

# CROSS TALK

*Remembering, Honoring, Celebrating  
Our First 100 Years*



In this issue:

Both issues of Cross Talk this year focus on our 100th Anniversary events along with additional historical information about the parish and its people. This issue primarily concentrates on events during the first half of the Anniversary year, focusing on Remembering and Honoring the past. We also take a look forward to upcoming Anniversary celebrations scheduled throughout the rest of the year that will be highlighted in the Winter Issue of Cross Talk.

Saint Helena Center Square was one of ten parishes founded in 1919 by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The other nine parishes were:

- St. Barnabas in Philadelphia
- St. Bartholomew in Philadelphia
- St. Joseph in Spring City
- St. Rose of Lima in North Wales
- Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Hilltown
- St. David in Willow Grove
- St. Philip Neri in Pennsburg
- St. Agnes in Sellersville
- St. Joan of Arc in Philadelphia

All remain open today except for St. Joan of Arc that closed in 2013.

To the parishioners of these parishes we offer our congratulations on your first 100 years! May you be blessed with at least 100 more!

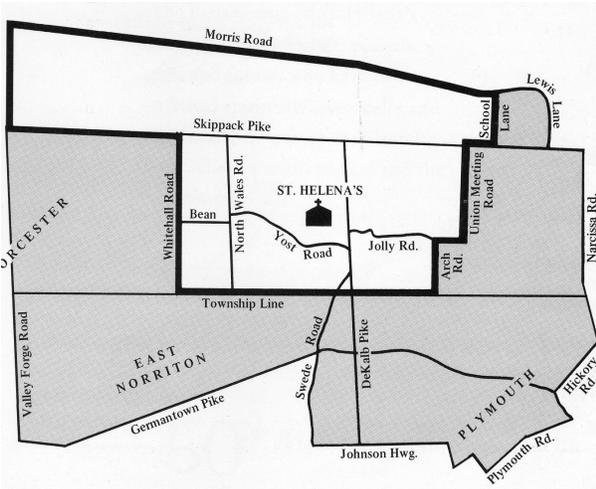
On the front cover are pictures of altars from our three churches.

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## A New Parish Is Founded

On September 2, 1919 the Board of Consultors of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia granted permission to Archbishop Dennis Dougherty to establish a new parish in Center Square as an offshoot of St. Patrick's parish in Norristown. A few weeks after the meeting, he named Father Francis Higgins as the founding pastor. Only 35 years old at the time, Father Higgins set out to find land and build a church, as yet unnamed.



Shaded area - original boundaries  
 White area - current boundaries

Times were tough for the new pastor. Father Higgins encountered strong bigotry against Catholics in the area making it difficult to find a suitable location for a rectory and church. He donned a shirt and tie to rent a house on Swede Road as a rectory because no one at the time would rent or sell to a priest.

The initial boundaries of the parish covered 25 square miles and included 25 families. Money was tight. Parishioners offered Father Higgins livestock or produce instead of cash donations. Father Higgins persisted with the help of a monthly stipend from the Archdiocese. One parishioner, Ellen Duddy, presented Father Higgins with two acres of her farm to build a church and her farmhouse

to say Mass. When the area bigots objected to the Yost Road site, Miss Duddy gave Father Higgins another seven acres so the church could be built further away. Upon Miss Duddy's death in 1922, she willed her entire 93 acre estate, including livestock to Father Higgins. Father Higgins later turned the property over to the Archdiocese.

A year after the parish founding, on October 4, 1920, the Board of Consultors approved \$25,000 to build the church. The church was a small wooden structure with stained glass windows.

Archdiocesan records indicate that Father Higgins requested that the parish be named Saint Helena to please the benefactress. Both Father Higgins and Miss Duddy shared a strong devotion to Saint Theresa, the Little Flower. While there was some discussion later on about renaming the church for the Little Flower, the church name remained the same with a shrine dedicated to the Little Flower.

From those early days the parish flourished. It served as a spinoff to other parishes - Epiphany of Our Lord, St. Titus, Visitation B.V.M., and St. Paul's. A rectory and convent were added. As the parish grew a new church replaced the original church. A school was built and expanded. A third church was built and additional educational facilities were converted from the second church. And now, as we honor and remember the past, and celebrate those who came before us who established our rich traditions, we look forward to our next 100 years!

## HONORING THE PAST



Our last issue of Cross Talk on the Chapel and Shrines of St. Helena Parish featured the Lourdes Grotto as perhaps the most iconic of all our outdoor Shrines and Gardens! Inspired by our founding Pastor's pilgrimage to Lourdes, Father Higgins created our own parish Grotto in the tradition of Lourdes which would be worthy of liturgical celebrations and processions honoring Our Lady.

In anticipation of our 100th Anniversary Monsignor Nicolo, as part of his Restoration, Beautification and Enrichment campaign, magnificently re-imagined and expanded the Grotto and added a handsome new Pergola and awe inspiring sanctuary for prayer and peaceful reflection.



On October 13, 2018 we celebrated the Dedication of the Pergola and Recitation of the Rosary, mindful of and grateful for the Grotto's long and storied history and the 100th Anniversary of our beloved St. Helena Parish!



## *HONORING THE PAST*

In the history of early Christian and Byzantine churches the Narthex served as a place of welcome, where the parish family gathered to prepare for worship and to be nurtured as a faith community.



As we remember and honor our own rich parish history, it becomes evident that our magnificent Narthex continues to reflect that worthy tradition. One of the most dramatic ways we have done that is by creating a suitable space to showcase both the beautifully refurbished original organ from the first church, the Shrine of St. Theresa the Little Flower, and the iconic Baptismal Font from the second church.

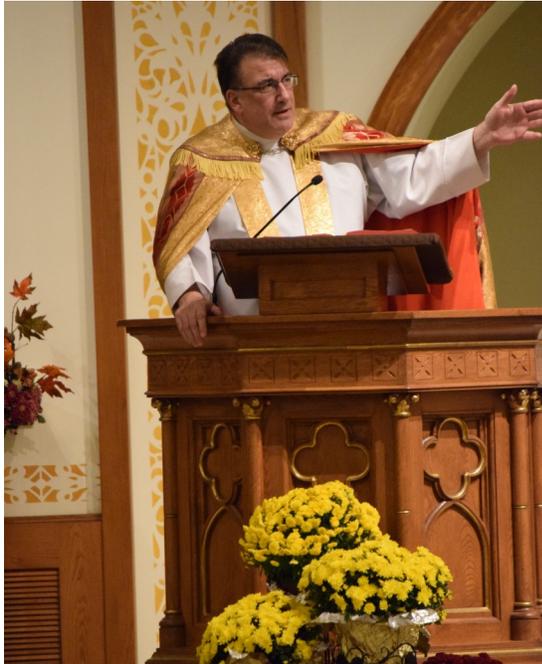
We have also been featuring a dynamic Slide Presentation highlighting an impressive pictorial of our past and present history including:

- \* October 1930 to 1948 - First Church, Shrine of St. Theresa; Pageant of the Saints; May Crowning at the Grotto; Trolley; Ponds
- \* November 1948 to 2004– St. Helena School; Second Church of St. Helena
- \* December 2004 - the New Church; Grounds
- \* January - Priests who served at St. Helena
- \* February - Children's Art Contest winners
- \* March - Couples married 50 years or longer
- \* April - 1940's through 1970's; highlighting our families
- \* May - Tree Lighting; Dinner Theater; Pysanky eggs

We are blessed indeed to share in such a wonderful, unfolding story!



## Forty Hours - Remembering, Honoring, Celebrating



We celebrated our Annual Forty Hours Devotion in this, the year of our 100th Anniversary, with our guest Presider and Celebrant, Father Louis Bellopede, Pastor of St. Mary Parish, Schwenksville.

Forty Hours Devotion or Solemn Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is a very special Devotion which reminds us to reflect on Jesus's own words, "I am the Bread of Life," and invites us in to a period of contemplation on His Divine Mercy and calls us to worship this Sacred Presence - Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity - in a personal and intimate way.

Father Bellopede focused on our Jubilee theme, "Remembering, Honoring, Celebrating" and masterfully integrated these worthy ideals into the history and founding of our parish and the significance of Christ in the Eucharist in each of our lives and in the lives of our families and of our parish.

We are grateful to Father Bellopede, a true friend of St. Helena Parish, for his prayerful presence and beautiful homilies and to all who came together to make this 100th Anniversary Forty Hours Devotion so meaningful and memorable!



## DINNER ON DEKALB



A fun time was had by all who joined in our first ever “Dinner on DeKalb” festivities on October 28, 2018. The theme for the day, “Food-Family-Fun-Community” invited all of our families and parish community to enjoy a fun-filled and memorable afternoon right here on our St. Helena Parish grounds.



The Holiday Road provided musical entertainment for those who were making a difficult decision of which of the food vendors would be their choice(s) for Sunday dinner and also for those gathered to relax in the Wine and Beer Garden.



For the more ambitious participants there were plenty of fun activities including a Corn Hole Tournament where, rumor has it, our own Father Bob and his team reigned supreme!



# CHRISTMAS CONCERT



The St. Helena 2018 Christmas Concert, held on December 16th, under the masterful direction of Cheryl Platco, offered us an opportunity to look back on the 100 year Christmas tradition of using the songs of Christmas to “Remember, Honor and Celebrate” the awesome legacy handed on to us.



The Program offered a wonderful medley of seasonal songs and carols performed by our Adult Choir, School Chorus, Bell and Chime Choir, Instrumentalists and Liturgical Dancers interspersed with inspirational reflections and a presentation highlighting our rich history.

If in the words of Johann Sebastian Bach, “The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul,” the 2018 Christmas Concert was an overwhelming success! Refreshment continued with a Dinner Buffet in the Empress Room. Everyone left this awesome celebration ready to embrace the true meaning of Christmas and keenly aware of how blessed we are to be a part of such a rich and memorable parish tradition.



## 50 YEARS TOGETHER

Each year on the weekend before Valentines Day, we at St. Helena Parish celebrate a lovely tradition at all of the Masses. We invite each of our married couples to come to Mass together and to join together in a communal recitation of their marriage vows.



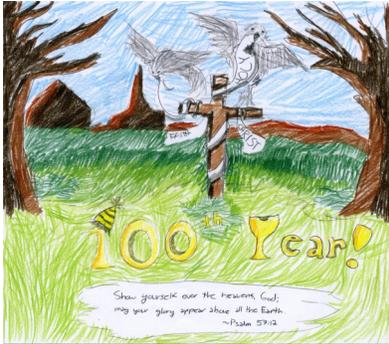
This year in conjunction with our 100th Anniversary celebration we chose to enhance this beautiful tradition by personally inviting all couples married 50 years or longer to come together at the 11 o'clock Mass and to renew their sacred vows together, surrounded by the love and support of their families and our own parish family as well.

The 38 couples who participated were grateful for such a lovely invitation to renew their vows communally and to be acknowledged and affirmed in such a positive way. Each of the ladies was presented with a long stemmed rose and a boutonniere to pin on her husband.



The celebration continued after Mass with a lovely reception in the Empress Room where everyone was able to celebrate the blessed bond they shared and savor the sweetness of such a memorable day!

## Through Our Children's Eyes



Grand Prize



First Runner Up



Second Runner Up



Third Runner Up

*"There's joy and wonder when we see the world through the eyes of our children."*

We invited our children in both the School and PREP to share their vision of our historic Anniversary by creating a cover for our Sunday Bulletin which would depict their perspective and invite us in to a broader appreciation of our story!

The winners were selected by Barbara Fitzpatrick and Joan O'Brien and have been a delightful addition to our ongoing celebration!

Grand Prize Winner - Darby Burke, Grade 5  
First Runner Up - Madeline Santana, Grade 2  
Second Runner Up - Ellie Coughlin, Grade 4  
Third Runner Up - Alex Winkowski, Grade 6

Honorable Mention - Grades K to 2:  
Ellie Rose Gigliotti, Grade 1  
Fiona McGlade, Grade 1  
Tommy McKeown, Grade 1  
Elle Olivetti, 1B

Honorable Mention - Grades 3 to 4  
Christina DiPaolo, Grade 3  
Katie Duffy, Grade 3  
Zach Ferenschak, Grade 3  
Declan Mc Glade, Grade 3

Honorable Mention - Grades 5 to 6:  
Samantha Acuna, Grade 5  
Antonio Espinoza, Grade 5  
Brynn Remar, Grade 5  
Samantha Szente, Grade 5

Many thanks to all who participated and helped us share in their joy and their wonder!

## Upcoming 100th Anniversary Events

- \* *June 25:* Reception to honor those in the parish over 50 years
- \* *June 28:* “Passion & Purpose” with Matthew Kelly
- \* *July 20:* New Murals installed in Church
- \* *August 15:* Parish Picnic
- \* *August 18:* St. Helena Feast - Hospitality after all Masses
- \* *September 29:* 100th Anniversary Concert
- \* *October 4:* Dinner on DeKalb, an evening of family fun
- \* *October 11:* Healing Mass with Kathleen McCarthy
- \* *October 18:* Anniversary Dinner with Dancing in the Empress Room
- \* *October 20 - 22:* 40 Hours with Fr. Szparagowski
- \* *October 27:* Anniversary Mass at 11AM celebrated by Archbishop Chaput, followed by light refreshments in the Empress Room

**CROSS TALK NEWSLETTER**  
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