



Memories of St. John's Parish

As part of the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the founding of St John Baptist de la Salle Church in Shillington, PA, we plan to present the history in several forms. Firstly, we will be publishing segments of the history in the weekly Parish Bulletin...one page each... over the next 15 weeks. We will also amplify the history with a presentation at the 75th Anniversary Banquet. The history will begin with background on the person, St John Baptist de la Salle. We will then review the achievements of each of the six Pastors and their "flocks". Important subjects will include: the people, the various church and school buildings, and the nature of the changes in the Church's architectural appearance.

We suggest that you consider making a booklet or "scrapbook " of these weekly offerings so that you will then have the story of St Johns Parish for future reference and sharing. A parishioner is offering a cash prize of 4 X \$75.00= \$300.00 for the best St Johns 75th Anniversary booklet or scrapbook delivered to the Parish Office by October 1, 2023.

Finally, please consider loaning any photos related to church activities and your family to the 75th anniversary committee. Please place them in an envelope with your name and telephone number and bring them to the parish office, if after hours, please place them in the enclosed porch area of the office. Some of these will be used in a presentation at the banquet and all will be returned to you. Thank you!



History of our Patron Saint St. John Baptist de la Salle–Part One

John was born in Rheims, east of Paris in the heart of France's Champagne country on April 30, 1651. He was an aristocrat by heredity, environment, and education. The La Salle Family was as pious as they were prosperous, as is evident by the fact that three of his brothers became priests and one of his sisters a cloistered nun.

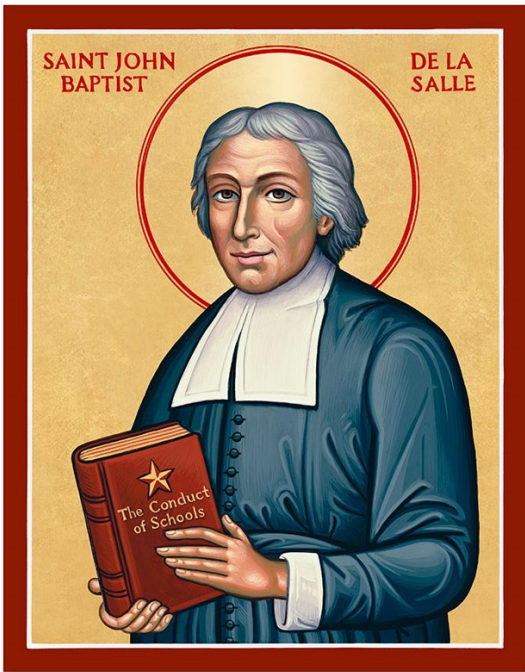
At 18 he received his Masters Degree and entered the seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris the following year. When both his parents died within a year, John, the oldest child, returned home to care for his four brothers and two sisters.

John was 27 when ordained a priest. Two years later, he earned a doctorate at the University of Rheims. As a priest from a wealthy family, he was given prestigious position at the Cathedral of Rheims. But he could not ignore the hunger, ignorance and despair of the poor.

The attitude of the time was that poor people didn't need to know how to read and write,. La Salle defied tradition and devoted forty of his sixty-eight years to providing a free education for the poor. He founded the Christian Brothers, an order devoted to teaching teachers how to teach. The Christian Brothers, without pay devoted themselves to teaching the poor. These teachers are among the most remarkable the world has seen. La Salle and his teachers pledged themselves to organize schools of free instruction even if they had to beg or live on bread alone to accomplish their goal. Through religious instruction and virtuous example, the Christian Brothers raised the moral level of the working classes. These schools for the poor were so popular that parents who could pay for instruction sent their children to the schools intended for the poor.

History of our Patron Saint

St. John Baptist de la Salle–Part Two



Before La Salle, teachers were shown little respect. Many were poor, inefficient laymen who held two jobs. The Christin Brothers were the first to give serious attention to training teachers. They became the model for many other teaching congregations of men and women, and played an important role in the progress of public elementary education in Catholic countries.

La Salle established all levels of institutions for educating the young: a normal school for the Christian Brothers, four for training teachers in general, three practice schools, and 33 primary schools. He founded secondary schools for modern languages, arts and science, and technical schools. He also founded the first reformatory schools, and his humane and understanding treatment was centuries ahead of contemporary methods of dealing with young delinquents. He organized Sunday schools for working boys who couldn't attend classes

on weekdays. His program consisted of the three R's, plus spelling and catechism. Math was taught by reason not by rote.

To counteract the noise and confusion that was common of classrooms of the day, he insisted on silence for good conduct and concentration. Of his many innovations, the two most important reforms in education were group instruction and teaching French rather than Latin. La Salle said it was far more important and useful to be able to teach French, it was also easier for children to learn and understand. In contrast to his background,

La Salle's tastes and manners of living were Spartan. He imposed strict discipline and severe penance upon himself. To fulfill his mission to teaching, he renounced his riches. During a famine in 1684, he sold his property and gave the money to the poor. He died on Good Friday, in 1719. In 1900, Pope Leo XIII canonized him a saint, and in 1950, Pope Pius XII declared him patron of all teachers of children and youth.

St. John Baptist de La Salle,
Pray for us

75 Years of Priests and Deacons Serving St. John's Parish

Rev. John Hassan + (Founding Pastor 1948-1950)	1987 Rev. Joseph D. Hulko +
1949–Rev. Stephen Bednarik (Resdt.) +	Rev. Msgr. Thomas J. Birch + (Fourth Pastor 1987-1996)
Rev. Henry D. McPeak + (Second Pastor 1950-1962)	1988 Rev. John P. Sabas+
1951 Rev. Henry C. Graf +	1988 Rev. William Carter +
1952 Rev. Francis X. Dreger +	1989 Rev. Richard Ford +
1954 Rev. Joseph C. McCloskey +	1990 Rev. John Little
1955 Rev. George Walsh +	1990 Rev. Bernard McGorry S.A. +
1959 Rev. Joseph R. Dickert (Resdt) +	1994 Rev. Patrick H. Lamb (Resdt)
1960 Rev. William J. Shields +	1995 Rev. Franz Berkhout (Resdt)
1962 Rev. Joseph P. Dooley +	1995 Rev. Lawrence J. Bukaty
Rev. John R. Lyons + (Third Pastor 1962-1987)	1996 Rev. Robert Finlan (Resdt.)
1964 Rev. William S. Bigos	Rev. David Gillis (Fifth Pastor 1996-2005)
1967 Rev. Thomas L. Edwards +	1996 Rev. Christopher Wakefield
1970 Rev. Francis J. McNelis +	1997 Rev. Kenneth Medve
1972 Rev. Leo S. Stajkowski	1998 Rev. Thomas Shanfelt
1976 Rev. Joseph L. Grembocki +	1999 Rev. Michael A. Ahrensfield +
1981 Rev. Joseph A. Lukach +	1999 Rev. Robert Finlan (Resdt.)
1982 Rev. G.J. Adamcik +	2001 Rev. James Maranki
1982 Rev. Gregory Tauber +	Rev. Richard Clement (Sixth Pastor 2005-2021)
1982 Rev. John Pasura +	2005 Rev. Robert Finlan (Resdt.)
1984 Rev. Thomas G. Shanfelt	2007 Rev. John Frink (Resdt.)
1988 Deacon Sylvester Simchick +	2015 Deacon Felix Joseph Lombardo
1987 Rev. Robert V. Dougherty +	2021 Rev. Edward J. Essig



+ indicates deceased

75 years of History - The Early Church of St. Johns

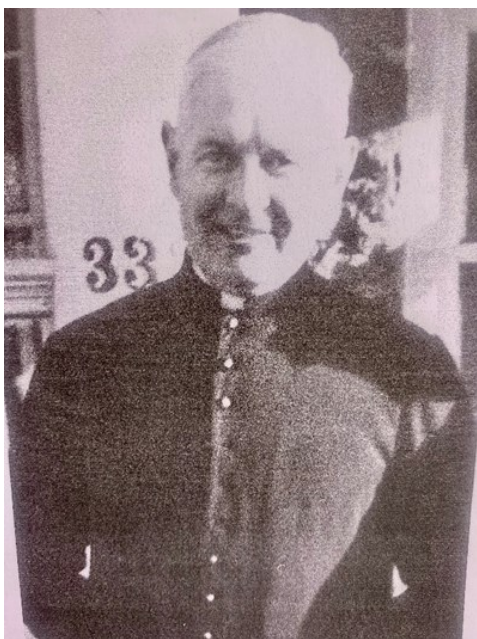
On October 4, 1948, Dennis Cardinal Dougherty, Archbishop of Philadelphia, established St. John Baptist de La Salle Parish from two already existing parishes - Sacred Heart in West Reading and St. Peter in Reading. At the time, we were part of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia until February of 1961 when the Diocese of Allentown was established.

The Parish included all of Brecknock Township and part of Cumru and Spring Townships. Within the original boundaries were: Shillington, Mohnton, Lincoln Park, Oakbrook, Millmont, Fairview and South Fairview, Kenhorst, Ridge Park, Lynoak, Montrose and the following areas...Allendale Speedway Park, Beverly Hills, Pennwyn, Goughersville, Fritztown, Montello, Vinemont and Indiandale, Freedman, Ridgewood, Angelica, Knauers, Alleghenyville, Hummel's Store, Orrton and part of Adamstown.

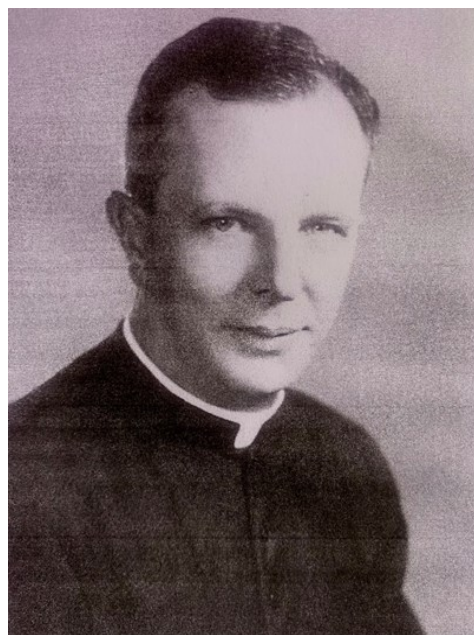
The Rev. John J. Hasson was appointed the first pastor of the parish and served from 1948 till 1950, stepping down because of ill health. For the first 6 months, Mass was held in the Shillington Community Center on Lancaster Ave. In his tenure, Fr. Hasson purchased a private residence at 332 East Walnut St. in Shillington and converted it into a chapel, seating 110 people, and it also housed the rectory.

Rev. Henry D. McPeak became the second pastor of St. Johns in 1950 and served till 1962. At this time, the parish comprised 300 families. In 1952, Father McPeak purchased a two-story factory building at the corner of West Walnut and North Wyomissing in Shillington and turned it into a church/school complex that would serve the parish as a church for the next 19 years, and as a school for the next 37 years. The Merion Sisters of Mercy staffed the school, and in the later 1950's children from St. Benedict's Parish joined the ranks of St. John's students.

The rectory was moved from E. Walnut St. to 39 E. Lancaster Ave. and then moved again to 218 N. Sterley St. to be closer to the church. The priests continued to live at this address until the building of the present rectory at 400 Holland St. in 1970.



***Rev. John J. Hasson, first pastor
of St. Johns parish at its founding
in 1948.***



***Rev. Henry D. McPeak, second pastor
of St. John's parish.***

75 Years of History – The Early Church of St. Johns



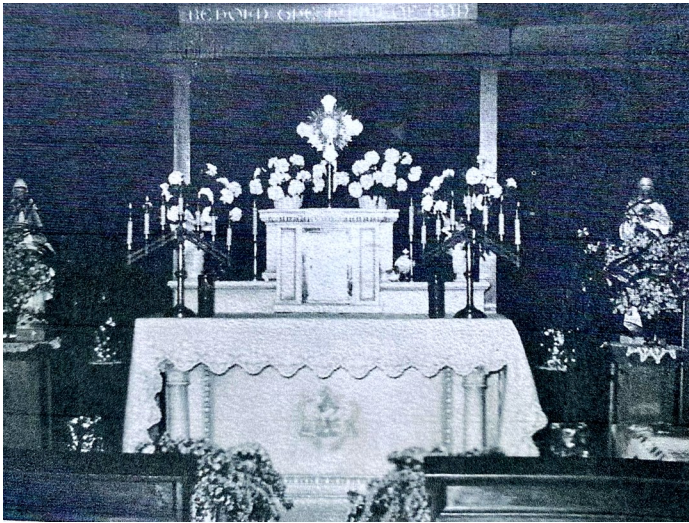
Shillington Community Center

Where Mass was held from October
1948 to March 1949



Private Residence at 322 East Walnut St.

Where Mass was held from March 1949 to September
1952



Main Altar of the original chapel on East Walnut St.

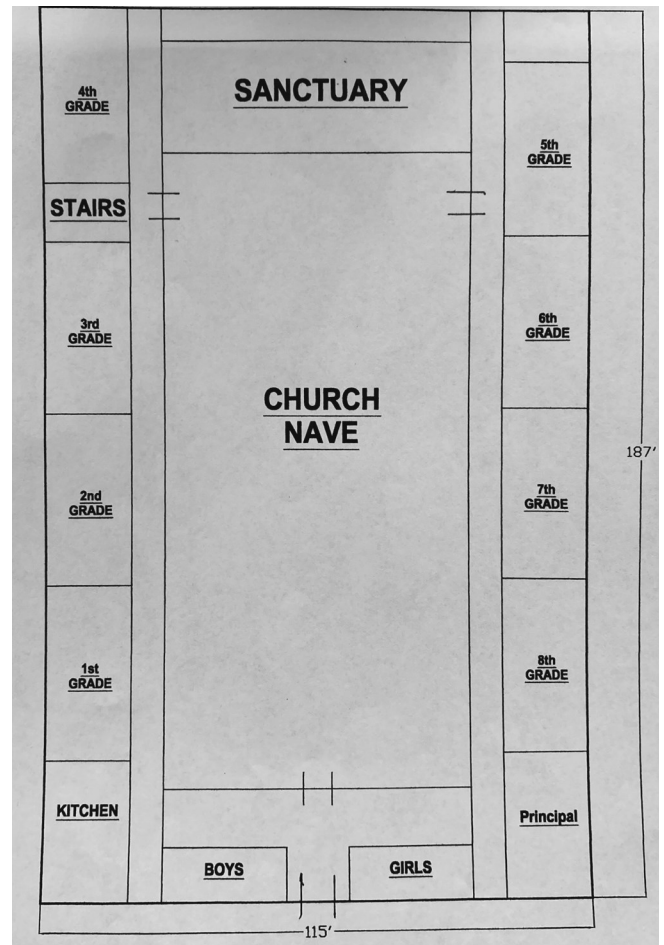


During St. John's pursuit of a permanent parish complex in the late 1940's and early 1950's overcrowded conditions were the norm. The private residence at 322 East Walnut St. in Shillington that was converted into a chapel that seated only 110 persons. By 1950 however, the parish community numbered 300 families.

75 Years of History – The Factory Church



**The Factory Church on the corner of W. Walnut St.
and N. Wyomissing Ave.**



Layout of the Factory Church and School



The Factory Church Altar



The Factory Church Nave

75 Years of History – The Factory School

September 1952 – November 1989

Saint John Baptist de La Salle School, Shillington PA, was opened on September 11th 1952, by the three Sisters of Mercy from Merion, PA. The first principal of the school was Sister Mary Roberta, R.S.M. There were 105 children in attendance. Classes were held in a building converted from a pre-World War II factory. The building served as a combined church and school for the parish. During the 1970's a new church, rectory and convent were built on a site located one mile from the school.

In June 1984, the Sisters of Mercy withdrew from the school. St. John Baptist de La Salle School continued its teaching mission in the hands of a dedicated lay faculty.

On April 29, 1988, Bishop Thomas J. Welsh approved the plans to construct a new building for the school on the same grounds as the church. This new facility, as a regional school under the direction of the Diocese of Allentown, then served three parishes: St. Anthony, Millmont; St. Benedict, Plowville; and St. John Baptist de La Salle, Shillington.

La Salle Academy opened its doors for the first time in September, 1989, with over 300 students in attendance. La Salle Academy is a Catholic elementary school serving students Kindergarten through Eighth grade.



Front of the Factory School



Students of the Factory School



A First Communion Class of the Factory School

75 Years of History – Father Lyons

1962-1987



Rev. John R. Lyons

Under the guidance of our third pastor—Rev. John R. Lyons, who was appointed in 1962, there came much change, not only in buildings and structures, but also in ritual and theology that was sparked with the convening of Vatican Council II.

By 1966, the time was ripe for parish expansion, with 900 families in the parish, it outgrew the “factory”. In May of 1968, Fr. Lyons purchased the last piece of property within the limits of Shillington for \$57,000 on the corner of Kerrick and Mitti in West Hills. The convent was built in 1969 (now parish offices) and the church and rectory were built in 1970. The church, in the form of a Greek cross, seats about 700, with no pew farther than 13 rows from the sanctuary. It was opened in July of 1970 and dedicated on March 21, 1971 by Bishop Joseph McShea.



Groundbreaking for the new church



Fr. Lyons with Pope John Paul II

75 Years of History – The New Church

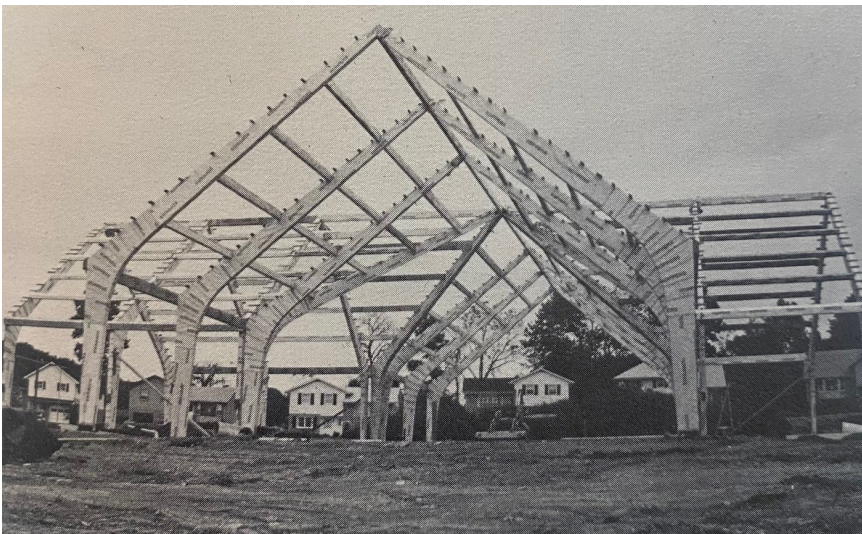
Part One



Exterior of the new church – July 1970



Sanctuary and Nave of the new church – July 1970



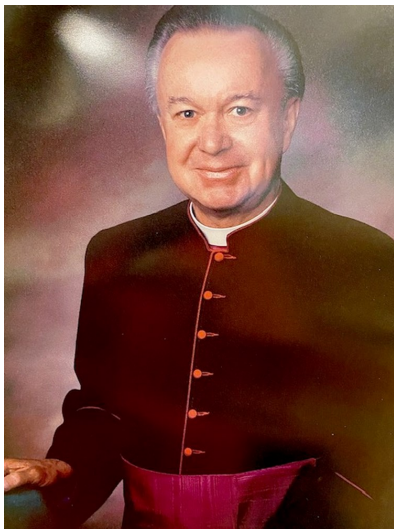
**Skeleton framework of the new church
May 1969**

75 Years of History – Monsignor Birch

1987-1996

In June of 1987, Fr. Thomas Birch was named the fourth pastor of our parish. The most pressing need at the time was to build a new school. In May of 1988, a capital campaign was initiated by the three parishes that fed our regional school (St. John Baptist de La Salle, St. Benedicts and St. Anthony) What resulted was a beautiful \$2.3 million dollar school that continues to carry on the great and rich traditions of Catholic education. The official dedication of La Salle Academy and Parish Center was held on November 4, 1989, just 369 days after groundbreaking, marking the final component of the parish complex. In August of 1989 the former church/school building was sold to Prospectus Associates, Inc., a human services agency headquartered in Reading.

Other building projects that were undertaken in the late 1980's and early 90's by the now Monsignor Birch, were the construction of the Father Lyons Meeting Room, new stained glass windows and doors in the church along with dry-walling, carpet and renovations to the sanctuary.



**Msgr. Thomas J Birch
Fourth Pastor - 1987-1996**



Msgr. Birch with his sister Margaret Mossop



Exterior of Father Lyons Meeting Room



**Interior of Father Lyons Meeting Room with
the Knights of Columbus**

75 Years of History – The New Church

Part 2

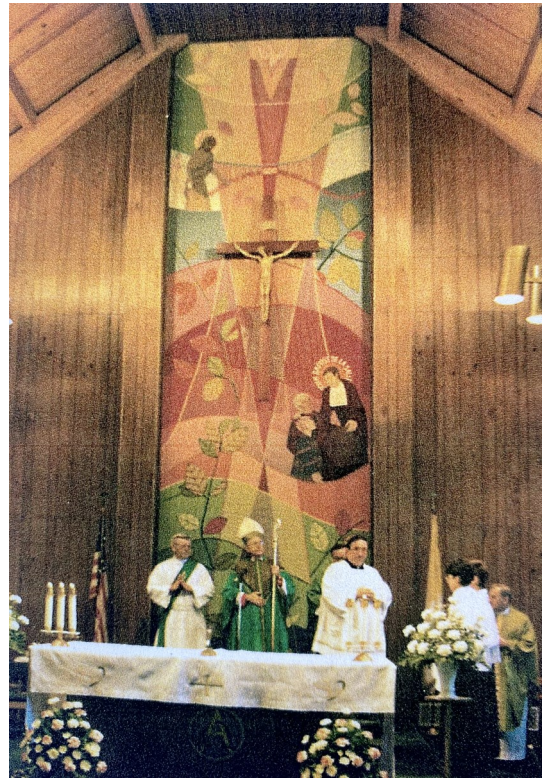
The colorful 26 foot-by-8 foot tapestry behind the altar at St. Johns Church depicts the interaction of God with creation. The tapestry was hand sewn and hung in the fall of 1987 by Sister M. Hadwig of the Precious Blood Sisters.

The rainbow colors represent the peace agreement God made with mankind when His Son, Jesus Christ, died for the salvation of the world. The tapestry forms a background for the crucifix, which was hung behind the altar when the church was constructed.

A scene at the left towards the top of the tapestry depicts the baptism of Jesus by St. John the Baptist. Further down on the opposite side of the tapestry, St. John Baptist de La Salle, the parishes patron saint, is shown with youth.

Leaves, in a variety of colors, depict the new life resulting from the death and resurrection of Christ. The dove at the top of the tapestry symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Vertical and horizontal lines, leading back to the crucifix, represent the interaction of God with this creation.

St. John's first Deacon, Sylvetser Simchick, can be seen pictured on the left of the altar.



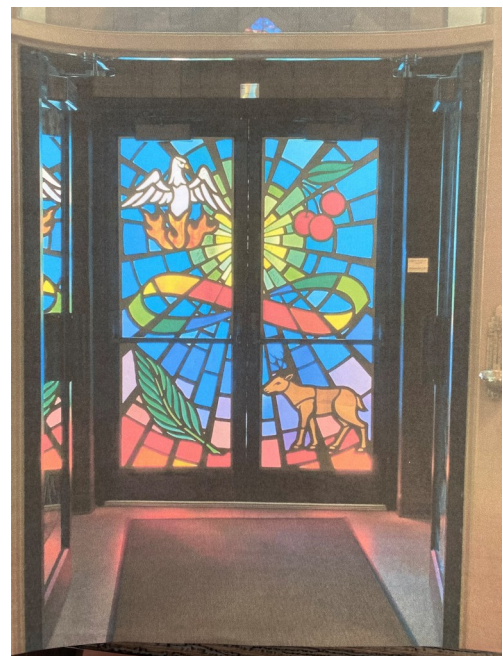
Tapestry behind the altar–1987

Prominent at the 50th Anniversary of St. Johns in 1998



Stained Glass Windows

Depict the Stations of the Cross



Stained Glass Door

La Salle Academy
Dedicated November 4th 1989



Instrumental in the planning for the La Salle Academy were (left to right): Miss Geraldine Williams, principal; Dr. Donald R. Muzyka, capital drive chairman; and Rev. Thomas J. Birch, pastor and project coordinator.



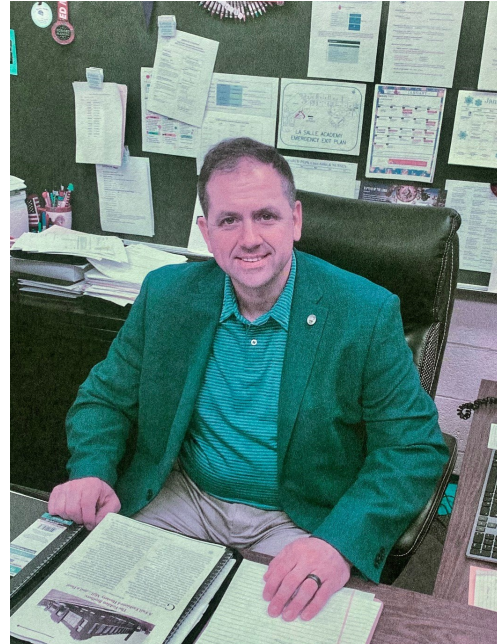
This aerial photo depicts the emergence of La Salle Academy prior to landscaping in the Fall of 1989

75 Years of History – La Salle Academy



Our Mission

The Mission of La Salle Academy is to send forth well educated, morally conscientious citizens prepared and eager to give life-long responsible Christian witness and service to the world. This mission will be accomplished in an environment of mutual respect and cooperative spirit among home, school and parish communities.



La Salle Principal,
Mr. Stephen Mickulik, M.Ed



**Bishop Alfred A. Schlert with an 8th Grade
Class of La Salle**



Kindergarten Class in La Salle

75 Years of History – Features of La Salle Academy



La Salle Academy has:

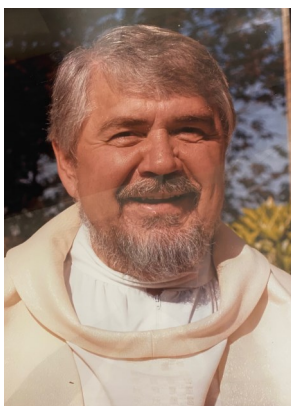
- **13 Air-Conditioned classrooms with 75" Interactive SMART board touchscreen presentation stations available for use by the school and religious prep programs.**
- 6 T.E.L. (Total Experience Learning) STEM Laboratories which include multipurpose use as well as for Science, Library, Art, Music, Coding, and Performance Arts.
- Business–Class Wi-Fi, Private Admin and Guest Internet networks for School and Visitor's use.
- **24–hour, multi-zone, 4k & 8k security camera surveillance inside and outside school premises.**
- Full-sized Middle–School gymnasium with bleachers including boys and girls locker rooms, referees' dressing room, and gym teacher's office, full coverage floor mats for social gatherings of 180+ people.
- Mobile Sound PA/Sound System Mixer for school dances, concerts, performances, in and outdoors.
- Cafeteria with full-service kitchen for school and parish use.
- **Multiple grass recess fields, newly renovated full-sized basketball court, Gaga pit, dedicated play area for preschool, a 30"x20" student-run garden.**
- Dedicated science lab with HS-grade experimentation tables, hydroponic gardens, and 3'D printing available.
- Art studio
- Music room and La Salle Academy Band
- Learning support room
- BCIU suite for remedial learning support and assessment
- **Shared campus access to St. John Baptist de La Salle Church for daily liturgical and para-liturgical worship services. Daily Mass 4 out of 5 days per week rotating through different homerooms each day.**

75 Years of History – Fr. Gillis and Beyond

Because of ill health, Msgr. Birch in 1996 stepped down as acting pastor and became Pastor Emeritus. It was Fr. David Gills who then became the fifth pastor of St. Johns. In his nine years of service to our parish, there became a need to enlarge the school building due to rising student numbers and changing academic necessities, such as an art and music facility, state of the art science labs and computer technology labs. The addition of a new wing with four class rooms was completed in 2002.

In June of 2005, Fr. Richard Clement was named St. John's sixth pastor. The much needed improvements made to the church sanctuary under Msgr. Birch were intended to be temporary with wood paneling and a fabric banner covering up what was originally just painted cinderblocks. The time had come to make the sanctuary permanent and up-dated to present day liturgical norms. Field stone was placed on the sanctuary walls. The baptismal font was positioned in the sanctuary and a new pulpit was made to match it and the altar. A twelve foot crucifix modeled on an Italian icon painted by Cimabui was carved and suspended in the middle of the wall. A new lighting system and chandeliers were installed and a marbled tiled floor replaced the rugs in the sanctuary. The organ (now in it's third church) was so old, it was beyond repair, and so it too was replaced with a modern three manual digital Allen Organ. The floor in the front vestibule of the church done in flagstone, and it continues to the outside making a larger entrance to the church with an addition of much needed lighting for the walk ways at night.

In June of 2021 Fr. Edward J. Essig became St. John's 7th pastor. He is assisted by Deacon F. Joseph Lombardo.



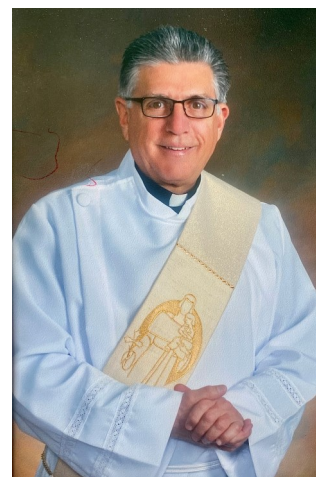
Fr. David Gillis 1996-2005



Fr. Richard Clement 2005-2021



Fr. Edward J. Essig 2021-Present



Deacon F. Joseph Lombardo 2015-Present

75 Years of History – St. John Baptist de La Salle
Church in 2023



Exterior of the Church–Summer 2023



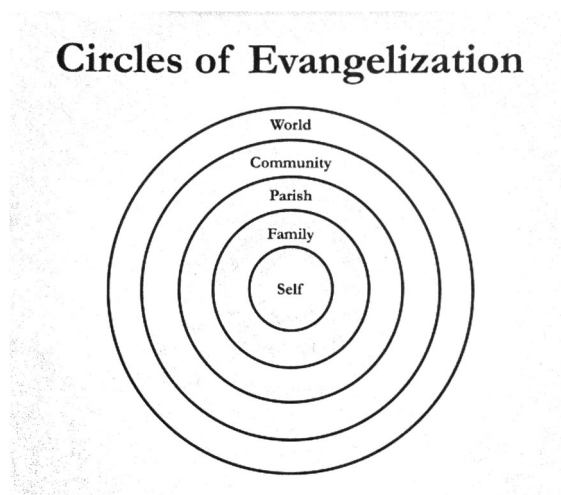
Sanctuary and Nave–Easter, April 9, 2023

75 Years of History

The Symbolism of our Church's Main Windows



North Window



It is believed that the five circles on the window above the front door represent the "Circles of Evangelization"



The East Window emphasizes the Greek latter Alpha—"The Beginning"

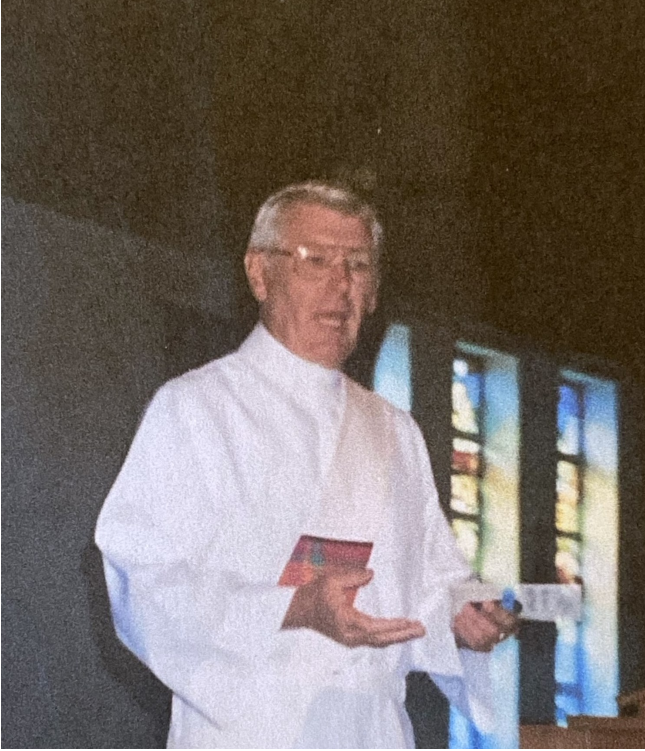


The West Window emphasizes the Greek letter Omega—"The End"

Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, used to designate the comprehensiveness of God, implying that God includes all that can be. In the New Testament Book of Revelation, the term is used as the self designation of God and of Christ.

75 Years of History – Deacon Cy

Our First Deacon 1988-2011



Deacon Cy
Our Deacon for 23 years

Deacon Sylvester F. "Cy" Simchick, 77 passed on to the Lord peacefully on April 6, 2011.

In 1982, he was ordained a Permanent Deacon in the Diocese of Allentown. He served as Deacon at St. Joseph's R.C.C., Reading, from 1982 to 1988.

From 1988 to 2011, he was the Deacon at St. John Baptist de la Salle R.C.C., Shillington. Deacon Cy visited parishioners in local hospitals and nursing homes, assisted in planning and implementing the RCIA program, instructed lectors and

Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist in their ministry, conducted Stations of the Cross and Eucharistic Exposition, and performed all the duties of a deacon, including baptizing, preaching at Mass, conducting funerals and funeral home and graveside services, as well as serving at the many liturgical functions at Mass, Holy Days and liturgical seasons. He was a charter member of Knights of

Columbus 7179. Whether silent or spoken, Deacon Cy's word touched the lives of many.



A statue depicting St. Francis was dedicated in memory of Deacon Cy to reflect his love of nature and animals.

