



ERIC CONOVER/Staff Photographer The Rev. John Lambert, pastor at St. John Bosco Roman Catholic Church, Conyngham, stands next to the recently restored altar in the church on Thursday. The church is celebrating 50 years by restoring some of the church's original elements.

St. John Bosco marks 50 years

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St. John Bosco Roman Catholic Church in Conyngham will celebrate its 50th anniversary Sunday morning with a concelebrated liturgy and dedication of its restored altar with the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, bishop of the Scranton Diocese and the church's eighth pastor, presiding.

Built and dedicated in 1963, the church underwent numerous changes over the years and the most recent renovations to the worship space pay homage to its early years and founders, the Rev. John Lambert, pastor, said.

In addition to the original marble altar being restored and returned to the sanctuary, the original, carved crucifix was restored and suspended above the altar. The original, marble baptismal font was reconfigured as a fountain of blessed water and repositioned at the foot of the main aisle. The sculpture of the Risen Christ, which was in the sanctuary, now hangs above the font.

"When you enter our worship space, you can't miss the baptismal font, the symbol of initiation into our Catholic faith," Father Lambert said. "As you progress through the nave, you can't miss the crucifix, the powerful symbol of our journey with Jesus Christ through his passion and death. As you turn to leave, you can't miss the sculpture of our Risen Lord, an eloquent representation of our resurrection of Christ.

"We live our lives between the crucifixion and the resurrection," he said, adding that cycle of life in faith begins and ends with these symbols.

The church began with Catholic families petitioning the diocese to begin a church in the growing Conyngham Valley in the summer of 1959. Their request didn't go unnoticed by then Bishop Jerome D. Hannan, who authorized a census of families living in the valley.

The census found 100 families who drove to various churches in the Hazleton area - and the need for a church was established.

Construction began in early 1963 and the church was dedicated on Dec. 15 the same year. Various priests from the area celebrated Mass in the new church, until the Rev. Joseph T. Shaughnessy was assigned on March 8, 1964.

The first child baptized using the original font was Michael Anthony Maylath in March 1964 and the crucifix from the original church and now over the altar was in honor of Barbara and John Maylath, among the original members, Father Lambert said.

The first celebration of First Eucharist happened on June 28, 1964, and the first Confirmation was Nov. 9, 1966. Carol Hyde and Michael Drewniak were the first couple wed on July 4, 1964.

Monsignor George T. Casey, the fourth pastor known as the people's priest, built the parish center in 1973, and the Rev. John K. Manno, the seventh pastor who served from 1984 to 1998, launched a \$1.1 million capital campaign and oversaw the construction of current church, which was dedicated on Dec. 6, 1992.

Then-Monsignor Bambera served the parish from 1998 to 2001.

"The parish's impact on my ministry as a priest and now as a bishop was significant," Bishop Bambera said. "I knew the parish as a community that was deeply committed to preaching and teaching the Gospel message, especially to its large population of children and young adults - a community that celebrated vibrant liturgies - and a community that understood the need to live out its beliefs in service, especially of the poor - something which is at the heart of Pope Francis' vision for the Church today.

"I hope and pray that St. John Bosco Parish will continue to be a sign of hope and a place of welcome for all for many more years to come!" the bishop said.

The dedication and celebration liturgy will begin at 11:30 a.m. with refreshments afterward outside.

Father Lambert invites people to learn more about the parish through the website at stjohnboscochurch.org.