

St. Joseph's Catholic Church began in Grundy, Va., long before the physical building existed, when as early as in 1951, a handful of local residents who wanted to continue to praise God in the manner to which they were accustomed and who, despite the absence of a Catholic Church, sought to continue to practice their Catholic faith, began meeting in area homes.

Luke and Sue Owens and Tom and Mary Holland were among those who first opened their homes for the celebration of the mass when a priest could be located to celebrate. Attendance was based on word of mouth, but three to four families gathered together when a priest was available.

As the number of practicing Catholics grew, a large banquet room owned by the Bohinskis served as one of the first regular locations for mass celebrated outside of area homes. Mass was celebrated on Saturdays two to three times a year and once at Christmas.

Buchanan Catholics moved to their first church of sorts in May 1959 when a school building at Dry Fork became available and was rented by parishioners of the church for \$15. Being a practicing Catholic became a little easier in 1961 when St. Joseph's was formally named a station of Pocahontas in the Wheeling, WV, Diocese. Its "mission" status followed almost six years later in 1967, just after the first formal church building was constructed and dedicated – the same building used today.

Father James Maher and Michael Gormley, of the Pallotine Order, from Pocahontas, said the masses and Fr. Maher also started the church in Richlands. Later, Father Daniel Hayes, Father Alphonsus Hayes, Fr. Paul Laub and Father Vincent Cunningham said masses on a rotating basis with Father James Walsh, who became the first official priest assigned to St. Joseph's in 1967 as it gained "mission" status.

It was in the late 1950s-early 1960s, Buchanan Catholics began looking for a more permanent place to hold mass and in 1961, Sue Owens wrote to Bishop John Swint in the Wheeling, WV, diocese to which Buchanan County was assigned at that time. Owens wrote in April of that year with a simple request – "that something be done about the church facility in Grundy."

Her letter was answered and on February 6, 1962, Grundy, Richlands and Tazewell split from Pocahontas and for the first time, a priest was specifically assigned to the two-county area. Father James Walsh then moved to the rectory at Richlands and became pastor for the Richlands, Tazewell and Grundy churches.

A survey of property in the Tookland area was conducted in 1965 and the two lots which now comprise the grounds on which the present-day church is situated were staked out and the little more than half acre plot of ground was purchased from George and Marlene Mitchell. Some \$6,500 came from the diocese for the purchase of the land and fundraisers were held to raise the money needed to build the church.

The physical church building became a reality after Fr. Walsh wrote to the Catholic Church Extension Society. The Walsh letter was given to Mrs. Estelle Hartnett of Brooklyn, N.Y., who was interested in helping to build new churches and she chose the one planned by the Grundy Catholic community as one of her projects. The extension society had a \$6,000 limit, but Mrs. Hartnett wanted to give \$10,000 in memory of her late husband, Joseph Hartnett. She later donated an additional \$10,000 and her daughter Mary, donated a pipe organ to the church. A plaque located at the back of the present day church is in memory of Joseph Hartnett, for whom the church was named.

John Kodak of Harman Mining and Frank Salak designed the church building. Ken Fletcher was the contractor who built it. Construction began in September 1965. The first mass said in the new church building was on Christmas Day in 1965. The formal dedication of the church did not occur until October 1966 because the bishop was not able to attend until then. At that time, Bishop Hodges praised the St. Joseph's congregation for its dedication in bringing the church into being and he assisted in the ceremonial laying of the cornerstone.

In 1968, the first Parish Council was formed and included Frank Salak, Sue Owens and Bertha Sutherland, representing Grundy. The council was also comprised of members from Richlands and Tazewell.

Throughout the years, St. Joseph's was served by a number of priests. Fr. Timothy Welsh succeeded Fr. Walsh as pastor in 1975 and was followed by Fr. Dan Bain, 1983-1996; Fr. Joseph Facura, who served in 1996; Fr. Tom Collins, 1996-2006; Fr. Dan Brady, 2006; Fr. Gaudencio Pugat, 2006-2011; Fr. Burt Sare, 2011-2014; Fr. Paul Muyimbwa, 2014-2016; Fr. Felix Amofa, 2016-2017; and Fr. Jugene Espeleta, who began serving as pastor in July 2017. Along the way, additional priests filled in until diocesan-assigned priests arrived to serve parishioners. Among those were Fr. Francis Musolooza; Fr. Mike Herbert; and surrounding area priests assigned to regional parishes.

The first nuns arrived in the area in the summer of 1976 when three members of the Congregation of Notre Dame established a residence in the Hurley community.

A twinning ministry with St. Michael's in Glen Allen, VA, came into being when Fr. Dan Brady was reassigned to that church. St. Michael's parishioners remain active in helping St. Joseph's through the Appalachian Twinning Ministry.

One of the biggest changes in the church structure came in 2010 when St. Joseph's was officially merged with the parishes of St. Elizabeth's in Pocahontas; St. Mary's in Richlands; and St. Theresa's in Tazewell to form Holy Family Parish. Each of the four churches maintained their own worship sites, but in Diocesan and administrative functions became one church.

The physical church building at St. Joseph's has changed little since its dedication. Stained glass windows were added as was a front porch and ramp to make the church more accessible. Landscaping has continued to improve the outside appearance of the church and its grounds.