

Welcome fellow Holy Spirit Parishioners

Let me start by asking everyone to offer their thanks to Father Orr and Sister Nancy for their hard work in guiding our churches on this journey to our new parish.

Let's also ask our Unification team and church councils to accept our gratitude for their tireless efforts to work thru the details of this consolidation.

At the age of 2, my great grandfather Michael Dennehy immigrated from County Cork, Ireland. It was 1848, the worst of the potato famine was devastating the Irish population and Michael's parents knew his best hope was in a new community. That community turned out to be the predecessor of our faith community today.

Michael arrived in Clinton County and family lore has it that he was there in 1852 on Bald Eagle St when the first Catholic Church opened on lot 128 of Jerry Church's plot of the city of Lock Haven. So just like most of you, my family's roots start in our Faith Community.

Our journey to this evening began 160 years ago in 1852, just 4 blocks from here, where Michael Dennehy, our faith community and Lock Haven community began to grow together. Mass at the then St Mary's church was said by Rev John C Gilligan and the founding Bishop was John Newman, who has since become Saint John Nepomucene Neuman - no pressure Bishop Mark, but keep in mind the last Bishop that presided over the founding of a catholic Parish here in Lock Haven became a Saint.

In 1857, St Mary's Parish was divided as the Irish Catholics obtained land on 3rd and Water streets from Christopher and John Fallon and Immaculate Conception Church was built. Simultaneously the German Catholics, probably with some of Father Mohr's ancestors, established St Agnes Parish, and in 1872 built their first church a few hundred feet from here, near the corner of Walnut and Liberty St.

So perhaps our unification was destined from the time we first separated in 1857.

By 1894, St Agnes began to see a growing Italian influence and in fact at the St Agnes Golden Jubilee in 1922, the sermon was preached in Italian. And local historians say Dan's great grandparents Phillip & Josephine Vilello and their children were in attendance.

Meanwhile in 1905, the Irish built a new Brownstone church for the Immaculate Conception parishioners, and even after 2 major floods it still stands majestically on Water Street today. Coincidentally, the first Jay St bridge was built the same year and has had to be replaced twice since then. That's probably a worthwhile comment on the construction skills of government versus those of God.

Most assuredly, my Grandmother Loretta Dennehy Hanna was in attendance when Immaculate Conception was dedicated in 1905. she and many others like her contributed to the success of our 2 parishes ever since. In fact, in my experience, it was women like Loretta Dennehy, Gloria Vilello, and Celestine Hanna who provided the greatest example of what Jesus calls on us to do as Catholics. These women not only lived our catholic faith; they converted in-laws, friends and in Loretta's case her husband to the catholic faith; and perhaps more importantly they kept fallen children from ever wandering to far from our faith. I remember their tireless efforts to recruit new priests from our ranks, and while their efforts seldom met with success, I know that my Grandmother is very proud that my father serves as both a Lector and Eucharistic Minister.

You know there is also historic precedent for our unification . Both St Agnes and Immaculate Conception have a long history of catholic education. These church's

each established a catholic school in the late 1800s. St Agnes was originally under the direction of the nuns of the Order of Saint Francis and Immaculate Conception started with the Sisters of Mercy followed by the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Dominicans. St Agnes's school continued until 1967 and Immaculate Conception built the current school building in 1962. So in essence our parishes successfully unified our catholic schools almost 5 decades ago, our children setting a strong example for the blending of our parish communities.

As we reflect on that history, we need to recognize that our parishes not only guided their members in their faith journey, but also from the very beginning, played a key leadership role in our local community. The Irish originally came to this area to build our canals and the Italians came to build our railroads. So historically our parishes not only built our spiritual infrastructure but our transportation infrastructure as well. More recently, our parishes' leadership in consolidating schools was instructive to the larger Keystone Community as it followed our example in dealing with its school challenges. Once again demonstrating our Parish's role in leading in our larger community.

But when it comes to a community's foundation, transportation and schools are important, but never as important as how our parishes have led our community in a spiritual way. Providing the basics of food, clothing, shelter and most importantly spiritual guidance to those who need it most.

Now, with those historical accomplishments to guide us, where shall we go from here.

With respect to our school, we are poised for dramatic success. Lock Haven Catholic is currently known for its outstanding educational accomplishments. I see a state of the art school continuing to provide not just a quality education but also the religious foundation that has made its graduates the pillars of our church and community. But that will only happen if we dedicate ourselves to our school. Every parishioner must find his or her role in contributing; be it time, talent or financial resources.

As for our Holy Spirit Parish, I see a growing faith community and every potential for not only our Parish but also our local community to prosper in the future. But once again that can only happen if we, as a faith community unite and accept responsibility for moving forward both as a parish and as a community. We must combine our resources so we can provide the leadership that God has made our responsibility; demonstrating our catholic faith in building a compassionate community that builds for the future for everyone, but always remembers our paramount catholic duty to take care of the neediest amongst us.

We will only know what great promise our future may bring, if we do as our ancestors have done and first and foremost follow and cherish our faith, remembering that our catholic faith is much more important than the buildings that we practice it in.

Again, I want to give special thanks to Sister Nancy, Father Orr, and the Unification team.