

## **Building a foundation of faith**

### **Sacred Heart Church celebrates 125 years**

#### ***Construction of new church to begin soon***

by KATIE MOORE

staff writer

SALISBURY — It was the perfect combination of old and new — a celebration marking the historical 125th anniversary of Sacred Heart Church in Salisbury, followed by the groundbreaking ceremony at the construction site of the new church.

On June 29, the feast of the solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, Bishop Peter J. Jugis; along with Father John Putnam, pastor of Sacred Heart Church; priests of the diocese; and parishioners celebrated the conclusion of the 125th anniversary of Sacred Heart Church with a Mass in the Omwake-Dearborn Chapel of Catawba College.

Later that day, in a fitting tribute to the two saints known as the founders of the Catholic Church, a commencement ceremony took place to mark the laying of a literal foundation — the one for the building of the new Sacred Heart Church and school.

“Celebrating 125 years here in Salisbury is a true milestone for our parish because it reminds us that in this world that is forever changing, the eternal truths of Christ and his church remain steadfast,” said Father Putnam.

The first Sacred Heart Church was built in 1882, long before the Diocese of Charlotte was established in 1972, and dedicated by Bishop Henry Northrup of Charleston, S.C.

A few Catholic families had resided in the area since the 1830s, and it was through their efforts that the establishment of the church was brought to fruition.

“We celebrate the sacrifices that were made by those first Catholics back in the 19th century,” said Father Putnam, reflecting on the rich history of the parish.

The legacy of those founding families has been carried on over the years and many of their ancestors are parishioners to this day.

“We celebrate all of the wonderful accomplishments and contributions that our parishioners have made both in this parish and in this community over the years,” said Father Putnam.

In 1910, the Sisters of Mercy from Belmont opened a private convent and school near Sacred Heart Church. It became a parish institution in the early 1940s.

Today approximately 220 students are enrolled in Sacred Heart School that educates students from kindergarten to eighth grade.

“It shows the great progress that has been made through the church,” said Mercy Sister Clara Virginia Kelly, who grew attending both the parish and Sacred Heart School.

“The Sisters of Mercy set me on the right track,” she said.

Sister Kelly is one of seven men and women from the parish to have answered the call to the priesthood or religious life.

“We have so much to be thankful for because of the people of the church,” she said.

“We’re a big family,” said Gail Mintz, lifelong parishioner and business manager at Sacred Heart School.

“I’ve received every single one of my sacraments in this church,” she said. “It has been an extremely important part of my life.”

Fellow lifelong parishioner Michele Moore Vaeth agreed, “I have loved this little church,” she said. “It will be hard to leave this spot.”

“But with change, good things come,” she added.

The new church and school will be built on 104 acres of land.

“I think it is an absolutely wonderful opportunity for the church,” said Mintz who said she is especially looking forward to having the extra space for the students to play.

“For the school we see grass,” she said. “All we have now is concrete.”

“It’s beautiful rolling pasture land,” said Vaeth. “You feel like you are out there in God’s country because it is so peaceful and beautiful.”

The land was acquired through a trade in 2007. A cemetery to include 660 plots has already been established and was blessed by Bishop Jugis on September 1, 2007.

The building project is projected to be completed in 12-13 months, according to Mike Vaeth, chairman of the building committee.

The project is estimated to cost \$8.9 million excluding the land, which is already paid for. The new church will be made of brick from a Salisbury-based company owned and operated by long-time parishioners of Sacred Heart Church.

“The church is overcrowded,” said Vaeth.

With the new property, there will be a “lot of room for the parishioners to move around,” he added.

The new church will seat approximately 800 people — four times as many as the old church.

“This is my way to evangelize,” said Vaeth. “To help build the building that will be the vehicle to evangelize people and bring them in.”

“The parish exists to further Jesus’ mission of salvation,” said Bishop Jugis.

“Jesus came for the salvation of all humanity,” he said. “Sacred Heart Parish plays an important role in that universal mission.”

“The parish is not responsible for the whole world, but it is responsible for Salisbury and Rowan County — to bring Christ’s salvation and love to the people here,” said Bishop Jugis.

“You are meant to be a leaven for society, providing the leaven of Christ’s presence to this community,” he told parishioners.

In terms of what will be next for Sacred Heart Church, Father Putnam said, “We celebrate our hopes for a bright future dedicated to proclaiming the Gospel message and the truths of Christ and his church for many years to come.”

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