St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church in Raleigh. They started 30 years ago.

Way back then, the first pastor asked me to write a little summary of how the parish got started. Jump 30 years to today and the current pastor has asked me to continue the story.

So here I am, talking with the clergy and the parishioners who made it all happen, recording the history, starting from the very beginning, and doing my best to retell our parish stories.

Think of this 30-year historical compilation as a work in progress. I have done my best to record the many parishioners' memories that surfaced. In many ways it is more complete than I anticipated and in other ways it is less.

I hope this narrative will tickle your minds and bubble up more memories for the compilation of future publications.

The narrative that follows picks up where the first story left off and leaves off where the rest of the story – our future history – begins.

Donna (Foglia) Sink



THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
11401 LEESVILLE ROAD
RALEIGH, NC 27613
919-847-8205
WWW.STFRANCISRALEIGH.ORG

IN THE VERY BEGINNING...

*“Lord, what do you
want of me?”*

*And the old painted
crucifix in the San
Damiano church
spoke. “Francis,” the
Lord said, “rebuild
my church. It is falling
down.”*

*For a short while,
Francis wandered. But
no place held his heart
like Assisi. So he
headed back to the
town of his birth and
set out to rebuild the
church of San
Damiano. But how
would he buy stones
and mortar and tools?
What could he do? He
knew how to sing. He
would sing for stones.*



Ready to build a church. Founding pastor, Fr. Jim English, S.J., stands on land that will become the home of our faith community.

The Early Years, 1978-1986

Eight hundred years after Francis heard God's call to rebuild his church, a people called upon their bishop to build a new parish.

And that's exactly what happened. Bishop Joseph Gossman called upon the Maryland province of the Society of Jesus and asked a Jesuit priest to consider becoming the founding pastor of a Roman Catholic Church located in a small suburb of Raleigh called Leesville. This Jesuit, Father James English, made several trips to North Carolina to meet with St. Raphael's pastor, Father Gerald Lewis, and with the bishop. He also toured North Carolina, driving from the Appalachian Mountains to the eastern coast of North Carolina, and then returned to Boston.

Father English contemplated, made his decision, flew back to Raleigh, and in February 1982 said to Father Lewis, "Jerry, I'm your man!" Father Lewis announced to his parishioners that his search had ended.

Reminiscing about those days, now-Monsignor Lewis told an audience of St. Francis of Assisi's more seasoned parishioners, "Those were very exciting days. Soon after he became bishop of Raleigh, Bishop Joseph Gossman was invited out here to Springdale to a meeting of people who lived in this area. They met at Yvonne and Henry Foglia's house, and they weren't gathering just to say 'hello' to the bishop. They were petitioning Bishop Gossman to start a parish out here." The audience chuckled; many recalled the auspicious beginnings of St. Francis of Assisi Church and the very meeting that put St. Francis on the map. Most of St. Francis of Assisi's early founders had been members of St. Raphael's parish. Living in the Leesville community required them to drive long distances for any church function. From mass to faith formation,

choir practice, Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) and Senior Citizen meetings, the miles added up. They grew weary of the heavy commuting. When rumblings of St. Raphael's expansion began, many northwest Raleigh parishioners couldn't resist thinking that what the diocese really needed was a church in their area.

Yvonne Foglia and MaryLou Bender, the 1977-78 hosts of the annual St. Raphael's Women's Guild potluck supper, had a novel idea. "Why don't we invite the bishop to come and talk

are we going to get a church?" The parishioners made a memorable impact on the bishop that evening. Yvonne notes of the following years, "Any time the bishop saw either Hank or me, he would smile and say, 'Any more vigilante meetings?'"

In August 1978, when Father Lewis' six-year term as the Chancellor of the Diocese of Raleigh ended, Bishop Gossman appointed him Pastor of St. Raphael Church with the assignment to study the western area of the parish and to start a new parish out there. And that was exactly what happened. The search for property began, but it proved difficult.

"One of our problems back in those days," Monsignor Lewis recalls, "was that people did not want to sell to Catholics. There was a lot of property around but not much that was available to us. John Norkus from Our Lady of Lourdes Church, a part-time real estate agent, found this property on Leesville Road. It was only eight acres, but it was all we could find."

This property, it turned out, was technically in the parish boundaries of Our Lady of Lourdes, Leesville Road being the dividing line. So, according to the Mother Parish Policy of the diocese, Our Lady of Lourdes paid for the land, about \$50,000.

"Having the property, we needed to start a community but we were not ready to do that yet without a place to have mass," Monsignor Lewis says. Their next step was to find temporary worship space for the portion of the parish living in the area of the new parish. This, too, would prove difficult. According to Monsignor Lewis, there was no school building near the area that would become the new parish. They did find a closed greenhouse and nursery, but Our Lady of Lourdes's pastor objected. The search continued for usable facilities, but they could find none.

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Monsignor Gerald Lewis

about building the church in northwest Raleigh?" Yvonne said to MaryLou. And they did. About forty or fifty folks came that night.

"A lot of curiosity-seekers, that's what it was," MaryLou says. "They wanted to see what was going to happen. When we got through eating, we went into the family room. We had people sitting on the floor and everything. We sat the bishop in front of the fireplace." Yvonne nods. "He was the main man. Father Lewis and another priest were there, too. We started asking the bishop questions."

"Everybody got settled in, and then there was this silence," MaryLou recalls. "Henry said, 'Okay, bishop, when

The closest public school to the proposed parish was Lynn Road Elementary School. Even though this school lay within the boundaries of St. Raphael's, they asked for the use of its cafeteria. They were turned down.

"In Wake County, each principal decides whether or not people can use the school," Monsignor Lewis explains. "When I relayed all of this to the Diocesan Building and Real Estate Commission, Jim Kaus, a member of the commission and a potential member of the new parish, offered to speak to the principal of the school. So, actually, through Jim Kaus, who had some connections at Lynn Road School, the principal reversed his decision and let us meet there. And we began mass at Lynn Road School.

"I had the first mass and Father Jerry Sherba had some, but I got Father Donald Staib, who was Chancellor, to come out most of the time," says Monsignor Lewis.

They were trying to build a community so that when they got a pastor for the new parish, the community would be well underway, and, at the very least, have a nucleus of a parish for the first pastor to work with. Proposed parish lines were drawn: Durham County on the west, The Neuse River on the north, Creedmoor Road on the east, and Glenwood Avenue (Highway 70) on the south.

Now that the property was purchased and a community was starting to form, the diocese began the search for the pastor. When Father English accepted the job as founding pastor of the new parish in northwest Raleigh, he had no clue what he would find or what could be accomplished. "I had never started up a parish before," he says. "I didn't know what the first, second, or third step should be."

When Father English talked with Bishop Gossman about this new parish, he asked him, "Where would I begin?" Bishop Gossman replied, "Come on down and find out."

On April 8, 1982, Father English officially arrived in Raleigh. He temporarily resided in St. Raphael's rectory. "Now," Monsignor Lewis says, "what does a pastor do with a new priest who wants to start a new parish during Holy Week?"

With access to a house at the beach, Father Lewis gave Father English the keys to the house, gave him his car, and said, "You go to the beach and come back next week."

Upon his return, a realtor took Father English around to look at properties. They looked at many new, big houses, but Father English found the perfect little brown house right across the street from the new parish's property.

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Fr. Jim English, S.J., Founding Pastor

He says, "Father Lewis knew the young couple in the house and knew they were going to move elsewhere. Therefore, that house was about to become available right across the street. Really, it was a miracle. I couldn't believe it myself. So, St. Raphael Church paid the rent and I moved in. It was easy. I had only my suitcase with me; I didn't have anything else but an empty house.

"The people found out that I didn't have any furniture—I mean, I didn't have a chair, I didn't have a spoon or a pot, I didn't have anything. I didn't have a towel. I didn't have anything in the house." Father English chuckles as he recalls those early days. "I had my little Volkswagen out the front door.

And that was it."

The ladies of the parish would have none of that. Dottie Fuller suggested they throw him a Rectory Shower so they could furnish his house. A lot of people showed up for the party in the living room of the little brown house. Father English unwrapped boxes of dishcloths and dinnerware, kitchen utensils and bath mats.

"I didn't know any of the geography," he recalls. "I got lost every time I drove more than a mile. There was nothing there, all trees." He was completely out there by himself. "What was quite clear to me," he says, "was that I did not know how to build a parish. I didn't know, and therefore, I had to find the people with the right talents. I had to find them and they found me and we put together people who, by the time it was over, knew how to build a parish." That was how it began.

"The first time we gathered at the public school for our first mass," Father English says, "I seem to recall saying to myself, this is going to be something, this building of a parish. I've never done it, and I don't know that anyone over here has ever done it before, but we're going to do it."

He told people he'd like to meet with them. "I said, therefore, every day next week in my little rented house, we're going to have a meeting. Everyone is invited to every single one of the meetings, but I'm going to name the meetings so that if there is something that you are really interested in, you will attend that meeting. "And people came every night that week and into the next week. And we would sit on the floor—they found out the house was empty. I had my hardcover books, and I would pass them around, and the people would give me their names and phone numbers. "It worked," he says. "People liked it, and they came. And some of the people who came to those meetings were still involved with what they had signed up for by the time I left St. Francis. They were still working at it. It was marvelous."

Father English describes the total experience of founding the parish as a gift. "What a gift they gave me in allowing this Jesuit to come here and do this thing. Watching the people form community has been dazzling," he says of the parishioners. "They are so good, so concerned. They love God and want to know Him." Out of those meetings came many committees, and eventually ministries still in existence today. The following committees were formed:

- Parish Building Committee
- Parish Finance Committee
- Education Committee
- Social Concerns Committee
- Liturgy Committee
- Pastor's Advisory Committee

The Education committee quickly recognized the need to form faith formation programs. After several meetings, Marylyn Kaus was chosen to "volunteer" to lead the program. She took over with gusto. Over 200 students and 35 volunteer teachers participated. They filled the rectory, several private homes, and the facilities of the neighboring Leesville Baptist Church.

The Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) soon formed and clamored success. Larry LeNoir from the diocesan office gathered parish teens in the rectory living room. Before long, a St. Francis of Assisi CYO was created with Larry and Pam Heyl at the helm.

The Parish Social Concerns Committee organized their efforts and visited the Madonna House in downtown Raleigh on June 19, 1982. This house offers shelter to local, poor families; it was a house in physical and financial jeopardy. Then the committee performed another wonderful task. It provided the prisoners of the Wake Advancement Center with Christmas gifts for their children. Gifts are frequently given to a prisoner, but seldom (if at all) does the prisoner have the opportunity to give presents to his or her family. In fact, the warden listened to the committee's plan but was skeptical about its success; gift giving by the

prisoners to their children was just simply unheard of. But the response was overwhelming. The prisoners gratefully welcomed the opportunity to give Christmas presents to their youngsters.

In addition to the various committees' work, contributions of many others enriched the experience of establishing the new parish. And we can't bypass the Christmas of 1982 without a word about the wonderful "living crèche". Angels from above were our toddlers, pre-schoolers and grammar schoolers. Our shepherds were our Goldenagers and our townspeople were all those in their prime! Father English found the perfect couple to

"... I THOUGHT HE WAS OUT OF HIS MIND. BUT HE SAID THE BARNs ARE BEAUTIFUL BECAUSE THEY ARE BUILT TO DO WHAT BARNs ARE MEANT TO DO."

Fr. English on design of sanctuary.

play the roles of Mary and Joseph and the infant Jesus. The Perillos had given birth to their second child only days before Christmas Eve. Great timing.

As the plans for the building were being finalized, fundraising efforts commenced. St. Francis did it with a song; we did it with John and Pegeen Griessmayer. Chris and Ronnie Offen, Jo and Jerry Finnen, and Mary and Paul Dunphy assisted. Teams of visitors were welcomed enthusiastically by the parish membership and their goal of \$200,000 was surpassed.

Plans for the building had begun much earlier, though. On March 7, 1982, a meeting was held in St. Raphael's parish center to discuss the building

plans. They started with an inflatable building, tossed around ideas of a metal, pre-fab structure, contemplated renting the uninhabited Springdale grocery store, and finally pursued the design and construction of a New England pole and beam style building.

"There are three reasons I chose the barn," says Father English. "The first was because when I became a Jesuit, I moved to the countryside, not far from where I am right now in Philadelphia, this gorgeous Amish country in Pennsylvania. I was a city boy, so living in the country with the Jesuits was a brand new experience.

"While doing that, I read Thomas Merton's Book, Seven Storey Mountain. In that book, he talks about joining the Cistercians. He was a very artistic person himself. He said that all the buildings out where he had joined the Cistercians were ugly. And, [Merton] said the reason they are all ugly is because everybody tried to make them look like 12th Century or 13th Century churches or buildings. But we can't do that anymore; it's not the 12th or 13th Century. He said the only beautiful things we have on our property – and we have a large property – are the barns.

"Now, as a city boy, I thought he was out of his mind. But he said the barns are beautiful because they are built to do what barns are meant to do, and nobody is worried about making them look like this, that, or the other thing. And, as a result, they become simple and strong, and they look beautiful.

"I took it upon myself in Pennsylvania to go into every single barn I saw. And I began to just look at them. This was when I was very young, long before I ever came to North Carolina. I was 17 or 18. And, I had suddenly realized, he was right. Barns are national treasures. They are so beautiful and their construction is so wonderful. So that was one thing that was in my mind.

"The second thing was that long before either of us ever knew anything about North Carolina, I went on a retreat with Bob Hudak (a Franciscan Friar of Holy Name Province) along with a group of

New church captur



St. Francis of Assisi Church on Leesville Road in Raleigh was dedicated on Oct. 9. During the ceremony, Father James English, pastor, read a "book" he wrote about his experience in founding the parish.

By Pam Smith
Staff writer

RALEIGH—When Jesuit Father James English accepted the job as founding pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Raleigh, he wasn't certain what would be in store.

"I had never started up a parish before," he said. "I didn't know what the first, second, or third step should be."

Looking back on the series of events that culminated in the dedication of the church building on Oct. 9, he described the total experience as a gift.

"What a gift they gave me in allowing this Jesuit to come here and do this thing. Watching the people form community has been dazzling. They are so good, so concerned. They love God and want to know him," Father English said of his parishioners.

The parish is comprised of 325 families carved from the mother parishes of St. Raphael and Our Lady of

Lourdes. Hundreds of them joined diocesan dignitaries under towering pine trees near the rustic church structure to take part in dedication ceremonies. Bishop Joseph Gossman, ordinary of the Diocese of Raleigh, concelebrated the liturgy with Father English, Father Gerald Lewis, and Father Raymond Donohue.

The story began before architect Ralph Reeves, builder E.I. Clancy, and members of the parish building committee handed the keys to the bishop and pastor at the front door on Sunday.

When the need for a new parish was created by the rapid population growth in northern Wake County, Bishop Gossman turned to the Maryland Jesuits for help.

Father English met several times with Bishop Gossman and Father Lewis, pastor of St. Raphael, before accepting the pastorate. His acceptance by the diocese and the people was his first gift, Father English said. That was in

es sense of history

February 1982.

Other prominent gifts include the eight-acre site on rural Leesville Road—land purchased by Our Lady of Lourdes parishioners—and \$125,000 seed money for the \$484,000 building project pledged by members of St. Raphael parish.

On April 25, 1982, the nucleus of the forming parish celebrated Mass for the first time with Father English under the patronage of St. Francis of Assisi. The liturgy was conducted in a small clearing on the church site.

Ground was broken on the Feast of St. Francis one year ago. As the building began to take shape, so did the parish community. Committees were formed, religious education classes met, and outreach projects were initiated.

The gift of brotherhood was offered by Rev. James McAllister and the congregation of Leesville Baptist Church, where Mass was celebrated and religious education conducted.

The partially constructed church rectory represents still another miraculous gift. Father English, who serves on the board of directors for Weston Theological College, attended a meeting on the Connecticut campus. Fellow board members George and Marie Doty of Rye, N.Y., became interested in his burgeoning Raleigh parish.

"They invited me to breakfast on the day I was leaving. Imagine my surprise when they told me to build the rectory; they would give a gift of \$100,000 for its construction," Father English recalled.

Meanwhile back in Washington, D.C., parishioners of Holy Trinity, where Father English was pastor for 13 years, were throwing a "Road Building Party." The \$12,000 raised was earmarked for asphalt driveways and parking areas at St. Francis.

The gifts kept coming from within and without the parish:

- a \$200,000 pledge campaign was realized;
- a loan from the diocese was negotiated;
- parishioner George Bastianello



Father Gerald Lewis, pastor of St. Raphael parish, anoints one of the church columns.

hand-crafted the altar, pulpit, high bench, beveled-glass cross, and candle sticks;

- Lee Webster, a parishioner, carved the processional cross and stand from black walnut;

- priceless hand-carved stations of the cross came from a Jesuit chapel in Boston; and

- from a Jesuit novitiate in Massachusetts came the hand-carved wood statue of the Holy Family and a marble statue of the Jesuit founder St. Ignatius Loyola.

It all came together in less than a year, Father English said. The first Mass was celebrated in June.

Despite its newness, the Church of St. Francis of Assisi has a sense of history. Its rough, exposed beams were salvaged by the Yankee Beam and Pole Construction Company from turn-of-the-century New England buildings waiting demolition.

The church seats from 400-500. When liturgies are not being celebrated, the building is partitioned for religious education classes.

The consecration and dedication appropriately came on the first Sunday following the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

monks. These monks had bought a farm to begin their monastery. And they took the barn on this farm and turned it into their place of worship. Bob Hudak and I went to mass there, and I was struck by how beautiful the liturgies were and how beautiful the barn was that they were in. They could swing the doors open, and you could look down into the trees and the meadows... it was simply heavenly. I had barns on my mind."

By the time Father English got to North Carolina, he thought, "I'm not going to build a big fancy church that will cost a fortune." He adds, "I went down to visit North Carolina. We went out there, right next to tobacco fields. I had never seen tobacco before—I thought it was corn! And then I thought, we should build a barn church; that is what we need down here - a big, beautiful, glorious barn."

The third reason Father English leaned toward the pole and beam design had to do with the company he would engage to design the building. "I had friends up here in Washington who had people in the horse raising business, and they told me about this barn-building company. So, I went up to New England and met this company. I stayed overnight and they showed me their barns and what they had built. Then I sat with them and I drew up how I thought this church should be shaped," he says. "I made it very simple.

"Then I went down to North Carolina, and within a week I had a model of the barn sent to me in the mail. I got together everybody who was interested. I showed them the barn and explained what I thought would be good about it. "One of the things I said was this: if this parish keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger, the barn is immensely flexible. You can convert a barn into many, many functions. Our function will be a church and a chapel; it will be beautiful in that way, but it will also be beautiful in all sorts of other ways if something larger has to happen at some point. That happened," says Father English.

Within two days, the Building Team had unanimously agreed on the pole and beam style. Shortly thereafter, Father English met with architect Ralph Reeves and builder E. I. Clancy. At 11 o'clock a.m. on Thursday, April 22, 1982, Hans Van Welzen and a group of friends – axes and power saws in hands – cleared the woods.

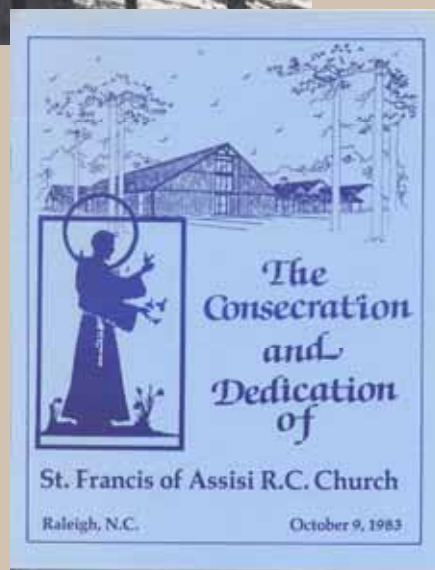
Preparations for the first mass in the Leesville woods were underway. Father English gave careful thought to

instead he talked to St. Francis, saying, "St. Francis of Assisi, you know I'm searching for a name for our church, and I would like to announce our parish name during the outdoor mass. So I'm putting you in charge of the weather, and if it rains, I will recommend the parish be named after St. Ignatius of Loyola."

The mass took place on a beautiful, sunny Carolina day. Father English recommended the church be called



Original Sanctuary – Main Entrance with circular drive



Worship Aid – Consecration & Dedication

the name of our parish—he narrowed the possibilities down to two saints and decided to let the saints choose. Bishop Gossman officially erected St. Francis of Assisi as a parish on April 25, 1982.

Father English never set a rain date for this special mass. According to legend,

St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church, and his suggestion was received with a resounding applause. The building crew diligently set about construction, and on April 3, 1983, we were able to celebrate Easter in our half-built church—what a glorious morning!

By June 11, 1983, St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church was finished. We are grateful to many whose contributions helped make the construction of the parish possible. We thank George and Marie Doty of Rye, New York for their generous gift of \$100,000 for the construction of the rectory; Nancy Dickerson, Mary Connelly, and Father English's friends in Washington, D.C., who supported the "Road Building Party" which made possible our parking lot and driveways;

Father English's scavenger hunts, which led to the following acquisitions for the original church:

The Stations of the Cross from a chapel in Boston, hand-carved Holy Family statue and white marble statue of St. Ignatius from a Jesuit Novitiate in Massachusetts and innumerable gifts from Father James McAghon of the Passionist Monastery.

Father English had become good friends at the racquetball club with a

Boston. I want to rent a car, drive right down the coast, and I want to go to every house that we are closing. They are great big houses with beautiful things in them. And if I know us, we'll just walk out with them. I want to go get them."

They did. Father English and Steve Hedrick went up to Boston and began a slow drive southward. They stopped all along the east coast at every Jesuit house that Father English knew about. "By the time we got home, the garage of that little rented house on Leesville and part of the first floor was just simply packed with beautiful, beautiful things."

Starting a new parish would take more than just stocking the building, though, and St. Raphael made significant contributions that helped launch the new parish. "St. Raphael didn't just push all the new parishioners off as a nucleus and say 'bye-bye'," Monsignor Lewis explains. Through a real cooperative measure, St. Raphael Church directly contributed to the success of the new parish.



Painting of St. Francis of Assisi in original sanctuary, painted by parishioners. Everyone wanted to be a part of building our new church.

George Bastianello for the hand-constructed altar, ambo, presider's bench, beveled glass cross and candle stands; and Lee Webster for the hand-made processional cross and stand, the statues of the four evangelists and the breathtaking grandfather clock. And we are especially thankful for

non-Catholic, Steve Hedrick. Steve Hedrick would become a major figure in all of this scavenging. "What I did was this: I said to my good friend, Steve, that the Jesuits were closing all these houses. The vocation crisis was coming down from Boston, all the way down here. I said, 'I want to go up to

A little help from our brothers and sisters – Contributions to our new faith community from St. Raphael the Archangel Parish.

- Donating \$125,000 to get the new parish started
- Paying rent in Father English's house for one full year
- Transferring to the new parish all unpaid pledges made to the St. Raphael Parish Center
- Making the St. Raphael office and staff available to Father English for one year
- Giving the new parish all of the altar supplies used at Lynn Road School
- Continuing for a year to educate the new parish's children through the religious education program
- Continuing for three years to accept the new parish's children for the Early Childhood Center at the same in-parish tuition rate as St. Raphael children.

"So when you talk about this little handful of people," Monsignor Lewis says, "remember there was a lot of help there, too. It was a real partnership." The northwest Raleigh people were terribly excited about starting their own new parish. And there was tremendous cooperation. "Father English got them really inspired and got the cooperation of all of the parishioners," Monsignor says. "By the end of the year Father English arrived and the parish was established, the new parish was twice as big as we had projected. The new parish had a good foundation from what St. Raphael had provided. You had a tremendously strong foundation in the people who were the nucleus of the new parish. And you had a really fine, dynamic, energetic, and visionary priest leading you at the time. So, God blessed you very much. I was glad to have been a part of it."

The original church seated up to 400 and was dedicated on October 9, 1983. "The church looked absolutely beautiful, our little church did," says Father English of the dedication. "It was exactly what we wanted it to be, a simple country church."

Bishop Gossman was the celebrant of the mass. Father English gave a short homily. In his few sentences, he told what he, the parishioners, and the diocese had tried to accomplish.

"I said that it seems every Jesuit at some point in his lifetime is supposed to write a book. I said, 'I am a Jesuit and I have not yet written a book, but I think perhaps now I am ready to write one. Perhaps I will do it right here, today,'" Father English recalls. "The title of the book is How to Found a Parish."

"The first thing you need to do is arrive. The second thing you do is find a people, a wonderful people who want to worship God, who want to care for their children and give them the faith, who live in terms of other people, not in terms of themselves. And, I said, bringing them together and the rest is a piece of cake."

Father English had grown up in a parish in Philadelphia that was strapped by a debt left by its founders. For the following 25 years those parishioners were paying off that debt.

"So I didn't want to leave a debt," he says. "That is why the Finance Committee was so important. They worked so hard, and we paid the whole thing off. Before I left, a good time before I left, we had a 'Burn the Mortgage' party. We burned the mortgage and had a great big outdoor picnic on the lawn." In fact, at that party Father English announced, "If you are new to the parish and made a pledge, understand that we have paid all of our bills and you may decide not to continue paying



Beveled glass cross made by parishioner George Bastianello. The frame was made with wood from the original pews in Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh.

your pledge. However, if you are able to continue paying the pledge you made, we have a special fund forming and that special fund will be for what we need next: an education facility for our children."

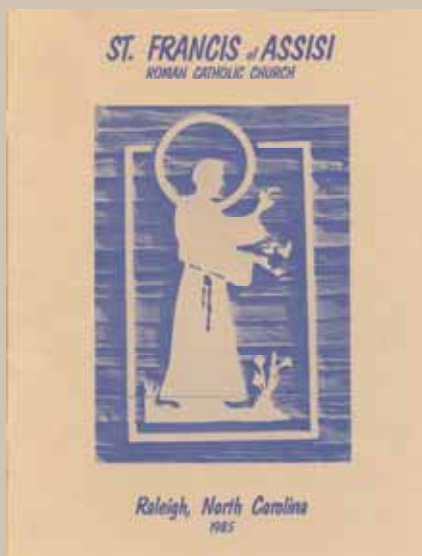
Not only did people continue paying their pledge, new pledges came in from people who had finished paying their pledges. And that was how it went. "Just find a people," Father English had said.

St. Francis of Assisi started out with two buildings; one was the sanctuary and the other consisted of the busi-

ness office and pastor's office, a small meeting room, and the rectory. The two buildings were separated by a lovely courtyard. Because these buildings had very limited space for meetings, the courtyard, the meeting room, and the sanctuary were hotbeds of early social and spiritual gatherings. Faith Formation sessions, CPR classes, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and all sorts of other groups used the confined areas to their fullest.

Parishioner Marylyn Kaus remembers early days that included Faith Formation classes being held, at first, in homes, then in the basement of Leesville Road Baptist Church, and later scattered in every corner and closet (literally) of the original church. She also recalls the parish renting space at Creedmoor Road Baptist Church and North Raleigh Church of the Nazarene.

"Weren't we blessed to be so welcomed by other faiths," Marylyn says, "especially considering that Catholics at the time were less than two percent of the North Carolina population. What a wonderfully ecumenical base for building our own faith community."



Our first parish photo directory, 1985.
Were you here?



Dear Members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish,

A great deal has been accomplished in the short life of our parish. It has been challenging and exciting. We have begun to create a very special community and, we hope, a holy church.

This book is an important instrument in our getting to know one another. We can begin to put names to faces. The book is already out of date simply because we are growing so quickly. We will do our best to bring it up to date each year. Let's pray together that our parish continues to grow, not just in numbers but in holiness and in doing the good works of God's people.

Sincerely In Christ,

James M. English, S.J.

Rev. James M. English, S.J.
Pastor

Directory welcome by Fr. Jim English, Pastor



Photos of Fr. Jim English and
Fr. Gerry Lewis with parishioners.



Our first celebration of First Eucharist as a Parish, in borrowed space
before the sanctuary was complete.



The courtyard outside the church was the hub of early social life at St. Francis of Assisi.

The Middle Years, 1987-1997

With the departure of Father English in the winter of 1987, Bishop Gossman named Father Jeffrey Ingham to serve as administrator. Parishioners knew a new pastor would soon be assigned. Their hope was that Father Bob Hudak, a Franciscan friend of Father English, might be chosen for the position.

"Father English had invited Father Bob to participate in the life of the parish, and I think it was at that point that Bob began to touch the lives of the people through his great presence," says Father David McBriar, O.F.M., who was eventually assigned as first Franciscan pastor.

The Parish Council, including Murray Gould and Chris Judy, investigated the possibility of having Father Bob assigned to St. Francis of Assisi. Once again, our parishioners ventured into territory not usually entered by the laity. On their own initiative, Murray and his small party traveled to Holy Name Province in New York City, the central administration for the Franciscan Friars along the east coast of the U.S. They met with Father David and painted a wonderful picture of St. Francis of Assisi Church. Father David was intrigued by this group of parishioners who made such a bold move on their own. This was exactly what Holy Name Province had envisioned in their call to empower the laity. In time, Father David was enticed to leave his administrative role and return to parish ministry.

Father David says, "I was Personnel Director in the province and it was at that time in administration when we were looking to branch out a little bit."

Holy Name administrators had already been searching for new places in the South where they could minister. Father David began by calling a meeting of friars.

"I remember calling this meeting," Father David says. "I said that anybody who would be interested in working in the South, we're going to be meeting in our headquarters. About 20 friars came. Of course, in those days, we numbered a lot more than we do now. But at one of those meetings, one of the men who came was Dan Kenna. His family was in Charlotte and he was more interested in us taking a parish that was available in Charlotte."

Catholics were so few in the South that the Franciscans referred to serving in the Southeast as the "southern missions".



Fr. David McBriar, O.F.M., second pastor of our Parish and first Franciscan pastor.

Father Bill McConville, O.F.M., who was assigned as Associate Pastor in 2001, confirms that, indeed, Raleigh's St. Francis of Assisi parish was off the radar screen. It was not a part of the discussions for Franciscan ministries of the future.

"It wasn't until after Jim English left and there was a movement by the people who went up to New York to request that the Franciscans be sent down here, that we all became perfectly

aware of St. Francis," says Father Bill. "But I never in a million years thought I'd be stationed here."

Also remembering his first visit to the little parish in the South, Father Mark G. Reamer, O.F.M., recalls, "It wasn't until Dan Kenna came here that I visited the parish for the first time. It was so isolated. The Franciscans didn't have a parish in Durham then, so, to us, it was just a place outside of Washington, D.C. There was a parish in Virginia and the next closest one was in South Carolina."

"One of the things that is important to know is the perception of the Franciscans toward the South," explains Father Bill. "The Franciscans came to the South to work in African-American missions. We had a whole string of men who came down to work in the African-American community after the Second World War. So, our heritage outside of Atlanta was African-American ministry. Then in the 1950s or 60s, the bishop, asked the friars to leave, so we left."

That was part of the early history of the Franciscans being in North Carolina, which had nothing to do with having Franciscans at St. Francis of Assisi in Raleigh today.

"Franciscans pastoring St. Francis of Assisi happened because of a friendship between a young friar and a Jesuit who started the parish," Father Bill says. "That's the reason we're here—well, the reason we're here is because our provincial said we could be here. But ultimately, that's how it became part of our map."

"Mission territory, it's funny," Father David says with a chuckle. "So, we had that meeting and then, lo and behold, circumstances were such that a friar, the Vicar Provincial Matthew Conklin, O.F.M., and myself were given the task of seeing if there were any benign bishops."

Father David and Father Matt visited Our Lady of Grace in Greensboro.

"Our Lady of Grace was a church that a non-Catholic built for his Catholic wife with the stipulation that nothing ever be changed in it," Father David says. "Matt and I went down there to see this church. It was kind of a beautiful church, marble altar rail, kind of like a cathedral. But when we heard about this stipulation, we said this is not for us. We were not going to take marching orders from somebody who says what you can and what you can't do. So we wrote off Our Lady of Grace."

When they got to St. Francis, Father Matt and Father David had conversations with many people, asking about the parish's strengths and needs.

"Most everybody was enthusiastic about the possibilities of the parish," Father David says. "Jim English empowered the people to run the place. They took over; they did what had to be done. Judy Shiel, Mary Morch, and Marylyn Kaus, all employees, were the main movers and shakers."

Father David was impressed with what he saw, particularly with the high degree of involvement from the laity. However, Father David recalls, "I remember saying to Murray and Chris, 'I'm not sure you want the friars. You want Bob Hudak and we can't guarantee that Bob Hudak will come here.'" Having talked at the time with Father Lewis, Father David also knew that it was Father Lewis' wish that St. Francis would become more in the mainstream of the diocese than it was.

"Location. There was a certain concern that the parish of North Raleigh wasn't being linked well with the diocese, as if we were a little boat out there on our own," Father David says. He adds that there were also some liturgical practices not in line with diocesan practices, which led to criticism.

However, David recalls, "I remember at the provincial meetings, both Matt Conklin and I said that St. Francis had real potential for the friars, for our style of ministry. I gathered a meeting to see if we could get two friars to go there.

"Dan Kenna couldn't come at that time; he was serving in New Jersey, so he was locked in. The person who wanted to come, who stepped right up to the plate, was Father Tim Gritman. He was a wonderful guy," says Father David. After a time, however, Father Tim backed out. "Raleigh seemed so far away," Father David explains. "Those kinds of issues continued to arise, and soon there were no volunteers. So I said, 'Well, I think we ought to do it and I'm willing to go.' And I asked Bob Hudak if he would come with me."

The Parish Council also met with Bishop Gossman to ask that he con-

"Judy Shiel, Mary Morch, and Marylynn Kaus, all employees, were the main movers and shakers."

- Fr. David McBriar, O.F.M. on lay empowerment in our early Parish.

sider having the parish served by the Franciscans of Holy Name Province. Like Father David, Bishop Gossman was impressed with these parishioners who seemed to take matters into their own hands. In July 1987, Bishop Gossman invited the Franciscan Friars to minister at St. Francis of Assisi. Father David McBriar, O.F.M., became the second pastor of the parish. He was there for a month before Bob Hudak arrived and was named Associate Pastor.

"Three things come to mind when I think of St. Francis," Father Bob says. One was his first memory of the church, when he had attended one of the Saturday evening masses that Father English held at Leesville Road

Baptist Church. "If a Jesuit and a Franciscan could live together, then surely the Baptists and the Catholics could live together!" Father Bob jokes.

"Secondly," Father Bob says on a more serious note, "I had the unique privilege of serving Father English, the first pastor who was a Jesuit, and Father David McBriar, the first Franciscan pastor.

"And thirdly, St. Francis of Assisi is a welcoming parish where people who have been broken or have gone through difficult experiences can find healing."

Father Bob was no stranger to difficult experiences. He says some struggles in his life had led him to step out of the Franciscan Order so he could deal with those issues. But eventually, he reflects, he learned some issues just can't be solved. He credits St. Francis with helping him return to the life of being a priest, though. "I had been working on the staff of a United States Congressman in Philadelphia when my good friend Jim English called me down."

By the time Father Bob came to Raleigh for a visit, he had not been practicing as a priest for two years. One of his more memorable homilies among St. Francis parishioners had to do with this struggle. In this homily, Father Bob shared that he had just made the decision to stop practicing as a priest, but he was still in so much turmoil about the decision that he went up to Woodstock, New York to be alone and to reflect on his life and what he was called to do.

One evening, just before dark, he went out jogging on O'Hayo Mountain Road. While he jogged, he cried and prayed. He asked God for a sign. He wanted to know if he had made the right decision. Presently, he crossed paths with a bicyclist named Joseph, who looked like Cat Stevens. "Oh no," he thought. "What if this guy talks to me? I don't want to get into a conversation with him. What will I say if he asks me what I do for a living?"

But Joseph did stop Father Bob, and he did ask him what he did for a living. Father Bob told him that two days ago he was a priest. He and Joseph talked for quite awhile. When Father Bob finished sharing his heart-wrenching troubles, he waited for Joseph's response. Joseph said, "Far out."

Then Joseph told Father Bob what he was doing in Woodstock. Joseph said that just the day before, he went to a

"Some people's struggle is about believing in God," he says. "I don't struggle with that. I believe in God. What I struggle with is trusting my inner voice. Trusting that voice inside me, hearing God's voice inside me." Father Bob described this event as part of his very significant journey that led him to Father English and to St. Francis of Assisi. He visited often when Father English was pastor and

"In the winter when it was cold outside, you'd walk into the church for liturgy and a cat would slip in with you," Pat recalls. "They loved the cloth-covered chairs that were nice and warm from your sitting on them. So you'd stand up for part of the mass and a cat would take your chair. You had no idea this was going on behind your back. Then you'd sit down and you'd go, 'Whoa!' because you had just sat on a cat!" Stray animals and people alike felt welcomed.

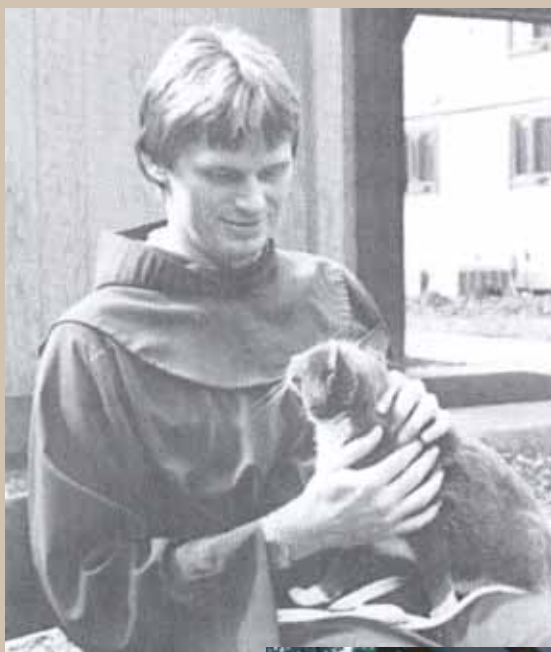
As with their Jesuit predecessor, the Franciscans welcomed warmly all who came to St. Francis of Assisi. The parish led the way in social outreach and in empowering the laity, both of which continue today. The parish continued to grow at a rapid rate, and parishioners and guests were soon standing outside the church during the liturgies because of the crowds.

"The parish was founded by Jim English," says Father Mark. "But when Father David came, he sort of re-founded it on the priorities that our Holy Name of Jesus Province had at the time, which include partnership with the laity, reaching out to those who are marginalized, and fraternity in mission." Those priorities were able to blossom here because St. Francis was a place that did not have a lot of baggage. It was always thriving and growing and adopting new venues through which to serve the community.

"Bob came and we had some great years together," Father David remembers. "There were some fine things that developed during those years. We picked up the Prison Ministry as well as the Gay and Lesbian Ministry. We didn't have it here, but we had priests who were willing to go to the little Episcopal church that had a gay and lesbian mass once a month."

Fathers David, Bob, and Charlie Mulholland served those masses, which Bishop Gossman had approved. And so it was that St. Francis embraced contemporary adult theology.

Father David continues, "It was also during those years that we started



Fr. Bob Hudak, O.F.M. with Cat A, an honorary member of the Parish.



Gene Pipas on piano, leads our music ministry in the original church.

Catholic church, intending to "cleanse his soul" by speaking to a priest, but no one was home. Father Bob listened to Joseph's confession that night and invited him a few days later to join him for dinner, which Joseph did. As suddenly as Joseph came into Father Bob's life, he disappeared. Father Bob lived on O'Hayo Mountain Road for ten months. And ever since then, Father Bob never again asked God for a sign.

returned as Associate Pastor with pleasure. He was coming home. He fit right in, too.

"Father Bob loved animals—a perfect Franciscan," Pat Kowite jokes. "He adopted these stray cats. He fed them, and they made their home here at St. Francis. The staff and parishioners called them Cat A and Cat B. Briefly, there was even a Cat C.

Passage Home, which was our first powerful outside ministry. We were always ecumenically minded, starting with our first faith formation classes in Leesville Road Baptist Church and Creedmoor Baptist."

With the vision of parishioner Jeanne Tedrow, St. Francis created Passage Home to address the needs of the poor in Raleigh. The ministry began with a conversation Jeanne had with Father David at his first St. Francis Parish Picnic. Parishioner Paul Williams joined the talks and Passage Home was born.

The ministry initially consisted of a group of parishioners who renovated houses for the underprivileged. A few months later, members of Lincoln Park Holiness Church, an African-American Pentecostal church in Raleigh's inner city, strolled over to volunteers renovating a house near their church. They asked what was being done and invited Jeanne to meet with their pastor, Bishop Ratcliffe. Many talks and lunches later, the two churches joined together as a first-of-its-kind ecumenical program. Passage Home is now a highly successful initiative that addresses the root causes of poverty. It is an independent, faith-based, interracial community development corporation run by the laity.

Using a community economic development strategy, Passage Home assists hundreds of families in transition, developing affordable housing opportunities for them that have included home ownership and small business development. Through life-skills education, spiritual companionship and emotional support, Passage Home has strengthened the lives of those they touch.

Jeanne, now the Executive Director of Passage Home, says they "develop programs and services for families and neighborhoods that lift them out of poverty." By partnering with other faith communities, they have accomplished far more than they ever could have alone.

While Passage Home and other social justice ministries proliferated, St. Francis also broke new ground in the Diocese of Raleigh when it employed the first lay business administrator, Julio De La Rosa, and the first volunteer coordinator, Mary Morch. When Holy Name Province set forth to empower the laity, St. Francis of Assisi was ready to answer the call.

vided a model other parishes throughout the diocese would soon adopt. Mary Morch also broke new ground in the Diocese of Raleigh. Mary began her role at St. Francis as the first Youth Minister for our high school teens. She left that role after four years, but she found a new service to our growing faith community. Many parishioners were eager to be-



Passage Home renovated house.

Ms Burrell (left) and Jeanne Tedrow (right) in the garden of one of the first Passage Homes



Clare Hall – Originally called "The Parish Center", Clare Hall provided much-needed space for our rapidly growing Parish.

Julio De La Rosa came to St. Francis after retiring as a manager at IBM. He was already involved with many ministries as a volunteer and had a rich spiritual life as a Benedictine Oblate. His spirituality and his business acumen made him a perfect fit for our parish and consequently allowed the pastor more time for our ministries and our parishioners. Julio brought good business practices to St. Francis and, for the first time, our parish developed strong financial policies that pro-

come involved with our ministries, but they had no idea how they could best answer that call. Mary helped them find volunteer roles that used their talents. She also taught staff members how to turn over some of their many duties to these new volunteers. Father David encouraged Mary to develop this role and Father Dan Kenna, O.F.M., the next pastor, officially named Mary as the first Coordinator of Ministry Development in the diocese.

Again, other parishes jumped on board and created similar positions. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has called us to share our gifts of time, talent and treasure—to give back a portion of the gifts God has given to us. Through Mary Morch, our parishioners could figure out exactly how to do that. Brava, Mary!

With the flourishing of new ministries as well as the Research Triangle Park, our parish, of course, continued to grow. Again, we outgrew our buildings.

"We knew we needed to build the Parish Center," Father David says. "Sam Jordan led the charge on that. I remember Sam telling me that he

The Fellowship Hall was used for large social gatherings, basketball and for a second liturgy at 10:30 on Sundays for overflow attendance. The Fellowship Hall, like all the rooms in the Parish Center, was used constantly for many ministries. As with our church, flexibility in design was the basis for planning the Parish Center.

As the parish meeting space grew, so, too, did parish ministries. Clare Hall was booked every night within a year of its completion. And during the day, a brand new ministry was being created that would change our parish forever. While Clare Hall was being built, meetings were held to investigate the possibility of having a preschool program at St. Francis.

There already existed a children's story hour and other similar volunteer ministries. One parishioner, Sharon Ardolino, led the way in planning a formal, expanded program for children ages three and four. Since our new building was on the way with plenty of room, it seemed like a wonderful addition to our parish ministries.

The Early Childhood Learning Center was opened in September 1991. Parishioner Nancy Bourke, who taught at the Early Childhood Center at St. Raphael's parish and was a catechist at St. Francis, was chosen as the Director. Nancy brought her contagious enthusiasm, her love of children and her Southern charm to the preschool. It has grown every year since its opening.

As the Early Childhood Learning Center grew, so, too, did the parish. By 1993, the parish membership numbered 2300 families. With continued growth, construction of a new sanctuary became a necessity. We just didn't fit in our little barn church any longer.



Originally called "The Early Childhood Learning Center" the St. Francis of Assisi Preschool was founded in 1982 with Nancy Bourke as the Director.

Shown here:



Nancy Bourke

1. Mackenzie Slaney
2. Patrick Phelan
3. Michael Hamilton
4. Emily Thronson
5. Evan Goff
6. Megan Deu
7. Peter Mangano
8. Evan Watson
9. Robert Grey
10. Kevin Feeley
11. David Ruiz
12. Daniel Son

Other groundbreaking initiatives that grew out of our faith community were the creation of the Carolina Interfaith Taskforce for Central America, begun by parishioner Gail Phares, and the hiring of the first parish lay employee in the diocese to promote social justice, Paul Amrhein.

would do as much or as little as I wanted. I said, 'Sam, the thing is yours.'"

Dedicated in October of 1991, the Parish Center, now known as Clare Hall, included 10 meeting rooms, a library, a kitchen, office space, and a Fellowship Hall that doubled as a gym.



Building for the People of God – A new sanctuary is built to seat our many members.

The Later Years, 1997-Today

Jon Condoret, a Chapel Hill architect originally from France, was hired to design a new worship space. We chose Jon because of the natural simplicity of his designs, his ability to use windows and natural light to bring in the outside environment, and his talent for blending the old with the new. The goal was to create a new worship space that would "fit" with the existing buildings.

Brother Frank Kacmarcik was chosen as the liturgical design consultant. He was a Benedictine Oblate at Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota and a renowned authority on sacred art and architecture. His belief was that a bigger construction budget wasn't the answer to building better churches.

"There are more bad churches built with too much money than with lack of it," says Brother Frank.

He advocated the use of timeless materials, from the mud of a pueblo to marble. "The essential ingredients for worship space are simplicity, proportion, and 'the poetry of light'." A church is a container for the people of God," Brother Frank explained. "It's the people inside that make it holy."

For almost two years during the construction of the new sanctuary, Brother Frank worked closely with Jon Condoret, Father David, and Father Dan Kenna. (Father Dan had finally come to St. Francis and was serving as Associate Pastor.)

Father David had become acquainted with Brother Frank's work many years before. First, Father David listened to Brother Frank's lecture in a Cistercian monastery. Then he read about the awards Brother Frank had received for Excellence in Liturgy. "He really put form and function together, which I think embodied the spirit of the Second Vatican Council," says Father David.

"Then I saw some of the churches and restorations that he did, and I thought his ideas were in keeping with what the parish had begun. So, we hired him. He was a blessing.

"He was a genius, and a very difficult man to work with—by his own admission," he says. "Frank refused to work with a committee, so it took a great deal of finesse to work with him. He had all of the ideas and all of the answers. We somehow had to make sure the committee's ideas were filtered to him, but it wasn't as though they weren't really Frank's anyway."



Many meetings were held, and Brother Frank talked to the Liturgy Committee, the Building Committee and the parishioners.

"He showed his slide show, which was tremendously impressive," says Father David. "The committee members were captured by it. I think his style fit in well with them, with the spirit of the parish."

"Frank was self-taught," according to Father Bill. "He may have something to say about the building, but he mostly creates the spaces inside."

Like Father English, Brother Frank saw and appreciated the natural structure of barns. He continued the design of the original church. His slide show presentation included photos of barns throughout the United States, illustrating their simplicity and their beauty. He, too, built a simple church made with natural materials.

Those natural materials were at the heart of Brother Frank's design. He used granite as a sign of the endurance of our faith. He used woods without heavy stains, pews with no cushions, walls of simple concrete blocks. He used glass windows that had only a hint of color. He likened the windows and the view beyond to a Monet painting, allowing an impressionist's view of the outdoors to enter, but not distract from the liturgy and the parishioners inside. Bits of golden color were woven into the glass to remind one of the sun.

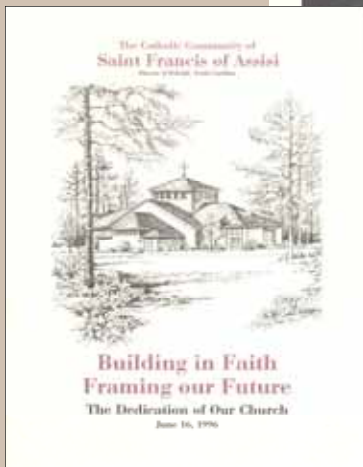
Brother Frank designed the altar so that the eye would be drawn to it, not the ceiling.

"He originally wanted a more simple altar," says Father Mark. "But he made the altar a more complex and substantive piece to keep the eye from wandering to the ceiling. He modeled it loosely after the altar in the

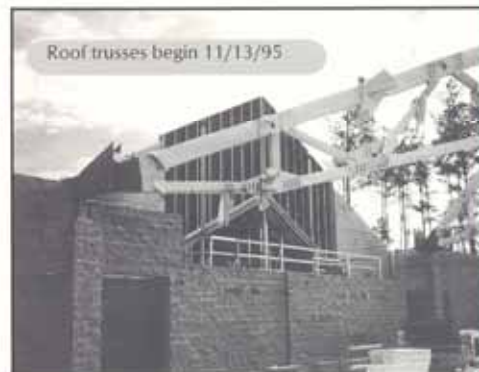
lower church of the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. The altar in Assisi is actually made out of wood."

"Frank liked the idea of sight-lines and having people face each other," says Father Bill. "He put the focus on the people rather than on the stained glass windows. He didn't like stained glass; he wanted the community to provide the color."

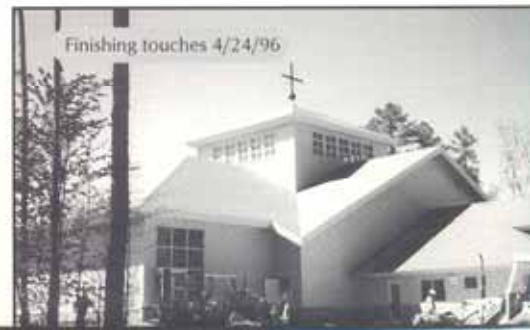
"He once came here all the way from Minnesota just to make sure we used the right shade of white paint on the walls," says Pat Kowite, "so that the



Worship Aid
for the Dedication of
the new sanctuary,
June 16, 1996.



Building for the People of God



faces of the people would stand out. That was important to him. He also redesigned the shape and placement of the pews so nothing would interfere with our seeing one another. Brother Frank said, 'The people are the jewels.'"

Brother Frank and Jon Condoret greatly changed our interior worship space, but they did no less outdoors. Under Father David's radically creative vision, St. Francis of Assisi became one of the first Catholic churches in the United States to build a Columbarium in its Memorial Garden. The Columbarium is a place of great faith, a place for the cremated remains of our dead. Parishioners visit each time they come to church. As we pass through the Memorial Garden, we are reminded that we are linked together in life and death through our faith and one day we will be united with God and those we love.

Pat Kowite notes, "When we saw the plans for the Columbarium on paper, we thought it was a wonderful idea. We

loved the theology and the beauty of the Memorial Garden. But we had no idea how beautiful it would become, what a spiritual place it would be. I have seen teenagers come every month on the date that their friend died in an auto accident. They prayed together and they cried together.

"I have seen widows bring their visiting grandchildren to the Columbarium and tell them stories of their grandfather. The most moving gesture, though, is the touch of the hand on the granite. Seeing a parishioner go up to one of the niches and place a hand on that granite and pause with head down is to see our faith come alive. It is very moving, something we never imagined when we were looking at blueprints."

In another radical departure from the traditional, our new building included a room for having wakes at St. Francis. The Parlor seems simple enough—a room adjacent to the Gathering Space that looks very much like the living room of a home. The Parlor has only two designated uses. It is a place where brides prepare for their weddings and it is a place for wakes before funerals. It is a place where we celebrate new life. Many Catholic parishes now have wakes at the church, but at the time we built the new sanctuary and the Parlor, having a wake at a church instead of a funeral home was

we might be sent forth to the streets to proclaim to all that our unity as children of God transcends the barriers of gender, class, race, and lifestyle that so often divide."

The cornerstone of the new church building proclaims: My house shall be a house of prayer for all people. "That's what our lives must also say," said Father David. He told parishioners to learn from the wise women and men who founded this parish and to be guided by their inspiration.

In September of 1995, in the midst of construction, Father Dan Kenna

became the third pastor of St. Francis of Assisi. He always dreamed and hoped he would come to the South to minister. He had heard good stories about the parish from Father David. He first came in 1993 and served as Associate Pastor. He arrived in a red mustang and sported a rat tail. The Mustang and the rat tail didn't last very long, but Father Dan did. He brought with

him his own desire to bring about lay empowerment and social outreach. He reached out to our parish community in a personal way. He spent many hours counseling parishioners who were experiencing hardships. His outreach to our faith community was a big part of his ministry.

Father Dan had a great rapport with adolescents, teens and young adults. As the South Regional Vocation Director for Holy Name Province, he met with anyone interested in becoming a Franciscan. He always had a warm smile and greeting for any of our young parishioners. He loved basketball and often used athletics to reach out to the youth.



October 2000, dedication of The Franciscan School, Bishop Joseph Gossman with Fr. Dan Kenna, O.F.M., third pastor of our parish.

October 2000, dedication of The Doggett Family Media Center

unheard of in the Diocese of Raleigh and in most Catholic churches in the United States. Like having the Columbarium, having wakes at St. Francis has brought a deep sense of spirituality to our families experiencing death, far beyond anything we imagined. These families are at home at St. Francis.

On June 16, 1996, as Bishop Gossman dedicated the new sanctuary at St. Francis of Assisi, Father David challenged parishioners to look toward the future.

"Yes, this new room of reverence is our place to gather," he said, "but not our place to stay. While it provides a place of worship, it does so only that

Father Dan was progressive in his theology. He was impressed with the vision already present in our parish. He once said of St. Francis that although the calendar read 1996, the parishioners were already living in the 21st century.

"The calendar simply has not kept up with us at St. Francis," he said. "More and more of us are searching for deeper meaning in our lives. It is a search that was once private. At St. Francis it has become public. We thirst for spirituality. And we are not alone. A recent national survey of twenty-somethings ranked 'finding spiritual fulfillment' more important than achieving financial success. That's exciting. That's what's next. That's our future."

When Father Dan uttered those words, he didn't realize the extent of "our future" at St. Francis. It was in that same year, 1996, that the Diocese of Raleigh formed an inter-parochial School Committee to determine the need for Kindergarten through Grade 8 parochial schools in Raleigh.

By June 1997, a report completed by Meitler Consultants presented the findings. Faced with "the daunting challenges of pent-up demand for Catholic schools and a growing population" from 1997 to 2015, the study recommended that a new elementary school be opened at St. Francis of Assisi. The Meitler Report found that the zip code areas of our parish had the greatest immediate and future need for a parochial school. Father Dan commented that it looked like we were going to build a school.

And that's exactly what happened.

With a vision of continuing an 800-year-old tradition of Franciscan education, Father Dan appointed a St. Francis Catholic School Task Force in the summer of 1997 to answer tough questions. If we build it, will they come? How big should we build, and how much will it cost? Could all of the classes be filled in the first year?

According to Father Dan, "There is something unique, something distinctive about the Franciscan approach to education. A Franciscan school in our parish will emphasize the dignity and value of each person. It will strive to cultivate the singular gifts and talents of each student so that they, in turn, might in their own day be committed to the on-going development of their world."

Father Dan once told the parish community, "It's my belief that education, if it is to be worthwhile, must develop what is best in people and make them not only clever, but good."



The Franciscan School opened in August 2000 with founding principal Barbara Polston.

Just as important was the planning of a school that would be integrated into the existing ministries of the parish. The building would house the elementary and middle schools as well as faith formation programs, a daily mass chapel and rooms available for ministries to use for special programs. This would not be a school that stood apart from the parish. We sought to blend the new buildings with the old and the new ministries with the old.

Julio De La Rosa, the Director of Finance and Administration at the time, recalls the grand announcement of the school construction to our parishioners. "On the day that building of The Franciscan School was officially

announced to the parish, a special ceremony was held at the corner of Leesville Road and New Leesville Road, across from Harrington Grove. One of the highlights of the event was to be the release of several white doves. The day was very hot and the doves became a little overheated in their cage, so that when released, they didn't have the energy to fly. A couple of them ran onto Leesville Road and had to be rescued from the traffic. The others were put back in the cage and taken into air conditioned rooms. Despite the failure to launch the doves, it was a great occasion for the parish."

The Franciscan School opened its doors in August 2000 with 320 students. Within one year, The Franciscan School was accredited and had an enrollment of 462. Father Dan personally interviewed all candidates for teaching positions, along with the founding principal, Barbara Polston. Its enrollment, like that of the Early Childhood Learning Center, has grown each year. Years passed and the parish continued to grow. In July of 2004, Father Mark G. Reamer, O.F.M., became the fourth pastor of St. Francis after having served as Associate Pastor since 1995.

"My first experience with the parish was actually with First Reconciliation of the children in January of 1993," says Father Mark. "I came to visit when Father Dan was here." The way the parish celebrated reconciliation touched Father Mark. "The people standing up and the family holding hands together was something very different that I hadn't experienced before."

In fact, Father Mark took the idea back to St. Francis of Assisi Church in Triangle, Virginia where he was serving at the time and instituted a new tradition of having the child hold hands with the family after he or she receives the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

That simple act of the family holding hands after the child's First Reconciliation struck Father Mark as exciting. "Wow," he thought, "this is a more meaningful way of doing things." After that, he came down to Raleigh to visit a couple times more.

"There was always this sense of openness to the church," he says. "Even when I came down to the church, there was still this sense of vibrancy and I remember initially being overwhelmed by the numbers of people—and back then the parish was just half of its current size!"

Father Mark remembers seeing all the new faces. "Mass after mass, they just kept coming in with this energy, excitement, youthfulness."

Just before Father Mark officially became St. Francis of Assisi's fourth pastor, he served the religious needs of marines and sailors serving in the desert of Kuwait and Iraq during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

As a reserve Navy chaplain, Father Mark was activated in January 2003. He left Raleigh and prepared for war at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina and in Camp Pendleton, California. For six months he lived in a tent with more than 40 men in the desert of northern Kuwait—without running water or air conditioning. Father Mark wore his hair

high and tight in accordance with military regulations, ate MRE's (meals ready to eat), donned desert camouflage and flak jacket, and spent his downtime reading, writing letters, or playing cards.

After arriving back in North Carolina, Father Mark took a week hiatus to visit his family before he began preaching again at St. Francis in July.

When Father Mark first addressed the congregation, he told them it was good to be home. Parishioners burst into applause.



Fr. Mark G. Reamer O.F.M., fourth pastor of our Parish and third Franciscan pastor

When asked how it felt to receive a standing ovation after being away for six months, Mark laughs off the accolades. "I guess I did receive a standing ovation," he says. "But they were already standing, so does that count?"

Looking back at the accomplishments of St. Francis's more recent pastors, Father Mark says, "David's strength was really the social outreach, having us look beyond ourselves. I think Dan's strength was the Catholic school and including that in the mission of the parish."

And reflecting upon his own goals for the parish, Father Mark sums it up in one word: unity.

"My goal is to continue to unite the parish so that we are continuing to be connected with one another in the sense of community, and continue to reach out to those who hunger and thirst for human dignity."

But he also has his eye focused on the needs beyond the parish boundaries, evaluating the needs of the community and how ready the parish is to respond to those needs. He pointed to the name of the 2007 capital campaign as being a reflection of his goals as pastor: Growing in Faith Together. "The word together is important in terms of how we all move forward," Father Mark says.

From that capital campaign came the next phase of our parish growth and construction. We now have a new Daily Chapel and Community Center, and an enlarged Early Childhood Learning Center. Completed soon afterwards was the Siena Center for Lifelong Learning and renovations to Clare Hall. This we do together. Together in faith.

And so we arrive back at St. Francis of Assisi of our present day and look to our future, moving forward together. This is the hallmark of our faith community. We have never been satisfied with the status quo. The very beginning of our parish is anchored in a group of faith-filled Catholic Christians who wanted to worship our God together in a new way, in a new place. We have always looked for new and better ways to pray together, play together and serve the people of God together. That is our past and this is our future.

Elizabeth Hall



Elizabeth Hall gets a facelift - just in time for the 20th Anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi Preschool .



Lobby of Elizabeth Hall—Preschool building



Left to Right:
Fr. Mark G. Reamer, O.F.M., Pastor
Jennifer Bigelow, Director of Catholic Education and Formation
Most Reverend Michael Burbidge, Bishop of Raleigh
Nancy Bourke, Director of St. Francis of Assisi Preschool

Assisi Community Center



If you build it, they will come.

Our community center, dedicated April 25th, 2010
is a place for gathering, for forming
roots in our faith community.



The gym has brought an explosion of new programs, from volleyball
to basketball to exercise classes and summer programs.



The Assisi Café is an informal place for parishioners,
prayer groups, and ministries to gather.



The Cupertino Room is usually filled with teens, exercise groups and clubs.

St. Mary of the Angels Chapel



St. Mary of the Angels Chapel—a place of faith.



Our new Chapel, like our original and current sanctuaries, is designed with simplicity. Here we celebrate small weddings and funerals, prayer services and daily mass. Here we feel the presence of our God.



Presentation of LEED Gold Awards to Fr. Mark G. Reamer O.F.M., Fr. John O'Connor O.F.M., of Holy Name Province and Bishop Burbidge for environmentally sound buildings Elizabeth Hall, Assisi Community Center, and St. Mary of the Angels Chapel.

The Siena Center for Lifelong Learning



(Top) Construction in progress for the Siena Center for Lifelong Learning. (Above) Completed Siena Center for Lifelong Learning



Bishop Burbidge and Fr. Mark visit with middle school classes on the day of dedication, January 31, 2011.



Jennifer Bigelow and Bishop Burbidge celebrate the National Blue Ribbon Award presented to the Franciscan School in 2011

The Art of Joany Condoret

In 2011, St. Francis was blessed with the gift of stained glass art created by Joany Condoret, the wife of architect, Jon Condoret, who designed our sanctuary and Memorial Garden and re-modeled Anthony Hall. Staff members remember Jon speaking of his wife's works. We never imagined we would have her art gracing our buildings.

All of Joany's glass work has been inspired by the bible. Her juxtaposition of the lighter, darker and textured glass with heavy solder are integral parts of her designs.

Influenced by stained glass windows in European cathedrals, Joany initially used colored glass in her works. Her first two large figures are St. Francis of Assisi, made with 125 individual pieces of glass in 25 colors, and Mary Magdelene, made with 240 pieces of glass and 10 colors.

Later, Joany migrated to clear glass to better symbolize the purity of her belief in God. She almost destroyed her original two pieces because she was no longer pleased with the color. We are glad the pieces survived her design change.

You can now see Joany's stained glass art framed by Jon's windows. While that was never a part of our building design or theirs, it brings poetry to our buildings and to our parish history.





Here we are! The Catholic Community of St. Francis of Assisi

The Catholic Community of St. Francis of Assisi, as it is today. It was not always so.

Our buildings have grown many times over the years. When Clare Hall, first called the Parish Center, was being built, Fr. Bob Hudak spoke of our new building in a homily. He told of his dream, a vision really. He walked down the hall and passed many rooms. In one room, Alcoholics Anonymous was meeting to give people the courage and support they needed. In another, children were being formed in their faith. In another, teens were planning a retreat. In yet another, parishioners planned outreach programs for the poor and marginalized. As he continued down the corridor, each room was bustling with good people doing good work, God's work. Fr. Bob's dream became a reality.

In the words of parishioner Marylynn Kaus, our buildings are not just bricks and mortar. Our buildings are made of people of God doing God's work. This is our history. This is our future.



Our tour of St. Francis begins at the beginning, at our original church with its circular drive.

Tour of St. Francis of Assisi

Author's Note: I was given a tour of the church by parishioner Pat Kowite. I learned two things on that tour: one, Pat has an acute memory; and two, she gifts the parish with her great enthusiasm for its history. What you are about to read is what I've gleaned from Pat. I had a blast on her tour and hope to convey her information and energy in a jaunty narrative for you. Any errors are mine, as will be any misdirection. If you get lost, just holler—someone will be along shortly.

The Original Church

Let's start with the old church—or what remains of the old church. The original post and beam structure is still there, but its interior is so transformed that you have to engage your imagination to see it as it used to be. But, let's try....

Start in the Gathering Space at the fireplace.

Walk down the hallway from the Gathering Space, past the restrooms on your right, and dogleg your way back to what is today called the Anthony Hall Founders' Room—the back of the original church.

Walk to the double glass doors and look outside. These doors were the main entrance to the church. Gaze out the front doors toward Leesville Road. Can you envision the circular drive that used to be in the front of the building? Parishioners dropped off family members at the front door to the church and then parked their cars. Look to your left to the woods; that is where the first outdoor mass was celebrated to bless the ground of our future church.

Now turn around and stand with your back to Leesville Road. You are looking down what used to be the center aisle toward the altar, which was way

down and beyond the sheetrock walls that block your vision now. (You'll see where the original altar had been later.) There were no glass windows along the side walls back then and the wood had a natural wood stain.

While you are still at the doorway, look to your right. You'll see a door to a closet—this room used to be the sacristy. It was actually two rooms: the Reconciliation Room with its entrance around the corner and the vesting sacristy where the priest and altar servers prepared for liturgies.

On the wall to the left of this sacristy door is a fire alarm panel, but it wasn't

"WE TALK NOW ABOUT HOW WE NEED MORE MEETING ROOMS," PAT SAYS. "BUT OUR FIRST 'MEETING ROOM' WAS OUTSIDE IN THE COURTYARD, AROUND THE FOUNTAIN."

Parishioner Pat Kowite on our beginnings.

always here. Originally, there hung a beautiful bell donated by Judy and Pat Shiel. They brought it back from a monastery in Ireland. The bell tolls at The Franciscan School now, calling students to their morning prayers. When our parish first began, there were many liturgies, especially on the weekdays, that had no music minister. Father English used to ring this bell to signal the beginning of mass. It was our call to worship.

Now look to your left and you'll see a little kitchen. Originally, this kitchen was two rooms: an even smaller kitchen and a really small restroom.

(Anyone using the restroom during mass flushed to a full audience.) After many transformations, the room is once again a kitchen. The restroom is a hike down the hall, but it is much roomier now.

Walk outside through the double doors and head left. Stand in the walkway with the old church on your left, Leesville Road behind you, and the courtyard with the fountain in front of you.

The building on your right is now Elizabeth Hall. Originally, it was much smaller than what you see now. This was formerly the Parish Office with two offices, a supplies and copier space and restrooms. Father English's office was on the back side of the building. Sliding glass doors led from his office to a little, wooden deck outside. This is where we put an altar for mass at the first parish picnic. Parishioners brought blankets or lawn chairs and sat on the wide lawn just beyond the deck. Back then, everyone brought dinner for their own family with extra food to share.

Look at the courtyard. It looks very similar now to the original design. We gathered here as a faith community for all kinds of functions.

"We talk now about how we need more meeting rooms," Pat says. "But our first 'meeting room' was outside in the courtyard, around the fountain."

"The courtyard was where most of the social events took place. And if it was raining, you stood under these covered walkways," she says. "The First Communion receptions were held outside. Children's Liturgy of the Word. Dinners. Everything was held outside."

"If you needed a table and chairs, there was one indoor room for you. It was a meeting room where there is now a breezeway between Elizabeth and Clare Halls. It was a place to hold meetings, such as for Pastoral Council and Finance Council."

Beyond Elizabeth Hall and the meeting room was where the rectory, now called the friary, used to be. The Parish Office, the meeting room and the rectory were all connected as one long building.

"I remember the day the friary was moved to its current location. I had just begun as a staff member and construction of the Parish Center (now called Clare Hall) was to begin soon. I was sitting in the meeting room at my first staff meeting. We looked up and saw the friary moving past the window. We did not accomplish much at the staff meeting from that point on. We were all glued to the window as we watched the friary move across the property. The friary has changed considerably over the years, but that original "rectory" is still at its core."

Let's get back to the Founders' Room. Head back inside and take a look at the structure.

"When the parishioners said they wanted the church to be a barn," Pat recalls, "Father English really wanted it to look like a barn."

The wood itself – the posts and beams – were recovered from buildings in the northeast slated to be demolished. St. Francis used a company that specialized in salvaging and reusing good materials from old buildings.

Pat points to one of the posts in the center of Anthony Hall. "You see this square hole in this post? This is a hole from the post's former use," she explains. "These posts are really old. And it's such hard wood that when we tried to hang up children's First Eucharist banners, we could not even get a nail in. It is as hard as rock!"

Now, look around the room and imagine it filled with individual chairs with blue padding. Because we had no social hall, we often used the church for gatherings. The blue chairs were moved to the side walls for larger functions. This sacred space has seen many liturgical celebrations as well as any other celebration you can imagine – Faith Formation sessions for our

children, Bob Hudak's farewell party, teen dances, and more.

Now we'll move on from the Founders' Room. As you exit the room, you will see a large quilted hanging on the wall. This was made by parishioner Vickie Reno and others for the 25th Anniversary of the parish. It has a lot of our history stitched into the design. It is appropriately placed at the entrance to the Founders' Room.

inverted tree stump that stood about four feet tall. It was almost as wide.

"A friend of Father English had a farm in Statesville," Pat says. "And that absolutely huge three trunk came from his farm."

Parishioner Don Donaghy remembers St. Francis acquiring "The Tree". He says that Father English had seen this gigantic stump in the farm field.

The courtyard and fountain, unchanged since our early days.



Interior of the original sanctuary.



Baptismal font made from a tree stump.

As you turn, you will be looking down the corridor. Not too far down on the left is the Anthony Hall Conference Room, recognizable by its door with a stained glass panel.

This used to be the choir wing and the baptismal area of the original church. Early parishioners all remember the baptismal font as "The Tree". It was an

"And Father English's wheels started turning," Don said. "He went over and asked the guy, 'What are you going to do with this stump?' The farmer said he was just going to get rid of it, so Father English told him that we would like to use it as a baptismal font. The farmer hauled it down here, somebody carved it out, and we used it for years

as our baptismal font... until we found out it had termites. Then we had to get rid of it."

Pat says the stump was finished with a lovely stain, but was never treated correctly. "I was here, teaching a CPR class one evening, when Father English poured water into it for the first time," she says. "It was the grand debut. And the water just leaked out like a sieve. They never could seal it properly. They tried many times to finish it so that it wouldn't leak, which is why we had to put a basin inside. And, of course, then we found out it had the termites inside and it finally deteriorated. By the time we built the new sanctuary and Father David was here, it had deteriorated to the point we couldn't use it. We did put the tree trunk outside, though, and we kept it for a long time because so many people felt attached to it.

"Father David began using a wooden stand with a wonderful, footed copper bowl in the front of the church for baptisms," Pat continues. "Those pieces also are a part of our beginnings, though. The wooden stand was made by parishioner George Bastianello to be used as a candle stand in the original church. The copper bowl was one of Father English's scavenger finds."

Father Bob used to laugh and say that somewhere there was a one-footed lion who gave its other three feet to our parish!

Let's continue down the corridor towards the Gathering Space. You'll soon come to the Guatemala room on your right and a small meeting room on your left. If you stand directly between them, you'll notice that the corridor walls jut out slightly. This now non-distinct spot is one of great importance to early parishioners.

You are standing where the original altar was—where many sacraments were conferred, Eucharist shared, and where many people were blessed. Where the wall juts out is where the presider's bench stood. The altar was slightly in front of that.

Close your eyes and imagine.... In front of you would be the tall glass windows and the presider's bench. On the sides would be two tall wooden stands, and next to the altar were shorter wooden stands.

The altar was interesting. It was made so we could use our limited space to the best advantage. The feet of the

"George Bastianello built the original altar and those wooden stands," Pat says. "Today those stands are used frequently. The time that you see them most prominently is when we have the Month of Remembrance in the Gathering Space. Photographs of the people who died during the year are placed on George's stands."

George also made the original tabernacle and the beveled glass cross that was used in the original sanctuary and then in the daily chapel for many years.

Can you imagine being at mass on Sunday and having those floor-to-

ceiling, clear glass windows on either side of the back wall? We could see the blue sky and the white clouds, the flowers and the trees.

"When we built the new church, nobody wanted to get rid of the glass because you could see all of nature outside," Pat says. "Of course, liturgically that's horrible because you're tempted to pay more attention to the birds and the trees, the planes coming in, and the people running in late to the liturgy. That is actually why we have the simple stained glass in the current sanctuary. We had to compromise because everyone wanted the clear glass, but Frank Kacmarcik, our liturgical design consultant, felt that wasn't what you want for a church."



Fr. David McBriar O.F.M. Fr. Mark G. Reamer, O.F.M. Fr. Bill McConville, O.F.M.

altar sat in two tracks that made it movable. It could slide forwards or back depending on the type of service being held. If we had a bride and groom in front of the altar, it slid back to allow more space in front. If we had more priests con-celebrating a liturgy, the altar moved forward to allow more space behind. There was a large oriental rug that covered the tracks.

He said, "I want it to be like a Monet painting in the sense that you could see muted colors" ...but not the planes flying overhead.

Okay, now open your eyes. This is the end of the original church. Keep walking and you'll pass the restrooms on the left. Make a pit stop if you need to and we'll meet in the parking lot to begin the tour of the new church.

The New Church

Here in the parking lot, one of the first things you see are the brick stairs. Keep these bricks in mind and notice where they lead.

Now keep walking up the steps, and pause under the breezeway. Look to the left at the altar outside in the courtyard. Do you see that design? Look at the shape formed by the legs. Remember that design. You will see it again a little later.

"Brother Frank Kacmarcik designed this altar and other pieces we'll see

his liturgical designs as he is for his artistic work. "When you leave your car in the parking lot, you also leave behind the busy-ness of your world. When you come up the sidewalk and enter the Memorial Garden, you are reminded of your baptismal call to gather here. The brick walk that begins at the parking lot and continues all the way into the sanctuary symbolizes that life is one journey," Pat explains. "We are a resurrection people. We have life on earth, we have death, and we have new life. We are reminded of that with the baptismal call.

"When we come up the steps and walk through the Resurrection Garden - the Memorial Garden where there are those who have gone before us - it

This is why some of our liturgies are celebrated in the Memorial garden.

"Then what do you see as you come inside?" Pat asks as we continue along the red bricks. "We pass the Stewardship Room. We are again reminded of our baptismal call not to keep our faith within these walls, but to take it out into the world. In the Stewardship Room, our ministries call to us to become involved, to live our faith."

Then you come to the Gathering Space. The Gathering Space is an important space just outside the sanctuary, since fellowship with other members of our faith community before and after mass is considered part of our liturgies.



The brick walk that begins at the parking lot and continues all the way to the altar symbolizes that life is one journey. We are a resurrection people.

later for the Infirmary Chapel for Holy Name Province, but they were no longer being used. Holy Name Province donated them to our parish. This altar and the baptismal font were too small in scale for a church of this size, so we use the altar outside," says Pat. "The baptismal font used to be located at the bottom of the stairs outside the Memorial Garden. It is now used in the daily chapel. One other piece we received was the presider's chair. It is being used in our sanctuary today."

Frank Kacmarcik was the leading liturgical design consultant in the United States and is well known internationally. He is as respected for

reminds us of our own death and our new life."

Father Dan Kenna once said of our Memorial Garden, "We are reminded of the greatest truths that we are linked together in death as in life. We are passing through, travelers one and all, incorporated in the Body of Christ, one day to be united with God and those we love, never to die again."

The Memorial Garden and Columbarium is a place of great faith, a place of rest for those who have died. It is also a gathering place before and after weekend liturgies and on other special days of remembrance such as the Feast of All Souls and the Easter Vigil.

Here we can relax by the cozy fireplace. The fireplace is a symbol of hospitality, designed to give you an at-home feeling. In front of this fireplace is the most dramatic work that parishioner Lee Webster carved for the original sanctuary—the wooden statues of the four evangelists, inspired by the 17th Century folk art from Brittany: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

"These were the first human figures that Lee carved," Pat said. "If you look at the hands and feet, you can see the progression as he got better at what he was doing. Can you take a guess at which one was the last one he did?"

"In the original church, the statues of the evangelists were mounted on four columns that were towards the front of the sanctuary. It looked like they were calling us to the Eucharistic table. Frank Kacmarcik loved the statues, but he hated where they were mounted. The stained wood statues blended into the wooden columns. Frank wanted them to stand out more. He wanted them to grab our attention. He looked for a special place to showcase them in the new building. Lee would approve."

On the wall opposite the fireplace is the Parlor. Designed to feel like a living room, this is the room used for weddings and wakes. Step inside for a moment. The talent and generosity of

In the corner is the grandfather clock Lee Webster made for Father English as a personal gift. He later donated it to St. Francis.

When he left, Father English took his clock with him because it meant so much to him," Pat says. "It was given to him, not the parish. But when Father English came for the dedication of this new church, he was very touched by our parish and decided the clock belongs here. So Father English gifted our parish with this clock made for him by Lee. Isn't that lovely?"

Pat adds, "The painting over the sofa was painted by one of our parishioners, Michelle Minah. She helped design the room and created this beautiful painting because she wanted

two huge oak doors. These doors are significant. They are the doors through which we enter the sanctuary. They are prominent in size to make a point. All people coming to worship enter through these common doors. There are no back doors or side entrances at St. Francis of Assisi because we are all one people of God. We enter together as one—rich and poor, old and young, women and men, all races, all creeds. We are made one when we enter these doors to pray together around the table of the Lord.

Before going into the sanctuary though, let's get back to the Fellowship Table.

"We gather around this table as a faith community," Pat says, "just as we



The fireplace and the Fellowship Table are symbols of hospitality in the Gathering Space.

our parishioners is found throughout this small room.

Parishioner Greg Mintel carved a cross to be used for wakes. The background is mahogany with a black walnut outer cross and bird's eye maple inner cross. Three nail wounds are made of purple heart wood. During wakes, that cross replaces the mirror, and the casket replaces the table.

Parishioners, headed by Jeanette Doggett, designed the furnishings in this room. Some sewed the pillows and curtains. Others selected the furniture and the art work. It was a collaborative undertaking.

to give of herself. For many years, she remained anonymous as the painter, but allowed me to use her name for this parish history."

"The spirit of wanting to do something for the parish is why we have all these pieces – the grandfather clock, the cross, the painting, the drapes. Our parishioners have poured their hearts into St. Francis of Assisi from its very beginning until now. We are very blessed." Now let's go back to the Gathering Space and turn to the right. Before you is the large, oak Fellowship Table. We'll talk about it in a moment. For now, look beyond the table at the

gather around the Eucharistic table as community. Look at the altar in the sanctuary. Can you see the similarity in the design of the oak table and the altar? Both have many legs around the simple table. This symbolically reminds us that we are one as a faith community when we worship together and when we carry our faith beyond the doors of the church.

"The altar and the oak table are both designed after the altar in lower chapel in Assisi, Italy, where St. Francis is buried," Pat explains. "Theirs is more ornate."

To appreciate the relationship between the ornate altar in Italy and the simple one in front of you, Pat says, "You have to get into the mind of Frank Kacmarcik. He didn't design our altar with elaborate decorations. He made our altar square, so no matter where you sit the altar is the same. Frank also made it of granite as a symbol of how rock solid is our faith. 'Upon this rock, I will build my church.'"

Did you know that a relic is placed beneath the altar before you? "The story of how we got the relic is just amazing," Pat says. "It gives you chills." Go up close to the altar and look between and behind all those legs, down low at the base. Look inside the center there and you will see a small, raised plate.

Can you see the plate with a cross on it? "That is the covering of the reliquary," Pat explains. "Underneath that plate is a cavity in the granite and in it is a relic, a first degree relic. That means it isn't, for example, something that touched the body of a saint like a piece of cloth; a first degree relic is perhaps a bit of bone from the saint.

"Well, of course, we wanted a first degree relic of St. Francis of Assisi, but there were none available. Parts were spread everywhere, but we couldn't get one. Meanwhile, the construction of our altar was nearing completion and time was running out."

"At the time, Sister Loretta Jean Schorr was on staff here. She was a member of the Sisters of Divine Providence from Pittsburgh. One of the sisters in her community was dying of cancer and was giving away her possessions, one of which was a first degree relic of St. Francis of Assisi.

"She had no idea that we were building a new church, no clue that we were looking for a relic of our patron saint and coming up dry," Pat says.

"She got in touch with Loretta Jean and said, 'I know you belong to a church that has St. Francis of Assisi as the patron. Do you think they would like to have this relic?' I don't even

have to tell you what Loretta Jean's response was."

Now look up. Up high to the top of the church. The altar is directly beneath the center of the lantern, our steeple-like structure with the large exterior cross above it. When you leave, be sure to take a look at that cross outside. It is a "crux gemmata", or jeweled cross, designed and so-named by



Blessing and raising of the exterior cross, our *crux gemmata* (jeweled cross).



Frank Kacmarcik. The globe under the cross represents the earth over which the cross stands victorious. It is a Cross of Victory, the symbol of the victory of Christ over death.

From where you are at the altar, look up at the other cross, the one inside the church. It, too, is an original work of art by Frank Kacmarcik.

"We are often asked why there is no corpus on the cross in the church," Pat

says. "We do not have the figure of Christ on the cross because it was designed as a Resurrection cross. Christ has risen. The four golden 'jewels' in the corners represent the nail wounds of Christ.

"There are many artistic designs for crosses in churches throughout the Catholic Church. Many Americans don't realize that the more traditional



Our interior cross is designed as a resurrection cross, symbolizing the risen Lord.



Our granite altar is designed after the altar in the lower chapel in Assisi where St. Francis is buried.

crucifix they see in many churches is only one of many designs. Ours is a beautiful symbol of the Resurrection, the Risen Christ at Easter."

The baptismal font in the sanctuary was designed for both adult and infant baptisms. Placing the font near the altar was in deference to and in keeping with St. Francis of Assisi's tradition of baptizing babies near the altar.

Most contemporary churches have the baptismal font at the entrance of the church.

"Brother Frank just about had a fit because we wanted baptisms near the altar," Pat recalls. "We told him, 'This is what our faith community does.'" "It would be like putting a bathtub in the middle of your living room," he responded at the time."

baptism here, up front and near the altar, he said, 'You were right.' *The Frank Kacmarcik*—we changed him!"

Any place you go that Frank Kacmarcik designed you will see the use of natural materials. "He picked granite and natural wood," says Pat. "You don't see gilded gold and elaborate designs because Brother Frank believed that the people are the

others' faces," Pat says. "It's one of the things that I appreciate the most about our church. I can look out, and I can see people who are going to our Sister Parish in Guatemala; I can see people who are working at Passage Home; I can see people who are working for our other ministries, perhaps for the AIDS Ministry or for the Consolation & Care Ministry or the Faith Formation ministries. These people are living their faith in the truest sense of what we are called to do.

"And then I see somebody who has cancer or someone who is being abused at home. But here, I know they are finding strength in our celebrating our faith together. So when I look out, I see Christ in those people. Christ is present in them just as much as Christ is in the bread and wine. My faith grows when I see the witness of their faith. I love what Brother Frank did here."

The Eucharistic Chapel was also designed by Brother Frank, and is located according to the Diocese of Raleigh's guidelines at the time the sanctuary was built. It is visible, but apart from the main sanctuary. This is where the Reserved Eucharist is placed in the tabernacle. It also serves as a place for private prayer and adoration.

The tabernacle is attached to the rear wall of the chapel, but was designed to have the appearance of floating in space. Narrow, amber-colored windows are on the sides of the tabernacle so it is bathed in a golden light.

The windows of the sanctuary were designed by a German artist. The panes are diamond-shaped with reamy (pronounced ree-mee) glass. The glass has a wavy, irregular surface and has strands of gold woven through them, which allows the warm mottled sunlight to pass through.

If you look back towards the entrance doors, let your gaze rise up high. See our rose window? It has a simple design like the rest of our sanctuary and is made of the same reamy glass as the windows.



The altar in the Memorial Garden with its *keyhole* design that is repeated in other areas.



The baptismal font also designed by Br. Frank Kacmarcik, Liturgical Design Consultant.

Brother Frank's preference was in keeping with that of the Church, which was to have baptisms at the entrance of the church because when you are baptized you enter into the new faith community as you would also enter the church.

"But you know," Pat says, "when Frank came back later, when the new sanctuary was finished, and he saw a

decorations and the people give color to the walls." The design of the new church echoes the parish's belief that when we gather to pray, Christ is present in each one of us. The floors are sloped, the altar raised, no pillars block people's vision, all so we can see the members of the community.

"Frank made sure the columns and the pews were positioned so that they would not block anybody's view of

The Stations of the Cross are along the walls of the side wings. Walk over and peek at them up close. They were cast in sand and bronzed by sculptor Gerald Bonnette. They tell the story of Christ's passion graphically, and their smaller size invites one to come close. Bonnette also designed the processional cross, one of the items of transition from the original sanctuary. These "items of transition" were carried in procession from the first, small church to the new one. They were symbolically the roots that anchored our faith community in our new home.

Do you need to rest a spell? Sit for a moment on one of the pews. The red oak benches, similar in finish and style to those at Mepkin Abbey near Charleston, South Carolina, were fabricated by Ray Brooks of Minnesota. "Mr. Brooks had been carrying out the designs of Brother Frank for over 35 years when he designed our benches," Pat says. "They may not be the softest when we sit for long celebrations, but they are lovely."

While you are resting, note the statues of St. Francis of Assisi and the Blessed Virgin & Christ Child. They were carved in Asheville, North Carolina by native artist Mark Stromm. These were Mark's first statues of such large proportions. He loved working on them and felt he grew in his own faith as he created these pieces for us. The statues were designed to be accessible to all, including children. The height of the base was carefully considered so that the sight-line from the statues would go directly to most of its viewers.

Originally there were no candles placed by the statues in the sanctuary. There were candles, though, if you look closely. There are four dedication candles, one on each of the four columns on the walls surrounding the altar area.

"You see the four columns they are on?" Pat asks. "Now look up and see where those columns go. The weight of the roof over the altar is resting on those four columns. That is why the

dedication candles are there." Look more closely and you will see squares with recessed crosses below the candles. Those are the Dedication Crosses.

"When Bishop Gossman was here for the dedication of our sanctuary, he rubbed sacred chrism over the surface of the altar to consecrate it. Then Father English, the first pastor, went to each of these four columns; he took the chrism; and he blessed the crosses because the weight of the

square opening with the narrow slot below. You will see the "slot" of the keyhole in several other places.

From where you are, take another look at the baptismal font. Look at the design. Do you see the "slot" that is in the upper font and at the candle? This is repeated in the water font in the Daily Chapel, the third piece designed by Frank Kacmarcik for Holy Name Province. Take a look at it sometime. You'll see the keyhole just like at the font in the sanctuary.



Our stations of the cross, created by Gerald Bonnette, invite one to come closer.

church rests on them. We Catholics have such beautiful rituals."

One last detail to notice on our tour is Frank Kacmarcik's artistic designs that are repeated over and over. Stand at the doorway of the Reserved Eucharist Chapel. And look at the Resurrection Cross and then look at the door of the tabernacle. You'll notice the design repetition of the cross and the jewels.

How about the altar in the Memorial Garden? Remember looking at the design of the legs when you were standing in front of the altar. If you are still in the doorway of the Reserved Eucharist Chapel, look at the "window" in front of the tabernacle. You'll see the same design. Frank Kacmarcik called this his "keyhole" design - the

Now look at the ambry mounted on the wall just outside the Reserved Eucharist chapel. This is where the sacred oils used for sacraments are kept. Look at the design. Now look at the altar. Do you see the design repetition of the many legs? It's the same as we saw in the table in the Gathering Space.

Frank's artistic design repetitions, like the continuous brick walkways, remind us that all of our faith life is one journey. You cannot separate life and death and resurrection. They are all one. This is one of the great truths of our faith, engraved into our souls and symbolized in our sacred spaces.



COME, LET US WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD. – *Isaiah 2:5*

The lighted cross over the lantern was called a *Crux Gemata* (jeweled cross) by Brother Frank Kacmarcik who designed it. The jewels are the brass designs on each arm which represent the nail wounds of Christ. Ours is a cross of victory, symbolizing the Resurrection, Christ's victory over death. The globe beneath the cross represents the earth over which the cross stands victorious.

The Memorial Garden is a place for the remains of those we love and reminds us of the mystery of life and death and resurrection, just as the liturgy of the Eucharist reminds of the life, death and rising of Jesus. The word *columbarium* comes from the Latin word for *dove house*. The dove has always been a symbol of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life. In Europe, these nesting places were often built near cemeteries. The cooing of the doves, which were heard day and night, reminded those who grieved that a loved one was buried there and, at the same time, was alive in the Spirit. In years past, cemeteries were often located on church grounds, many built directly along the path worshippers followed on their way into the church. This practice reflects a deep theological truth which links both Baptism and the Eucharist. Baptism is a symbol of birth into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; the Eucharist is the meal for life's journey. The believer, coming to church, literally comes from death to life, comes through our Memorial Garden and Columbarium to the waters of Baptism and the table of the Eucharist.

Many Ministries



Many Ministries

A Look at Some of the Ministries in the Parish after 30 Years

Father English started the rich tradition of founding ministries at St. Francis when he rattled off "headlines" of the committees the parish needed to build community. The enthusiasm of parishioners to create and be involved in the assortment of ministries available at St. Francis became infectious. To count the number of ministries at St. Francis today would be an arduous task. The ministries number around 100.

"Isn't that something?" Father English says. "Franciscans overwhelm me, they simply overwhelm me. You tell them that a Jesuit said so!" How did we grow from a handful of committees to about 100 ministries? Read on for the history and highlights of some of our ministries, then and now.

A People Came Forth

Whether Jesuit or Franciscan, there is one common thread that has always existed at St. Francis that makes for a rich life in ministries. That thread is lay empowerment. It was the lay people in Northwest Wake County who approached Bishop Gossman about forming a new parish and it was the lay people who approached Holy Name Province about Franciscans coming to St. Francis of Assisi. Our parishioners have always been bold and creative, ready for new beginnings.

When Father English began our little parish, he wanted everyone to be a part of building our faith community. And everyone was anxious to do so. There was an atmosphere that welcomed new ideas and initiatives.

When Father David became the first Franciscan pastor, he brought with him the mission of Holy Name Province. Empowering the laity was important and no person excelled at bringing forth the gifts of the parishioners as Father David. There was an explosion in the number of ministries as parish-

ioners came forth with their ideas, their enthusiasm and their considerable gifts. Father David was there to guide and support, to create a culture for lay leadership.

A People Who Pray Together

One of the earliest ministries to begin at St. Francis was the Liturgy Committee. It began with Father English's asking one person in his living room to begin the committee. Every week, just before the beginning of a liturgy, Father English asked those present to be eucharistic ministers and lectors. Volunteers led the small congregation in song. We have come a long way since those days. St. Francis now has 17 liturgical committees responsible for the liturgical needs of our parish. From Eucharistic Ministers to Funeral Greeters, from Parking Ministry to Lectors, from Choirs to Deaf Ministry, all have a role in creating liturgies where God's people come together for worship and go forth to serve others.

One liturgical ministry with a rich and varied history is the music ministry.

When Sunday masses were held in Lynn Road School, Frank Casey volunteered to take on the role of the Church's first choir director. His wife, daughter and about 10 others made up the first choir.

As the years passed, the choir grew under the skilled direction of several others, including Jim Emory, Val Parker, Jim Smith, Tom Carawan (who was our first music minister as a full-time employee), Joanne Wines, Joyce Paxton, and Nan Dickman. In 1992, Gene Pipas, long-time director at St. Raphael's Parish, bestowed his gifts of music and spirit upon St. Francis to become St. Francis' Music Minister. Gene remembered well when the announcement was made at St. Raphael's that our parish was to be formed. He remembered the enthusiasm Father English generated. When he joined us, he felt at home at St. Francis and led the choirs for 18 years.

Under Gene's leadership, the choir recorded its first CD, titled "Surely the Presence". It included all those who sang in St. Francis' choirs over the years. A second CD, "All Are Welcome", was recorded for the 25th anniversary of the parish.

Judy Barton, long time parishioner and choir member, says, "Gene developed a wonderful music ministry with 5 active choirs, a flock of musicians, children's choir camps, concerts, and the development of beautiful liturgies."

In 2010, Gene retired and Jim Wahl followed building on the foundation Gene laid.

A People Who Play Together

It was apparent from the very beginning of St. Francis of Assisi that forming community was important. Monsignor Lewis knew that he should start bringing people together before there was a pastor, before there was a church. So he began with our gathering to worship together, the start of our faith community.

We prayed together, but we also played together. Father English had social gatherings often to help his young parish form roots. There were dinner and theatre nights, the first Parish Picnics, receptions, and more.

That was the beginning. St. Francis now has a Community Center that welcomes parishioners to basketball, volleyball, the Assisi Café, sing-alongs, and Seniors' luncheons and games. The Parish Picnic continues each year as Francis Fest. There are Dinner Groups, Moms, Pops & Tots, Bridge Clubs, teen gatherings, and more. Other organizations, such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Knights of Columbus, also find a home with us and serve our parish well. Our parishioners need little reason to join together for fun. We do it well.

A People Who Care Together

As Catholic Christians, we are called to reach out to those in need, to serve as Jesus served. At St. Francis, social justice ministries began with the Social Concerns Committee. Early parishioners supported prison ministry, Respect Life movements, Catholic Parish Outreach and other efforts in the community to care for God's children.

These early beginnings helped prepare our young parish for what has continued to be a call to justice and peace. One event in particular riveted our attention to answering God's call. In 1986, one of our young parishioners, Jeff Meyer, was accused of murder. He was convicted in 1988.

Jeff's family is a good and holy family, founding members of St. Francis. The parish responded immediately. Father English reached out not only to Jeff and his family; he also visited the family of the victims. He told them all we would pray for them in their suffering. The next Sunday, St. Francis included Jeff Meyer and his victims in the Prayer of the Faithful. Father English promised we would continue to pray for them as long as Jeff was in prison.

Each of our Franciscan friars since those days has continued to minister to Jeff and other prisoners. As a parish, we have fought for reform of the death penalty and have created a Pen Pal Ministry of parishioners who regularly correspond with prisoners. Our friars still visit prisoners on a regular basis.

Jeff, too, has found a ministry within the prison walls. Through his witness, many prisoners were baptized and confirmed in prison by Bishop Joseph Gossman. Jeff was the sponsor for many of them. He currently continues to be a part of a bible study group on death row.

If Prison Ministry has flourished as an outreach ministry, it is not alone. With the Franciscans, social justice ministries found new and fertile ground. Parishioners came with their ideas and these blossomed into active

ministries. Several have become independent non-profit organizations serving the needs of our community and beyond. Jeanne Tedrow began Passage Home; Gail Phares began the Carolina Interfaith Taskforce on Central America (CITCA) and Deb Royals-Mizerk created Justice Theater Project. These organizations have won much civic praise for their good works. They have also been arenas for ecumenical work as we join with other churches in ministry.

CITCA was the springboard for another significant outreach ministry at St. Francis. In 1993, our parish joined the international Sister Parish organization and began a relationship with Las Margaritas Parish in Guatemala. The Sister Parish mission is to promote social justice worldwide. Since our Sister Parish Ministry began, about 20 delegations of parishioners have traveled from St. Francis to Las Margaritas. There have also been South to North delegations for Las Margaritas parishioners who have visited us.

The Sister Parish Ministry has made great strides in advocacy for water, land and women's rights. They have also advanced medical care and education in the region. It is important to understand, though, that this is not a one-way street with St. Francis providing for the material needs of those less fortunate. The sister parish relationship is very much a sharing of faith and spirituality between our two cultures. Delegates return to St. Francis amazed that they have received more than they have given.

These far-reaching ministries are but a few of the social justice ministries at St. Francis. The Parish has often led the way in outreach. At a time when AIDS was poorly understood and much feared, parishioners formed the AIDS Care Team in 1993. In 2004, it was presented with the Governor's Award for outstanding service in North Carolina. In addition to serving victims of AIDS, this ministry also serves parishioners in witnessing God's call to reach out to the least among us. They

have broken down social barriers and stigmas. They proclaim that we are all brothers and sisters and we are called to care for one another.

St. Francis was the first parish in the Diocese of Raleigh to hire a lay staff member to direct social justice ministries. Paul Amrhein was that director. He did much to advance parishioner understanding of the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church and the spirituality of answering God's call to care for others. Megan Nerz followed and created the Franciscan Coalition for Justice and Peace.

As the Peace and Justice Ministries care for those beyond our doors, the Pastoral Ministries address the needs of our parishioners. As with other areas, often these ministries came to life when parishioners brought forth creative ideas for putting their faith into action. They are present to parishioners preparing for marriage, the arrival of a baby, illness and death, divorce and unemployment. They celebrate good times and walk with those experiencing difficult sorrow and struggles.

Those difficult times included the category 4 tornado that made its long path through many neighborhoods in our parish. Just after Thanksgiving in 1988, the storm left many in the Raleigh area with extensive damage to their homes. Father David and many parishioners joined together in clearing debris and downed trees from homes and yards. Other parishioners worked with The Red Cross and other organizations bringing assistance and care.

Similarly, Hurricane Fran in September, 1996 and a severe ice storm in December, 2002 left parishioners with power outages, fallen trees and home damage. Two call lines were established at St. Francis – one if you needed help and the other if you were offering help to others. The outpouring was incredible.

Those natural catastrophes brought immediate and widespread hardships, but many more families have been hurt by illness and death, unemployment,

abuse, divorce, and other difficulties. St. Francis has opened its arms to all.

A People Who Form Their Faith Together

One of the first committees created in Father English's living room was the Education Committee. From its earliest beginnings of meeting in homes, nearby churches, and every nook and cranny of the original church, the faith formation of our children, our youth and our adults has been of great importance.

Like most Catholic churches at the time, religious education in our early years was centered primarily on the children and teens. Rich programs were offered with hands-on activities that made faith come alive. The participants and the volunteers grew in number each year.

Formation for adults initially included Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) and sessions for returning Catholics who had been away from The Church. Classes for Preparation for Baptism and Marriage rounded out the offerings.

Shortly after Father David arrived, he created the Outstanding Theologian Series for adults. It was the beginning of regular formation opportunities for the ordinary parishioner who wanted to learn about contemporary Catholic teaching. For many, it was the first time their theology had been awakened since grade school or high school. Many misconceptions about our faith were dispelled with each visiting theologian. We had a lot of church teaching to catch up on.

If we move forward to the current day, the original Director of Religious Education position has been replaced with a large, professional team in the Evangelization and Education Ministries. Along the way, the St. Francis of Assisi Preschool (originally called the Early Childhood Learning Center) was created, you guessed it, when a volunteer came up with the

idea and did all the leg work to make it happen. That was back in 1991, shortly after Clare Hall (originally called The Parish Center) was built with the intention of its being an education building. Little did we know that other education buildings would soon be in our future.

With the beginning of a new century as a backdrop, St. Francis of Assisi had its own new beginning in the year 2000 when it first opened the doors of The Franciscan School. With Father Dan as pastor, the children and youth now had more than one avenue for faith formation at St. Francis. The school has grown consistently over the years in both numbers and spirituality.

A People Who Tend to Business Together

My, how we have grown over the years. That small group of families who met in the Foglias' living room with Bishop Gossman had no idea what they were starting. From a little parish church built on 8 acres of land on Leesville Road, St. Francis of Assisi now has grown to 14 buildings located on about 35 acres. Visitors often compare St. Francis to a small college campus.

A lot of good work happens in these buildings. The Parish Operations group helps to make it happen. Of the original committees formed with the start of the parish, the Pastor's Advisory Committee, the Parish Building Committee and the Finance Committee all assisted with the business matters of St. Francis. The first lay employee was Judy Shiel, the Parish Administrator. Judy stayed busy with everything from registering new parishioners to paying bills to reserving rooms for our many groups and all the other day-to-day business that came along.

From those humble beginnings, there is now a team of staff members and many ministries and volunteers who make sure St. Francis of Assisi is a well-run parish. Communications now include our printed bulletin as well as a

dynamic web site and social media. Facilities and maintenance schedules space for all the hundreds of events and programs and makes sure all is in working order. Stewardship reminds us of our call to receive God's gifts graciously, nurture them responsibly, share them in love and justice, and stand accountable before the Lord. Administration and Finance sees to the business issues of our large faith community.

A People Who Keep Growing

The Catholic Community of St. Francis of Assisi. This is who we are at the young age of 30 years. We have done much in that short span of time. But this story will be outdated very soon. We are a faith community that keeps growing and evolving. St. Francis is a rolling stone that gathers no moss. We are continually reborn as new and vibrant followers of Christ. It is a certainty that we shall find and create new ways to serve God and all God's people. This is our blessing.

Parishioners Remember

A Look Back

Author's Note: The following is a compilation of miscellaneous memories from parishioners who responded to my call for contributions this historical narrative. Some wrote to me, others I recorded as we spoke together, and still other accounts are public speeches that I have transcribed.

Bishop Joseph Gossman An Interview:

Would you have done anything different with regard to how St. Francis of Assisi was founded?

No, because the way St. Francis was founded is generally the way parishes are founded. Either the local pastor or – as in this case – the people bring forth the need. And it is still done this way.

What effect has the founding of St. Francis had on the Diocese of Raleigh?

The outreach of St. Francis of Assisi has been wonderful, beginning with Father English and then expanding tremendously. St. Francis, from the very beginning, has been very conscious of reaching out to the community. The people of St. Francis have been very much aware that they are blessed with resources much beyond most of our parishes. And they have been so very generous in reaching out to others that many of the good outreach programs that have been done in the diocese have, if not started by St. Francis, have been given life at St. Francis. And that is something that St. Francis can be very proud of. It is not a rich parish that is just sitting there. St. Francis is a parish that is very conscious of sharing.

MaryLou Bender Early assignments—a memory from the very early days

Father English had asked me to be on the Parish Council. So I went to the meeting. I guess they were giving out assignments for what they would do, and we talked about all different kinds of things. Then, on the way out I happened to be walking beside Father English.

He said, "I want you to take over the Liturgy Committee."

I looked at him as if he had lost his mind, and I said, "Father, look, I've gone to Catholic schools all my life—I mean all the way through school I went to Catholic school. I got married in the Catholic Church, and I am willing to do anything I can around here. But, Father, I don't know a thing about liturgy."

And he said, "Don't worry. I'll tell you what to do."

That was so funny and every time I think about that I laugh. He must have been really desperate to have made that suggestion.

But, I didn't last very long. He finally found somebody who knew what he was doing.

Bob Dietz This church provides many fond memories.

We first arrived at the little St. Francis door, back in 1984, and thought "what a wonderful little community". The church was small but we grew to like it just that way. My sons were two and four at that time, so we met many new families, who over the years became some of our closest friends—and to this day still are!

I became an usher and continued to do so for the next 17 years. I enjoyed this ministry because it gave me an opportunity to welcome people and meet new friends.

It always amazed me to see the blessings we enjoyed at St. Francis by the various priests who led our community. They were, and currently are, some wonderful Christians.

As our children and many others have grown up, gone to college, and moved on with their lives, so have many of our church family friends. Although I have since moved to Cary, I still continue to socialize with many of our St. Francis friends and continue to drive almost 30 minutes to my favorite church—the small church that welcomed me in a big way.

Thanks for the memories.

Betty Camp Speaking to an audience of St. Francis' more seasoned parishioners, March 2007

I moved here in January of 1983, and I recall the dedication of the original church.

My son led a procession on Leesville Road, carrying a banner. Of course, Bishop Gossman was there and I remember him rubbing the altar with oil; I remember a lot of that, a lot of arm work.

And, in preparation for that day, Father English had asked people to ring a bell, that somewhere in the old church at some point in the dedication of the church you would ring a bell.

Well, I didn't have any old dinner bell to ring, so I don't know that the Camps brought one, but a lot of people did. And at some point during that ceremony there was ringing of bells and it was quite memorable.

I remember certain things about Father English, one of which was right around the time the church was being built. Of course there were a lot of pine trees that had recently been bulldozed. One Sunday, he came out and said that it looked just like a great big chocolate pudding out there. But the church got built and he, I believe, had the mortgage paid off in five years.

And there's another thing about Father English, from when we were first here. He, of course, had volunteers and asked for clean-up days. I remember one Saturday being out there and picking up rocks in front of where the rectory used to be before it was moved. Afterwards, he invited the workers inside. And when I went inside there was a plaque in the entranceway and on it were the names of the couple who had donated the money for the rectory. The people's last name was Doty and they were from somewhere up about New York City. They were friends of his.

When they found out that he was coming to Raleigh and starting a new parish, they had said, "Jim, what can we do for you?" And he said, "Well..." and thought and thought, and said, "Well, you know, we don't have a rectory." So they said, we'll give you a hundred thousand dollars for a rectory.

On that day we had cleaned up the grounds, he said, "Coming home on the train I thought, 'I wish I had asked for a whole new building!'"

So, that was Father English.

I would like to say, in closing, that I have been a Catholic for nearly 70 years, and I have lived up and down the east coast—New Jersey three times, Virginia, Baltimore, here. I've gone to Catholic churches all my life.

There is nothing like this parish.

I thought a Catholic church was a Catholic church, and you went to the nearest one to you, and that would be that. But there is a special spirit about St. Francis, and I think every one of you in here has probably experienced it.

Nancy Dilger

My mother-in-law was cleaning out her drawers and just sent this "blast from the past". On the last Sunday that we, as a community, celebrated mass in the old church, various parishioners were invited to offer their reflections on the following prompt: How has the spirit of St. Francis and my involvement inspired me to live the Gospel? These witnesses were part of the bridging celebration that took place to ease our letting go of the old and encourage embracing the new. Attached is the delivery that our daughter, Tricia, gave at the age of 10.

The Spirit of St. Francis By Patricia Anne Dilger

How has the spirit of St. Francis and my involvement inspired me to live the Gospel?

St. Francis of Assisi Parish inspires me to work together with others. If someone needs help, all of the people pitch in and help them out. Sometimes when we do this, it makes me remember the saint, Francis. It also makes me think of God and Jesus. I like our patron saint, St. Francis. He was kind and gentle just like the people in this parish. The church follows Jesus Christ and as a group we act like St. Francis did.

At mass I learn a lot from Father Jim's, Father Dan's, and Father Mark's readings. I like it when they make funny remarks to get their point across. I love going to mass on Sundays. I get to sing in the choir, too!

Being a child, I feel really special to be a part of the people (the church!). St. Francis Church really helps kids like me learn about God and Jesus. Faith Formation helps us learn a lot. There are lots of activities for children like: the youth choir with Mr. Gene and Mrs. Pam; Back to the Time of Christ when we get to act out the life of Jesus; Faith Formation classes with my friends; and many more activities all year long.

Every day I look forward to the next season in the church year, especially Advent! We have a very exciting Advent Festival. My family and I make an Advent wreath. We bring it home and that's like bringing home a small part of the church. We light a candle for every Sunday during Advent at dinner time. I think that St. Francis of Assisi has helped me understand the seasons of the church year.

I think St. Francis of Assisi has really inspired me to live the Gospel! When I live the Gospel, I feel good inside!

Ron Doggett
Speaking to an audience of
St. Francis's more seasoned
parishioners, March 2007

I know you're asking why a guy my age who has a hard time remembering where he parked his car in the parking lot is going to remember back 25 years. Well, I remember many things that have already been shared with you. How well I remember, actually 27 years ago, when I was on the Finance Council at St. Raphael's and Monsignor Lewis, at that time Reverend Lewis, indicated we had new plans that we needed to consider.

I scratched my head because I had just finished my pledge to St. Raphael's building. He said, "We are going to form a new parish and we're going to need some help. We're going to help them and that means financially. Therefore, I'll need the help of the Finance Committee and I'll need your personal support again."

So, indeed, I did eventually sign over another pledge. And it was with an energetic group of people on the Finance Council that we started our efforts.

I can remember Sam Jordan, Jerry Finnen, Rudy Frye, and perhaps some of you here today who joined in the effort to get the campaign going.

One of the first things we did was to go out and look at the site where this new church was going to be. One of our first expressions was, "Boy, this is really out in the sticks. It's a long ways away."

But it was on beautiful wooded acreage and how beautiful it is today.

Shortly after that, after we got our things together and got the campaign working, we learned a lot about ourselves and a lot about Catholics in the community.

There were some who doubted the need for what we were addressing. After all, we were still a missionary state, around only two percent of the

population was Catholic in North Carolina, and they wondered if we could really undertake this venture. But, indeed, we would and we could. It was shortly after that that we got a new pastor.

Father English came to us, another newness to our community, a Jesuit coming to our parish. What a wonderful man he was, and what dreams he had.

We had about 150 families as I recall and we were saying mass in the Lynn Road School. I can't help remember so well Father English's story of how we got the use of the little Baptist church where we also had mass.

Without all the details of this, you have to remember again that there were not too many Catholics in the community at the time. I was always struck by one of the things I was asked when we moved here in 1970.

One of the first questions people asked me was, "Where you from?" They talked like that.

I said, "Well, I'm from Minnesota, moving here from Philadelphia."

And then they said, "Where do you go to church?"

I said, "Well, I go to St. Raphael's. I'm Catholic." "Oh."

Anyway, Father English located the minister of the little Baptist church, knocked on his door, and said, "Hello, I'm Father English. We're starting a new Catholic church here in the community, and we would like to borrow your church to hold mass."

There was this sudden gap in his jaw as he acknowledged Father English, but he said, "Well, come in. We'll talk about it."

So he went in, talked about it, and had an agreement to use the church where we held mass in the little chapel, as many of you have been there, a charming place. And it was after a number of masses that took place, that I guess Father English and the minister actually became pretty good

friends. Honestly, after our church was completed, the minister came back and preached one day for us. It was a great event.

I remember the little home we had across the street for Father, where he used to live, where he held mass outside the house... hot, sticky, insects we were fanning away as we were trying to keep cool, standing in knee-deep pine straw. But it was an intimate, warm mass, out there under the pine trees.

Many of you, as I do, remember his "I had a baby" homily. The baby was, of course, the recently completed church, and he said, "This is my baby; I love it, and we love it, and it's wonderful..." and so forth. I can't embellish his remarks enough. He was really excited about it.

With Father English's eventual departure, many of us wondered how we would ever find someone to replace this great guy, but we were blessed with the arrival of a Franciscan Friar, Father David McBriar. He was terrific.

We loved his homilies, his enthusiasm for education, for outreach, beginning a lot of social activities, the liturgy, music, choir... a lot of things. Under his leadership, we grew. We grew rapidly, and we launched another building campaign because we had to expand this place.

The momentum continued. Demands for expanding our facility and including more educational facilities in the new church, Father David supported all of those and other growth plans. And he developed the staff we have today.

Father Dan came on, Father Mark came on, and back at that time, I think I still had a little color in my hair... Father Mark actually had some hair at that time, I think.

How well I remember the many, many meetings we had to acquire land, facility plans for the new church, new school, remodeling of the rectory. We conducted another capital campaign and Father Mark was able to convince my wife to be honorary chair for that, I

guess, and he wishes Jeanette was back again, I think. They had such a good time and success with it. And, here we are today.

Those are just a few of the memories after 25 years. A lot of doers, a lot of believers, a lot of great lovers of their faith in the Catholic community.

I have enjoyed being a part of this parish for all those years. I have enjoyed funding it and seeing my children baptized, my grandchildren go to school here, and seeing old friends like you continue to participate in all that goes on in this parish under the leadership of Father Mark, and Bob, and Jim, and Bill, and David, and Dan.

Thank you.

Don Donaghy Serendipity—an impromptu meeting and memory

Father English's homilies were superb. Oh, mama. You never knew the first sentence that would come out of his mouth; he would shock you. He would just shock you. There were two most memorable homilies that I remember.

It was either during the first or second time my wife, Terri, and I had visited the church that Father English got up and gave one of his famous homilies, "If I Were Pope".

He went on for almost 10 minutes saying things like, "If I were Pope, you wouldn't have to go to church on Sunday, you wouldn't have to go to confession, you wouldn't have to do this..." and we were all sitting there thinking, "What is this priest doing, why is he saying this?"

But after he shocked us all, he hit the high note by saying, "You should go to church because you want to go to church, not because you have to go to church. You should confess your sins because you want to confess your sins, not because you have to." So after he had set us all up with "you don't have to do this and you don't

have to do that", his message fell very powerfully on the congregation.

And the other famous homily was about the Queen of England.

He said the queen of England was coming to the United States. And, she was coming to St. Francis.

Every one of us sat up and listened.

He stood up there, looked straight at us, and said, "Yes, we were going to have to get a committee together, we're going to have to clean the church, we are going to have to get everything ready so when the Queen comes, it'll all be perfect."

Everybody got all excited, thinking, "Yes, we have to get ready for the queen."

And then, after he got us all on board, Father English said, "Well, you know, Jesus comes every week. Why shouldn't we prepare for Jesus and God the same way as if the queen were coming?"

Father English would always keep you thinking. I used to love his homilies. They were fantastic. I give credit to our current friars; they are wonderful, too. But Father English has a special place in my heart for those homilies. They WOWed us.

Sonia Kane Thank you, St. Francis of Assisi

When I walked through the doors of St. Francis eighteen years ago with my husband and one-year-old son, we immediately felt that we had come home. Having just moved to Raleigh, we began to build our extended family in this welcoming community.

The challenging homilies of Father David McBriar and the gentleness of Father Bob Hudak drew us to mass.

The joyful spirit of Mary Morch, the youth minister at the time, drew us to work as leaders in the high school Awareness groups and on retreats.

The Young Adult group, complete with sing-alongs, faith sharing, and potlucks, filled our social needs with the foundation of life-long friendships.

The Parenting for Peace and Justice group guided and encouraged us in our desire to be purposeful about our parenting. And our Small Church Community (Renew Group) challenged us to both share and live out our faith.

Each of these wonderful groups, as well as the ones we have more recently become a part of, has a common thread that has kept us loving our church home: Community. Thank you, St. Francis of Assisi.

Art Kilmartin Speaking to an audience of St. Francis's more seasoned parishioners, March 27

When Father English first started saying mass at Lynn Road School, my ten-year-old son, my youngest boy, was with us. Father English came over, grabbed him by the arm, and said, "I need an altar server."

My boy looked at him, astounded, because I don't think he even knew what an altar server was.

So he took my son up to the altar. "I'll tell you everything you need to know; just stand here, right next to me." And he did.

After we heard the sermon – the first we had heard by Father English – my son came back.

I said to him, "Well, how did you like that?"

He said, "Oh, that was fun."

I said, "How did you like the sermon?"

He said, "This guy's really good."

So that's when we started coming to St. Francis, and I'm very happy we made that choice.

I was a founding member of the new church at Lourdes when it was built prior to St. Francis, so I've been

around a long time—since 1965. We've really enjoyed St. Francis immensely. Thank you.

Anne E. Laethem
My reflections on
St. Francis of Assisi

My first encounter with St. Francis was in April 2005, when I opened the phone book and looked under C for Church.

Not knowing anyone in North Raleigh or my way around, as a newcomer to the area, I thought that was a logical place to begin searching for a church.

The ad in the phonebook had a brief description and directions, so I tore it out one Sunday morning and decided to see what St. Francis had to offer.

I was impressed with the church from the beginning, but it was not until I volunteered to be an RCIA volunteer that I felt at home.

It was through that experience that I met Brother George and Julie Weber. The two of them could not have been better suited to be the first faces that those inquiring about the Catholic faith meet.

Through my experience as a sponsor, I developed a greater appreciation of my Catholic faith and a better understanding of St. Francis and its mission.

I love St. Francis because of the mission statement and, specifically, how I see the members living out that mission every week.

Matt Morrow
My special memory of
St. Francis of Assisi

I am 15 years old, I'm a freshman at Ravenscroft School, and I have been a member of the Music Ministry at St. Francis for almost five years. My family started coming to St. Francis when I was five years old, and eventually we joined the church and I attended The Franciscan School [TFS]. When we came to St. Francis for mass, particularly in the current sanctuary, we would sit near the music and choir area. I remember watching Mr. Gene and the other musicians and wishing that someday I could be part of that group. At the time, I was taking drum lessons, and I hoped that there would someday be a chance for a drummer to play at mass.

While attending TFS, in addition to drums, I also started studying the trumpet. Mr. Gene came to our band class one day and talked to us about joining the Music Ministry. I couldn't wait for the first rehearsal. I started playing trumpet with the Music Ministry at Saturday night mass in October 2001. I was in fifth grade at the time. I continued on the trumpet at 5:30 Saturday mass, and then about a year or so later, Mr. Gene got a set of electric drums and asked me to debut them at mass. I was so excited!

That summer, we practiced together almost every day, and I played the drums at two or three masses almost every weekend. Now I get to play both trumpet and drums at Saturday night mass and on special occasions. I have been honored to play at the Confirmation Mass for the past three years, and was very honored to play at a special mass in honor of Bishop Gossman last year at Our Lady of Lourdes.

I love the Music Ministry at St. Francis and playing with Mr. Gene. This is a very important part of my life, and even after I graduate high school and am gone off to college, I plan to continue playing music at mass wherever I am. Thank you.

Kathleen Riordan
My memories of
St. Francis of Assisi

My husband, Stu, and I joined St. Francis in August 1983 right after we moved from New York. I was 26, he was 33, and we had no children. Father English was the pastor and the congregation had just moved into the new church. We were founding members and our names are on the plaque in the Founders' Room.

Since then, we had three sons, all baptized at St. Francis, who are now 15, 18, and 20 years old. Stu passed away suddenly in 1999 of a heart attack and is buried in the Columbarium. So, St. Francis has definitely been with my family through the good times and the bad.

When I first joined St. Francis, I became involved in the Ark Shelter and met wonderful folks, like Marianne Williams and Nancy Dilger, who are still active in St. Francis. Over the years my husband and I both taught Faith Formation classes.

In the first church, I can remember the current rectory was attached to the church, and then it was later moved to its current location.

I remember Father Bob Hudak, who was affectionately called Father Hunk-a-Monk! And Father David, of course, is was always near and dear to everyone's hearts. And then there was Father Kevin and Brother Patrick and (another) Father Bob—we have had quite a portfolio of priests leading up to Fathers Bill, Mark, and Ray.

In my boys' elementary years, Vacation Bible School was always a big event. Barbara Goff was always a big contributor to those. And the Harvest Moon Festival was also a big tradition—my boys loved the cake walk.

Our family used to take Alice Peterman to church through the Transportation Ministry. She was a wonderful lady, and it was a gift to meet her.

She had the sharpest mind and always remembered exactly which of my sons was involved in certain activities. Alice was very frail, but when my husband died, she was the first person to show up at the wake. And when Alice died the following year, Tim was asked to be the cross bearer at her funeral.

Father Mark was special to my youngest son, Brian, when my husband died. Brian had only just turned eight. He had this need to continue to talk to his dad, so he would write letters and give them to Father Mark for 'delivery'.

Through St. Francis, we have met a core group of families who have stood by us in friendship and love and support through the years – the Barkers, Goffs, Mundells, Gallos, Conners, Holmeses, Bouchards, and many others – and that has been the biggest blessing of St. Francis.

Chuck Small Blessed to have found our community at St. Francis of Assisi

Even before I arrived in Raleigh, I had heard about St. Francis. A good friend of mine, a fellow parishioner at Little Flower Catholic Church in South Bend, Indiana, knew that I was moving to Raleigh in the fall of 1993 to join my partner. This friend, a graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill, said she thought I'd like St. Francis and would find its community welcoming to my partner and me.

But when I moved here, I thought St. Francis, way up on Leesville Road, was a pretty fair hike from where I was living off Gorman Street near NC State in West Raleigh. I wondered whether I shouldn't try other parishes closer to my apartment. I did, but they were cold and not at all what I was used to at Little Flower.

Then, about three weeks into living here, I met my partner for mass at St. Francis. From the time we walked in and gazed at the wooden beams and heard the music from the Gather hymnal, the same music Little Flower used, I felt at home.

As we walked out into the garden afterward and saw the carefully tended roses and the peaceful water fountain, I felt a sense of tranquility and beauty. Within a month we read a bulletin note from Father David McBriar that specifically included gays and lesbians in the parish's definition of "family", and I knew we had found our home.

Thirteen years later, we continue to come over at least once or twice a week from our West Raleigh home. (Of course, these days with I-540, it's a much quicker trip than it used to be going up Glenwood Avenue!)

We feel blessed to have found our community, and we hope to continue to be part of it for years to come.

Mary Tremmel My very first memory of St. Francis of Assisi in 1984

We moved to Raleigh Friday, September 27, 1984, from a small town in South Carolina. On Saturday, while driving around trying to locate a hardware store at the intersection of Strickland and Leesville Roads, we noticed a small blue sign that simply said "St. Francis – 1 Mile."

From our house-hunting trips to Raleigh, we knew the locations of St. Raphael and Our Lady of Lourdes. We were so happy to find a church closer to our new home.

Driving to church, we learned that Sunday masses were at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. The next morning we arrived at 10:15 and discovered that the mass, for that Sunday, had begun at 10.

Dressed in our Sunday best, as was the custom in our previous parish, we saw most of the 100 families of the St. Francis community sitting on picnic blankets under the pines—now the playground for the Early Childhood Learning Center.

That Sunday was a very special day. It was the one-year anniversary of the dedication of the first church building,

the celebration of St. Francis's feast day and an outdoor mass and family picnic!

Having arrived late and not dressed for a picnic, everyone knew we were new to the area. Instantly we were offered seats on blankets. After mass many people welcomed us and invited our family to stay and share their family's picnic.

To this day the much larger St. Francis community still offers a warm welcome to all who visit, whether for the first time or as a parishioners for the past 22 years.

Paul and Marianne Williams Friars spark the St. Francis of Assisi engine

We moved to Raleigh in June of 1987. Our first mass at St. Francis happened to be the weekend that Father Bob Hudak returned to St. Francis of Assisi. Everyone was so happy to have Bob back. I learned quickly why people loved him so much.

It was also the first weekend for David McBriar, and so it didn't take us long to know that St. Francis was where we wanted to be. Just as it is now, the parish was welcoming to new people, alive with activity. People like Judy Shiel and Marylynn Kaus were among the first people we met.

There were also great volunteers like Sam Jordan, who was on the Finance Committee and directed the building of the Parish Center. There is not a man on earth I respect more than Sam. He still serves on the Finance Committee. David and Megan Nerz have given much to St. Francis over the years through service on the Finance Committee and Parish Council, as well as service to many outreach ministries, most recently the Justice Theatre Project.

We told David McBriar that we wanted to get involved in outreach. I served on the Social Concerns Committee for

five years. During that time we met Jeanne and Jim Tedrow. Jeanne wanted to start a transitional housing program. Matthew House was started and has grown into Passage Home.

Jeanne has been recognized as a woman of vision in her work with people struggling to escape the bonds of poverty in Wake County and so many families have been served since then.

I remember the tornado that ripped through North Raleigh the Sunday after Thanksgiving in 1988. The St. Francis community jumped into action. I was so proud to be a part of the community that helped each other recover from the disaster.

But the friars provided the real spark to the St. Francis engine.

They challenged us not to be complacent in our comfortable North Raleigh homes because we have brothers and sisters who need our love and support.

The friars connected the gospel to the action. They are partners with us on this life journey.

OUTTAKES

Impromptu stories from those who remember

"Father English's gift to us was his true love for everybody. He truly wanted to be here, it wasn't just an assignment. He wanted to start a church. He wasn't there to impress anybody but God. He did everything for love of God and love of people. He truly was what he said he was; he was genuine, original, and highly motivating."

Jo Finnen, Parishioner

"For a Jesuit, Father English was a helluva Franciscan!"

Don Donaghy, Parishioner

"One of the sad stories of this parish was Judy Shiel's death—what an important person she was in the life of the parish. Her funeral was standing room only. She was seen as someone who optimized the mission statement of the parish. She was so welcoming to people. She answered the phone and did everything. She was ever-present and everybody loved her very much."

Father David McBriar, Former Pastor

"Father Hudak was a hoot. He would always carry his notes for his sermon on him. So we would all wait for this.... He would get up there to the podium, and he would reach up behind his head, and reach into the hood of his robes, and pull out his notes. Everybody would laugh, everybody knew exactly what he was going to do."

Don Donaghy, Parishioner

"Brother Frank Kacmarcik, the liturgical design consultant hired to design the interior of the New Church was a very opinionated and outspoken Benedictine monk from St. John's Abbey in Minnesota. He spared no one in commenting negatively on the design ideas given by the Parish Building Committee members. Father Dan, our pastor, once proposed that two additional aisles be added across the main nave of the church. Brother Frank's immediate comment was that if the aisles were added, the church would resemble a Chicago stock yard with little pens between all those extra aisles. The aisles were not added."

Julio De La Rosa,
Former Staff Member

"When we first built the church way out here on Leesville Road, there was nothing but trees. It was very rural. We knew that a population explosion was heading in this direction though. Father English used to say that someday people are going to wonder why we built this itty-bitty church in the middle of downtown Raleigh."

Pat Kowite, Coordinator of
Finance and Administration