



# *Chronology of the Church of the Assumption*

Est. 1874

Keyser, West Virginia

**1874** The first Mass at the Church of the Assumption is celebrated on September 20 by Fr. Jeremiah O'Sullivan, pastor of St. Peter's Church in Westernport, Maryland. Due to a shortage of priests in the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia, Fr. O'Sullivan provides sacramental care of Catholics in the Keyser area until the end of 1875.

**1875** Father Hugh J. McKeefry is appointed as the first pastor of Assumption Parish. There are 225 parishioners. Shortly after his arrival, Fr. McKeefry pays off the debit of \$443 and enlarges the church to twice its original size.

**1878** Father Peter Fitzsimmons becomes pastor.

**1881** Father P. J. Hasty is named pastor, but leaves after just a few months after becoming ill. He is succeeded by Father Eugene Mahoney who not only serves the pastoral needs of the faithful, but he also completes much work on the parish Rectory.

**1882** Father J. H. Cutler joins as pastor, but stays less than a year due to poor health.

**1883** The newly ordained Father Joseph Frioli comes to the parish and remains pastor for six years until he is installed as Vicar General of the Diocese of Richmond.

**1889** Father Charles Donahue is named pastor.

**1891** Father R. A. Drake becomes the parish's new pastor.

**1900** Father Thomas J. Wilson arrives in Keyser, and oversees extensive work on the church.

**1902** Our new pastor is Father William O'Hara. He determines that the existing church is not worth repairing. The original church is moved down James Street to the Blackberry Alley corner and will later become St. Mary's Hall.

**1904** Honorable Thomas B. "Colonel" Davis generously donates a plot of land for a Catholic cemetery for the parish: St. Thomas Cemetery.



*The original church before it was moved down the street to make way for the church that we know today. That original church is now known as St. Mary's Hall.*

**1905** Groundbreaking takes place for the new church. Contractor for the project is McIver and Piel of Baltimore for the price of \$12,497.

**1906** The church cornerstone is laid on May 20 and the dedication service held December 16.

**1917** Father Francis Theado becomes pastor during the influenza epidemic which is affecting hundreds of parishioners. Fr. Theado faithfully administers to the sick, and becomes ill himself and passes away in 1918. He is buried in St. Thomas Cemetery.

**1918** Father William Jan arrives. He oversees many improvements to St. Mary's Hall during his tenure.

**1928** Father Patrick J. Morahan arrives in Keyser. He does much for the spiritual needs of the congregation, including organizing religious education programs for both adults and children.

**1945** Father Morahan passes away and is buried at St. Thomas Cemetery.

Father Kenneth Rizer is appointed Pastor.

**1953** Through Fr. Rizer's perseverance, St. Frances School opens and is staffed by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Classes are initially held at St. Mary's Hall.

**1955** The newly completed St. Frances School, located at the corner of West Piedmont and A Streets, is dedicated on December 8.

**1957** Father Joseph Hirsch arrives at the parish as pastor.

**1961** Father William McGonigle is named pastor.

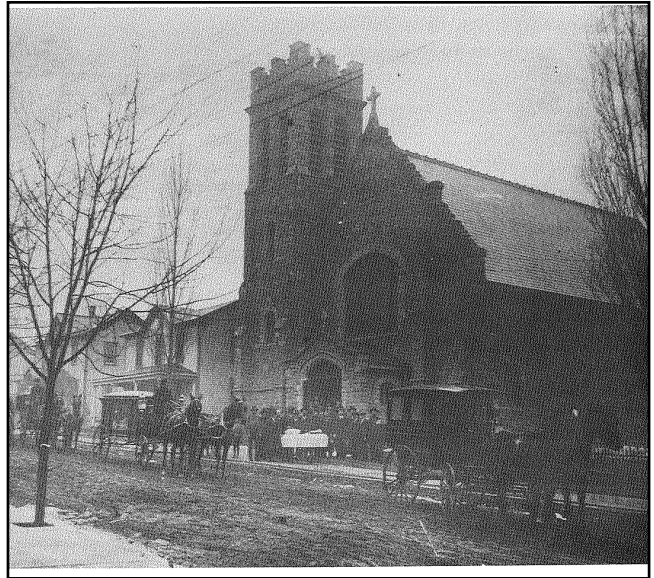
**1963** Father John J. O'Connell is named pastor. He had been assistant pastor at the parish since 1958. He is challenged with leading his congregation through the Second Vatican Council and the many changes that it brought to the church.

**1964** Two new stained glass windows are installed: the large "Assumption" window which can be seen from James Street above the entrance to the church; and a smaller window featuring St. Cecelia and St. Patrick which is at the landing of the choir loft and also can be seen from James Street. Both windows are installed by the Hunt Glass Company of Pittsburgh.

**1967** Father Raymond McIntyre is named pastor. He continues the physical work on the church, including redecorating the sanctuary, repairing and painting the buildings, and sandblasting the church. He also works to promote the educational standards of St. Frances School.

**1968** Father Leo Creamer becomes pastor in December. He stays only a short time.

**1969** Father Paul Jenkins arrives as pastor. A new Moller pipe organ is installed.



*The newly built church, circa 1906.*

**1973** Father Norman Murphy is named pastor.

**1974** Centennial celebration held to commemorate the church's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Events are held in conjunction with the City of Keyser's centennial celebration. Mass is celebrated by The Most Reverend John J. Russell, retired Bishop of the Diocese of Richmond, along with nine priests.

Diocesan boundaries are adjusted to fit within state boundaries, and Assumption Parish becomes part of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

Father Eugene Jacobs becomes pastor.

Fr. Kenneth Rizer, pastor from 1945-1957, passes away and is buried at St. Thomas Cemetery according to his wishes.

**1976** Electrical bell ringing system is installed on church bell.

**1981** Father Leroy Beyer is named pastor.

**1986** A shortage of Diocesan priests brings priests and brothers from the Franciscans, Third Order Regular (TOR), to serve the Parish. Father Gervaise Cain, TOR is named Pastor.

Brother Luke D. Stone, TOR becomes Principal of St. Frances School.

**1988** Father Terrance Adams, TOR is named pastor.

**1989** Father Samuel Vaccarella, TOR is named pastor.

**1991** Father Ivan M. Lebar, TOR is named pastor. Brother Luke Stone is named pastoral associate. Under Fr. Ivan's leadership, many improvements are made to the Church and its properties, including new altar crucifix and church statuary; Stations of the Cross wall hangings; interior church lighting; pew cushions; church restroom; a new HVAC system in the church; handicap ramp and railing at church entrance; and a columbarium at St. Thomas Cemetery.

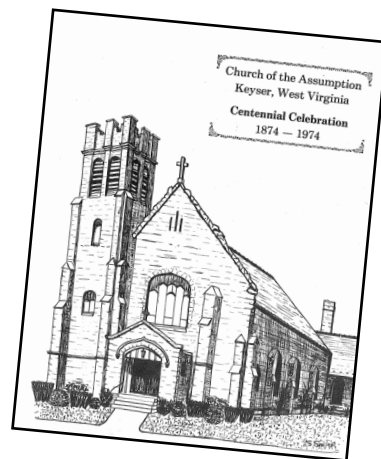
**1993** St. Frances School is closed, marking the end of 40 years of Catholic education.

**1994** St. Frances School building, along with the convent, is sold to the Mineral County Board of Education.

**2011** Brother Luke Stone passes away. A stone bench is placed at the Blessed Virgin Mary statue in the side yard of the church in his memory.

**2013** After a remarkable 22 years of service, Fr. Ivan Lebar retires. A retirement celebration is held at Davis Hall on the campus of Potomac State College. A special stone is erected at St. Thomas Cemetery in his honor for his "dedication and work" at the cemetery.

Father William K. Matheny (Fr. Bill) is named pastor.



*Fr. Ivan Lebar, TOR*

**2014** An Ambry for Holy Oils is installed in the church.

Fr. Bill creates the parish's website, increasing communication to parishioners.

**2015** Father Bill is assigned as pastor to Our Lady of Grace Parish in Romney, in addition to Assumption Parish.

A new sound system is installed in the church.

**2016** Father Paul Mundumoozhikkarani, CST (or Fr. Paul 23) is named Administrator of Assumption Parish. Father Jojan Joseph, CST is named Associate Pastor. This marks the beginning of service of priests from the Little Flower Congregation (St. Thomas Province, Kerala, India) to our parish.

**2017** Father Binoy Thomas, CST is named Associate Pastor.

**2018** Father Thomas Sebastian, CST is named Administrator of Assumption Parish.

**2019** Father Thomas Sebastian, CST is assigned as Administrator at Our Lady of Grace Parish in Romney, in addition to Assumption Parish. Fr. Binoy is named Administrator of Annunciation of Our Lord Parish in Fort Ashby and St. Anthony Parish in Ridgeley.

Maintenance Manager David Bowers and Secretary Kathy Finnell both retire on December 31. Together they have 67 years of service to our parish. David's position is not filled; parishioner Kelli Wittman is hired as Secretary.

**2020** Celebration of Mass, along with all other parish activities, is cancelled beginning March 14 due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Several Sunday Masses are video recorded for parishioner viewing at home via YouTube. Services resume in person on May 23 at 50 percent seating to maintain social distancing. Face masks are required to enter the church. Parishioners begin serving as Ushers to greet Mass attendees, check temperatures and offer hand sanitizer. All pews are sanitized following each Mass.

**Church of the Assumption**

34 James Street

Keyser, WV 26726

304.788.2488

acckwv@gmail.com

assumptionkeyserwv.org

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