

## St. Paul the Apostle Church

The Catholic community of St. Paul the Apostle Church was founded in July 1974, when then-Bishop Michael J. Begley of Charlotte invited the Paulist Fathers to create the fifth parish in the Guilford County seat.

The first pastor, Paulist Father Robert T. Scott, celebrated St. Paul the Apostle Church's first Mass at Cross of Christ Lutheran Church. While a long-term, three-phase building plan was drawn up in those early days, the congregation first gathered at a number of Protestant churches and a funeral home for liturgies and parish celebrations.

As the number of families continued to grow from its original 90 to more than 350, the parish set its sights on constructing a church. Ground was broken in August 1975 for a multipurpose facility, and the parish gathered for its first Mass in the new 450-seat church in April 1976.

In addition to the central worship space, the new building also provided a chapel, kitchen and rooms for a nursery, classrooms, religious education offices and meeting rooms.

Bishop Begley served as celebrant at the dedication Mass in May 1976. Concelebrating was Paulist Father Thomas F. Stransky, then president of the Paulist Fathers, who delivered the homily, and Father Scott.

While the Paulists ministered to the ever-growing parish of St. Paul the Apostle Church, they also served in campus ministry to Catholic students attending Guilford College, Greensboro College and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. This ministry developed into the Catholic Student Fellowship.

Parish growth continued through the 1980s, both in the number of ministerial efforts and the size of the congregation.

The Paulist Fathers continued their pastoral at St. Paul the Apostle Church until 1991. That year, the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales assumed pastoral leadership, and Oblate Father James O'Neill was appointed pastor.

The parish at that time was composed of almost 1,000 families, and Father O'Neill immediately began plans to enlarge the church facilities. The expansion, which yielded additional worship space, was dedicated by then-Bishop John F. Donoghue in March 1993.

By 1998, the parish had grown to about 1,900 households with more than 5,500 people. On Oct. 21, 2001, then-Bishop William G. Curlin joined the parish family to celebrate the dedication of a new Parish Life Center, a facility providing a multipurpose room/gymnasium, additional meeting space and classrooms.

Father O'Neill continued to serve the Greensboro parish until April 2002. Oblate Father Tom Murphy, who came with Father O'Neill in 1991 as parochial vicar, returned in April 2002 as pastor.

Oblate Father William J. Ruhl assumed the pastorate of St. Paul the Apostle Church in July 2004.

The parish council has developed a vision statement that stresses St. Paul the Apostle Church's commitment to the Eucharist as the center of each parishioner's life. "Our Vision 2000" encompasses individual spirituality and community outreach as the model by which the St. Paul the Apostle Church family will continue to move through the new millennium.

An ecumenical outreach, which developed during the Paulist presence in Greensboro, continues today. The Catholic parish signed a covenant of cooperation with Cross of Christ Lutheran and St. Barnabas Episcopal churches, which were utilized by St. Paul parishioners in the early years for parish functions.

Emphasis on community -- among the congregation and beyond -- has been an important facet of parish life. In the mid-1970s, Father Scott brought a ministry to the parish for divorced and remarried Catholics. In 1978, the parish made local news when it "adopted" a family of Vietnamese refugees.

St. Paul the Apostle parishioners are known in the Greensboro community for their extensive involvement in outreach opportunities. The church is one of a small number of churches that participate in the Guilford Interfaith Hospitality Network, a joint venture of area churches that unite to provide shelter, meals and compassionate assistance to homeless families. Four weeks each year, the parish transforms meeting rooms into bedrooms and provides housing for the families currently in the network.

Other outreach activities include volunteering at a soup kitchen, maintaining a food pantry and providing Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter food baskets to about 150 families referred by the Hispanic Ministry, the Native American Association and local social service groups.

St. Paul the Apostle parishioners also work to alleviate hunger and housing crises through participation in CROP Walks and Habitat for Humanity.

St. Paul the Apostle has formed a relationship with a parish in Manta, Ecuador, and through the Sister Parish program they have helped finance a soup kitchen, provide wheelchairs for four parishioners and hearing aides to a young child.

Dozens of other ministries and projects enhance an active faith life at the parish. From youth ministry to Mobile Meals for the needy, small faith communities to Respect Life ministry, the people of St. Paul the Apostle Church reach out far beyond the church walls to touch the lives of many in their community.

*Staff Writer Karen A. Evans contributed to this story.*