



**A BRIEF HISTORY
OF THE PARISH OF
SAINT CLARE OF ASSISI
TO COMMEMORATE ITS
75TH ANNIVERSARY
1929-2004**

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Preface

*“I have loved O Lord the Beauty of Thy House
and the Place Where Thy Glory Dwells”*

The ancient psalmist sang of the beauty of the Temple, the place where the people gathered to give thanks to the Lord. He praised not only the physical beauty of the House of the Lord but, we believe, the beauty of the people praying there and trying to live as good a spiritual life as possible.

This is what we have attempted to do in this brief history of the Parish of Saint Clare prepared for its seventy-fifth Anniversary. That is, we have tried to show the beauty of the countless ways in which parishioners have sought to enhance and strengthen and help the Church of Saint Clare of Assisi. Our church structure contains many elements of physical beauty to the discerning eye—statuary, murals, architectural features and more. But church has another meaning as well, namely the people, the individuals who make up and comprise the parish. For seventy-five years, the parish of Saint Clare has been blessed with more than its share of hard-working priests, nuns and dedicated laity who have made it a parish of beauty. There are so many names which could be mentioned that it is difficult to mention all, but He assured that their numbers were and still are many. They were the men and women who organized clubs, volunteered to work on various committees, led a helping hand in such drives as food collections making minor repairs to the physical plant, volunteering to accompany the school children on trips and in so many, many other ways. Again, they have been many, and may the Lord reward them always. There is also the beauty of the neighborhood, the pride that people maintain in planting their gardens, in beautifying their houses and apartment houses with plants, decorations and other symbols, especially during the Christmas and Easter Seasons. We can never fully know how uplifting this can be for many individuals who do not always have the opportunity to travel or visit outside the area. We have also had a certain element of earthly beauty in the businesses that surround us which help us to fulfill the needs and necessities of the day.

One of the greatest of beauties with which we have been blessed is the beauty of the lives which so many parishioners have let or try to lead with the help of the Lord. There is an outstanding beauty in the priests who over the years have brought us the blessings of the Mass and the Sacraments,

who have celebrated our marriages and our baptisms, who have given us all of the Sacraments, who have comforted us in times of grieving and have reminded us of the beauty of our eternal home. Indeed, their lives are unique for they have dedicated themselves solely to the spiritual realms of life. There is the beauty of the nuns who were with us for so many years, and the lay teachers who have devoted their lives to teach our children not only the secular subjects they need to live a full life, but who have also taught them the spiritual dimension of their lives. Another kind of Beauty is that of the Deacons over the years, and the Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist and the Lectors, and the Altar Servers, and the Ministers of Music, and the Coordinators of Religious Education who help prepare children and others for their First Communion and Confirmation, and the Ushers who welcome people and help them to find a place, and the Secretaries of the rectory and the school, the cooks, and the Maintenance People, and all involved in any kind of outreach programs such as A.A., the Boy and Girl Scouts, and the others of equal importance. Let us think of the officers and the members of such long-standing societies as the Holy Name, the Christian Mothers, the Altar Servers Society, and so many, many others, as well as newer associations such as the a Pro-Life Group. We many not always be cognizant of their names or the effort they have put into these organizations, and we usually fail to think of these efforts as a beauty, but it is, indeed a beauty which can enhance lives and help give us a fuller measure of what life is really all about - the worshipping of the Lord to the best of our abilities. Yes, we in Saint Clare's Parish can truly say, "I have loved the Beauty of Thy House and the Place where thy Glory Dwells."

Introduction

Local history often times can best be seen and understood in the context of the larger sphere of which it is a part. If we try to frame it in the contents of a larger area, and with a brief glance at some leading figures, it can perhaps be appreciated more deeply, and we can be proud that we have been and are a part of this beautiful history. When the Parish of Saint Clare was officially established in 1929, the leader of the Church in the Archdiocese of New York was His Eminence Patrick Cardinal Hayes, known as the “Cardinal of Charities” because of his great work in that apostolate. The archdiocese has had in succession Cardinals Spellman, Cooke, O’Connor and our present Edward Cardinal Egan, all individuals of extraordinary intellectual acumen and religious fervor. The Presidents of the country have been twelve in number starting with President Hoover to the present President Bush, while our Mayors have been fourteen in number starting with Mayor James Walker to our present Mayor Michael Bloomberg. The Catholic Church Pope Pius XII, Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul I (who reigned only a month), and our present illustrious and saintly pope, Pope John Paul II.

It is also interesting to note that from the “Mother Church” of the Archdiocese, Saint Peter’s in lower Manhattan, the Church gradually expanded until a Catholic church was eventually established in what is now the Bronx but then part of Westchester. Located about two miles south and east of our Parish. Saint Raymond’s Parish established in 1842 is the “Mother Church” of the Bronx. Founded as a small chapel with no resident priest, the fledging church was assigned temporarily to a young Italian Vincentian, Father Villanis, who was also the Seminary Rector of Saint Joseph’s Seminary at Fordham. The Seminary would eventually move northward to Yonkers, and Saint John’s College, later to be renamed Fordham University, took its place. In 1844, the mother church of the Bronx received its first resident pastor, Father William O’Reilly. Soon other churches were established until now there are in the Bronx some sixty-three parishes. More than three quarters of them were established before St. Clare’s Parish was, and primarily in the southern portions of the county since much of the area north of Tremont Avenue was still rural and almost farm like in appearance. Of these sixty-three parishes in the Bronx, one third or twenty-two of them were established in the nineteenth century. An indication of the development of the area Morris Park and the immediate areas of Van Nest and Eastchester can be gleaned from noting that most of these churches were founded within a few years of each other. Though Our Lady of Solace was founded as early as 1902, the others, Saint Dominic,

Holy Rosary, Saint Lucy, and Saint Francis Xavier were founded respectively in 1924, 1925, 1927, and 1928, a period when the Bronx in general, and areas such as ours in particular, were expanding in population.

From the broad perspective from which we can examine the more detailed and specialized history of the parish, we can note that when Father Cagnina, later to be Monsignor Caginina, our founding pastor arrived to these shores from Italy, travel was restricted to the steamship, and a lengthy voyage averaging perhaps twelve to fourteen days. In today's world we can literally travel the globe in a day. The founder of the parish and all the early priests who served in it were born in the 19th century, while today we are already well ensconced in the 21st century. Finally, we can note that the 1920 Bronx census figure stood at 732,016, the 1930 census figure indicated that the Bronx had some 1,265,258 people (19% of whom, incidentally were of Italian background), while the 2000 figure though not dramatically different, stood at 1,332,650. We have seen not only a telephone listing which began with a two letter abbreviation of the area for the parish, but today we web site, the e-mail number and all modern technology. We thank the Lord for these gifts, and pray that we will use them wisely for the good.

CHAPTER 1

The Saint Clare Area Today and Yesterday

It is well to remember that as no individual lives in isolation, so does no parish or other entity to which we belong be it small or large. Technically the Parish of Saint Clare was founded as a national, that is, ethnic parish, and thus had no hard and fast boundaries but could welcome any Italian speaking people who found it convenient because they were assured of Italian speaking priests. This concept held good, of course, not only for the Italian ethnic but for any other sizeable group, and it is interesting to note that today fully 10% of American parishes are ethnic non-territorial parishes. As stated, though there were no hard and fast boundaries, some developed in natural fashion as major streets became boundaries or proximity to neighboring parishes became boundaries. Thus the Parish boundaries are roughly Bronxdale Avenue to the south, Eastchester Road to the north, and Morris Park Avenue and Pelham Parkway to the east and west respectively.

It is interesting to note that this area and its immediate surroundings, relatively speaking, that is, is rather diverse and interesting both from an historic point and a social view, and contains as well elements of religious background. We have in our midst, for example, one of the better known and outstanding medical schools in the entire country, the Albert Einstein Medical College. As part of the College and the Hospital which bears its name are a number of prominent units devoted to specialized fields such as medical care for children. Adjacent to the College is the Jacobi Medical Center and its various units, perhaps the largest or one of the largest municipal hospitals under New York City's jurisdiction. Morningside Nursing Home which was founded in the late nineteenth century under the jurisdiction of the Episcopal Church was an early pioneer in its field. On Pelham Parkway North is the New York Institute for Special Education School which was founded as early as 1831 as the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind devoted to helping disabled children. Not long afterwards in an effort to help other disabled children, Saint Joseph's School for the Deaf was established in 1869 by the Daughters of the Heart of Mary in the Fordham section first, and then by the early nineteenth century moved to larger headquarters in the Throggs Neck section. Again, to the north and east of the Parish is the United Cerebral Palsy Rehabilitation Center which occupies the buildings once housed by the Kennedy Center which was founded around the 1960s to honor the late Senator Robert Kennedy, brother of the first Catholic president of the United States, John F. Kennedy. The building which housed the chapel still stands with its

magnificent relief sculpture in stone of Our Blessed Mother and a large cross at the top of the building. Our area once boasted of another girl's high schools besides our current saint Catherine's Academy run by the sisters of Mercy, namely Mother Butler. The building is now the headquarters of a unit of Montefiore namely, Aging in America. Two public elementary schools, P.S. 83 and P.S. 108 exist. The latter being named after a distinguished educator and community leader and member of our parish, Philip J. Abinanti.

Our parish is very close to such distinguished Bronx landmarks as the Bronx Botanical garden, the Bronx Zoological Society, Fordham University, and the largest park in the area in New York City, Pelham Bay Park. We are also near or relatively near such historic landmarks as the Bartow-Pell Mansion (Pelham Parkway takes its name from the Pell family) and Poe Cottage. From a Catholic perspective it is interesting to note that the great writer Poe would occasionally take walks on the campus which would soon become Fordham University, and that he got to know some of the Jesuits living there. We also note that Fordham University was the first Bronx University to have a medical school as part of its makeup, as well as a School of Pharmacy, now both long gone.

From another Catholic perspective, it is also interesting to note that nearby Parkchester, one of the very first private housing developments in all of New York City, is situated on the grounds of what was once the Catholic Protectory which housed hundreds of poor abandoned orphans and children. The Hutchinson River is named after Anne Hutchinson, an early seventeenth century figure who in a modest way for that time helped to pioneer religious freedom. Our number five subway was once part of a suburban transit system and until sometime in the late 1970s or early 1980's, some of the portals which were probably part of the old Morris Park Race Track were still standing. Also the Morris Park Race Track which closed in 1904 was also used as a primitive airfield, and we also have the remnants of the old waiting room of the old New York, New Haven and Hartford railroad at the intersection of Sackett and Paulding Avenues which was built in 1909 designed by the famous architect Cass Gilbert and which brought people to the bucolic Bronx.

We are close to Boston Post Road or U.S. 1, the very first major roadway in the country going north and south which was built in the late eighteenth century to connect the two major cities of New York and Boston so that the post, that is, mail could be more quickly delivered, and that we are also within walking distance of the Bronx River Parkway, the first parkway in the nation. A parkway differed from a highway in that it ran essentially through lovely wooded or park like areas, and was designed for car traffic

to help people reach country areas faster not only for business purposes but for pleasure and recreation. History abounds in our area though it remains rather hidden unless some research is undertaken.

A brief word about our other parishes in our immediate area. Saint Francis Xavier, our nearest neighbor honors one of the greatest Jesuit missionaries who preached throughout parts of Asia. Saint Lucy was a forerunner of several churches which during the earlier decades of the twentieth century began to build grottoes in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes and soon it was known as the “Lourdes of America”. The Grotto was dedicated on Memorial Day, 1939, and one of its unusual features that it was built without the use of mortar by the Italian craftsmen of the parish. Also, in honor of the Scala Sancta in Rome, Saint Lucy’s Church some two years later would build one in imitation, one of only a handful throughout the world. The Church of the Holy Rosary as it stands today is built in the latest modern style. It replaced a more traditional church which suffered extensive fire damage around the mid 1960s and had to be demolished. Holy Rosary is one of the most ultra-modern churches in New York, and a very good example of this style.

On a broader perspective regarding Catholic landmarks, we can note that in Mott Haven section of the South Bronx exists the Church of St. Rita of Cascia founded in 1900 the year that the Saint was canonized. In 1901 a first class relic of the saint was deposited in the Church and the following year the Church was designated by Pope Leo XIII as an official shrine to the saint. Also, interestingly, Mother Teresa of Calcutta in 1973 established the first United States congregation of her Missionaries of Charity in that same parish. Another saint also traversed part of the southern area of the Bronx, namely Saint Francis Xavier Cabrini and an individual whose cause for sainthood has been introduced, namely Cardinal Terrence Cooke, lived but a few miles away from our are in Throggs Neck served by the Parish of Saint Benedict. Also at least three other saints, Saint Isaac Jogues, Mother Elizabeth Seton of Manhattan, and the Father of Saint Padre Pio also worked for a short time in New York City at the turn of the twentieth century to earn needed funds for his family back home. We should also mention that Mother Cabrini has a shrine dedicated to her honor in not too distant Washington Heights and that her body lies in honor there, and that the house in which Mother Seton spent time as a youngster visiting her uncle’s family is still standing on the Shore Road in New Rochelle, about a mile from the Bronx border. Furthermore, there is a shrine dedicated to her memory in the Our Lady of the Rosary Church near Manhattan College, and the College of Mount Saint Vincent. Numerous are the unique distinctions which can be written of each one, and it is inspiring to note

that it was on the Fordham University Campus that the religious magazine which had a very large circulation in its day, “The Messenger of the Sacred Heart” was published during the early part of the twentieth century. In the Church of Saint Jerome established in 1869 in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx, Father Cacella of Portuguese descent, published the newspaper “A Luta,” the only Catholic paper in the nation printed in Portuguese.

It is also interesting to note that religious orders were very instrumental in founding parishes in the early days of our country’s history. We have or have had the presence of such religious orders as the Redemptorists (Church of the Immaculate Conception in Melrose, 1853), Saint Rita of Cascia, 1900 now staffed by the O.A.R., the Capuchins (Church of the Immaculate Conception on Gun Hill, 1903), the Augustinians (Church of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine, 1906), the Franciscans (Church of Our Lady of Pity, 1908, but now closed, and the Church of the Holy Cross, 1921), the Carmelites, Church of Saint Simon Stock, 1920), the Augustinians Recollect, Church of St. Roch, Santa Maria Church, 1926, the Identite Missionaries of Christ Crucified, and the Benedictines (Church of Saint Benedict, 1923 but now staffed by Diocesan clergy).

Also within our boundaries or the immediate area, are other religious edifices including Jewish synagogues, Protestant churches and a Moslem mosque. Though the mosque was not established until about the late 1990s, several of the others date essentially from early days of our parish or somewhat earlier.

Many of the streets in our area are named after early mayors of the City such as Paulding who was mayor in 1825-1826, Hone, 1826-1827, Lurting, 1726-1735, and Colden, 1815-1818, while a few others such as Yates honor early governors. As a point of interest, our neighbors in the Van Nest area around Saint Dominic’s Church have many streets named after early presidents such as Adams, Taylor, and Fillmore. We also pay tribute in our own area to the Native Americans with streets bearing such names as Seminole, Choctaw, Pawnee, and Narragansett.

A brief examination of some aspects of the Federal Census of 1960 and 2000 shows the following population changes. We will be concerned with only two census tracts of our area where we feel the majority of parishioners reside though there are about six which can be said to encompass to some degree the area served by the church. Additionally, some tracts also include small areas where only a few parishioners may reside. It must also be remembered that every decade there were different data collected about the population so that the same information isn’t always available.

1960- In two census tracts(248 and 288) covering the areas from Radcliff Avenue to Williamsbridge Road and Pelham Parkway to Neill Avenue, Williamsbridge Road to Seminole Avenue, and Pelham Parkway to Morris Park Avenue, we find that the total population was 6157. Of these, the two largest ethnic groups were those of Italian background numbering 1896 and those of Russian background, (no doubt mainly of Jewish heritage), numbering 620. The median age of the area was about 37 years. Individuals who were seventy or older numbered 340, while there were 1246 children from infancy to fourteen years. There were 3441 married, 354 widowed and 85 divorced or separated.

2000- The latest census tract information essentially for the same areas shows the total population a bit higher at 6311. Ethnicity was not broken down in all areas of the Census but information was given on races. Black or African- American comprise 193, Hispanics 892, Asian 414. Regarding age factors we find 1452 people 65 and over, while there are 903 children from infancy to fourteen years. The median age of the area is about 42 years, some five years older than 1960.

Our area is a vibrant one with caring and hard- working people. Though virtually no empty lots remain we still retain an appearance of suburban charm and beauty with beautiful private houses and splendid looking apartment houses, and above all a neighborliness, a reflection, we believe of the love of neighbor which follows from the love of God.

CHAPTER 2

Father Cagnina and His Early Assignments

Beginnings are usually exciting even though there is always an element of some apprehension. It must have been such for a young Father Cagnina born on August 20, 1884 when he was assigned in the late 1920s to begin the process of starting a new parish. But being a man of faith, he trusted that the Lord would be his guide. Father, of Italian descent and specifically from the Sicilian province of Enna and the small town of Santa Caterina Villamosa near its capital, Caltanissetta, was a relatively young man of forty –three years of age at the time. Father was the son of Vincenzo and Marianna Gueli Cagnina and came from a household deeply religious in nature so it was no surprise when at the age of twelve he entered the local seminary in Caltanissetta. It was common in the nineteenth century for young men who felt they had a religious calling to begin formal studies early. Young Francis was eventually to earn a doctorate in Sacred Theology

from the famous Gregorian University in Rome. In Rome he was also given the opportunity to pursue another field in which he had great interest, that of music, and eventually became an accomplished organist. Thus it was that his dream of priesthood became a reality and on April 19, 1908 at the age of twenty-four, Francis Cagnina became Reverend Francis Cagnina. The young priest was ordained in one of the most famous churches in Rome, the greatest Basilica of San Giovanni Laterano, portions of which dated back to the fourth century, most of it rebuilt in the thirteenth century, and every corner of it containing works of art. Ordination Day was a day that he and all of his family would remember for the rest of their lives.

Not long afterward, the Cagnina family decided to immigrate to the United States. This was the period of the great emigrations from various parts of Europe to America, and Italy was one of the countries which saw a great percentage of its citizens leave to seek better economic conditions. Young Father Cagnina knew that his compatriots would need priests to minister to them, and indeed as immigration to this country increased the American bishops sent out a call for native clergy to accompany their people. Thus it was that just over a year after his ordination. Father received permission to immigrate to America and place himself at the service of an American bishop. On July 2, 1909 Father Cagnina arrived in New York City, and one can only guess at the feelings which must have pervaded his very being. He was fortunate in having the company of some family members unlike so many others of his countrymen who had arrived alone or virtually alone. He could also see that New York would be a city that needed the ministrations of priests who could tend to the spiritual needs of his countrymen. The Archdioceses of New York was at the time under the administration of John Cardinal Farley (1902-1918). Father Cagnina was immediately assigned by the Cardinal's personnel office to the very small Staten Island Church of St. Clement. Such was his enthusiasm that in order to become more familiar with the English language, he enlisted the aid of a tutor. Saint Clement's Church was in the district of Staten Island known as Mariner's Harbor. Located opposite the New Jersey Shore, the area was sparsely settled. Perhaps Father Cagnina smiled a bit if he reflected on the fact that he came from a large Island, that is, Sicily, and his first assignment here was also an on island, the small island of Staten Island. Perhaps he thought it providential that he could become accustomed to American ways in a rather bucolic setting before encountering the more complex society which was New York.

The assignment at Saint Clement's did indeed turn out to be but a brief introduction for within three years, 1912, he was assigned to the Bedford Park section of the Bronx, specifically to the Church of Saint Philip Neri

named after a great and well-known Italian Saint. The parish had been founded only some dozen years earlier in 1898 and was located in an area which though largely composed of Irish-Americans was witnessing a small but increasing number of Italian-Americans. It was also a rather large parish and by the time Father Cagnina would leave it in 1929 would boast of some 5,500 families. It is interesting to note that the pastor of Saint Philip Neri was Monsignor Daniel F.X. Burke who in 1906 had been instrumental in establishing the Parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the “Little Italy” section of Belmont. He was an aficionado of things Italian having spent some time in Italy in diocesan concerns, and like his new assistant Father Cagnina he also had a doctorate in divinity. It would be at Saint Philip’s that Father Cagnina would become better acclimated to New York City, and where he would also become more practiced with the ways of the Italians who were immigrants like himself. He was happy to note that from the earliest days of immigration, the Italians had been encouraged to continue to practice some of the ways of their native land such as, for example, continuing the tradition of celebrations of religious feasts by not only religious services but by outdoor festivals as well. In this case, devotion was especially strong to Our Lady of the Assumption. While at Saint Philip’s besides many other duties assigned to him, Father Cagnina was appointed to train and coach the church choir, and this he did with great enjoyment and dedication, much to the pleasure of the entire congregation who heard the music. It was also at Saint Philip’s that Father became acquainted with the fine work of the Ursuline Sisters who taught at their nearby Academy, and some of whom also taught at Saint Philip’s newly established parochial school. He was assigned for a time to offer Mass in the Ursuline Chapel as well as to serve as a spiritual director. A lover of education, he no doubt looked forward to the day that if ever he might be given the grave responsibility of establishing a parish, one of the first things he would do was establish a school. Such a responsibility for founding a parish would indeed come to the young priest for in the late 1920s he received word to proceed with such a mission, and more specifically in 1929 after almost two decades at Saint Philip Neri, Father would be absorbed in the founding a parish which would soon blossom forth as the Parish of Saint Clare.

CHAPTER 3

Saint Clare’s is Founded

It was evident in the mind of Cardinal Hayes and his assistants that a new parish, preferably a “national parish”, that is one technically without

specific boundaries created primarily, but by no means exclusively, to serve the special needs of a specific ethnic group, would soon have to be established in the Morris Park area of the Bronx for the area was growing especially with large influxes of people of Italian extraction. Indeed, two decades later when a 1950 study of New York City's ethnic groups was published it would list eight churches serving primarily the Italian ethnic group, the earliest being that of the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua in lower Manhattan which was founded in 1866. Since the Church of Saint Dominic was at the western and southern end of the area, and since its pastor Father Dominic J. Fiorentino was the brilliant and hard working pastor of the largely Italian-American parish, the Cardinal chose Father to start the process to establish the foundations of a new parish which would be assigned to another priest to bring to full fruition.

The Archdiocese had rented a store at 1060 Morris Park Avenue which could accommodate somewhat less than a hundred people. It was on September 16, 1928 that Father Fiorentino celebrated Mass in the tiny chapel. The name Saint Dominic's Chapel was painted on the window, and soon caught the attention of the passers by who of course, were not quite as numerous as today for there were still large portions of the area that awaited development. Now the residents were happy for at last they had their own chapel which they were sure would soon blossom into a church. Now they did not have to travel the long distance (usually by trolley are which they could pick up at Bronxdale Avenue) to Saint Dominic's. Thus, as Saint Raymond's Church was the Mother Church of the Bronx, the Church of Saint Dominic was the Mother Church of Saint Clare's Parish. There were three Sunday Masses, one at 7:00 a.m. in Italian, one at 8:30 for Italian children who were learning English, and a Mass at 11:00 for every one. It was now only a matter of a few months when Saint Dominic's Chapel would be out of the jurisdiction of Saint Dominic, be renamed by its new pastor, and stand on its own in the hopes of becoming a new established parish.

Father Cagina's fine record at Saint Philip Neri was brought to the Cardinal's attention as a logical choice as a founding pastor and so it was that in July 1929 Father left the church on the Grand Concourse to begin the task of establishing Saint Clare's Church. In the interim, Father Fiorentino had been authorized by Archdiocesan officials to purchase a large vacant lot which at the corner of Rhineland and Hone and Paulding Avenues had been used as a ball field and was known as the Choctaw Ball Park. Unlike today when there is virtually no empty lot in the area, there were still several in the 1920s large enough to accommodate a church structure and its attending satellite structures, that is, a rectory, and possible school and convent.

Thus it was on the feast day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, July 16, 1929 that Cardinal Hayes officially sent a letter to Father Cagnina announcing his intention of appointing him pastor of a new parish, and asking his acceptance of this monumental but onerous task. Father Cagnina immediately stated his willingness to accept the challenge and requested that the new parish be called Saint Clare of Assisi, a request immediately granted. Except for a church on Staten Island which had been founded in 1921 and a hospital named after Saint Francis. Father Cagnina had great devotion to his name sake Saint Francis, and as a logical corollary to this, had devotion to Saint Clare who had been so instrumental in helping Francis spread his order. And so on Sunday July 28, 1929 Father Cagnina celebrated his first Mass at the Chapel and proudly renamed it Saint Clare's Church – a new parish had been born. Father Fiorentino assisted at the Mass as well as several other priests and he was just as happy as Father Cagnina that a new parish had been established to help and assist the burgeoning Italian-American population. It was a day of great celebration, joy and thanksgiving to God, and for Father Cagnina one as well of deepening knowledge of the responsibilities which would now be his.

CHAPTER 4

Saint Clare's First Decade

Naturally, the first order of the day would be to begin the building of the church. The chapel on Morris Park was only a temporary measure. It is difficult for most individuals to really fathom what a challenge this could be to the person responsible for such an undertaking. Besides the obvious huge financial considerations which would largely be Father's responsibility to fill, there were the selection of the architect, the builder, the artists, the numerous details that would have to come into place. The Archdiocese stipulated that \$75,000 could be spent to build a church. Since the Great Depression broke out just at this time, a Depression which would last throughout the 1930s, it was a difficult time to obtain loans. Father Cagnina tried his best to secure such loans but needless to say, the period was not propitious for one to be granted easily, and several inquires were refused, and perhaps the young priest had some moments of dejection. However, Divine Providence in the guise of a Mr. James Driscoll, an insurance broker, who appeared on the scene looking for business, telling Father Cagnina to leave it to him. Mr. Driscoll persuaded a local bank manager to visit Father and examine the blueprints for the proposed church. Though the latter expressed doubts that \$75,000 would be sufficient, he went along with the

estimate and the loan was granted. Now the Church could be built, and though he knew that the future would hold some difficulties, it was a happy Father Cagnina who gave the signal to proceed with construction. Meanwhile, he would visit as many people as possible to ask for small donations. In this he had the aid of a small group of men and women and especially John Dormi who soon became a kind of chairman for parish activities.

Now that a full fledged parish was commencing, Father wanted to live as close to the site as possible, and not travel from Saint Philip Neri Church or any other church for that matter. He immediately was donated some rooms in a small apartment house diagonally opposite the site of the future church at 1052 Rhinelander Avenue which was owned by his brother Pasquale Cagnina. This would serve as a temporary rectory for the rectory which now stands today on Paulding Avenue would not be built until October 1932. Now, in his temporary living quarters he could readily supervise the progress of construction and generally become immersed with life there. Just a few weeks later in September when a mortgage interest payment had to be met, he was given permission by his former pastor Monsignor Burke at Saint Philip Neri to take up a special collection to help meet his debt. As far as is known, this was the first time that the parish was forced to do this. It is both interesting and meaningful to note that in its almost eight decades of existence, Saint Clare's has always reciprocated this gesture by having a great many representatives of various religious orders and worthy charities to take up special collections in the parish.

The architect chosen for the church was a well-known individual, Mr. Anthony DePace associated with the firm of DePace and Juster which at that time was located at 151 West 46th Street in Manhattan. Mr. DePace lived near the Morris Park area and among other outstanding buildings had recently completed the Church of Saint Theresa of the Infant Jesus in the neighboring Pelham Bay section (not the church as it is today but the original one which unfortunately had to be demolished after a disastrous fire). He had also designed Saint James Hospital in Newark, the Immaculate Heart Academy in Bergen County, New Jersey, and Saint Peter's Church in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and was considered a foremost architect. As described by Mr. DePace, Saint Clare's Church was designed in a style called "modified Romanesque with a leaning towards the Italian Renaissance". Regarding the former mentioned style, we can note that the arch is especially used to good advantage over our church's main entrance with two Corinthian columns, and that the stone statue of our patron saint bolsters this feature. Up until the late 1990s the gargoyle features which once surrounded the Church and were especially noticeable from the

Paulding Avenue side were another Romanesque feature, as are the ten large arched windows containing the stained glass paintings of Our Lord, the Blessed Mother and various saints. The Renaissance style is probably best typified in the fact that Saint Clare's has no columns inside the church thus giving and unimpeded view of the sanctuary, and also by the fact there are a number of murals and other artistic designs, as well as a relatively large balcony and choir loft.

Construction began almost immediately and it was on the Sunday afternoon of October 20, 1929 at a ceremony attended by members of the clergy such as Father Fiorentino, Monsignor Burke, Father Kearney of Saint Francis Xavier Church and Capuchin Friar Father Raimondo Tonini of the Church of the Immaculate conception on Gun Hill Road that ground was officially broken. Also in attendance was Mr. Jesse H. Haley, principal of Public School 83 and a Catholic layman, and of course, virtually all of the neighborhood people. Several brief speeches were, no doubt made, and as part of the ceremonies, a parade was held throughout the street led by an Italian band. No doubt the band was one of several small bands which were popular in Italian neighborhoods and especially used in the celebration of various feast days such as that of San Silverio on June 20th and Our Lady of the Assumption on August 15th. Father Tonini gave a moving sermon on the life of Saint Clare, and as a Capuchin he was especially pleased that a new church dedicated to the great Saint Clare would be built.

The construction firm of John Cornacchia with headquarters at 1171 Herkimer Street was the one chosen for the building of Saint Clare's. The firm, a very experienced one, had constructed such ecclesiastical structures as Saint Joseph's School and rectory and Our Lady of Pompeii Church both in lower Manhattan and both founded by the order of Saint Charles more popularly known as the Scalabrini Fathers, a group founded in Italy with the purpose of helping the Italian immigrants in their newly settled lands.

So rapidly did construction proceed that some five months later it was decided to hold the first Mass in the new church, and this, of course, signaled the gradually closing of the chapel on Morris Park Avenue. The first Mass at the Church of Saint Clare thus was celebrated on Saturday, March 1, 1930 at 7:00 pm., a rare example of permission being given for an evening Mass. The first Mass was actually celebrated in the "lower church" or basement because the main floor of the church still needed some final attention before it could be open to the public. Rather appropriately some six weeks later on April 10th, Holy Thursday the new Church could now be opened, just in time for the solemnities of the three high holydays leading to Easter. Prior to a number of liturgical changes resulting from Vatican II, Masses for the special holy days were held in the morning. Thus, the Mass

for Holy Thursday began that morning at 8:00 a.m. Huge crowds were on hand to help celebrate this first Mass in the main sanctuary. A large procession including about sixty priests formed as the Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession through some of the streets. Several priests came from Manhattan, and at least two represented religious orders, namely, Franciscan and Jesuit. The church bells rang out for the first time and represented not only the bells for Holy Thursday which would then be dormant to about noon of Holy Saturday, but signaled, naturally, the happy event. Two weeks later after a brief interval for Easter, the formal celebration of the church's completion took place on Sunday April 27th. However because of scheduling difficulties which is normal in such circumstances, the formal dedication by Cardinal Hayes did not take place until the following year 1931 on Sunday May 16th. Again a large procession took place throughout the neighborhood streets, and all were in a most festive mood. It is interesting to quote some of the remarks of the beloved Cardinal Hayes who was known as the Cardinal of Charity. He stated that he was happy to accept the Church of Saint Clare into the Archdiocese and to "add it to that golden chain of churches in the archdiocese of New York-over 400 churches and over 200 chapels-where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved". He then continued by stating "When you realize that all these churches are united to all the Catholic churches in this country and throughout the world, then you will understand what it means to this parish to be united with them in a Universal Church. I am indeed very happy to see what has been accomplished in this parish in so short a time. I was very much impressed by my first view of your church, and indeed, with the entire neighborhood, and I feel that this church has been built just in time, for the section is growing rapidly and the church will be here as a welcome and as a benediction to all who come to dwell here. I am sure that every member of this parish glories in the new church, for you are privileged to be the builders of such a beautiful sanctuary to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. The eloquent preacher (Father Tonini of the Immaculate Conception Church who had spoken in Italian) has just told you what the church should mean to you. His eloquent tongue must have fired you with a greater love and appreciation for your church. How proud you all ought to be to have the privilege of belonging to the "Church of God".

It was indeed a happy day, and Saint Clare's was now on firm footing to begin its ministry in the area.

CHAPTER 5

The First Decade Continued

“I have loved O Lord, the beauty of Thy house and the place where Thy glory dwelleth”. These words taken from the 25th Psalm symbolize the deep feeling and love which Catholics generally have not only for the spiritual beauty of their Church but for its physical loveliness as well. Father Cagnina, born in a country renowned for its artistic treasures was nurtured by all he saw, and thus upon his appointment as pastor began immediately to plan how he could make his church a house of physical beauty as well. The individual eventually chosen to decorate the church was the artist Antonio D’Ambrosio, a native of Campagna in the province of Salerno. Born in 1898, he immigrated to the United States as a young man 1921 after studying for many years under expert teachers in Salerno. The firm he would eventually establish and which endures to this day would decorate numerous churches and other buildings over the decades. For example, the firm has decorated such churches as Sacred Heart Church in New Haven, Connecticut; Saint Anthony in Albany, New York; Saint Michael in Atlantic City, New Jersey; and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jersey City, New Jersey. Saint Clare was among the earlier churches which the artist would decorate, and interesting to note, was that in later years when renovation was needed, his son, Anthony, Jr. would continue the fine tradition.

We must bear in mind that Saint Clare’s Church like so many other churches was gradually worked upon and changed and redecorated as necessity, especially in regard to repair work, dictated. Thus the church as we see it today evolved over the decades. The major change undertaken by the artist in 1939 and coming on the church’s tenth anniversary was the painting of the apotheosis or exaltation of Saint Clare. This mural over the sanctuary was a major work of art. It depicted not only our patron saint but the three orders of Franciscans. That is, the first order was shown in the depiction of Saint Francis the founder of the Franciscans who held a large cross in his hand; the second order shown by the Franciscans Sisters, the order for women founded by the Saint; and the third order for laymen who wanted to follow the Franciscan by a kneeling Christopher Columbus who was a member of this third order. Several other figures were interspersed throughout depicted various clergy representing, no doubt, popes or bishops over the years who were instrumental in aiding Franciscans gave approval to the Order over the years. Unfortunately, in 1967 because of such factors as the installation of air-conditioning extensive rain damage over the years and similar, the mural would be removed.

Besides the great mural there were other decorations made inside or near the sanctuary which also would be eventually eliminated for reasons stipulated above. Mr. D'Ambrosio also executed the five Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary starting with the beautiful Annunciation at the altar and ending with the Coronation of Our Blessed Lady painted over the choir loft.

Medallions, smaller paintings, were also added, and were varied in their depictions. Older saints from the beginnings of Christianity were painted and depicted Saint Cecilia, Saint Lucy and Saint Peter. Modern saints, were represented by the then recently sainted John Bosco, a saint well-known to many of Italian background, and interestingly Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, the young Native American saint whose cause for beatification had been introduced just a few years earlier in 1932 (indeed, she would not be beatified until 1980). There can be little doubt that Saint Clare's was unique in this regard, that is depicting the first Native American ever to be beatified.

The stained glass replacing the original plain opaque type glass was installed later in 1954, the church's twenty-fifth anniversary, and again it is interesting to note that those portraying Saint Pope Pius X (donated by the Children of the Parish), and Saint Maria Goretti (donated by the Mother's Club of Saint Clare's School) were probably among the very earliest depictions of the two saints who, again, were but recently canonized. Also of note is the fact that two other stained glass windows, that of Saint John Bosco and that of Saint Francis Cabrini also depict more modern saints, both of Italian background. As a small matter of observation, we can note that unlike several other churches which were founded as national parishes to help particular ethnic groups become adjusted to a new environment, the notations on the windows of Saint Clare's were all inscribed in English. Our neighboring parish of the Immaculate Conception some two miles to the north of Gun Hill Road, for example, has stained glass windows all or virtually all of which were inscribed in Italian. These for the most part were installed around 1950.

There were over the years several changes in decoration, some due to physical consideration such as, for example, the doors of the church, or to change mandated or recommended by recent church laws, such as the new and smaller altar when priests began celebrating the Mass facing the congregation. Still other changes, for example, the Stations of the Cross, were made on aesthetics grounds that are to incorporate newer art forms, and help always to enhance the House of the Lord.

Of course, without our priests there is no church. The priest is at the heart of every parish. The very first assistant at Saint Clare's, Father Bartolomeo Paolozzi, was also a native of Italy, and during the early decades virtually all assistants would also come from Italy. Other priests to serve

the parish would include Father Dante Magri, Father Philip Monteleone, Father Vincent Noto, Father Nicholas Falotico, and Father Nicolo Rimoli. Father Charles Vecchini, Father Santa Duca, Father James D'Ascoli, Father John Rettagliata and Father Conrad Renneisen. Most served for brief periods, and we note that two Father Margi and Father Renneisen, were not diocesan priests but members of religious orders, namely the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, and the Augustinian. It is also well to note that Father Cagnina, as the parish does to this day, also relied, at various times for help from the nearby Jesuit community at Fordham University to offer Sunday Mass. During these early times, Sunday Mass schedules differed somewhat from today, Masses were offered at 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:30 and 12:00 noon, while during the week there were but two Masses at 7:00 and 8:00. In December, 1932 the Church rectory was opened and connected to the Church and now with sufficient space and rooms it became easier to administer the Parish.

Because of the absence of a parochial school, Father Cagnina introduced about this time a catechetical program placing it under the direction of an affable and most enthusiastic woman, Mrs. Maria Corrado. Each succeeding pastor would continue to make use of a catechetical program and over the years the individual in charge would accrue more relevant credentials by attending, for example, bible study programs in schools, attendance at diocesan meeting, enrollment in various and pertinent college programs, and similar commiserate with modern technique used today. Having taught at Saint Dominic's Church, and being a person of great religious belief and enthusiasm, Mrs. Corrado with the aid of an assistant who had joined her, Miss Purpi, gradually drew most of the children of the area into her classes. These, of course, were drawn from the neighborhood public schools, and especially P.S. 83, and were children who were preparing for First Communion and Confirmation. She also tried to see to the needs of the slightly older child as well as any adult wishing to do so, and introduced a post-Confirmation class on Friday afternoon. When Mrs. Corrado retired some forty years later in 1969, she could look back with great satisfaction on the years she had taught in her field at both the churches of Saint Dominic and Saint Clare, and she serves as an outstanding example of the many lay people who over the years served their parish with dedication and distinction.

On April 23, 1933 the Parish most enthusiastically celebrated the 25th Anniversary of Father Cagnina's ordination. A Commemorative Booklet was published, and the strong Italian influence can be seen in the fact that the title on the cover was written in that language as well as several other pages. An ambitious musical program was presented that day with not

only professional singers and musicians but also with selections from the Church's Junior and Senior choirs as they were divided in this early period. Four parishioners Francesco D'Erasmus, Anthony M. Zamprelli, Kathleen Cioffredi, and Mary Voltura paid tribute to their beloved priest with an essay or a poem. A small remembrance card, printed in Italy, depicting a priest at the altar was distributed that day to all parishioners.

From the very earliest years, a number of organizations sprang up most of which are still active today. The first four societies, all most endeared to the heart of the young founding pastor, sprang up almost simultaneously in 1929 and 1930. They were the Sodality of the Sacred Heart, the Christian Mothers, the Children of Mary, and the Holy Name Society. Though the Sodality of the Sacred Heart and the Children of Mary no longer exist, the other two do, though not with the initial large memberships they once had. The Christian Mothers, whose president was Mrs. Marie Volpe, were, among other things, devoted to setting a good example of Christian living and to praying for the Church, would do yeoman work some twenty years later when they would help Father Cagnina collect funds for the parochial school he anticipated building. The primary purpose of the Holy Name Society was to pledge to do its best to uphold the Holy Name of Jesus and all for which it stands for. One of the first members of the Society and one who would serve as its president was Mr. Renato Bellantese known for his very great devotion to the Church. Another very early member was Mr. Fedele "Phil" D'Erasmus, a man active in the church from its inception and credited with being "the first altar boy." Another early altar boy was Italo Premuroso elected first president of the Altar Boys Society. Rather uniquely among parish Holy Name societies was the prison apostolate undertaken by a very few of the men, especially Mr. Cosmo Martino who had an Italian delicatessen at the corner of Williamsbridge Road and Rhinelander Avenue. He and a few other members would go on a monthly basis to visit Riker's Island or other relatively nearby prisons to distribute Catholic literature to the men and engage in some brief conversation. These men were literally following the injunction of Our Lord when He said "I was in prison and you visited me." In later years the Society would also establish a Junior Holy Name Society for boys and young men in elementary and high schools. Eventually, however, this section would be disbanded.

Rather interestingly, Father Cagnina with the help of a Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart member, Sister M. Roberta, conducted a Parish Census in those early days, and learned that about 1800 individuals now considered Saint Clare's their parish. Always ready to fill a need, several other societies were soon formed. Among these which began during this early period, most of which are still in existence was the choir organized

by the very talented Miss Ida Iacapraro, a graduate of Julliard whose father and brother were Bronx pioneers in running a music store in the Melrose section of the borough back in the 1920s through about the 1960s. Miss Iacapraro, as would most of the music directors who succeeded her over the years, was also a composer of religious music including a beautiful Ave Maria. She served faithfully as a music director from the earliest days and well into the 1970s.

Other societies such as the Saint Vincent de Paul Society did not only charitable work like collecting funds for the poor, but also by these kind actions helped to expand church membership. The Maids of the Blessed Sacrament, another early society and one composed principally of young women, also tried to set example of devotion to Jesus in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Also, though affiliated with the church but coming under some civic jurisdiction as well, were the Catholic War Veterans which was established on November 21, 1938 and would continue to work for the veterans through at least the 1940s and 1950s. Among the chief founders was Mr. Alphonse Corcillo who from the earliest years because of the great love he bore for his Church became involved with virtually all of the parish's societies, and Mr. James Cassano, another active layman. In 1947 a woman's auxiliary was formed.

Indeed the first full decade of Saint Clare's existence witnessed a strong and vibrant parish in every way. Its priests and its parishioners were able to lay the basis for succeeding years to grow and expand and to continue to proclaim the word of God to an ever growing populace, and Father Cagnina thanked the Lord daily that whatever initial difficulties there were inherent in the founding of any parish were met and overcome. He could look upon this decade with satisfaction and a spirit of thanksgiving.

CHAPTER 6

The early years, the second to the fourth decades, the 1940s to the 1960s

The 1940s may best be described as the "war years" and "recuperating years", not only for the parish, of course, but for the country. War or rumors of war were with us from the very late 1930s until 1945 when World War II ended. Many men of the Parish, as well as several women, were called to serve during this War, the largest war which the United States was engaged in up to that time. When the final number was tallied, the number

of service men and women participating from the Parish would total about seven hundred and fifty. Thankfully when the War ended, the country proceeded to get back to normal. A special servicemen's altar dedicated to the Blessed Mother was set up on the Gospel side of the altar bearing the names of all who had served. Unfortunately during this period two more wars would occur, namely, the Korean War and the Vietnam War but, of course, not on the same devastating scale as World War II. One of the assistant priests who was stationed at Saint Clare's during this period was Father (later Monsignor) John Rettagliata who was among the very first priests who heeded the call of the Archdiocese to become a chaplain. Indeed, Father would remain (with the exception of a brief period or two) a much needed chaplain until 1962. The Holy Name Society, with a large and active membership during these years, was credited with helping maintain the morale of the men during that time, and their monthly Communion was offered that they be preserved from harm. It was during the War, specifically in October 1942, that the Society began its publication, the "Holy Name Clarion." Though several individuals were involved, the publication was largely the inspiration of assistant Father George Giammarino, a friendly and warm individual who would one day be appointed pastor of Saint Clare's Parish. The newsletter was ably edited by Mr. William Walter Britting, a parishioner with a flair for editorial work, and one who tried to preserve the history of the Parish through some of his writings. Other individuals who worked very hard over the years to see the publication succeed were Father Adamo who was to succeed Father Giammarino, Mr. Dante Mazzocco, Mr. Frank Farina, and Miss Rose Cuomo, the latter individual also being called upon in 1955 to edit a beautiful "Souvenir Journal" for the Parish's twenty-fifth anniversary. Unfortunately in the early 1960s, the "Holy Name Clarion" for a number of reasons (no doubt, largely difficulty in getting individuals to contribute articles and ideas) ceased publication.

In 1944, a short-lived club named in honor of Mother Cabrini was formed. Aimed at the high school students and those slightly older, the Club introduced a number of dances and socials (in the 1950s this type of activity would eventually be undertaken by the Mothers and Fathers clubs when Saint Clare's School was established). As always, the pastor continued to provide a mission retreat during Lent, and these were and continue to be very well attended. Again as in the earlier decade and continuing to the present day, the mission was conducted in Italian as well as in English, and a children's mission was also conducted. Numerous and different in personalities were the priests who gave these missions, and without a doubt spiritual blessings were gained by all who attended. A parish bazaar which had started somewhat earlier and had

provided some entertainment during the Great Depression decade of the 1930s became larger towards the end of World War II. Profits, though never very large, were a great help towards meeting the expenses of the parish. Again, as with every other church endeavor, it was only through the help of the men and women of the parish that these efforts were able to succeed for it was they who literally volunteered hundreds of hours to help in the success.

A highlight of this period was the Pontifical Solemn High Mass celebrated on January 15, 1945 commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the Church, and the fact that the entire church debt had finally been eliminated. New debts, of course, would accrue in the future but for the time being the initial financial obstacles had been overcome.

The 1940s would see new priests appointed to assist Father Cagnina. These included Rev. George Giammarino, previously mentioned as beginning the "Holy Name Clarion," Father Joseph Adamo, Father Stanley Matthews, Father John Conway, Father Charles Blesch, Father Francis Quinn, Father Marcello Alferano, Father Gommarr DePauw, Father Peter Marino, and Father John Moran. These usually served for brief periods and for the most part there would be three priests serving simultaneously at Saint Clare's.

The decade of the 1950s as well would also witness several additional assistant priests, namely, Father Anthony V., Ferrarelli, a native of Italy, appointed in 1950, Father Vincent Taglienti appointed in 1954, Father Anthony D'Antonio, a native of Italy, appointed in 1956 and who served about sixteen years until he was transferred to the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the nearby Belmont area, Father John Lisi, C.R.S.P. and Father John C. McCarthy. It is interesting to note that Father Vincent had the distinction of working in the Parish for twenty-one years, 1954 to 1975, one of the longest records for parish work at one church. He later became Co-Pastor of the Church of Saint Michael in the Coop City area of the Bronx where he served for some nine years until 1984 when illness forced him into limited duties as Priest in-residence at Saint Gregory the Great Parish in Harrison. Shortly after this warm-hearted and affable priest passed away, other priests as well such as Father Ferrarelli would also become pastors after leaving Saint Clare's. In the later instance, Father (later Monsignor) Ferrarelli becoming pastor of the Italian national parish of the Immaculate Conception in the North Tarrytown. He retired from there after serving twenty-six years, returned to his native country Italy and passed away in the town of Croton after a long illness on February 15, 1985.

A near tragedy struck the Parish when a fairly severe fire in 1944 resulted in some damage to the Church (another minor fire would also occur in 1967), but thankfully all of which could be repaired. A circular stained glass window depicting Saint Clare had to be removed due to water damage around the window frame. Thankfully, the window was carefully packaged and retained

and reinstalled in 1958 in the new convent chapel. A number of parishioners helped out in any way they could such as helping clear the damage. Thus, another example how with the help of dedicated individuals, the Church could be repaired and become new again.

In April 1948 the "Holy Name Clarion" issued a special edition for the fortieth anniversary of Father Cagnina's ordination. Greetings were printed from the Holy Name Society Bernard A. Ferrara, President at that time, the Sodality of Our Lady Senior and Junior Divisions, Jean Cuomo and Rosalie Bertola, Presidents, Christian Mothers, 3rd Order of Saint Francis, the Saint Clare Catholic War Veterans and Ladies Auxiliary Robert L. Singrossi, and a greeting from Mrs. Corrado, the children's religious instructor.

Among several changes which inevitably occur in most parishes, this period in the 1950s saw the discontinuance of Sunday movie programs which Father Cagnina had begun in the earlier decades primarily to help provide good entertainment in an area when many people did not own cars or did not find public transportation always convenient. Also at this time, a small library primarily for children and young adults, a rather advanced concept as well as a beautiful one, ceased to function, no doubt because it was not always convenient to staff it, and because public libraries were beginning to function a bit more in the general area.

On a very sad note, the parish witnessed the first occurrence of the death of a priest while still serving at the parish. On January 18, 1950 Father Francis Quinn, one of the very few non- Italian background priests to ever serve at Saint Clare's died at the early age of fifty. Father Quinn was typical of the many priests who would succeed him over the decades in that he was tireless in serving the people of his parish. Father Cagnina gave a most moving tribute to his assistant.

The 1950s saw more and more emphasis being placed on programs for the youth of the parish. Father Cagnina had always wanted a parochial school but this had to be done gradually until the new parish was more financially sound, and as more families moved into the area. As the decade began several hundred children were enrolled in a number of activities besides, of course, the paramount one of being instructed for First Communion and Confirmation. Volunteers were always needed, and the Ladies Auxiliary of the Catholic War Veterans, among others, aided in this cause besides carrying on other works. In 1952 the Guardian Angels Society was founded and flourished under the leadership of the Church Sacristan, Mrs. Helen Reilly which had as its main goal to assist the parish priests on caring for the altar boys. By conducting raffles and similar events, the Society was able to purchase cassocks and surplices for the boys as needed, and to sponsor a Fall Altar Boys outing. Other societies appearing on the

scene at this time were also the Legion of Mary headed by Ilda Cruz, and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society with its first president being Renato Bellantese. As would happen for a period in some of the later decades, increased Mass attendance at this time would result in the basement of the Church being converted into what could be termed a chapel so that two additional Masses could be offered there to accommodate more people. It was also during this decade of the 1950s, specifically in May 1952, when Father Cagnina received news that he had be elevated to the rank of Monsignor. It was a well deserved honor, and the Parish was so very pleased at this news, and many congratulatory cards were sent to their now beloved Monsignor.

This period also saw more emphasis on charity bazaars and socials of every kind. Not only were ever needed funds raised, but people were given more opportunity to socialize in a very friendly and rewarding manner. Under the direction of Mr. John Dormi, Sr. the number of ushers were expanded and these fine men not only assisted in their main function of seeing to the needs of those attending Mass, but many of them were always available to help out at these other functions.

The crowning glory of this period was the founding and opening of Saint Clare's School. As noted earlier, the establishment of a school was a goal which Father Cagnina had worked on from the beginning. There is hardly a parish anywhere in the Archdiocese in residential areas, which does not have its own parochial school, and Saint Clare's would be no exception. As an aside and in the broader context of Catholic Church history, we may note that the first ever free school organized in New York City was established by Saint Peter's Church, the oldest parish, in 1800. To help secure a more substantial base for his school, they sought the financial help of many. As an example, he asked the help of Mrs. Lena Ippolito, one of the early members of the Christian Mothers to organize as many members of the organization to visit parishioners to ask for donations exclusively for the proposed school. Parishioners responded with generosity for a parochial school was dear to the heart of most of them. Once that he felt that the parish was on a more solid financial base, Father Cagnina began to develop specific plans for the opening of a school. He looked to one of the newer congregations of nuns for aid, namely the Congregation of Sisters Oblates to Divine Love, which had been founded in his native Italy in 1922 when Mother Margherita Diomira Crispi opened the first convent. Basing their lives on the Rule of Saint Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus or Jesuits as they are more commonly called, the Order quickly spread through parts of Italy, France, and the Latin America. In the United States they established novitiates such as, for example in

Hopewell Junction. The Oblates were engaged primarily in teaching but also were occupied in the apostolates of caring for orphans, moderating sodalities and parish work.

Thus it was that the Sisters Oblates to Divine Love arrived in Saint Clare's Parish in September 1949 to gradually begin their work. This first group had initially established themselves in El Salvador, Costa Rica and Nicaragua and then with the approval of the Apostolic Nuncio began their work in the New York area. Setting themselves up in a temporary convent at 2118 Hone Avenue, the sisters, who were primarily of Hispanic and Italian backgrounds, began acclimating themselves to the area while Father Cagnina began his plans for the school. It was on the Feast of the Assumption 1950 that ground for the school was broken at the corner of Rhinelander and Hone in a moving ceremony with a number of dignitaries in attendance including Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Flannery, Monsignor (later Bishop) Joseph Pernicone of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, and Father Adhamar DePauw, brother of Saint Clare's Father Dommar DePauw who was the Belgian delegate to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations. Four months later, one week prior to Christmas Eve, in another inspiring ceremony the cornerstone of the school was set in place. By September 1951 the school had been completed so that classes could begin. A short time later, hundreds of happy parishioners and friends gathered for the official dedication of the school by Francis Cardinal Spellman on October 14, 1951.

It should be noted that initially only four grades were operative, that is, the Kindergarten through the third grade. Gradually other grades would be added until 1957 when the first group of students who had been enrolled from opening day would be graduated. It was also in 1957 that some slight expansion to the school was done which made more space available. The very first teachers were Mother Josephine Giaccone, first superior and principal, Mother Anna DiGiorgi, Mother Consuelo, Mother Molina, Sister Gloria, and Sister Susana. Sister Gloria, soon to be known as Mother Gloria, soon after became principal. They were all dedicated teachers and happy to serve their students. When Mother Gloria stepped down in 1969 to serve her Order in national office, she was succeeded by Sister Josephine Stabile who would serve for more than three decades.

From virtually the very beginning of the school, parents became involved with the formation of first the Mothers' Club in November 1951 with Rita Paglianti its first president and three years later in October 1954 the Fathers club with Mr. Anthony DeGeorges its first president. In later years the two were joined into one organization the Parents Teachers Association or P.T.A. as it is more familiarly known. In 1952 the Mothers Club began their first card party and thus was begun a tradition which continues to the present.

Starting in the Church hall its popularity forced it gradually to move to large catering halls. Though earlier names have been lost with the passage of time, in more recent years such card parties have been headed by such individuals as Angela Loretta. Other sociable events were also organized as the years passed all with basically the two goals of providing a friendly atmosphere to meet and relax, and at the same time to raise needed funds of the school. That same year the Mother's Club began issuing a one page newsletter, the "Mothers' Club News".

As the School progressed, it was obvious that the Sisters did not have adequate numbers to fill the classes. Thus, from the earliest years, the 1950s, lay teachers were gradually introduced. Among the first pioneers were Miss Damiano and Mrs. Adele Perrotta who worked so well with the Sisters to guarantee the finest education for the children. Another pioneer was Sister Josephine Stabile at that time still a lay woman but who in 1961 would enter the Oblates and who because of her excellent work would in 1969 become principal.

A sampling of statistics can be useful in depicting the School's growth. For example, in 1955 there were 247 boys and 309 girls enrolled and they were taught by seven sisters and two lay teachers. Eight years later in 1963 the figure had increased to 444 boys and 447 girls being taught by ten sisters and nine lay teachers. Through a program of "released time," Saint Clare's also reached out to parish children who attended the nearby public schools (P.S. 11 and P.S. 108). These children were given a few hours a week to attend a religion class at Saint Clare's to learn the rudiments of their religion. A few laywomen joined with the nuns in this endeavor continuing the fine tradition that Mrs. Corrado had begun under Father Cagnina's direction from the earliest beginnings of the parish until the late 1960s when she retired from this beautiful apostolate.

As this period progressed various changes in the school were made. As an example 1968 witnessed the beginnings of the school library. The Mothers Club provided an occasional volunteer to oversee the library, and the children made good use of the encyclopedias and other books available. Field trips and other events were planned, as well as various contests and other events, in short, the children had a full and varied year. It was also about this time that Saint Clare's in common with various other Catholic schools drafted a reevaluation of statement of principle as to their philosophy of operation. This inspirational statement sums up in a beautiful fashion the splendid commitment which the parochial school has made to the betterment of its surrounding. It is quoted here and reads as follows:

In the spirit of Christ as seen in the Gospel to educate the whole child morally, intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, inculcating the values of by which he will develop to his full potential as a Christian, respectful of all life, cognizant of

the worth of human dignity, and able to take his place in society as a useful citizen and loyal American with a sense of personal responsibility. To provide for the needs of immediate parish first and for those outside the parish whenever and wherever possible to cooperate and share with the community our ideas and facilities becoming more flexible in our outlook and ability to cope with changing conditions and environment.

And so the School continued to prepare the children in the best possible way, with field trips, various educational programs, and some after school programs. It also published a series of beautiful small booklet of “Memories” with photographs and brief descriptions of what had transpired during the year, and recalling to mind episodes of the past.

Slight changes in the neighborhood continued to occur as it continued to welcome those moving in from other sections. In the 1960s it was estimated that about two thousand families were in the parish. The 1960s would also witness many changes occurring in the Universal Church as Vatican Council II begun in 1962 and terminating in 1964 would implement new directives. Among some of these changes as the years progressed would be the optional use of the native language at Mass instead of Latin, the priest offering Mass facing the congregation, the introduction of Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. It was during Monsignor Cagnina’s tenure that these changes were gradually introduced, but it would be left to his immediate successor, and others who would follow to implement them. Some of these will be discussed briefly in the following chapters.

As this period progressed, Saint Clare’s became more involved with newer activities. For example in 1963 the Knights of Columbus began to sponsor a special Mass for the handicapped which was held under the auspices of the organization, the Fordettes. Usually rotated among several churches throughout the Archdiocese. The Fordettes usually met at Saint Clare’s in April for the Mass and a lunch. Dominick DeLuccia chaired this event, and continued till the close of the century, truly a remarkable achievement. All the pastors from Father DiFalco who first gave permission to use Saint Clare’s facilities up till the present day have all made this unique charitable group feel most welcome. We mention here as well that the Knights of Columbus, though not a parish related organization, had been founded on Holy Thursday in April, 1957. A small group of men met in the lower church to discuss starting a council. As related by one of the charter members and one of the most active and involved of all Parish members, Al Corcillo, the national Knights of Columbus had been founded in the basement church of Saint Mary’s Church in New Haven, and strange but beautiful so did this new Council soon to be named after Our Lady,

Queen of Peace was founded in the lower church of Saint Clare's, and would over the years become a great help to it and neighboring churches. The founding members of the Mary Queen of Peace Council were Salvatore Iacovacci, Anthony Zamprelli, Renato Bellantese, and William Yehle. Another group to appear was the Young Christian Students (Y.C.S.) which was an affiliate of an international organization which had been formed in France as early as the 1930s. The group, geared to youth in high school and college, tried to combine spiritual activities with a deeply committed sense of activity on behalf of all who might have material needs. Moderated by Father Vincent who introduced the group into the parish and led by a high school student Mr. Anthony Cerna, (now president of Sacred Heart University in Connecticut), the group was active for several years. However, like some other groups in all parishes, it eventually disbanded.

The last year of the decade, 1969, would witness the retirement of Monsignor Cagnina. Parishioners had become too accustomed to having him as their pastor and friend that it was very hard to accept the news. They knew that Monsignor with his age and consistent hard work on behalf of the Parish had indeed earned his retirement but they could not quite get used to the idea. Though he wouldn't need any memorials to be remembered, the parish saw to it that a large portrait of him would be placed in the school auditorium so that future generations could see what their founding pastor looked like. The Knights of Columbus dedicated a statue of the Blessed Mother to him and placed it in front of the rectory. Monsignor would no longer be in the parish, but remembrance of him would always live on. Few were the families who did not have some personal remembrance of him for the countless times he had visited them while they were ill, or counseled them in troubles or sorrows, or urged them on to a better spiritual life in talking with them at numerous meetings in their various clubs and organizations. And so at the very beginning of 1969, Monsignor retired thankful that the Lord had given him strength and zeal to serve his parish for some forty years. He was given the well deserved honorary title of "Pastor Emeritus". A new era would now begin when in March a new pastor for Saint Clare would be appointed.

CHAPTER 7

The later years, the first half, The 1970s and 1980s

The priest to succeed Monsignor Cagnina was Monsignor Joseph Raimondo, a native of Westchester County. Monsignor, as would be all

future pastors, was American born thus signaling the end of an era when so many pastors throughout New York were European born. Like his predecessor, Monsignor Raimondo was known for his intellectual acumen and his zeal on behalf of his parishioners and his Church. After his ordination in May 1940 he was assigned to the Church of Saint Theresa in the nearby Pelham Bay section of the Bronx. A short time later in December 1942, heeding the call for much needed chaplains for the men in service in World War II, he entered the Chaplains' Corp and was assigned to the Army. In service he often lived the dangerous life of any person in a war zone. His service record eventually earned him both the bronze star and the silver star as well as other citations. After the War, Monsignor would serve at the historic Church of Saint James in lower Manhattan's East Side the parish where the famous "Al" Smith the first Catholic to be elected governor of New York State lived. Monsignor also served at Saint Dominic's as well as Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Poughkeepsie, and it was while serving there that he was elevated to the rank of Monsignor in November 1965.

The period when Monsignor Raimondo began his service at Saint Clare continued to see changes brought about primarily because of Vatican II. This great assemblage of churchmen prayed, studied and deliberated on how to better serve their people, get them more intimately involved in helping their priests and religious, and become more aware of the treasures of their faith. As the 1970s began the Archdiocese introduced the option of a Saturday evening Mass (in some upstate communities where it had become more difficult to fulfill Sunday obligation, this practice had actually been in force during summer months). Monsignor Raimondo invited all parishioners to give their opinion regarding the matter. The response was overwhelming in favor and thus on August 10, 1969, the parish witnessed its first Saturday evening Mass. It is believed that Saint Clare was the first or among the very first parishes in the Bronx, and, indeed, among the very first in New York City to take advantage of this option. This privilege was not granted as a permanent one by the Archdiocese, however, until the end of the year. The next month on September 7th, Saint Clare's also introduced a Sunday evening Mass but this was later dropped. The next week on September 14th still another first took place when Monsignor urged that the 9 o'clock Mass primarily for children be changed in emphasis and be a Mass known primarily for parents and their children. The concept of family worship would thus be emphasized. This idea was continued by succeeding pastors and would be further accentuated during the pastorate of Father Guarnieri in the 1990s by such opportunities as providing coffee and cake after Mass so that children and parents could meet briefly with one another, get to know each other better, and recall to mind that the Church is and

should be one big family with all that implies such as being ready to aid one another in time of need. Truly does such a concept follow the command of Christ. Again, largely because of deliberations during the Vatican II Council still other changes were made. For example, in 1977 the practice of receiving Communion in the hand became lawful in the United States. As an instruction issued by Vatican II noted that the practice “ought to strengthen (the recipient’s) sense of dignity as a member of the Mystical Body of Christ... (and the recipient) will thus experience an increase of faith in the great reality of the Body and Blood of the Lord which he touches with his hands”.

It was also at the beginning of the pastorate of Monsignor Raimondo that a Folk Mass in the lower church had been initiated on a trial basis. Such a Mass tended to use music more adaptable to the guitar rather than the organ, and tended to attract primarily, but by no means exclusively younger people. We note in passing that gradually as the decades progressed, the lower church would for all practical purposes cease to be used as a church. The evening Mass could now accommodate the parishioners so that there was little need to have another Mass there. Thus, the lower church as several years passed, would gradually cease to function as a church, gradually divested of its sacred appearance, and would become used for meeting room purposes as more and more groups began making use of it. The Folk Mass would later be moved to the 12:15 Mass (this Mass would later be changed to 12:00 Noon when the parish made all its Masses on the hour). For example, while during the 1970s Sunday Masses were offered at 7, 8 (in Italian), 9 (Children’s Mass), 10:15, 11:15, 12:15, and 1:30, the mid 1980s onward schedule would be 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, 11:00, 12:00 and 1:00. A 1977 directory used the word “Youth” in place of “Children” for the 9 o’clock Mass, and introduced the word “Folk” for the 12 o’clock Mass. In the 1970s the Saturday evening Mass was offered at 7:00 P.M. but after a brief period of trial was changed to 5:30 P.M.

Among a few of the names which have come down to us (and there were some others) associated with the early Folk Mass were Bill Sterling, Ed Fata, Bob Seda, Anthony Cernera, Lawrence Rywalt (later to become a Passionist priest), Louis Basilone, Barbara Mahan, Susan Tavernia, Lena Benigno, Fran Scagnelli, and Jenny DeBrino. Ed Fata besides being a guitarist and singer, was a signer for the hearing impaired, and when the occasion arose, he would use this talent at Mass for these individuals. This could be done by him for unlike today’s folk group, the earlier group played and sang at the side of the altar.

When the group decided in the early 1990s to leave the Parish to play and sing at various other parishes, they continued to utilize signing for the

deaf whenever the need arose, and thus showed their concern for all those who were handicapped in this area.

The priests who assisted the pastor during this period were for the 1970s Father Raymond T. LaManna (1972), Father Joseph B. Hynds (1975) and Monsignor Francis Cassano (1979). For the 1980s they were Father Herbert D'Argenio, Father George C. Lodi, Father Moro Manzi (a native of Italy), Father Thomas J. DeLucci, Father Joseph Bisignano, and Father Stan Santhu, the later interesting to note, a native of India. During these decades there were also a number of resident priests stationed at Saint Clare's. That is, they were in the New York area for study purposes or other, and would soon return to their original parishes. Among these priests would be Father Daniel Maloney, a Benedictine priest, Father Conrad Kraus, Father William Macera, Father William Cyr, and Father John J. Naumann. The priests appointed to the Parish were of varied backgrounds and experience. For example, Father Lodi who was ordained in 1974 and ministered almost five years at Blessed Sacrament Church in Manhattan, served at Saint Clare's from 1979 to 1982 when he was transferred to the Church of Saint Gregory. Father D'Argenio would at about the beginning of the twenty-first century have an Early Learning Center at the parish of Saint Theresa be named after him. Each priest had his own charisma and the parish benefited from this. A youthful Father "Tom" DeLucci worked well with parent groups and young people, Father "Joe" Bisignano took charge of the Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharistic and the Lectors on occasion having spiritual talks with them and reminding them of the sacredness and the importance of their ministry. Father Stan Santhu jovial and amiable would regale some of the older Italian-speaking parishioners with his beautiful Italian, and they would marvel as to the excellence of his speech. The parish also saw the services of some Sunday Associates or at any other time needed such as Father James J. Halligan, Father Leo Gariazzo, Father Edmund Whalen, Father Kenneth Marks and various Jesuit priests from Fordham University. Among the latter was Father Edward F. Maloney a past president of Fordham Prep and a superior at Fordham, Father David Casey, Father Daniel Fitzpatrick and Father Joseph Dolan. On two or three occasions, Saint Clare's also saw the services of Father Avery Dulles who would in 2001 be appointed a cardinal by Pope John Paul II, a rare and great honor and responsibility.

It was also at this time that the Parish Council was formed. Composed of parishioners from a varied background, the Council was intended as an advisory group to the pastor and his assistants. A committee was appointed to try to obtain the services of those who were willing to serve on the Council, and eventually a slate of these individuals was prepared. Monsignor wanted to make sure that all parishioners would have a voice in the Council's formation and thus had a rather professional ballot prepared

listing the names, background and photographs of those willing to serve. Thus each parishioner voted and in the December 19, 1971 of the Parish Bulletin it was proudly announced that “The Parish Council is born”. Four hundred and nineteen ballots had been counted and in a very close election the following were elected—Anthony Cernera, Alfred DeSantis, Mary Haughney, Teresa Ippolito, Virginia Maffei, Cosmo Martino, Peter Monti, Ray Monti, Rocco Miano, Anne Parker, Louis Recker, Felix Romita, Rita Verrino and two youth representatives, Bobby Calvo and Al Magro. Also on the council as seven appointed members were the three parish priest, two sisters including Sister Stabile, the School Principal and two trustees, Al Corcillo and Phil D’Erasmus. The Council was duly installed the next month on January 10, 1972, and immediately it established five working committees, namely, Spiritual Development, Community Action, Adult Education, Parish Activities, and Administration. Two years later in 1974, the Council began to publish a Parish Newsletter. Ordinarily about six to eight pages in length, the Newsletter with Father LaManna serving as moderator. During its existence, the Newsletter usually featured an article by the pastor, a synopsis of minutes of Council meetings, a message from Sister Stabile, and some articles by Father George Lodi explaining some tenants of the Catholic faith. It gave news of various events, listed the names of the School’s graduation classes, and similar. The early editors were Nick Falco a long-time dedicated parishioner active in numerous church activities. A few years latter Miss Lucille Fabrizio, an early graduate of Saint Clare’s School, became editor. Knowledgeable about school activities and similar, she added a new dimension to the task. The painstaking activity of typing and arranging the issues were expertly filled by such individuals as Marina Perna, Adrienne Sicilia, Elaine Corcillo, Janet Corcillo, and Rita Verrino. All in all the Newsletter was a valuable asset in helping parishioners learn more about their Parish.

In 1977 the Council issued a thirty-four page Parish Handbook titled “Know Your Parish”. Four pages were written in Italian to accommodate the still relatively large number of parishioners who were more at ease with their native tongue. The Handbook sought to make parishioners more aware of what was offered by their parish so that they could take advantage and be aided to help live a much fuller and integrated spiritual life. More awareness of the needs of the handicapped also began to develop at this time, and thus in the summer of 1978 a ramp for the handicapped was constructed at the Paulding Avenue side of the Church, and immediately was put into good use by those who needed it.

Newer groups began to appear on the scene including in 1978 a Charismatic Prayer Group which met in the afternoons. Led by such

individuals as Norma Kane and Irene Gill, they prayed for various special needs not only of individuals but for the Church in general. On occasion Norma would play the auto harp and some hymns would be sung. During its height there were some thirty or so individuals involved, mainly elderly who were not working. However in the mid 1980s as participation declined, the group gradually dissolved and essentially prayed as an informal group after some of the morning Masses which they usually attended and such individuals as Agnes Cacace would lead the rosary. An Italian prayer group which had been founded earlier is still active today, meetings on Wednesday evenings at 7:30, in the lower Church.

This was also the period when the Archdiocese started a Renew program, and Saint Clare's became one of the first churches to start its local group. Two of the principals involved were Bernie Moran (then still not a deacon) and his wife Theresa. Members met in the lower rectory and prayed and discussed ways of bringing a greater spiritual vitality in their lives and in the lives of those they encountered. The prayer which they recited not only at meetings but in their own private prayer life is here quoted in full for it encompasses great spirituality – "Lord we are your people, the sheep of your flock. Heal the sheep that are wounded. Touch the sheep that are in pain. Clean the sheep that is soiled. Warm the lambs that are cold. Help us to know the Father's love through Jesus the Shepherd and through the Spirit. Help us to lift up that love and show it all over this land. Help us to build love on Justice and Justice on love. Help us to believe mightily, hope joyfully, love divinely. Renew us that we may help renew the face of the earth. Amen."

During this period the Catholic Church had reintroduced the Diaconate, a ministry which traced its origins back to the earliest days. Among the reasons to reintroduce this ministry was the fact that with added assistance priests could expand their services throughout the parish and wherever else it was needed. Thus it was that on May 25, 1974 Deacon James Oakes was ordained to the Permanent Diaconate. During its history, Saint Clare's would eventually have two other Deacons. Deacon Joseph A Weckbach three years later in 1977 and two decades later, Deacon Bernard (Bernie) Moran ordained on June 7, 1997.

The three deacons in Saint Clare's history would prove of invaluable service. They not only assisted at Mass, usually the 11:00 o'clock Mass, but distributed Holy Communion to other shut-ins, assisted at Funeral Masses, and visited the sick.

The year 1979 was a special year for the Parish for that was the year of its 50th Anniversary celebration. For that occasion Monsignor Raimondo wrote an excellent history of the Parish beautifully illustrated with numerous

photographs. Each and every picture evoked many wonderful memories of events of the past. The cover painted by the church artist, the son of the artist who had done the artistic designs earlier, Anthony D'Ambrosio, Jr. depicted Saint Clare with a modern background of modern office buildings, a saint for the present who had but recently been declared patroness of television. In fact, Mr. D'Ambrosio had painted the same scene for the interior of the Church, but later, again largely because of weather damage, was covered. With the compliments of the John Dormi and Sons Funeral Home, our historical calendar for 1979 was issued containing both photographs and original illustrations painted by some parish artists such as Mario Starace, Rose Falco, Josie DeCicero, and Howard Ferry. A Mass of Thanksgiving offered by the Cardinal and a dinner-dance attended by many parishioners brought this special anniversary to a pleasant end.

The next year, 1980, Saint Clare's would receive its third pastor when Monsignor Raimondo was transferred to Saint Gregory's Parish in Harrison. Monsignor had set the Parish on firm footing by leading it through the new directives which had resulted from Vatican Council II of the previous decade, overseeing the area growing slightly and accommodating more parishioners, and keeping up any work needed to the church and school.

The third pastor would be another personable, warm and friendly priest in the person of Father George Giammarino who had previously served here briefly as an associate in the early 1940s. Later he had been transferred to the Church of Saint Roch in the south eastern of the Bronx where he served as pastor from 1968 to 1974. That Church established in 1899 had at one time a very sizeable Italian-American community. Born in Manhattan, Father Giammarino was ordained in 1941 from Saint Joseph's Seminary. Besides his service at Saint Clare's in the 1940s and at Saint Roch, Father would also serve Saint Patrick's Old Cathedral and Holy Rosary in Manhattan, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Theresa in the Bronx. Father Giammarino, a likeable and friendly priest, was to serve Saint Clare's Parish until 1986 when he was transferred to Saint Ann's Parish in Yonkers.

It was during Father's tenure, specifically in April 1983 that our present music director, Mr. Lloyd Thompkins, was appointed. A native of South Carolina and a musician of impeccable credentials, Mr. Thompkins was also a composer of several musical pieces including a magnificent "Gloria" as well as an arranger of music. He has and continues to sing in the chorus of the New York City Opera Company, as well as on occasion in other of the great halls in New York City. Other than the church's first musical director, Miss Ida Iacaparó, Mr. Thompkins has served Saint Clare's the longest period. A composer of several hymns, as well as an arranger of other pieces, the quality of music in the parish has been greatly enhanced.

Virtually every year during his tenure the Choir, among other activities participates in Christmas caroling during this joyous and beautiful Season. In a short time, he would introduce several musicians (usually a quartet) to accompany the choir during the solemn vigils on Christmas Eve and Easter. Mr. Thompkins succeeded Mr. Salvatore Rendina and Mr. Thomas Marino parishioners who though serving the Parish relatively briefly had served it so well with their musical talents from the mid 1970s. As an example, under Mr. Rendina's direction, the Saint Clare's Choir participated with some other groups in a Christmas musical celebration at the Pan Am building in mid-Manhattan, and also participated at Saint Patrick's Cathedral when our parish nuns were honored at a special ceremony. Mr. Marino as well provided music with the choir on special occasions. Also for briefer periods Saint Clare's was served by at least three intermittent directors. It is well to remember that on Sunday with the exception of the 7:00 a.m. Mass, church music is provided for each and every Mass with the entire choir always participating at the 11:00 a.m. Mass.

The Bicentennial of the country in 1976 saw many celebration events throughout New York City. School children participated in various ways. That same year, our School held its Silver Jubilee Anniversary. A beautiful booklet was produced by the Sisters, "Silver Memories" replete with photographs showing the children, and the teachers at work and play. Highlighting the School's history, the Sisters highlighted such events as the opening of the new Library in the fall of 1974; the introduction of the portable Science Laboratory in 1975. A delightful brief reminiscence by Lucille F. Fabrizio, of the Class of 1957, the class which had started in the third grade, and thus was the first class to graduate.

In 1986, when Father Giammarino was transferred to Saint Ann's Parish in Yonkers he was succeeded by another warm and friendly priest, Father Leonard DiFalco, whose appointment became effective on September 15th thus becoming Saint Clare's fourth pastor. Father, a native of Manhattan, was ordained from St. Joseph's Seminary in 1949. He was an associate pastor at St. Rita's on Staten Island and at Holy Rosary in Manhattan until he became secretary to Auxiliary Bishop Edward V. Dargin, who was also pastor of St. Gregory's in Harrison. Father DiFalco was named administrator of St. Ann's in Yonkers in 1971 and then served as pastor from 1972 until 1985 when he began work on the retired priests' project. He served as temporary administrator of Mt. Carmel Church in Manhattan from March until July of that year, when father Terzo Vinci, S.A.C. was appointed pastor. Father DiFalco would continue to his work on the retired priests' project. Father also had a very keen interest in persons of disability, and was known for his

efforts to accommodate them in every way. Within a few months of his appointment, he created an outreach office obtaining the services of Sister Enid Storey, P.B.V.M. a Presentation Sister, to help the elderly in innumerable ways. She made frequent visitations to their homes, and was an advocate for them in their needs. After a few years, however, Sister was asked by her Order to take over other duties within the Order, and she left her Saint Clare's post.

On a lighter note, Father introduced the custom of the Blessing of the Animals for the October Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi. At about four o'clock the school yard would be filled with a wide assortment of dogs, cats, birds, and an occasional not so ordinary pet as a hamster or similar. It was his way of reminding both the young and the old that our concern and compassion should cover all of God's creature. The beautiful custom would be carried on to the present.

At the time of Father DiFalco's appointment, Father Thomas J. DeLucci was appointed as associate pastor. The young priest had recently returned from graduate studies in Rome, and now looked forward to parish work, and before long was moderator of several organizations. A native of Staten Island, Father had spent five years studying at Gregorian University and Academia Alfonsiana in Rome. During this time which included his deaconate year, he worked at a home for youth in southern Italy, in a home visitation program for the sick, and as a United States Army chaplain in Kirchgoend, West Germany. Following his ordination in New York in June 1985, Father DeLucci was assigned for the summer to St. Joseph's in New Windsor. Father was able to get many of the teenagers involved in helping distribute food and other items which had been collected during the month. The custom had been started of asking parishioners to contribute on a monthly basis various food items which with the aid of several of the youngsters parents would be taken to a distribution center in the south section of the Bronx then to be distributed to the needy. Many parishioners responded with a concern for those less fortunate, and under Father Tom's direction the students were happy to be involved.

Activities by various clubs continued with vigor and foresight always directed by dedicated lay people. One such example would be the Jack O'Leary Memorial Scholarship & Pasta Night which was organized by the Father's Club in 1988. In February of that year, a dedicated individual Jack O'Leary who among other things had helped organize activities for the school children from 1975 till his death and who had given countless hours to help all youth, passed away. Immediately the officers of the Fathers Club were approached. It was suggested that they should give thought to ways in which to remember Jack, and in a sense recall to mind all the dedicated men past and present who had done so much for Saint Clare's School. Thus from what had previously been a kind of cook out to help

raise funds, developed into a more enlarged and expanded Scholarship and Pasta Night. From the proceeds of the event it has been usually customary to select one boy and one girl eight grader to receive scholarships to help them through high school, and to help the school with a donation.

Among the many other activities during this period would be the inauguration of a Seder in the early 1970s by the Parish Council. Held in the lower church, the Seder would sometimes attract as many as one hundred and fifty people. With the aid of a Jewish commentator, and prayers said by our priests, attendees learned more about our Christian roots in the Old Testament. On occasion children in the upper grades would be taken on a spiritual retreat for the week end. The Senior Citizens groups grew more active and the officers organized many one day trips much to the enjoyment and relaxation of all the participants. Both the Clarion Leisure Club and the Senior Citizens Thursday Club organized many one day trips, and on occasion even longer ones. These over the years would be conducted by such individuals as Fay Purpi and Perri Rebecchi. The custom of giving attendees “Saint Anthony’s Bread” at the end of the Masses on his feast day which probably had been done in earlier decades, at least sporadically, would be continued by such individuals as Joan Pastorella. Bible classes were also inaugurated in the evening drawing as many as thirty or so participants, several from out of the Parish. These classes were taught by priests, nuns, or deacons all of whom were able to point out numerous interesting and important details regarding the Bible, and thus make all attendees more aware of the spiritual treasures which it contains. Again, as in previous decades, Saint Clare’s Parish was living up to the high ideals which its pastors and priests had set up for it.

CHAPTER 8

THE LATER YEARS, THE SECOND HALF THE 1990s TO THE PRESENT

The year 1989 closed on both a sad note but one also rejuvenated with hope. Father DiFalco became ill and his tenure at Saint Clare’s would be but a short one. In the fall of 1989 his illness overcame him and he passed away. An immense outpouring of affection took place at his Solemn Funeral Mass with many priests assisting in offering the Mass, and hundreds of parishioners in attendance. Though his stay had been but a very short one his outgoing personality and warmth had touched everyone who had met him, and the memories would remain.

A few weeks later Saint Clare’s fifth pastor, Father Richard Guarnieri

would be installed. The sadness which had occurred but just a short time ago, turned into joy and thanksgiving that once again a pastor was found ready to serve the spiritual needs of the parish. Father Guarnieri was a priest of varied experience including the teaching of Italian at Fordham University, and serving as pastor of the Church of The Assumption on Staten Island. Father, having grown up in the nearby Parish of Our Lady of Mercy in the Fordham section of the Bronx, was not a stranger to the Morris Park area. Upon his arrival, he lost no time in further familiarizing himself with the parish and its people. His interest in them was so obvious and his willingness to listen to all were hallmarks of a man of devotion and concern.

In but a short time, Father became acclimated to his parishioners, had become better known by them, and grew to know the many members of the various societies. In his very first year, that is, 1990, he introduced the beautiful idea of having a Parish Picnic in the school year on the Sunday nearest the feast of Saint Anthony of Padua, a joyous and happy climax to the three day tridium in honor of the saint. With the enthusiastic help of several men from the Parent, Teachers Association who served some light refreshments, and who helped arrange picnic tables, a few hundred parishioners were able to enjoy an afternoon of companionship and fun. Father also hired a small old-fashioned Italian band from Staten Island which briefly played at the picnic after a procession with the saint's statue and several other saints through some of the neighboring streets. The picnic was such a favorite that is now regarded as a custom always to be cherished.

Father Guarnieri also strengthened and enhanced the monthly "Family Mass," offered at 10:00 AM, and parents were strongly encouraged to attend Mass with their children as a family unit. After each Mass with the aid of the mothers and fathers of the Parents, Teachers Association and others he would provide refreshments for the group so that they could socialize and get to know each other better, truly a beautiful and important demonstration of concern. The children participated more fully, some serving as Lector, many singing from the altar, and all singing with gusto at the appropriate time during the Mass.

At the end of Father's first year, specifically on Saturday, December 1, 1990, at the 5:30 Mass the Church was rededicated after being closed for three months for extensive renovations. On Sunday, December 2, 1990 resealing of the cornerstone of the Church took place. It had been opened four months previously near the Feast of Saint Clare as part of the Parish's sixtieth anniversary. The following were the articles which were placed in the cornerstone:

1. Picture of Msgr. Francis Cagnina, 2. Picture of present pastor, Father

Richard Guarnieri, 3. Letters from Mrs. Mary Bellantese, Phil D'Erasmus, teenager Brian Yovine, and St. Clare's Student Jennifer Tonchetti, 4. History of parish by Nick Falco, 5. Newspaper article (Bronx Times Reporter) regarding re-opening of cornerstones. 6. Medals of Holy Year 1925 and Pius XI, Pope when St. Clare's was built, 7. Rosary beads from Assisi, 8. Rosary from Medugorje, 9. Booklet entitled "Endangered & Threatened Wildlife and Plants, dated April 15, 1990. 10. Rose from casket of Monsignor Cagnina, 11. Cross belonging to Mother Margherita Crispi, foundress of Oblates to Divine Love (the name was later changed to Oblates to the Blessed Trinity) the religious order teaching in the School. 12. Coins dated 1990, 13. Newsletter of Teenage Group, and 14. Contents which had been removed from the cornerstone a few months previously on August 9th, namely three newspaper articles, signature of those who were present at the dedication in 1930, and coins of various dates.

In an interview in the "Bronx Times Reporter" at the unsealing in August, Father gave a brief but enthusiastic report of plans for the Church. He noted that the Church would be getting new lighting, and a new and more modern organ would also be purchased. In this latter regard we can note that the original pipe organ had long since been changed due to some smoke damage in 1967. Thus, during this decade some of this work proceeded.

From the very beginning of Saint Clare's School there had always been a CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) program in the School. However, to help coordinate religious education in the Parish, a task which was becoming more complex as the years passed and which needed more professional direction unlike during the earlier years of the Parish's history, Sister Martha Oterstadt, P.B.V.M., another Presentation Sister as had been Sister Enid Storey, was appointed in 1994. When she left the next year, the task of Coordinator of Religious Education was taken over by Ms. Vittoria "Vicky" Bianco. It was her very important duty to insure that children in the nearby public elementary schools (essentially P.S. 83 and P.S. 108) received such instruction through the released time program. Generally held between the hours of 2:00 to 3:15 p.m. on a weekly basis, the program sought to fill in the religious void in the youngster's public school program. Though figures fluctuate, generally speaking to this day, Ms. Bianco has about one hundred and eighty-five children to instruct. From time to time, she helps some of the children get involved in community projects so that they can better appreciate how their faith should be lived, and they have on occasion been the subject of brief newspaper articles in the local Bronx press. She has truly been an inspiring teacher. To give a more recent statistic indicating the scope of this apostolate, eighty-eight students were confirmed in the first year of the

21st century, 2001. A Program issued at the time acknowledged all who helped bring the children to this joyous day, and these besides Ms. Bianco were especially four teachers, Mrs. June Brusco, Miss Madeline Moccia, Mrs. Anne Palmieri and Miss Giovanna Ruggiero.

Much in the same vein, The RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) came into its own at this time. Simply put the Rite is a process for any individual interested in becoming a member of the Catholic Church, or who seeks to come into full communion with the Catholic faith community. Thus it is intended for individuals who have never been baptized or for various reasons never received the sacraments of the Eucharist or Confirmation. It was also intended for those seeking to join and become Catholic. As coordinator of religious education, Ms. Bianco works diligently to organize these programs.

During this decade more and more made use of the church facilities by groups not officially affiliated with the church but serving a very real and spiritual or social need for many individuals. More specifically these groups included Alcoholics Anonymous, Gambler's Anonymous and Overeaters Anonymous. During various weekly afternoon or evenings, these groups meet and try to help one another. Always seeking to utilize its church facilities, Saint Clare's has had for decades meetings of still other groups such as the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, and the Brownies. Also in 1996 Knights of Columbus, Mary Queen of Peace Council, began using the lower church for meetings when their building on Williamsbridge Road was sold. We note that the majority of its members are or have been parishioners. Among groups using Saint Clare's facilities such as the School auditorium to have Masses offered have been the Fordettes, an organization dedicated to helping handicapped individuals. Two parishioners who were in earlier years actively engaged with this wonderful group have been Al Corcillo, and Dom DeLuccia.

In 1994 in an effort to raise needed funds for church expenditures, Father Tom thought of the idea of publishing a cookbook, and immediately consulted with Sister Enid who was able to fill in needed details on how to proceed. Forming a cookbook committee headed by Paula Angerame and Laura Berardi, and soon to be joined by Richard Franzetti, Margie Nigro, Anthony Perito and Dale Raffaele, the group was able to publish a cookbook with hundreds of recipes contributed by people of this Parish. A social as well as a financial success, the funds generated were largely used to pay for repair and maintenance work, and excellent example of people coming together to assist the Parish.

In 1997 and in a most important event, the parish was so very pleased to welcome Father John Voglio as assistant. A native of Levittown, and

originally a member of the Salesian Order which placed stress on the teaching vocation, Father felt his call to be more in the nature of a parish priest. He had entered the Salesians of Don Bosco in 1975, and professed final vows in 1983 and was a teacher of history at Salesian High School from 1987 to 1994. Before coming to Saint Clare's he served at Immaculate Conception Church in Stony Point from 1994 to 1996 and at Saint Joseph's Croton Falls from 1996 to 1997. Father has a natural rapport with young people and during his ministry has been called upon on several occasions to serve at special functions outside the parish such as, for example, offering the Mass for a First Communion occasion at Villa Marie Academy.

In the early 1990s in collaboration with the San Silverio Society of Morris Park, a novena and outdoor procession were begun in honor of San Silverio a fifth century pope. The San Silverio Society of Morris Park was founded in 1987. Composed in large measures of natives of the Island of Ponza and their descendants, many members were originally parishioners of the Franciscan Church of Our Lady of Pity in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx, and were members of the Society in that area. When they began to move out of the neighborhood to settle in Morris Park or adjacent areas, they carried their great devotion to their patron saint with them. Thus it was that Father Guarnieri was more than pleased to accede to their wishes for special Masses in honor of San Silverio, and to proceed through the streets on the Saints feast day, and also to build a small chapel at the church entrance. Heretofore, this small area had been used largely as a closed vesting area for the priest about to begin a Mass. Thus in 1990 statues of Saint Anne and young Mary, Saint Anthony, and the Blessed Mother in her title of the Immaculate Conception were removed from storage and placed in this new chapel. Also placed there was a statue of San Silverio donated by the San Silverio Society thus forming a prayerful and beautiful atmosphere. Several small plaques listing names of benefactors and donors were also added.

The church entrance underwent another renovation in 1996 when for the fourth time the old church doors were removed and replaced with doors of solid mahogany. The original doors were large relatively heavy wooded doors. Later they were replaced by more modern doors with large portions of glass. When these were found to be deficient, Father Guarnieri had them replaced. There are several plaques in the vestibule. One of the smaller ones attests to the fact that the new doors were officially installed and dedicated at the Easter Vigil, April 6, 1996. The other plaques including a "Tree of Life" pay tribute to the large number of donors who assisted the church financially at various times including, for example some three hundred names for the Golden Anniversary in 1979, some two hundred

and fifty names on the “Tree of Life”, and “To the Glory of God and in Living Memory” listing an additional some one hundred and twenty-five names. There is also a plaque noting that the Sacristy renovation was in memory of parishioner John A. Dormi from his wife Mollie Anne Dormi and another listing the names of almost a dozen individuals who contributed to obtaining a new organ. A small plaque movingly pays tribute to the memory of Mrs. Helen Reilly who died on March 30, 1997 and who was Sacristan of Saint Clare’s for over forty-five years, truly a remarkable example of dedication and devotion.

When the Knights of Columbus relinquished its quarters on Williamsbridge Road, a statue of the Blessed Mother which had been dedicated by them on May 19, 1968 “in Memory of Our Loved Ones”, and which stood on their grounds was removed to the Church yard. Thus Saint Clare’s now had two statues dedicated to Mary standing outside on the lawns, the other being the Our Lady of Fatima group at the right entrance.

The parish gained some additional outdoor statuary in 1994 when three statues were added on the lawn between the rectory and side entrance. The near life-size statue of Saint Clare was specifically added in honor of the 800th Anniversary of her birth which occurred on August 11th in 1194. Appropriately also added was the statue of Saint Francis, founder of the Franciscan Order, and a smaller statue of San Silverio because, as stated earlier, of the devotion to the saint on the part of a large number of the parishioners. These newer statues nicely complimented the statue of Our Blessed Mother outside the rectory which the Knights of Columbus erected in 1961 to honor Monsignor Cagnina, also a knight for his service, as well as over fifty years of priesthood. Inside the church also gained a small statue of the newly canonized Father Pio, in honor of Father John, as well as a most beautiful Crucifixion scene donated by Deacon Weckbach. During this same decade, again because of repair problems, the gargoyles along the border of the roof were removed. We also note a beautiful planted bush on the side of Saint Clare’s School, its planting was occasioned by the sad event of a school child’s death. The simple but moving words state “In Memory of Melissa Degano 1993”.

A new and very important organization that appeared on the scene during this period was the Pro-Life Group which came into being in the fall of 1998. Though there had been a Pro-Life Committee of the Parish Council as early as the late 1970s, it had basically ceased to function by sometime around the 1980s. This new Pro-Life Group became very active from its formation in 1998. “Pro-Choice” groups (more accurately termed “Anti-Life” associations) were becoming even more vociferous in the 1990s than they were since the infamous case of *Roe v Wade*, and their challenges

to the taking of life of the unborn had to be met. Two parishioners, Norma Kane and James Curran, who were much motivated by their study of the life of Mother Theresa and her fight for the poor and unwanted became inspired to start a group which would pray and become active for all aspects of pro-life and fight against abortion. Father Guarnieri was more than pleased to give his blessings to such a group and made the lower church available to them for their meetings. Within a very few days or weeks, several other parishioners joined the two founders after they read a notice in the Church Bulletin that such a group was being formed. These early members included Anna Brusco, Vincenza Brusco, and Diane Marino. Over the years the group grew as several other members joined and though still small in size, their enthusiasm and efforts knew no bounds. As part of Saint Clare's First Friday devotion, the group conducts a holy hour from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. to pray for an end to abortion. They usually insert a "Pro-Life Thought for The Week" in the weekly Parish Bulletin, and Mr. Curran as a member of the Holy Name Society has over the years inserted pro-life messages from the Pope and other Church officials in the monthly Newsletter published by the New York Archdiocese Holy Name Office. The group also publishes an occasional Bulletin giving news of pro-life activities in New York City or elsewhere and in 1999 they began their first annual collection for babies. Parishioners were invited after Mass to come to the lower church to make donations of clothing or funds to be distributed to about -to-be-mothers or new mothers in need. Over the years they have invited parishioners to attend their meetings to listen to various speakers, especially from the congregation of Sister of Life which has a convent in the Bronx. They also prayed outside abortion clinics, especially one located, rather ironically, on Eastchester Road near Pelham Parkway in the sight of both Jacobi Hospital and Einstein Hospital, dedicated, of course, to saving lives not destroying them.

On July 25, 1999, the Parish celebrated its 70th Anniversary with a 1:00 p.m. Mass on Morris Park Avenue at the site of the first little chapel at 1060 Morris Park Avenue. Outdoor seating was provided for 600 people. Joining in the celebration with our priests and deacon were our Sunday associate, Father Edmund Whalen, and three of its Jesuit assistants, Father Joseph Dolan, S.J., Father Daniel Fitzpartick, S.J. and Father David Casey, S.J., as well as Passionist Father, Lawrence Rywalt, a graduate of Saint Clare's School. Also interesting to note is that besides English hymns, the well-known and beautiful Italian hymn, "Resta Con Noi" was sung, as well as the Spanish hymn in English translation, "Lord when You Came to the Seashore", tributes one feels, to the universality of the Church. A reporter from the "Bronx Times Reporter" and a parishioner Lucille Fabrizio-Segreti

wrote a beautiful new story about the event which ended movingly with a quote of our pastor stating, “We are thanking God for 70 years in Morris Park. We also want to thank the Morris Park community and our great parishioners for our 70 wonderful years”.

It was also around the late 1990s that Father Guarnieri introduced the very moving depiction of the barren Cross on which had hung the crucified Christ near the entrance gates outside the Church. Many passers by could not help but pause and reflect on the solemn events represented by Good Friday. Indeed, in 2004 Channel 12 depicted this scene on one of its programs.

In 1995 the parish school began its annual “Block C” award breakfast honoring its students who excelled in certain sport activities. Also an annual Science Fair was started, and as one teacher and organizer, Louisa Damaiani was quoted in a March 2002 interview in a local Bronx newspaper said, “It’s a good way for the students to get hands-on experience in the field of science”. Indeed, that year’s projects were displayed in the school gymnasium, and the following year the students were treated to a presentation on science from none other than the NASA program manager, George Komar.

June 7, 1997 witnessed the ordination of the third deacon in Saint Clare’s history when Deacon Bernard “Bernie” Moran was ordained. Like the other two deacons who served before him, Deacon Moran would prove of inestimable service. He usually assisted at the 11:00 o’clock Mass after earlier having distributed the Holy Eucharist to the Catholic patients at Morningside Nursing Home. He was also available to conduct other services for the Parish as needed. On November 3, 2002 a pulpit announcement was made that Deacon Moran was leaving. Though sad to see him leave, the congregation applauded for the dedication shown while he was here. Previously a November 10th announcement in the Parish Bulletin had stated that since the Deacon and his wife had moved to Somers, he was being assigned to the Church of Saint John in that area. The announcement praised the Deacon for his five years of service at Saint Clare’s including visiting the sick. Leading Eucharistic Services at Morningside Nursing Home and being present at our Sunday Liturgies. Saint Clare’s has not had a deacon since.

In Christmas 2000 Father Guarnieri introduced the beautiful custom of placing the nativity scene in the center of the altar. For the occasion he issued a photograph card showing the altar and listing the special events for the Christmas Season, namely the Novena to the Immaculate Conception, Lessons and Carols, and Advent Evening Prayer. The Nativity Scene is so very exquisite in the fine workmanship of the figures it portrays, that many non-parishioners often come to visit it. All this was done with the aid of several members from the San Silverio Society.

As usual, any number of other special celebrations took place in the Parish in this period as in past decades such as, for instance, anniversaries. To signal out just one from several, and this associated with the school, Sister Mary Angela on April 28, 2002 at the 1:00 o'clock Mass, celebrated the 25th anniversary of her final profession as a religious Sister joining the ranks of others of our sisters who had earlier celebrated similar anniversaries. A special note in the Church Bulletin thanked Sister "for her constant spirit of enthusiasm and her readiness to help wherever needed". The occasion brought to mind the lives of all of the sisters who were so very dedicated to the teaching of the children under their charge. It brought to mind that just one month prior, Sister Felicita Gonzalez had passed away at the age of 56. From 1990 to 1993 she had worked as a pre kindergarten assistant at St. Clare's School. She then moved to a new apostolate in 1994 serving on the Parish staff of Saint Patrick's Cathedral and helping fill the many duties involved with such work. Again, a life of dedication and service.

Father Guarnieri was honored on several occasions as we moved into the twenty-first century. As examples, FIAME (Federation of Italian-American Educators) honored him with the Philip Abinanti Community Service Award on March 30, 2001. The Award, named in memory of a community leader and who was a member of the Parish, honored individuals who helped the community by extraordinary service day by day. Two years later in December, 2003 the Kiwanis Club of Westchester Village honored Father for similar service.

In 2000 as we were about to move into the 21st century, Saint Clare's, as common with virtually all institutions, also obtained its first web site, www.rc.net/new_york/stclare, which provided a bit of practical information such as times and schedules for Masses, and for the reception of various sacraments.

Probably never done at any other time in Saint Clare's history, Father Guarnieri had "Birthday Wishes" inserted in the Church Bulletin of August 17, 2003 to announce the 80th birthday of Al Corcillo, and send best wishes to a man "for all that he has done throughout the many years of service." He signaled Al primarily because he above all typified the hard working and devoted parishioner who from the Parish's earliest years had gotten involved in virtually all organizations usually serving as an officer at one time or another. The announcement also typified a characteristic of the pastor, one which was always so appreciative and thankful for so many of his parishioners who in varying ways put so much of themselves in working for the good of Saint Clare's Parish.

In 2002, the Folk Mass was once more introduced into the Parish. Parishioner Greg Butler, a musician and lover of music from high school

days, who had always admired the work of the earlier folk group, was inspired by this memory to try to have such a Mass once more. Father Guarnieri enthusiastically gave them permission to perform at one of the later Masses. Initially the 12:00 o'clock Mass was chosen and later moved to the 1:00 o'clock. Some thirteen musicians and vocalists were initially assembled and instruments included flute, guitar, bass guitar and drums. Besides Mr. Butler and his wife Paula, the original group consisted of Steve Aversano, Steve and Karen Catuogno, Jim and Diane Darienzo, Susan DePasquale, Vinny Difalco, Lynn Evers (who had been in the original folk group in the 1970s and 1980s), Cora Filopei, Charles Napoli, and Maria Prezioso. Soon after, two more individuals joined Peter Enea, and Lisa Spadafora.

At the end of 2002, Saint Clare's School proudly introduced its Early Childhood Program for three year olds which would begin the following month, January 2003. In a registration ad in the "Bronx Times Reporter" the school stated "We are very excited about this new milestone in (our) history..." A choice was offered to parents for either a three or five afternoon enrollment respectively for \$185 or \$225 monthly. A flyer issued at the time succinctly proclaimed the philosophy of St. Clare's School – "It is our belief that we should strive to: promote an awareness of the presence of Christ in the world and the ability to see the magnificence of God's creation through a body of knowledge; to build Christian community through love and service of one another in the classroom and the world; to prepare the children to live with everyone in the world, regardless of race, color, or creed, as responsible citizens who are witnesses of the love of Jesus." The logo on the brochure proudly proclaimed "WHERE EVERY CHILD IS A STAR."

In June of 2002, due to ill health Sister Stabile retired as principal after so many years as part of Saint Clare School. Sister was honored at a special Mass of thanksgiving and then at a very well attended reception hosted by Father Guarnieri. It was wonderful to see a good number of former students return to honor Sister. It was truly a fitting tribute to a long career.

And thus it was that Ms. Janice Desmond who had been appointed assistant principal in 2001 became principal in 2002. That same year saw the introduction of the Early Childhood Program which accepted young children as young as three years old. Again, Saint Clare's School was making an effort to accommodate a need. Indeed, the need for such a program was verified when fifty- six children graduated from this program in 2004.

As with all the previous years of Saint Clare's history this latest decade has continued and is continuing to be with the grace of God one of continuing growth. We are thankful indeed.

POSTSCRIPT

As we conclude this history, we can be grateful for so many beautiful blessings which the Lord has given to this Parish. We especially thank God for the consistent service of so many dedicated priests, nuns and deacons. Also we thank the Lord for the help and assistance and labor of the literally hundreds of parishioners who over three-quarters of a century gave of themselves by taking on the responsibilities and difficult work of forming sodalities, organizations and clubs of many kinds, all for the betterment of Saint Clare's Parish. Parishioners who were able to take advantage of these organizations and joined them were rewarded on two levels, we believe. First, though difficult to evaluate, they enhanced their spiritual life by becoming more aware that services to others is part of spirituality, and then they enhanced their social life by making friends and expanding their environment. We thank all parishioners, each and every one of whom we truly believe, contributed to the betterment of our Parish merely by their presence and their support of the Church. We acknowledge the members who joined organizations over the years, and helped to the best of their abilities to further and enhance them. We also thank the Lord for the many secretaries, custodial workers, house keepers and cooks, workers of all kinds who strove always to fulfill their responsibilities to the fullest. All these individuals by working so diligently were also fulfilling their spiritual life following the injunction of Christ to help alleviate the stresses of the poor, the sick, the lonely the forgotten, for it was He who said, "Whatever you do to the least of my brethren you do unto me." Too numerous to mention all, and often times too difficult to try to recall to mind with the passage of time, their names are enshrined in the hearts of the many they served and knew. May the Lord bless them all, and may the Lord continue to bless the Parish of Saint Clare of Assisi. In August 2002, Father Guarnieri had so considerably reproduced for distribution to all parishioners a beautiful prayer card printed in Italy depicting Saint Clare. He had also most thoughtfully reproduced in the Church Bulletin of August 11, 2002 the Feast Day of the Saint a prayer to her. We now close this history with this lovely prayer to our patron saint. CLARE, brilliant light, intercede for us in our need and show us the WAY. Clare, you know suffering in your life, experiencing war, exile, terrorists attacks. But you always trusted in God's care. Pray for us that we may have confidence in God's love for us. Teach us, in joys and sorrow, to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus. Help us to follow your example by searching for the light of Christ which upholds us in times of trial and enables us to be a support for our brothers and sisters in their difficulties. Intercede for us in our special need. May we always remember to praise and thank God at every moment in of our lives. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

Nick Falco