

## St. Benedict the Moor Church

The parish of St. Benedict the Moor was established in 1940 to serve the spiritual needs of Winston-Salem Catholics. Now one of four Winston-Salem parishes, it has helped shape the Catholic landscape in the Winston-Salem Vicariate.

Bishop Eugene McGuinness of Raleigh established St. Benedict the Moor Church in response to the needs of African-American Catholics living in the Winston-Salem area. Placing it under the direction of the Franciscans, the bishop welcomed Franciscan Father Ronald Scott as the founding pastor.

About a dozen local African-American Catholics made up the original parish family. The first Masses were celebrated in the home of a lawyer, Hosea Price, and his wife. Working closely with Father Scott, parishioners began searching for a site on which to build a church. Property for that church, along with a parish hall and rectory, was purchased in April 1940 from a bishop of the AME Zion Church. The site is that of the present St. Benedict the Moor Church.

As construction proceeded, the congregation continued gathering for Mass at the Price home and, in November 1940, in a local funeral home. Bishop McGuinness dedicated the new church the following year.

Father Scott continued as pastor, and in August 1943 he welcomed an associate pastor to assist in developing the parish. Parishioners found spiritual and social opportunities in a number of parish groups and organizations, including the Legion of Mary, Third Order of St. Francis, St. Monica's Guild and St. Benedict's Men's Club.

To enhance the educational aspect of the faith, the Sisters of St. Francis of Allegany, N.Y., arrived in Winston-Salem, and in early September 1946 opened St. Anne Academy. Later that month, Bishop Joseph Waters of Raleigh dedicated the academy, a convent and a residence for girls.

In September 1950, the Sisters of St. Francis helped found a parish grammar school, enrolling 116 students in its first year. In addition to education and spiritual nourishment, the school also turned out championship basketball teams throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s. The school continued operation until 1979.

St. Benedict the Moor Church assumed responsibility for its first mission, Our Lady of Fatima Chapel in downtown Winston-Salem, in 1969. The following year, the Catholic community to the east in Kernersville became a mission of St. Benedict the Moor Church and continued as such until 1973. Catholics to the north in King were also ministered to by St. Benedict the Moor clergy. That community, now known as Good Shepherd Church, remains a mission of St. Benedict the Moor Church, while Our Lady of Fatima Chapel is now a mission of Our Lady of Mercy Church in Winston-Salem. The Kernersville congregation was given parish status in 1973, when Holy Cross Church was founded.

St. Benedict the Moor parishioners observed the 50th anniversary of their church in November 1990 with a Mass celebrated by then-Bishop (now Archbishop of Atlanta) John F. Donoghue. Among the concelebrants were Jesuit Father Lawrence Hunt, pastor; and Father Francis O'Rourke and Father Thomas Gaunt, former pastors.

Parish formation continued through the 1990s under the pastorate of Father Hunt, who has served at St. Benedict the Moor Church since 1990. Parishioners continue to be involved in an active prayer group, altar servers group, youth group, religious education, choir and a variety of commissions.

The parish also places a high priority on community involvement. Local groups and efforts such as the Crisis Control ministry, Red Cross donor program and Samaritan Soup Kitchen have benefited from St. Benedict the Moor parishioner support. The church building is host to Narcotics Anonymous and Community Watch meetings.

Parishioners are also actively involved with the diocesan African American Affairs Ministry. Several parishioners joined members of Our Lady of Consolation Church in Charlotte for a heritage pilgrimage to Baltimore and Washington, D.C. in May 2004.

The parish family of St. Benedict the Moor celebrated the church's 60th anniversary with a retreat, spring picnic, fall festival and a dinner celebration for 150 parishioners in December 2000.

In the past year, the Community Knowledge Center was established at the church. Sponsored by Winston-Salem State University, the center features 10 computers and offers classes for senior citizens, tutoring for middle-school students and a tax-filing service for Hispanics.

As pastor of St. Benedict the Moor Church in Winston-Salem and Good Shepherd Church in King, Father Hunt ministers to hundreds of Catholics in Forsyth and Stokes counties.