

History of Queen of the Apostles Parish

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Queen of the Apostles Church

Under the shadow of the seat of the Diocese of Charlotte and Belmont Abbey, Queen of the Apostles Church has provided a spiritual home for Gaston County Catholics since its dedication in March 1965. Although the parish community is relatively small in size, Queen of the Apostles Church's parish boundaries cover a large part of Gaston County, extending into western Mecklenburg County.

While Queen of the Apostles Church was founded as a parish of the diocese rather than that of Belmont Abbey — which to this day falls under no diocesan jurisdiction — its parishioners thank the Benedictines for their assistance in indirectly establishing the parish.

The Abbey cathedral was the only active church for Belmont-area Catholics until 1965, when plans to establish a diocesan parish came to fruition. Named Queen of the Apostles Church, the church was the converted gymnasium of a boarding school for boys, while an addition was built to include a sacristy, rectory and office.

Shortly after the church's establishment, Queen of Apostles parishioners were given a duty of significant historical value: custodial care of the Church of Sts. Joseph and Mary in nearby Mount Holly. Although liturgical activities had been suspended in the small church in the late 1800s, St. Joseph was restored in the mid-1970s under the direction of then-Bishop Michael J. Begley of the recently created Diocese of Charlotte.

Today St. Joseph Church is used for special occasions such as the feast of St. Joseph. The U.S. Department of the Interior and the State of North Carolina declared the church a national historical site in 1979.

In 1991, then-Bishop John F. Donoghue granted permission for construction on a parish center for Queen of the Apostles Church to begin. The two new buildings — a parish family center and a classroom center — were dedicated in February 1992.

Queen of the Apostles Church has been blessed with many dedicated pastors over the years, including Bishop Peter J. Jugis, Msgr. Anthony Kovacic, Father Richard Hokanson, Father Edward Malloy, Msgr. John McSweeney and Msgr. Thomas Burke.

Oblate Father Joseph Zuschmidt served the parish as pastor from May 1, 2003 – June 30, 2007. He was impressed with the commitment, enthusiasm and hospitality of the parishioners of Queen of the Apostles Church.

Outreach being a continuing effort of the parish, Queen of the Apostles Church stands as a testimony of the enterprising evangelical spirit of Catholicism in North Carolina's history — and its present. Ecumenical bonds are maintained through such efforts as the Gaston County Nutritional Program, which uses the parish's family center on a daily basis to provide and deliver meals to those in need. Parishioners distribute food to the needy of Belmont from the church's food pantry as well.

The church also maintains active ties with the Belmont Community Organization, which offers help to the needy in Belmont by providing clothing and financial assistance for utilities, medicine and food.

The parish displays a keen sense of outreach to the organization operated by the Sisters of Mercy, including volunteer work at Catherine's House, Holy Angels and House of Mercy.

Another ecumenical program initiated by Queen of the Apostles Church is the interfaith prayer for peace service, where people of all faith meet at a different house of worship in Gaston County each month to share their experiences and pray for peace.

Along with the normal activities of the parish, such as opportunities for adult faith formation and Bible sharing, Queen of the Apostles Church has a parish nurse who works with other churches in the Belmont area.

The parish continues to maintain its historical ties with Belmont Abbey through periodic assistance from the Benedictine monks for reconciliation services and weekend liturgical activities when the pastor is unavailable.

A chapel for perpetual adoration of the Eucharist, located on the abbey grounds, was established by former pastor Msgr. Thomas Burke. Members of the college community join parishioners of Queen of the Apostles Church in daily adoration.

On Jan. 9, Bishop Jugis rededicated the church's parish life center in honor of Msgr. Kovacic, in recognition of his nine years as pastor of Queen of the Apostles Church. The day's events also celebrated Msgr. Kovacic's 85th birthday.

"Msgr. Kovacic is a beloved shepherd and friend to the parish of Queen of Apostles," said Father Zuschmidt. "In honor of the occasion of his birthday, we are rededicating the center to him, since he built it."

"Queen of the Apostles Church is also in the shadows of the Abbey and the Sisters of Mercy," said Father Zuschmidt. "While proud of our connections to all of them, we are also proud to be a viable parish in our own right, fully equipped and able to minister to the Catholics of Belmont, Mount Holly and beyond."

During the Thanksgiving Dinner of 2005, the parish family celebrated "The 40-40" anniversary, 40 years a parish and 40 years of Father Zuschmidt's service as a priest.

In July, 2007, the Reverend Francis T. "Frank" Cancro began his service as the parish's newest Priest.

Originally published by the Diocese of Charlotte. Staff Writer Karen A. Evans contributed to this story.

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