

**St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Monongahela**  
**1860**  
**Mrs. Florence Yohe, Historian (updated 2012 by JRG)**

Standing at 104 West Maine Street in the Monongahela business district, St. Paul's is the oldest Washington County church in the mid-Mon Valley. First known as Parkinson's Ferry because of the river crossing service provided by that family and later called Williamsport, Monongahela is an old river town where boat building, coal mining and steel fabrication dominated a diverse industrial economy. Beginning in the 1960's, the area has been hit hard by mine and steel plant closings. Over the years, people of many different ethnic backgrounds came to the region and have changed St. Paul's once-predominant "Johnny Bull" membership.

What made a new congregation possible here was the determination of Eliza Jane Stuart who, during 1860, began a Sunday school in her home across the alley from the present church building. Later, the Stuarts gave the land for the church and their house as a rectory. This Sunday school was so successful that parents and the other individuals began asking for Prayer Book worship. The Sunday school class outgrew the house and had to be moved to the hall of the local public school.

In late December 1860, Fr. Richard H. Lee of Trinity Church, Washington and retired professor at Washington College, came to the town to preach to a large ecumenical congregation in the Presbyterian Church. It was almost a year later that Dr. Lee returned and began occasional visits that continued through 1862. During 1862, Fr. Edward M. Van Duesen of St. Peter's, Pittsburgh also visited at Monongahela.

In July 1862, the Western Convocation of the Diocese of Pennsylvania met in Monongahela, using the local highschool auditorium. At this meeting, Fr. William P. TenBroeck was appointed missionary in the Valley. On August 9, 1863, Bishop William Stevens, coadjutor

of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, made his first visit and confirmed four. Bishop Alonzo Potter came in October of that year and confirmed eight. In November 1863, Bishop Potter presided at the Second Western Convocation in Monongahela. During that time, he organized the first vestry. Those elected included William Manown, R. M. Gee, Francis Nelson, James Sheplar, John Markell, R. L. Robinson and E. W. Crittenden. At that time, \$220 was pledged toward construction of a sanctuary. Families active in establishing the church included the Stuarts, Sheplars, Robinsons, Markells, Parkinsons, Wests, Keys, Kerns, Collins and Hills.

Father Henry Mackay, who had been serving Georgetown in the Ohio Valley, agreed to come to Monongahela and begin his duties immediately. During the spring of 1866, not long after his consecration as the new bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, John B. Kerfoot made his first visit to the area. He brought great encouragement to the new and uncertain congregation. He returned September 3, 1866 to lay the cornerstone of the present church. The stone, itself, was given by Godfrey Kern, who owned a nearby quarry. The stone was cut, dressed and laid by members of the parish. Father Mackay resigned his charge in the fall of 1869 to start a new congregation at Brady's Bend. Father John Linseka succeeded him in March 1870.

The new sanctuary was completed during 1870. Gothic in design, with eighteen-inch thick, gray native stone, the nave was 60 by 36 feet and the chancel 21 by 14 feet. The congregation used the building for worship before the interior walnut wainscoting and other woodwork were completed. The altar was later dedicated in memory of Bishop Kerfoot. When Fr. Linseka was deposed from the priesthood in October 1871, worship was suspended until March 1872. At that time, Fr. John P. Norman, MD was placed in charge. During May 1872, Bishop Kerfoot visited the parish and confirmed six. The tower with its spire and cross was completed in 1873. While serving the congregation, Dr. Norman also practiced medicine, caring for many poorer community members at no cost. He continued as vicar until July 1875, when he

took charge of St. Luke's, Bloomfield until 1880.

What followed was a period of rapid clergy turnover at St. Paul, which saw Frs. Percival Beckett, Emilius W. Smith and Thomas White come and go, serving only one or two years. Finally, in April 1880 Fr. Norman returned to St. Paul's and steady growth began. He obtained an organ and developed a strong choir. The Christmas and Easter cantatas became annual civic events. During his long, stable pastorate, many Pittsburghers made excursions up river by packet boat on Sundays to have picnics at St. Paul's and attend Evening Prayer. On June 9, 1882 St. Paul's, now debt-free, was consecrated by Bishop Whitehead, who confirmed nine. Dr. Norman organized and sponsored cricket matches and soccer games. In addition to serving on the school board, he was active in Masons and the Grand Army of the Republic, and still found time to write book reviews that were published in Pittsburgh. He established an excellent Sunday school that numbered more than 100. Something of a character, the good doctor loved chewing tobacco and drank his coffee scalding hot. One year, even with a broken leg he celebrated the Eucharist and baptized infants. No other priest served St. Paul's so effectively for so long. Along the Monongahela River he gathered and ministered to congregations from Homestead to McKeesport to Brownsville. He retired at 82 in 1918, dying in 1923.

The Rev. Lewis H. Huber arrived as pastor in 1918. During his term, he organized the Boys' Brigade, St. Agnes Missionary Guild and St. Paul's Altar Guild. The first members of the Altar Guild were Mmes. Huber, W. I. Jones, Charles Frye, James Crall, Frank Myers, William Pursglove, T. J. Eckbreth, S. M. Downer, Morton Collins, Clyde Albright and James Ternent. Father Huber also introduced the duplex envelope system for regular giving to missions, as well as parish support. Following Fr. Huber's resignation in 1920, Fr. Henry McClellan then served the parish for three years.

In 1924, Fr. William Bayle came to St. Paul's. The parish house was built on the hill

behind and adjoining the church. A severe coal strike hit the community and local relief efforts were coordinated there. The National church surveyed the local conditions, bringing added recognition to the congregation's community outreach. During a visit by the Brothers of St. Barnabas in 1924, the outdoor manger scene was first erected. The Brothers came every year at the start of Advent to preach and erect the manger for many years. It is believed to be the oldest manger scene in continuous use in the Mon Valley. Father Bayle, an effective if somewhat crusty character, when challenged by the spouse of a vestry member with the question "Who was it who founded the Episcopal Church?" replied, "Why, Madame, Jesus Christ himself." He left St. Paul's in 1927 to become Archdeacon.

During the Depression and World War II years, St. Paul's experienced a high rate of clergy turnover, with eight priests coming and going. Arriving in 1949, Fr. Ward Smith was the first of a crop of newly ordained young men who served their first tours of duty in Monongahela. From 1955-57, Fr. Richard W. Davies served as vicar. Then, after 94 years as a mission, the final debt on the rectory was paid, and St. Paul's became an independent parish. During Fr. Davies' pastorate, St. Paul's celebrated its 100th anniversary with publication of an extensive history entitled, "The Joy of Saints." In 1957, another group of young clergy with short tenures followed him. Father Ralph Brooks is remembered because of his adventures as a volunteer fire fighter.

During the six-year pastorate of Fr. Douglas Kierstead in the mid-1970's, the church was renovated and the second floor of the parish hall was divided into seven Sunday school rooms and a nursery. Sanctuary renovations included removing the wainscoting and painting the church white, in addition to moving the altar so that the priest could face the congregation. New pews, lighting and carpeting were installed. The original altar, pulpit, lectern, Bishop's chair, tabernacle and organ were retained and are still in use. Bishop Robert Appleyard rededicated the renovated

sanctuary on Sunday, March 2, 1975. Father Kierstead's faithful pastorate of 1970-76 was the longest since the retirement of Dr. Norman in 1917. The two- to four-year tenures of so many of St. Paul's priests hindered parish growth. Yet the years 1977-79 were again marked by clergy turnover. Father William Wilbert became so ill he had to resign, then died not long afterward. His wife Betty was a most effective parish secretary.

The Adeste Fedelis Bible Class began a parish tradition in 1924. An elegant English Tea, complete with linens, brass appointments, flowers, fancy cake stands and teapots with cozies, serves English fancy cookies, tarts, breads, fruitcake and finger sandwiches. Offered on the first Saturday of November, this event is well attended. The tradition has expanded to include a ham dinner.

St. Paul's has been noted for its community dinners. Strawberry festivals were very popular in the early years. Fresh roasted peanuts and donuts were made for years, with the small girls and boys of the parish who delivered them being paid in donut holes. In recent years, the men of the parish cook breakfast for everyone the fourth Sunday of each month. Lenten Friday fish fries, a Bazaar and other projects are held throughout the year.

In 1980, the Diocese yoked St. Paul's and St. John's, Donora so that a full-time priest might come to the Valley. Father Robert Brickart encouraged spiritual renewal and developed a youth ministry during his four years as pastor. He resigned in 1984. Two years of uncertainty followed, and then in 1986 another newly ordained man came to serve both parishes. Father James Hibby, who initiated a Kids Club ministry with his wife and parishioners, stayed until 1990.

In 1990, the two parishes asked the Diocese to dissolve their partnership. The senior warden, then a student at Trinity seminary in Ambridge, was made lay reader-in-charge. This arrangement did not work well. The seminary asked the warden to withdraw and the Diocese

removed him from the parish. Bishop Appleyard appointed Fr. John Leggett, retired rector of Trinity, Washington, as interim priest in 1993. Like some of his interim predecessors, Fr. John, working three days a week, visited all the parishioners at home during his one-year tenure. In 1992, St. Paul's had purchased and demolished the house next door to the church in order to install new steps and a handicapped ramp to enter the church. A large illuminated sign was also installed in that space. Fr. John oversaw the completion of the handicapped ramp, as well as the re-grading and landscaping of the church side yard, and the installation of an attic-type fan for summer cooling. As Diocesan historian, he began an update of St. Paul's history.

The year 1994 saw the arrival of Fr. Walter Syzmanski as interim pastor. Under his leadership, a group of adult leaders gathered the youth and began Sunday evening Vespers and monthly vespers visits to St. Vincent's Archabbey in Latrobe. He also instituted the first licensed Lay Eucharistic Ministers that year: Joseph Acton, Raymond Johnson and Florence Yohe. They began taking Sunday communion and making visitations once a month to approximately 15 parishioners who were either housebound or in personal care homes. Fr. Syzmanski's two-day-a-week duties ended in 1995. During the following two years, supply clergy covered the parish.

A new era in parish life began in late 1997 when the Diocese sent Fr. William "Jay" Geisler to St. Paul's. A former Roman Catholic priest, he and his wife are long-time drug and alcohol counselors. He heads a Christian 12-Step Recovery program at the Greenbriar Treatment Center in Washington. He served the parish three days a week.

When Jay Geisler was called to other duties in the diocese in 1999, David Kinsey served as interim. He was followed by the Rev. John Fierro in 2000. In 2008, many in the diocese voted to leave the Episcopal Church. Much of the congregation followed Father Fierro into the Anglican Church of North America and they remained in possession of the building. However, a group remained committed to the Episcopal Church. Court opinions rendered in October 2009,

January 2010 and confirmed on appeal in February 2011 confirmed that the Episcopal Church owned the St. Paul's Building. In 2012 Episcopalians asked the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh to provide a priest. The diocese sent The Rev. Walter Szymanski back to the parish with additional help from the Rev. Theresa Hunt. The Episcopal congregation is currently meeting in homes awaiting negotiations with the Anglican group occupying the Episcopal Church building.

There have been only two people from St. Paul's to enter into the priesthood. James M. Frye, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Frye served Transfiguration Mission in Clairton, first as lay reader from 1948 to 1952, then as priest from his 1952 ordination until his death in 1954. The Rev. Rebecca Lepley, daughter of the late Clinton Baird and June Baird, was ordained in 1985 and serves at St. Mark's in Marine City, Michigan.

Special mention must be made about two men of the parish who have given of their talents and time over the years: the late George Roul, Vestryman Emeritus, and Joseph Harrison who served both on vestry and as parish treasurer for many years. St. Paul's has one fourth-generation family, the Yohes. Horace Yohe was the parish's first Lay Reader, and his mother, Nancy Yohe, the first organist from 1906 to the early 1940's. Both third and fourth generations are still active.

## **CLERGY**

### **St. Paul's, Monongahela**

|                       |           |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Richard H. Lee        | 1860-1862 |
| William P. Ten Broeck | 1862      |
| Henry Mackay          | 1863-1869 |
| John B. Linseka       | 1870-1871 |
| John P. Norman        | 1872-1875 |
| Perceval Beckett      | 1875-1876 |
| Emelius W. Smith      | 1876-1877 |
| Thomas White          | 1877-1879 |
| John P. Norman        | 1880-1917 |
| Lewis H. Huber        | 1918-1920 |
| Henry L. McClellan    | 1920-1923 |
| William F. Bayle      | 1924-1927 |

|                                 |                   |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Arthur L. Gaylord               | 1928-1930         |
| Adolphus W. Cheatham            | 1930-             |
| William O. Johnson              | 1931              |
| Chester L. Hults                | 1932-1934         |
| A. Lester M. Worthey            | 1934-1936         |
| William Heilman                 | 1937-1938         |
| Ivan H. Ball                    | 1939-1944         |
| Joseph N. Wittkofski            | 1944-1946         |
| Supply                          | 1947-1948         |
| Ward R. Smith                   | 1949-1953         |
| Max E. Smith                    | 1953-1955         |
| Richard W. Davies               | 1955-1957         |
| Ralph P. Brooks, Jr.            | 1957-1959         |
| Arthur W. Archer                | 1960-1963         |
| Benjamin T. Winsor              | 1964-1966         |
| Eugene J. Loughman              | 1967-1968         |
| Robert A. Horner                | 1969-1970         |
| Douglas M. Kierstead            | 1970-1976         |
| Donald M. Veale                 | 1977              |
| William C. Wilbert              | 1978-1979         |
| Robert M. Bruckart              | 1980-1984 (yoked) |
| Gilbert M. Watt (Interim)       | 1904              |
| Ronald W. Younkin               | 1985-1986         |
| James L. Hibby, Jr.             | 1986-1990         |
| David Boyd (seminarian)         | 1990-1993         |
| John M. Leggett, Interim        | 1993              |
| Walter L. Szymanski (Interim)   | 1994-1995         |
| Supply                          | 1996-1997         |
| William J. Geisler              | 1997-1998         |
| David Kinsey (Interim)          | 1999-2000         |
| John Fierro                     | 2000-2012         |
| Walt Szymanski and Theresa Hunt | 2012-             |