

Church of the Transfiguration 1959-1984
A History of the Church of the Transfiguration

Compiled and researched by Col. Terence J. Smith

KEY DATES

Jun 1, 1959	-Archbishop Hurley purchased 10 acres for our future parish
Sep 20, 1959	-First Parish Mass celebrated in Lealman Junior High School
Oct 7, 1959	-Women's Guild formed
Oct 1959	-Man's Club formed
Nov 18, 1959	-Archbishop Hurley designated the parish name, Church of the Transfiguration
Feb 16, 1960	-Transfiguration Parish canonically erected
Mar 31, 1960	-Holy Name Society formed
May 15, 1960	-First Holy Communion Class
Jun 1960	-Father Profeta transferred
Jul 4, 1960	-Father Mulligan assigned
Nov 18, 1960	-Groundbreaking for new church
Mar 19, 1961	-First Fund Raising drive
Apr 2, 1961	-Dedication of new church
Jun 16, 1961	-Groundbreaking for school
Sep 5, 1961	-Four grades opened in the church hall
Oct 2, 1961	-Dedication of Transfiguration Parish School
Oct 29, 1961	-Eucharistic Congress
Jun 18, 1962	-Father Bolger assigned Assistant Pastor
Feb 16, 1964	-Second Fund Raising Drive
Jun 27, 1965	-Groundbreaking for convent
Aug 23, 1965	-Presentation Sisters arrived
Feb. 1966	-Dedication of convent
Jun 1968	-Diocese of St. Petersburg erected
Apr 1970	-Father Bolger transferred St. Joseph, Zephyrhills
Sept 1972	-School Booster Club formed
Dec 1978	-Bishop Charles McLaughlin died
May 1979	-Father Larkin consecrated Bishop by Pope John Paul in Rome
Sep 2, 1979	-Father Mulligan transferred St. Brendan's
Sep 2, 1979	-Father Bolger returned to us as Pastor
Jul 1982	-Classrooms air-conditioned
Aug 1983	-Two portable classrooms added
May 1984	-Renovation and expansion of church begun
Dec 18, 1984	-Bishop Larkin dedicated renovated church

The growing population in the State of Florida during the late 1950's motivated Archbishop Joseph F. Hurley to seek land for the anticipated expansion of Catholic facilities in the Diocese of St. Augustine. One of the plots selected for the site of a new church was a ten acre area comprising a citrus grove at the corner of 43rd Street and 40th Avenue North. There was a garage apartment and a two story frame house on the property.

The initial designation of the new Church was "The Catholic Mission of North St. Petersburg." The first administrator of the new Mission Church was Father Salvatore Profeta. One of the first tasks for the men of the Mission was to tear down the two story frame house, and from the salvaged materials, to construct a small temporary chapel for daily Mass. The Sunday Masses were held in the auditorium of Lealman Junior High School on 35th Street North, where the first Sunday Mass was said on September 20, 1959. The rent charged by the Pinellas County School Board was \$44.00 each Sunday.

Shortly after his arrival at the Mission Church, Father Profeta began a census of Catholic homes within the parish boundaries (54th Avenue North; 22nd Avenue; 28th Street and 58th Street). The census was taken by Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Divine Child of Williamsville, New York. They were assisted by two young women of a lay organization called the Daughters of St. Francis whose headquarters were in San Antonio, Texas. The Sisters and the lay people were aided by members of the parish, who furnished transportation, and who had the four census takers in their homes for lunch. The census was important because its results would be needed to determine the seating capacity of the eventual new church and school.

Father Profeta organized the men and women of the Mission into a Women's Guild and a Men's Club; the first president of the Guild was Mrs. K. Sherlock; the first president of the Men's Club was Colonel Terence J. Smith. The initial organized meeting of the Women's Guild was held on October 7, 1959. A silver collection at the meeting netted \$13.85.

The first Church Sunday bulletin was published October 18, 1959. One of the items in the bulletin read "The Church Women's Guild is sponsoring a housewarming in honor of the new pastor today between 2 and 4 PM at the Rectory which is located at 4000 - 43rd Street N. To those of you who are not familiar with this location it is easily found by driving along 38th Avenue North to 43rd Street, riding past the Clearview School to 40th Avenue. There you will see a garage apartment located in an orange grove.

November 18, 1959, Archbishop Hurley informed Father Profeta that the Church was no longer a Mission and as a Church it was designated "The Church of the Transfiguration". The name of the new church was first used publicly when the members of the Men's Club were selling the citrus fruit they had picked from the trees on the church property. The men had erected a sign which read:

FOR SALE - CITRUS FRUIT PICKED FROM TREES
LOCATED ON CONSECRATED GROUND CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

Christmas of 1959 gave the members of the Women's Guild an opportunity to decorate the altar which was located on the stage of the High School auditorium. They purchased Christmas trees, collected pine cones, sprayed them with gold and wired them to the tree branches. A parishioner who grew poinsettias donated a great number of the plants in cans. The green and gold of the trees and the red leaves of the poinsettias changed the drabness of the stage into a beautiful Christmas setting.

About the middle of January 1960 all of the citrus fruit in the Church grove had been picked and sold. In anticipation of the need for a cleared area for the site of the new church, the members of the Men's Club cut, chopped and dug out the standing trees. To eliminate the expense of hauling away the cut branches, roots and trunks, the Men's Club obtained permission from the Lealman Fire Department to "control burn" the debris.

The parish was canonically erected on February 16, 1960. At that time there were about 670 families in the parish.

The Church bulletin for Sunday, Feb. 28, 1960 carried this announcement. "Shrove Tuesday", March 1st, there will be a spaghetti supper from 6 to 8 PM at Luigi's Restaurant 4105 Park St. N., This is for the benefit of our Foundation Fund. ALL YOU CAN EAT FOR \$1.00. Everybody plan to eat at Luigi's on Tuesday evening. Tickets on sale at entrance to auditorium".

Although handicapped by the lack of a permanent meeting place, the members of the Women's Guild worked diligently to raise funds for the support of the Church. They sold religious articles at the Sunday Masses, held card parties at the Catholic Daughters Hall, conducted their meetings at the homes of members and made and maintained the altar linens. They also taught C.C.D. classes after the 9 o'clock Mass on Sundays.

On March 31, 1960 the Men's Club of the parish was discontinued and the Holy Name Society was formed. There was no change in the slate of officers.

The first annual Communion Breakfast of the Holy Name Society was held Sunday, Apr. 21, 1960 in the cafeteria of Lealman Junior High School. It was a catered breakfast. The principal of the school was kind enough to permit us to use the facilities of the school cafeteria.

At the Women's Guild meeting May 4, 1960 the members elected the following officers for the year 1960-61. President, Mrs. Georgia Driscoll, Vice President, Mrs. Regina Payne, Recording Secretary, Mrs. Mary Ridge, Corresponding Secretary Mrs. Dawn Zils, Treasurer Mrs. Emily Rizza.

Sunday, May 15, 1960 was a memorable day for the five boys and four girls of the parish who made their First Holy Communion at the 9 o'clock Mass.

A Mother and Daughter Communion breakfast sponsored by the members of the Women's Guild was held May 22, 1960 in the Lealman School Cafeteria.

The following item appeared in the parish bulletin Sunday, June 5, 1960: THIS AFTERNOON THERE WILL BE a farewell lawn reception at the rectory of Father Profeta from 2:30 -4:00 PM. Father Profeta will assume his new duties at Holy Cross Parish in Palmetto on Thursday, June 9th. He would like to take this opportunity to say goodbye to all the parishioners and to thank them for their splendid spirit of cooperation.

Father Edward Mulligan arrived in the parish on July 4, 1960 and said his first Mass in the parish on the same day. Later in the day he joined a group of his new parishioners at a picnic in the garden of the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Lange. Father Mulligan was born in Arva, County Cavan, Ireland. He was ordained in June, 1956 and was promptly assigned to the Diocese of Miami where he taught high school among his other duties. Transfiguration Parish was his first assignment as pastor.

A few weeks after his arrival, Father Mulligan conferred with Architect Thomas Madden of Miami who had been commissioned by Archbishop Hurley to prepare the plans for a new Church. The plans and specifications were drawn up and then released for bids. Groundbreaking for the new church took place November 18, 1960. The new church was dedicated by Archbishop Hurley on Easter Sunday, April 2, 1961.

April 7, 1961 was a red letter day for the new parish. Father Mulligan announced that the Fund Raising Campaign which started March 19th had been oversubscribed. The goal of the drive was \$150,000, pledges totaled \$151,852. Thomas O'Connell was the professional chairman of the drive. The parish members of the campaign were: Dr. Richard Carroll, Joseph D'Andrea, John DiVito, James McGann, D. Perry Moran, Joseph O'Rourke, Frank Rizza and Col. Terence J. Smith.

On June 16, 1961 ground was broken for an eight classroom parish school. The ground breaking ceremony was performed by the Right Reverend Monsignor John P. McNulty, V.G.

The St. Petersburg Times on August 29, 1961 announced that Archbishop Hurley had begun preparations for a Eucharistic Congress to be held October 29, 1961 on the grounds of Bishop Barry High School in St. Petersburg. This announcement was of particular interest and pride to the parishioners of Transfiguration Church because our pastor, Father Mulligan, had been appointed Executive Secretary of the Congress. On Friday, Nov, 3 The Florida Catholic reported that 29,000 of the Faithful had attended the Congress and that 11,000 of those present had received Holy Communion.

The Parish School opened on Tuesday, Sept. 5, 1961. Classes were set up in the social hall because the new school was not completed. (School started with four grades and added one grade each year until there were eight.)

Monsignor John J. Mullins dedicated the new school Monday, Oct. 2, 1961. The tuition fees were \$7.00 a month per pupil or \$9.00 a month per family regardless of the number of children in the family attending school.

The following is quoted from the Church bulletin of Nov. 5, 1961. "The Women's Guild assisted by members of the Holy Name Society will present a Holiday Festival next Saturday and Sunday, November 10 and 11 from 10 AM till 10 PM. A highlight of the Festival will be the arrival of Santa Claus (D. Perry Moran) by helicopter which will land on the parking lot at 10 AM on Saturday. The helicopter will be made available through the courtesy of Bill Trump".

In preparation for the Installation of Officers on April 3, 1962, the Women's Guild members organized a kitchen band known as "The Guildettes". The piano in the social hall was augmented by various household utensils and kazoos. Guildette members were: Lucille Burke, Laura Conley, Georgia Driscoll Jayne Duffy, Nancy Dusseault, Roselle Fibich, Dorothy Hepburn, Jeanette Hodge, Frances Jones, Julia Kempster, Martie Lange, Doris MacDonald, Edith Parkerton, Irene Pierson, Emily Rizza, Helen Smith, Josephine Snyder and Mary Syriac.

For this special occasion Guildette Dorothy Hepburn composed the lyrics of a song dedicated to Father Mulligan and sung to the tune of "Harrigan". It went like this:

M-U-DOUBLE L-I-G-A-N SPELLS MULLIGAN WE ARE PROUD THAT WE ARE IN TRANSMUTATION
WE SING THIS SONG TO GIVE HIM AN OVATION M-U-DOUBLE L-I-G-A-N- YOU SEE
HE'S OUR PASTOR AND FRIEND
WE'LL STICK WITH HIM TO THE END OH! FATHER MULLIGAN, THAT'S WE.

June 18, 1962 Father John Bolger was assigned as the Assistant Pastor in our parish. Father Bolger came to us from the Diocese of Salford in England where he had been stationed for several years. He was born in Lucan, Ireland. All Hallows College was his alma mater. Father was a most welcome addition to our parish.

A second fund-raising campaign was launched Sunday, Feb. 16, 1964 to raise \$100,000 to reduce the parish debt and to provide for future parish needs. The campaign was a one day effort and the total amount pledged exceeded the goal.

After four years of concentrated effort Father Mulligan obtained a commitment from the Mother General of the Sisters of the Presentation from Cork, Ireland, to provide a small group of Sisters to augment the lay teachers at the parish school. Based on that commitment, our pastor commissioned Architect Thomas Madden of Miami to proceed with plans for the construction of a six cell convent to house the Sisters who would arrive in time for the Fall school term. The ground breaking for the Convent was held on Sunday, June 27, 1965. Three Sisters of the Presentation order arrived at Tampa Airport on August 23, 1965. They were: Mother Mary Carmel, Sister Mary Alphonsus, and Sister Mary Concepta. Before coming to St. Petersburg Sister Mary Alphonsus who became the school principal and Sister Mary Concepta had served for three years at Sacred Heart School, Warner Robins, Georgia. Mother Mary Carmel, superior of the community, was a staff member of a large school in Cork prior to her arrival in St. Petersburg.

The new convent was dedicated in Feb. 1966 with an open house for the entire parish.

In June 1968 the Diocese of St. Petersburg was erected and Bishop Charles McLaughlin was consecrated in Cathedral of St. Jude.

In April 1970 Father Bolger was assigned to a parish of his own, St. Joseph's in Zephyrhills. The parish wished him well with a farewell party in the social hall.

In our brief parish history we have been fortunate to have many dedicated priests as our spiritual directors and leaders. Father Profeta, Father Mulligan and Father Bolger as pastor and/or administrator; Fathers Harry Mullin, Joseph Graham, James Waters, Laurent Bourke, Peter Zemanick, Ronald Demski, Stanley Chwalinski and Arthur Villemaire as assistant pastors.

Our school has had six principals in its short span starting with Mrs. Irene Hynes, the first principal, then Sister Alphonsus, Sister Carmel, Sister Vincent, Sister Una and Sister Joan.

Our parish has grown from the initial 670 families to over 1500 families. The school grew from the initial 96 students to the present 238 enrollment.

In 1972 the Booster Club was formed in the School and thus began a series of fund-raising events for the school to augment the continuing efforts of the Women's Guild, Holy Name Society and the Bingo committee to raise funds for the progressive needs of the school and church. They are all to be commended for a job well done. In 1981, the Booster Club was renamed the Moms & Dads Club.

On the spiritual side, the parish now has a Bible Study Group, a Respect Life Committee, the Centurions, all of which cooperate for the common good of the parishioners.

In December 1978 Bishop Charles McLaughlin died suddenly and in May 1979 Father Thomas Larkin was consecrated by Pope John Paul in Rome as our second Bishop.

In September 1979 Father Mulligan was assigned to St. Brendan's Church in Clearwater after 19 years in this parish. On September 16, 1979 he was given a farewell party in the social hall which was also a "Welcome Home: party for Father John Bolger who was returned to us as Pastor.

Many progressive changes have been made in the past few years. In 1982 the classrooms were air-conditioned (a welcome change for the students and faculty); in the summer of 1983 two portable classrooms were installed to provide sorely needed extra space for the school; and in 1984 a Kindergarten was opened for the first time in Transfiguration School.

In May 1984 renovation of the Church and Hall was commenced — the nave was extended to increase the seating capacity and new sacristies and meeting rooms as well as reconciliation rooms were added. The renovated church was dedicated by Bishop Larkin on December 18, 1984. At Christmastime, our "new" church was so beautiful and a great tribute to those who sacrificed much for a church that would rival any in simple eloquence and focus on faith.