During this Year of Faith, we remember our Catholic heritage and rejoice in who we are now. For many of us, our ancestors were immigrants who came to Cohoes to work in the mills. Because of their faith, they built beautiful churches to worship in. And so, with great dedication and sacrifice, they built St. Bernard’s, St. Joseph’s, St. Agnes, St. Patrick’s, St. Michael’s, St. Marie’s, St. Rita’s, and Sacred Heart - all a testament to their love of God.

God has opened the door of faith for each one us and he invites us to step through the threshold into a deeper relationship with him. Starting in September, St. Michael’s and Holy Trinity will celebrate a different church each month, remembering traditions and customs from each.

Come join us as we celebrate in our Cohoes Catholic heritage.

JANUARY 2014

St. Agnes’ Church
1878-1998
In the autumn of 1878, the Bishop of the Albany Catholic Diocese, the Rt. Rev. Francis McNeirny, directed a young priest, the Rev. John L. Lowery, to come to Cohoes and found a new parish in the hill section, which would minister to the needs of the Catholics there, mostly Irish immigrants and their families. The parish would be named for one of the earliest martyrs of the church, St. Agnes. A structure was begun on a plot of ground where the lyceum now stands, but while it was yet under construction, the pastor celebrated mass for his new flock in the building which served for many years as Steamer House No. 3, adjoining the Johnston Avenue Bridge.

A few years after it was completed, the little church, the pride of the “hill” Catholics, was destroyed by fire, and Father Lowery promptly contracted for the erection of a brick structure on the same site. Bad luck seemed determined to thwart the sacrifices and efforts of the parish again, for within a few short years the ground on which the church stood began shifting to such a degree that it was evident the building would soon have to be abandoned. It was then, at the start of the last decade of the century, that plans were discussed for the erection of yet another church, larger and more classic in design, to be built on land acquired from the Harmony Mill Company, across Johnston Avenue from the original site.

The project, under the direction of the Neary & Stanton Construction Company of Cohoes, was a building of majestic proportion, undertaken by a group of people far from affluent. The knitting mills, for which the city was noted, were the prime source of employment for the great majority of the parish “bread winners”, and yet the undertaking was seen to successful fruition. In speaking at the 50th anniversary celebration of the parish in 1928, Father Francis Hicks, himself a St. Agnes boy, referred to “the Cathedral built with nickels, dimes and quarters and a lot of faith.” And so it was! The nickels, dimes and quarters came hard to those mill workers who found themselves locked into a prevailing wage structure that did no more than provide each family with the barest essentials, a far cry from the affluent world their grandchildren and great-grandchildren would know. Yet, sustained by an abiding faith, they found the means to raise a magnificent edifice to God’s glory, the rival of any other parish church in upstate New York. The cornerstone of the new building was put in place in the summer of 1891, with appropriate ceremonies. Within the year, the present structure of 14th century Gothic architecture, with a seating capacity of 1000, was completed and ready for divine service.

In September of 1897, Bishop Thomas M. A. Burke of Albany, aware of Father Lowery’s experience and competence in building programs and parish development, terminated his almost twenty years of outstanding and productive service at St. Agnes’ and reassigned him to Troy to undertake there the same kind of work he had so successfully directed in Cohoes. In his place, the Reverend Michael C. Gavin was named pastor and would, for very near a quarter century, minister to his flock with a fidelity of purpose, priestly zeal and love that would endear him not only to the members of St. Agnes’ parish but also to the entire community. His death in 1921 after several years of failing health prompted an outpouring of grief that startled Bishop Edmund F. Gibbons, who came to preside at the funeral services. Remarking about it in later years, the Bishop said that in all his travels throughout his diocese officiating at funerals of deceased clergy, he never recalled an instance when the genuine sorrow of a parish was as evident as on the occasion of Father Gavin’s death. It was during Fr. Gavin’s pastorate that St. Agnes’ School
was built, in 1916, to provide Catholic education to the children of the parish who, over all the years before, had to travel downtown to St. Bernard’s Academy or attend a public school on the hill. Completely modern throughout, the building cost $40,000 and the pastor never lost an occasion to boast to his fellow priests that the generosity of his parishioners was such that the school building was paid for to the last penny before its doors were opened for classes in September of 1917.

With Fr. Gavin’s passing, Bishop Gibbons assigned his former secretary, Rev. Joseph A. Franklin, as pastor in November 1921. As the third shepherd of the parish since its founding over forty years before, Fr. Franklin was to serve longer than either of his predecessors, almost forty years until his death in 1959. It was during the early years of his pastorate that the church was renovated and beautified, the organ rebuilt and the magnificent carillon installed in the belfry. The extensive improvements were complete for the jubilee celebration of the 50th anniversary of the parish, which was observed during a three-day event in September 1928. During that joyous time, all the priests who had served as curates of St. Agnes’ and were still living returned for the solemn commemoration, which was concluded with the Mass Coram Episcopa, celebrated by the Vicar General of the Albany Diocese, the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph A. Delany, Bishop Edmund F. Gibbons presided at the colorful ceremonies and preached the anniversary sermon.

Three years later, the Lyceum was built as a place for parish activities of all kinds, including bowling, dancing, sporting events and parish suppers. The construction cost was $30,000 – a considered a great deal of money at that time. In the years following, prior to World War II, St. Agnes’ Lyceum sponsored one of the outstanding basketball teams of the Greater Troy League, which provided many an exciting evening before a jam-packed auditorium.

Father Franklin’s pastorate was long and fruitful, which his colorful celebrations of the feast days – and especially the Forty Hours devotion, known far and wide. Over many years, “standing room only” was the accepted condition on those special occasions at St. Agnes’, with the resulting traffic jam in the neighborhood necessitating additional policy and firemen on the scene to cope with it.

As his service in the vineyard of St. Agnes’ moved into its closing years, in 1956 Father Franklin was awarded the privilege of being raised to the Papal Household with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor. Over the next few years, his health showed marked decline and shortly before his eightieth birthday and after forty-nine years of priestly service, thirty-eight of them devoted to his pastorate at St. Agnes’, death claimed him on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1959. His passing marked the end of an era in the parish, for the changes flowing from Vatican II were soon to follow.

At the beginning of a new decade in the life of St. Agnes’ Parish, Bishop William S. Scully, in February 1960, sent to his first pastorate a priest who had served throughout the diocese as administrator of several churches, winning for himself an enviable reputation of outstanding ability. Father Charles Carter Smith brought with him also a talent for superior sermons, which the parish was to be treated to over the next fifteen years. Almost immediately after the arrival of the new pastor, he launched a fund raising drive to erect a new convent to replace the old
building at the corner of Johnston Avenue and Garner Street, which had reached a stage of disrepair which defied continued maintenance. A plot of ground north of the rectory on Johnston Avenue, known from the earliest days as “Longview”, was chosen as the site for the new building. Plans were drawn and work begun in the fall of the year, with the cornerstone put in place on December 8, 1960. The beautiful new convent was ready to receive its full complement of nuns the following September, which the school bell rang for another time and another semester.

Throughout the sixties and into the seventies, with their drastic economic changes and imbalances, Father Smith’s business faculty stood the parish in good stead as he strove to cope with raising costs while, at the same time, facing up to the demands of a large, costly physical plant. In spite of the economic climate, the interior of the church was refurbished, with new hanging lamps replacing the old fixtures which dated back to the 1928 celebration, the sanctuary decorated and recarpeted, as was the nave. At the same time, the brick exterior was pointed up and cleaned, accentuating the beauty of the building’s Gothic architecture. A new roof, replacing the original one of seventy-five years before, brought a final touch to the renovation. Coupled with the expense of the new convent, it was a costly undertaking but under the pastor’s shrewd direction, the parishioners rose to the challenge and the accounts were settled without forcing the parish into protracted debt. They were busy years, with the pastor patiently directing his flock in the many changes brought about as a result of Vatican II, contenting with the pressures of the economy as it affected the church plant operation, facing the ever increasing cost of education, and eventually being forced to forego the independent status of the parish school and join with other city parishes in forming a consolidated system of Catholic education as a survival measure. It was not a tranquil period for anyone charged with the responsibility of operating a large parish, and gradually the pressures took their roll on the pastor, already plagued with a circulatory problem. While preparing for mass one Sunday in December 1974, Father Smith was felled by a stroke, which removed him from further active duty and subjected him to a long convalescence with repeated periods of confinement in the hospital. With the awareness that his days of directing the affairs of the parish were at an end, Father Smith regretfully tendered his resignation to the Bishop in April 1975. While this would have normally meant his moving from the rectory, his successor, Father Thomas Powers, graciously insisted that he remain in residence as long as he desired and be carried on the rolls of the parish as Pastor Emeritus.

The fifth pastor, Father Powers, arrived at a time of change in the diocesan structure of parish alignment, prompted by a shortage of priests, dwindling membership in many parishes and the every-present problem of finances. Solutions were not easy. The parish merger brought about criticism from many who were fiercely opposed to any change in the independent parish unit concept. The merger with St. Patrick’s parish in the “orchard”, an old and honored one with loyal and devoted members, was not accepted by either group with outcries of delight, but the realities of the situation caused a gradual acceptance of things as they actually were rather than as they would have wished them to be. During this trying period, the new pastor moved with caution and great discretion and consideration for all towards unifying both groups into a single parish unit.

Again, it was time for major repairs to St. Agnes’ church plant, especially the much needed work on the old steeple which was rapidly sinking into disrepair, and also for considerable renovation to St. Patrick’s school building. With other improvements necessary to make the church ready
for the approaching centennial celebration, Father Powers, with the approval of the parish council, launched another fund drive in the spring of 1977 under the chairmanship of Paul Landor. Again, in spite of the poor economic outlook and rising costs, the drive was oversubscribed and funding assured for the renovation, including a complete refurbishing of the old steeple.

Though more than a year away, the Hundredth Anniversary of the parish would require extensive planning, so a steering committee was organized under the co-chairmanshıp of William J. Dillon and Ellen Stanton Farrell, and planning sessions were scheduled to outline the kind of program desired. The theme “A Century of Faith” was chosen for the jubilee celebration. From that long ago autumn when young Father Lowery summoned his new flock to participate for the first time at the holy sacrifice of the Mass as members of St. Agnes’ parish, in the improvised quarters of old Steamer House No. 3, across all the years between to the present, this stately and imposing citadel of faith has endured on this hill in times fair and foul with its venerable steeple holding high, above the ways of men, the cross of Christ.

In 1988, an elevator was installed in the church which made it completely “Disabled Accessible” - the first in the city. A small fire in the sacristy caused major smoke damage in the church in 1993 resulting in all masses and liturgical gatherings being held in the basement. The interior of the church underwent a major cleaning and painting and it was during this time that a new sound system was also installed in the church. In 1995, with the departure of the pastor of St. Agnes’, the bishop appointed Rev. Arthur Becker as administrator of the parish. The parish of St. Agnes’/St. Patrick merged with St. Marie’s to become known as St. Agnes’/St. Patrick’s/St. Marie’s and in February of 1998, St. Agnes’ church closed.

There is a passage in the Epistle of St. Peter in which he reminds his readers that they were not redeemed by silver and gold but by the precious blood of Christ. Any parish anniversary is a proclamation of that truth for the precise reason that the “parish plant”, all the necessary buildings of church, school, convent, rectory and lyceum, important as they are and as expensive as they were in both dollars and sacrifices, are only the physical symbol of all the parishioners and priests who have worked to make a faith community. A parish then is the countless hours of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament; it is the rich and meaningful liturgies, those marking the great feasts of the year and those celebrated in the quiet moments of morning and evening, with the faithful few. It includes the baptisms, with proud parents and godparents, and the frequently protesting infants coming to the waters of salvation with their names entered in the Book of Life for the first time. A parish is the array of pictures in the school hallways, showing the graduating classes. It is the pictures of First Communion classes with the children resplendent in their white outfits and innocent faces, all shining as they have come down from the mountain of Moses from their first Eucharistic meeting with the Lord. It is the remembrance of the many Forty Hours over so many years, with the crowded church, the procession of the men of the parish, hundreds strong, all with lighted candles in a moving demonstration of faith. It is the bazaars, raffles, bingos, suppers and parish projects without number, year in and year out, and the every-faithful ones ready to assist at the call of the Pastor. It is the confirmations, a time for the visit of the
Bishop and the entrance of the youngster of the parish into the sacrament of adulthood. It is, certainly, the recollection from a distance of the many incredible hours and priests and penitents have spent in the shadow of God’s love, administering and receiving the healing grade of Penance. It is the teaching, preaching, sacrifice of long hours, the joy in marriage vows, the tragedy in lives ending or maimed, and the coming together of faithful people to console and strengthen one another. It’s in all these the history of a parish is written, not in terms of silver or gold, but in the precious metal of people who cared. And so it has been at St. Agnes’ where, as in all parishes which mark a “Century of Faith”, such an accomplishment will be celebrated as the “Day the Lord Has Made”, in the “City in Which He Has Dwelt.”

The descendants of the first parishioners of St. Agnes’ still keep her memory alive today and the magnificent steeple “on the hill” remains a beacon in the landscape as you approach the city of Cohoes, from all directions. Long may she stand!

DECEMBER 2013

St. Joseph’s Church
1874 – 2009

Between the Civil War (1861-1865) and World War I (1914-1918), Cohoes would continue to attract immigrants, mainly because of decent jobs and dependable wages that its many mills and other businesses offered. Two groups of immigrants who first came to Cohoes, beginning in the late 1830’s and early 1840’s were the Irish and the French Canadians. Poverty, overpopulation, debt and infertile soil pushed the French Canadians off their land. Unable to make a living in their own country, they saw the US as a beacon of hope. A place like Cohoes offered the possibility of a better life - a job, shelter and a regular wage.
Along with the Irish, the French formed a small Catholic population in Cohoes. The first Catholic priest to come to Cohoes was a French speaking Belgian priest, Father Bernard Van Reeth. The year was 1847, and Father found about 300 Catholics. He said his 1st Mass in Cohoes in an old shop located on the flats. Later, Mass was said in a carpenter’s shop on the east side of Remsen St., just below Howard Street (now Marra’s Pharmacy). With the arrival of Father Van Reeth, the French had hoped to obtain permission to build their own church with a priest of their own nationality. On November 18, 1847, the corner stone of the 1st Catholic Church, St. Bernard’s, was laid. That hope turned to disappointment when, in 1853, Father Van Reeth returned to Belgium.

In 1866, Father Thomas Keveny was appointed pastor of St. Bernard’s. Father Keveny learned that Bishop Pierre Pinsoneault, retired Bishop of the Diocese of London, Ontario was living with his friend Father Beyard, the Pastor of St. John’s in Albany. Conscious of the problem of the French Catholics in Cohoes, Father Keveny invited Bishop Pinsoneault to preach a retreat at St. Bernard’s. Bishop Pinsoneault encouraged the French to have a church of their own.

In 1868, the French conducted a census and found there were 387 heads of families and a total of 2,209 French Catholics in Cohoes. They applied to Bishop Conroy, who was then the Bishop of Albany, for a French speaking priest. The request was granted. On June 18, 1868, St. Joseph’s French Catholic Church of Cohoes, NY was incorporated.

On August 23, 1868, Father Saugon, a priest from France was named pastor of St. Joseph’s Church. He found a lot of work to do as soon as he arrived in Cohoes. He had a parish, but the church existed only on paper since it had been incorporated about 45 days prior. There was no church building, no rectory, and not even the land that the church or diocese owned on which to build. Father Saugon celebrated Mass in a rented hall and went to parishioners’ homes for Baptisms. By October 24, 1868, the church had purchased 5 lots on Congress St. between White and Hart Streets, and was ready to start laying the foundation. On November 22, 1868, the corner stone of the church was laid, with Bishop Conroy in attendance. The French began building their church!

By March 20, 1869, the basement of the church had been completed and by July of that same year, the church was well on its way for completion. The walls were completed and the steeple raised. The work progressed at such a pace that on December 12, 1869 the church was ready for dedication. Father Keveny celebrated the first Mass because Father Saugon was too sick to attend. Father died 7 days later. He was 53.

The second pastor was Father Joseph Octave Lasalle from Canada. He was a good administrator but had a weak constitution and was sickly by the time he arrived in Cohoes. What did Father find at his arrival at St. Joseph’s? He found the new church to be unsafe. The foundations were too weak to support the building. There was no rectory and a debt of $10,837. To make matters worse, a high wind during the evening of April 20, 1870 considerably damaged the steeple.

To raise money to repair the steeple and put down the debt, a parish picnic was held in September and in October a fair was held in the church basement. In early November, Father
Lasalle bought lot # 159 on the west side of Congress Street for $800. It was used to build a rectory. Father had just enough rooms finished so that the place was serviceable. Finally, in 1874 the parish debt had been paid and there was a surplus of $1750. Because of the structural problems just described, a decision was made to demolish the church and rebuild. The parish borrowed $10,000 and in June 1874 the first stone for the present church was put in place. A few months later, Mass was said in the basement. In January, 1879, the interior work began. Sadly, the first Mass of the new church on February 4, 1879 was the funeral of Father Lasalle. He died of tuberculosis on January 31 at the age of 53.

Bishop McNierney of Albany worked hard to find a new pastor for St. Joseph’s. He went to Montreal, met with Father Louis-Marcil Dugas. After renewed entreaties from the Bishop, Father Dugas finally agreed to come as long as he remained a member of the Archdiocese of Montreal and with the expectation that his stay in Cohoes would be a short duration. On March 19, 1879, Father Dugas celebrated his first Mass. The parishioners affixed temporary doors to the entrances, brought the old pews up from the basement and erected an altar in the sanctuary for this special event.

Father Dugas quickly went to work. Every evening, except Saturday, he had classes for the children who were old enough to make their First Communion. His goal was to teach them French and the Catechism in French. The classes met with little success and Father soon realized that the children were forgetting their French language. The pastor decided to build a school. This need became even greater when in 1880, 100 skilled weavers arrived from Lorraine, France.

Father met with much resistance from the parishioners. Many thought it unwise to build a school at this time because the parish still had a debt of $15,000. The work on both the church and rectory was incomplete. Building a school would necessitate borrowing more money and putting the parish further in debt. Father Dugas was able to convince the parish trustees of the need for a school and won them over to his cause. On September 4, 1880, he knocked on the door of the Sisters of Ste. Anne in Lachine and the Sisters agreed to send three of their members to Cohoes.

The school opened on September 8th with 270 students registered and attended classes in the church basement. The Sisters sent an urgent request to Lachine to ask for more help. Three more Sisters arrived on September 26th. For the first six weeks, the Sisters were lodged in the rectory. Toward the end of October a house was rented for them. By the end of the school year, many children and two Sisters became ill from the poor conditions of the church basement so it was decided to build a school. In the spring of 1881, a lot was bought and the foundations laid for a four story building. The building opened in 1882 with the Sisters living on the fourth floor and eight classes on the floors below. All of the public school courses were taught and in addition to courses in reading and writing French and catechism in French. By 1883, the school was already too small with 500 students attending.

It was decided to build a classical college on the Canadian model and to give the direction to secular priests. This would alleviate the overcrowding and give the boys a solid education. A temporary locale was found and the pastor recruited candidates for the priesthood to staff his college. The college was placed under the leadership of a Canadian priest who had been an educator all of his life. The college was not a success and two years later (1885), the project was
abandoned. The Clerics of St. Viator, a teaching order of Brothers from Joliette, Canada assumed the direction of a business school that opened in 1887.

The church interior was completed in 1887 and a pipe organ costing $15,000 was installed. St. Joseph also acquired a cemetery. Father Rey, Pastor of Sacred Heart bought the cemetery on 1887. He realized that the cemetery should be the property of the Mother Church, namely St. Joseph’s, and sold it to the latter in 1888.

The parish had 1000 families by 1887 and decided to build a gymnasium where the youth of the parish could play sports and an academic hall where they could take part in French literary pursuits. In 1898 the foundations were laid. It was completed in 1901. The project increased the debt to $25,000.

On December 30, 1901, disaster struck. On that night a spectacular fire destroyed the parish school, the college and the convent. The buildings were of wood frame construction and connected together. An explosion of escaping gasses added to the flames and began to threaten the church. There were no serious injuries but everything was lost amounting to $50,000 after insurance claims. The Sisters returned to Lachine and the Brothers to Joliette. The children were placed in public schools throughout the city.

A drive was held to raise money for reconstruction. It netted $1,097 in two days. Committees were set up to collect a minimum contribution from each family weekly. One year later, January 1903, the Sisters of Ste Anne were welcomed back to St. Joseph’s. The Brothers never returned.
Father Dugas was a builder and an excellent administrator. He laid a solid foundation on which the parish could develop. In recognition of his accomplishments, he was made a Monsignor with the title of Protonotary Apostolic, the highest grade on Monsignors.

The new school opened in 1903 with the Sisters of Ste. Anne teaching both the boys and the girls. There were 8 grades in which students were taught half a day in English and half a day in French. From 1910 to 1925, a four year high school was added. In 1926, the high school closed and a two-year business course replaced it.

Father Dugas retired in January of 1915. After an eight month delay, Bishop Cusack appointed Father Anthime Lavigne as pastor for life. In seminary in Joliette, Father Lavigne taught chant and music. He was ordained in 1886. He was previously pastor of parishes in Albany and of Sacred Heart on Cohoes.

When Father Lavigne came to St. Joseph’s, other buildings surrounded the parish property. The main entrance on St. Joseph’s Place could not be used and the playground was small. Father Lavigne decided that the parish needed more space. He bought all of the buildings surrounding the property and had them demolished or moved. The second entrance on Congress St. was bricked in and closed sometime after that. Then, a green space was established next to the rectory and a statue of St. Joan of Arc was installed and later replaced by a statue of St. Joseph.

Father Lavigne made many changes to the Sanctuary. He decorated the church, added new lights and a new heating system and electrified the organ. The parish hall on the fourth floor of the school was inconvenient. With the opening of St. Marie’s, there were fewer students in St. Joseph’s school so he used the opportunity to build a parish hall on the first floor. All this was done by 1936. He then focused on the cemetery which was very unkempt. With Diocesan support, the cemetery corporation took over the upkeep with plot owners paying for perpetual care.
In 1936, Father Lavigne celebrated his Golden Jubilee of his ordination with a beautiful Mass and celebration. On June 16, 1946, Father Lavigne celebrated his diamond jubilee. It was another grand affair with a solemn Mass, speeches and wonderful music. On July 15, Father Lavigne died. After 31 years as Pastor, he had gone back to God. The city of Cohoes, and particularly the Franco-Americans, had sustained a great loss. For years he had been the Father and the Rector not only in religion but also in the civic welfare of Cohoes.

Father Celas Robitaille became the administrator of the parish from July 1946 to November 1946 when Father Joseph Pelletier became pastor. He had been the Assistant Pastor of St. Joseph’s from 1933 to 1936. Father Pelletier was pastor for five years and died very suddenly on August 3, 1951.

On September 23, 1951, Father Celas Robitaille became pastor. He was a native of the Northside section of Waterford and attended St. Anne’s School in Waterford. He had been Assistant Pastor at St. Joseph’s from 1924 – 1946. During his stay as Pastor, his task was to maintain and administer the heritage left by Monsignor Dugas and Father Lavigne. He was known as the “smiling priest”. He visited the hospitals daily to care and comfort the sick. He had a special touch when it came to ministering to them. He retired in 1970 and continued to celebrate Mass at St. Joseph’s until his death on May 21, 1977.

Father Joseph Robitaille became the seventh pastor on August 1, 1970. During his pastorate, Father Joe installed the Carrara Marble Altar as well as the matching ambo. He renovated the 24 rooms of the rectory as well as renovated the church basement and made it into a church hall that was handicap accessible. He also did work in the cemetery renovating the superintendent’s house and repaving the roads.
When Father Joe came to Cohoes in 1970, the school was still functioning. The Sisters of Ste. Anne had left in 1968. From 1968 to 1971, the Sisters of St. Francis of Syracuse staffed the school. During those years, various Catholic schools of Cohoes were consolidated into the Cohoes Catholic Schools. The Sisters remained after the consolidation until St. Joseph’s School closed. The Cohoes Consolidated Schools occupied St. Marie’s School K-4 and St. Agnes School 5-8 and were staffed by Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St. Joseph and lay teachers. Finally, both the convent and the school at St. Joseph’s were demolished.

During the last few years of his pastorate, Father Joe was in poor health. On January 27, 2002, Father Joseph Robitaille died at St. Mary’s Hospital. Bishop Howard Hubbard and Archbishop Harry Flynn officiated at his funeral.

With the passing of Father Joe, there followed a period of uncertainty in instability. The Bishop did not name an administrator. Fathers O’Neil and Nabolosny, both retired, agreed to serve the parish during the interim. Their ministry assured that the sacraments would be administered and the Eucharist celebrated while “things were being sorted out”. After eight months, the parish got its new leader Lorraine DeCuyper, the Parish Life Director. She provided the parish with much needed stability. The first Sacramental Minister was Father Michael Coutnoyer. He was followed by Father Henry Madigan, OFM conv.

Lorraine set up a Parish Pastoral Council. One of the first projects of this Council was to repave the large parking lot and surround it with a fence. Soon the Parish also became computerized and a Parish database was set up. The focus on education expanded to include parents of Confirmation and First Communion students, and adults who were seeking Confirmation.

Deacon Andy Cohen came to assist the Parish in many ways. In 2008, a second permanent Deacon, Charles Valenti was assigned to St. Joseph’s and St. Rita-Sacred Heart parishes and assisted in funerals and week-end Masses. All that happened under Parish Life Director Lorraine DeCuyper’s leadership was a testimony of the resilience, flexibility, hospitality, generosity, love and team spirit of the family that called St. Joseph’s parish “home”.

The Called to Be Church Diocesan program took place from 2006-2008. The Catholic Churches in Cohoes went through much dialogue, discussion and prayer. In 2009, it was decided that only two Catholic Churches in Cohoes would continue – St. Michael’s on the Island and Holy Trinity on the Hill. It was with great sadness that the Parish of St. Joseph’s had to close its doors and say farewell to the community and traditions they loved so well.

NOVEMBER 2013

**St. Marie’s Church**

**1927 – 1998**
The high banks of the Hudson and Mohawk River valleys separated the City of Cohoes into downtown and “Island” residents, and people on “the Hill” (“sur la Cote”). The people living on the Hill, mostly French-speaking families of workers at the Harmony Mills attended St. Joseph’s Church and sent their children to the parish school. In June of 1899, following an extremely difficult winter when children had to negotiate the primitive roads to get downtown to St. Joseph’s School, a committee was formed to request financial assistance from Monsignor Dugas, pastor of St. Joseph’s, to establish a school on “the Hill”. Permission was granted and six lots were purchased from Peter Lansing for $2,250. The school was built in 1900 at 145 Vliet Street and dedicated to Notre Dame de Palvoisin. The school was located on the Simmons Avenue side in what is now the parking lot of the new St. Marie’s (later Cohoes Consolidated) School. While the students did not have to journey up and down the hill to school, their teachers did. The students were instructed by the Sisters of Ste. Anne, a French-Canadian order, who traveled from St. Joseph’s convent on Congress Street. In 1901, when a fire destroyed the convent and members of the order departed the city, two women of the parish volunteered to teach during this crisis to keep the school operating until the return of the nuns. The next year permission was granted by Bishop Burke to erect an addition on the western side of the school building to be used as a chapel; on Christmas Day 1902 Ste. Marie’s Chapel was dedicated at a mass celebrated by Monsignor Dugas.

As the population grew rapidly on the Hill, residents again petitioned Monsignor Dugas to build and establish a parish of their own. This plan was presented to the Bishop, who gave his approval, and the Articles of Incorporation for the new parish were documented on July 16, 1906. Father George E. Gagne was appointed as pastor to “Mater Misericordiae” (our Lady of Mercy). A rectory was constructed in 1912 at 122 Vliet Street; the brick structure replaced the original rectory, a two-story wood frame building at 110 Vliet Street, which still stands today. The Rev. Paul Leduc sang his first mass at Ste. Marie’s in 1915; he was the first of many vocations from among members of the parish.

In 1916 the old convent, under the supervision of Sister Mary Theophile, was deemed inadequate so a building at 30 Watervliet Avenue was purchased and refurbished for the Sisters of Ste. Anne. A new wing was added in 1951. The convent closed in 1976 as vocations dropped and there were too few nuns remaining to support a convent. Also in 1916 a building fund was established to construct another school to house grades 5-8 because the old school could not
accommodate a growing enrollment. This school was located on Vliet Street, across from the present church. It is now a parking lot.

The next requirement was a new church. In 1920 Father Gagne formulated a plan for a “temple of God worthy of the faith” and a building fund was started. Land was purchased and construction began in 1926. The brick and limestone structure of Gothic design was completed in 1927 and the first service in the new church was Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve of that year. The next three years were devoted to beautifying the parish grounds and the other parish buildings. On September 19, 1930, Father Gagne passed away just short of the silver anniversary of his ordination, leaving behind a congregation saddened by the loss of the man who had done so much to develop this parish.

Father Napoleon LaPalme was named new pastor of the church in 1930. Planned improvements to the parish were halted by the Depression, but the congregation endured. Father LaPalme retired in 1937 due to poor health and was replaced by the Rev. Harvey Desautels, who served the parish until 1941. The next pastor, the Rev. Adrien Bechard, was faced with a large parish deficit due to the Depression and its aftermath, but he worked diligently to overcome this financial difficulty and a mortgage-burning ceremony for the church was held in 1947. The interior decoration of the church was the next priority, and by 1951 this work was completed. With many new families joining the parish, Father Bechard foresaw the need for a new school. A school fund committee was established with the fundraising goal of $120,000. Within ten days, pledges were received for $134,000. Construction began in 1953 on the new school, which was completed by spring 1955. Father Bechard was elevated to Right Reverend Monsignor on June 4, 1961. He continued to serve the parish and died suddenly in February 1965 on the steps of his beloved church. The Assistant Pastor Marc Touchette was appointed Parish Administrator immediately after, and served until June of that year when the Reverend George T. Quinlivan was placed in charge of the parish. He remained at St. Marie’s until February 1968. During this period the reforms of Vatican II began to be enacted in Catholic churches worldwide; among the changes was the delegation of more responsibility to the parishioners. In St. Marie’s, this would include the appointment of Eucharistic Ministers, and the establishment (in 1973) of a Parish Council. In 1968 the Rev. Lionel Guillaume became pastor and the reforms continued. The mass would thereafter be in English instead of Latin and the priest would face the congregation in celebration of the mass. Changes to the sacristy, completed in 1972, included removal of the altar rail.

In 1971, pastors from Catholic parishes throughout the City of Cohoes gathered to discuss the parish schools. A decision to consolidate the nine catholic schools in Cohoes was made, and the school building of St. Marie’s was chosen to house grades K-5, which grades 6-8 would attend classes at St. Agnes. The fifth grade classes moved to St. Agnes for a time due to high enrollments. Cohoes was a pioneer in school consolidation, with an extremely successful program that served as a model for other communities.

In 1975, Father Guillaume was transferred to Corpus Christi parish in Clifton Park and Father Leo Potvin was installed as pastor, the 6th in the history of St. Marie’s. Vandalism by fire damaged the front interior of the church in 1977, prompting the installation of a security system in the church and its other properties. The restoration of the church’s pipe organ and stained
glass windows, as well as an upgrade in the heating system, were accomplished during Father Potvin’s tenure. Father Potvin left the parish in 1984; he was followed by Father Albert and Father Hiney in 1987. In 1988, Father Arthur Becker became Pastor. Because of the shortage of priests and an interest in containing costs, St. Marie’s church was merged with the churches of St. Agnes and St. Patrick and on February 25, 1998, 324 years of combined history became one with the formation of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Cohoes, New York. Father Becker remained pastor until his death in October of 2010.

On June 6, 2004, the once-flourishing Cohoes Consolidated Catholic School at St. Marie’s was closed due to declining enrollment. The building was renovated and continues to be used as the Church of the Holy Trinity’s Parish Center for administrative functions, as well as parish and community activities.

OCTOBER 2013

St. Bernard’s Church
1847-2009

In the spring of the year of Our Lord 1847 Father Bernard Van Reeth, a Belgian came to the village of Cohoes to establish a church and minister to the spiritual needs of some three hundred Catholics of all nationalities who were then living in Cohoes. The first Mass was celebrated in an old shop located on what was then known as the Flats. Later on in the same year regular church services were conducted in a carpenter shop on the east side of Remsen Street just below Howard Street.
On November 18, 1847, the cornerstone of the first Catholic Church in Cohoes was laid by Bishop John McCloskey, the first Bishop of Albany. The land was donated to Father Van Reeth by the Harmony Mills Company. The site of the first church is that which was occupied by Keveny Memorial Academy on Ontario St. The Advertiser, a local newspaper of the time, after describing the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone, stated: “We congratulate our citizens in the prospect of having another handsome building to adorn our village. We understand that the new church is to be a Gothic structure 45 by 85 feet, with a tower and spire”. Father Van Reeth remained in Cohoes until October 1853 when he returned to his native Belgium. He was succeeded by Father Thomas Daly, who remained only eighteen months.

The growth of industry brought with it a large increase in population. It soon became evident that the church built under the supervision of Father Van Reeth was too small to take care of the needs of the ever growing parish. Plans were drawn for the new church to be constructed across the street from the old church on land purchased by Father Thomas Keveny, who succeeded Father Daly in 1855. Therefore, the cornerstone of the present church structure was laid on August 25, 1863 by Bishop John McCloskey. The church was completed by Father Keveny in 1866. It opened on October 14, 1866 with a grand sacred concert and dedicated by Bishop John J. Conroy of Albany on November 3rd. Three years later in 1869 the present rectory was built adjoining the church.

On the morning of February 5, 1876, a severe storm swept through this section of the country and did considerable damage to St. Bernard’s church in the destruction of its spire which was 200 feet high. The spire which had been constructed in 1866 was broken at its brick foundation. It crushed a portion of the roof as it fell on the railroad track east of the building. The chime of nine bells which had been installed in 1872 was badly damaged, only one bell escaping destruction. The total loss to the church reached nearly $20,000. Through the efforts of the pastor and the cooperation of his flock, St. Bernard’s church was crowned the following year with a tower and spire high and stronger than the first one. The spire measured 210 feet and was surmounted with a cross 10 feet high. One large bell replaced the chime which had been destroyed.

A boy’s school, taught by laymen, was established soon after the first church was built. Father Keveny, feeling the need for a school under the supervision and direction of Religious, was able to enlist the help and services of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. The first group of Sisters arrived from their motherhouse in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 17, 1860. Their first convent was a renovated home located at 108 Mohawk St. In October of 1960, St. Bernard’s Academy was opened as a select school for girls in a house adjacent to the boys’ school. Both schools were located on the present site of the parish school.
When the new church building was opened in 1866, the Academy moved to the old church which had been renovated for that purpose. When the new rectory was completed in 1869, the sisters took possession of the old rectory as a convent. Its location was on the west side of the old church. St. Bernard’s two schools grew to include both elementary and secondary programs of education.

Father Thomas Keveny died March 31, 1882. He was succeeded by his nephew, Father Thomas Sylvester Keveny, ordained on October 5, 1873 at St. Bernard’s, Cohoes, and assistant to his uncle until the time of his death.

In 1891, St. Bernard’s Academy was chartered by the University of the State of New York, and co-education began with the sisters taking charge. The first class graduated from high school that very year. In 1910 the convent moved to 100 Mohawk St.

No major changes or improvements were made to the church until 1898 when the marble side altars were installed. At the same time an electric lighting system was installed, the paintings which ring the sanctuary were installed and solemnly unveiled.

These are the work of Vittorio Tojetti. They include the Apparition of our Blessed Mother to St. Bernard, the Descent from the Cross, the Ascension, the Resurrection, and St. Dominick receiving the Rosary from Our Lady. The last two stained glass windows were installed at that time: the Annunciation on the east side of the sanctuary, and the Nativity on the west side of the sanctuary.

The sanctuary railing of cast brass and onyx was installed at that time. The original main altar was constructed of marble and scagliola. Below the Mensa of the altar was a reproduction of the entombment of Jesus done in alto relieve. This altar was replaced in 1913 by the beautiful Carrara marble altar which now adorns the sanctuary. It was designed and executed by the Sibyl Studios of New York. This altar and the painting that surround it have always been the admiration of those who have seen them.
Father Keveny was made an irremovable Rector in 1895 and was raised to the dignity of the Domestic Prelate with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor on July 4, 1904. On the occasion of Msgr. Keveny’s Golden Jubilee of Priesthood which was celebrated in 1923, a financial drive was started to pay off the mortgaged debt on St. Bernard’s church. The sum realized was $43,000. The debt was paid off. The church was redecorated and a new wood floor installed throughout the church. On October 6, 1923 the church was consecrated by the most Reverend Edmund F. Gibbons, D.D., Bishop of Albany. Msgr. Keveny died suddenly on March 4, 1924 and was buried in Calvary Cemetery, Cohoes on March 6, 1924.

Father William P. Brennan assumed the pastorate of St. Bernard’s parish on October 25, 1924. He was instrumental in having the beautiful grotto to Our Lady of Lourdes erected in the church yard.
south of the rectory. In 1929, after 63 years of use, the old school and convent were razed to make room for the construction of Keveny Memorial Academy, which was finished and dedicated on February 1, 1931 by Bishop Gibbons. This great undertaking cost $325,000. It was completed in the wake of the depression of the 1930’s. Because of this no further improvements were carried out in the church. The debt incurred by the construction of the new school was finally paid off in February 1952. From that time until 1956, the following major improvements were made: the church organ was completely renovated and modernized with a new console installed; a new roof was put on the church and the stained glass windows were completely restored. Throughout this period Father Brennan envisioned a complete restoration of the church. His failing health put an end to these plans a while longer. He died in St. Mary’s Hospital, Amsterdam on August 17, 1955. He was buried in the parish cemetery of his native town of Philmont, N.Y.

Father Brennan was succeeded by the Very Reverend Monsignor T. Gerald Mulqueen who assumed the pastorate of St. Bernard’s on November 10, 1955. Under his capable leadership and the wonderful cooperation of the people of St. Bernard’s parish, plans were outlined for a financial drive to restore the parish church, ultimately yielding a sum of $228, 900. On October 8, 1956, following the 7:45 Mass, the Blessed Sacrament was removed from the church and transported to the chapel prepared for it in the school. St. Bernard’s church was closed. From that day on all parochial functions were carried out in Keveny Auditorium with the exception of marriages and funerals. These were conducted at St. Agnes Church thanks to Monsignor Joseph A. Franklin, the pastor.

This restoration called for the removal of the pews, wood floor and beams, lighting fixtures and heating plant. A new boiler room was excavated, a new heating plant installed, and new foundations were constructed under each pillar. Steel beams were laid to support the new concrete and terrazzo floor. The floor of the baptistery is of polished marble. New, solid oak pews were installed, along with new confessional. New statues of the Sacred Heart and the Infant of Prague were installed. The front of the balcony was refaced in oak and the pulpit is made of oak with a wood carving of a dove. An entire new lighting system was installed.
Msgr. Mulqueen was preeminently an educator. Schools were a very important part of his life. He spent a great deal of time at Keveny and was responsible for the development of its high school programs and the strengthening of the school enrollment. Monsignor and his associates, Father Lionel Guillaume and Father Thomas K. Flanigan, made a fine team. Monsignor’s sudden passing in 1969 was a great loss to the parish.

Father Francis Janis came to St. Bernard’s in 1969. Keveny became a high school and the Cohoes Consolidated Catholic Schools came into being. The first parish council was formed, and the rectory was renovated. The parish was saddened by Fr. Janis’ death in August 1972.

In September of that year, St Bernard’s welcomed its eighth pastor, Father Lawrence G. McTavey, who came from Cardinal McCloskey High School in Albany where he had served as principal. He joined Father Frank Dubois, associate pastor, and Father James Hayes who taught at Keveny and directed the newly formed religious education program encompassing all the Cohoes parishes. Father Marc Touchette came to St. Bernard’s in 1980.

At this time, the city built McDonald Towers, the first of three senior citizen buildings, to be followed by Cayuga Plaza and Ogden Mills. To meet the needs of this concentration of seniors in the parish, St. Bernard’s expanded its program. Sister Marie Jose Hickey, well known in Cohoes from her years as a teacher at Keveny, joined the parish staff and began a ministry to senior citizens, offering in addition to spiritually related services, much needed assistance with problems of every day life such as social security, medical insurance, and whatever needs she saw. Sister Margaret Totten joined Sister Marie in 1982 and together they served the parish community. When the first seniors building opened, the priests of St. Bernard’s provided Mass there on Sundays and holidays, moving the service to the Cohoes Senior Citizen Center when that facility opened.

Sister Marie continued in this ministry until her death on April 18, 1982. Sr. Margaret continued this work with caring dedication. Our priests visited the hospitals and nursing homes on a regular basis and brought communion to shut-ins. Fr. McTavey also instituted a regular weekly mass at the Eddy Nursing Home on Columbia Street.

Father McTavey encouraged many retired priests to join him at St. Bernard’s. Monsignor John Forman, pastor emeritus of Blessed Sacrament, Albany, and a native of St. Bernard’s parish, came in 1973. Monsignor died in 1987. Father William Turner joined the parish family, sharing his kindly presence and his wisdom garnered from his years as parish assistant, teacher, U.S. Navy chaplain, high school principal and pastor of St. Mary’s Crescent. Father Turner died in 1991. Fr. John Phillips and Fr. William Jillisky, former pastor of St. Mary’s Oneonta and St. Joan of Arc, Menands, also resided at St. Bernard’s during their retirements. The parish was also fortunate for a time to have had theological students from the Franciscan Friars at St. Anthony on the Hudson. These young men served the parish as interns and gave valuable service to the parish until the seminary closed.
On the occasion of its 150\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, St. Bernard’s church underwent another renovation. The interior of the church was repainted, the altar paintings were refreshed and roofing and structural repairs took place.

In 2005, Father McTavey was honored on the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of his ordination. He retired at the mandatory age of 76 in June 2007. Father John Lanese served for a short time as pastor during the Called to Be Church process. The church was closed in February 2009.

SEPTEMBER 2013

CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY

On February 25, 1998, 324 years of combined history became one with the formation of the Church of the Holy Trinity. The changing population and demographics of Cohoes, coupled with the increasing shortage of ordained clergy, brought about a three-year process of prayer and study which led the pastoral councils of St. Marie’s and St. Agnes-St. Patrick’s to propose closing the three churches and creating one new parish.

After consultation and prayer, Bishop Howard Hubbard granted the request and approved our choice of the Church of the Holy Trinity as the name of our new community.