

Dedicated 29 Sep 1979

**Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis
Bishop of Bridgeport Diocese**

The Parish of Saint Elizabeth Seton was founded on May 29, 1976 when Bishop Walter W. Curtis, 2d Bishop of Bridgeport Diocese, commissioned Father Francis J. Medynski to form a new congregation in the Ridgebury district of Ridgefield Connecticut. Some three years earlier, the Bishop had been considering dividing St Mary's Parish, Ridgefield. A census showed about 800 parishioners interested in a parish in the Ridgebury district.

St. Mary's Parish in Ridgefield purchased a small ranch style house on Regan Road. Volunteers cleaned, decorated, and donated furnishings for the rectory which contained a chapel, kitchen, bedroom, and a small room for Religious Education. The chapel altar was also the conference table for the newly formed Parish Council as well as other committees.

Plans for the new parish church began almost immediately. A site committee was formed and held meetings weekly, searching for a suitable site for the church. After many months, the property on Ridgebury Road was located, and purchased by St. Mary's Parish. Volunteers cleared the land and hauled brush to the town dump.

In the meantime, parishioners provided suggestions for a name for the new parish. St Elizabeth Seton had been canonized recently, and some parishioners suggested this American saint as a patroness. Bishop Curtis, who had attended her canonization in 1973, confirmed the Parish name.

Once the site was selected, other committees were formed. Area churches were visited and architects presented their concepts. An architect from Bridgeport Connecticut, Ed Luders, was selected, and the plans for the church building were discussed. This resulted in the contemporary wooden beamed structure which became Saint Elizabeth Seton Church.

The Finance Committee was formed and volunteers visited parishioners to solicit pledges for monetary contributions and support. A large donation was received from an unexpected source, Mr. Francis Martin, a devout Methodist, who had also contributed to the building of the Jesse Lee Methodist Church in Ridgefield Center. His contribution to St Elizabeth Seton Parish was in memory of his mother, a Roman Catholic. The window behind the main altar is dedicated to his memory.

A ground-breaking ceremony was held on September 27, 1977, a damp, humid day in late spring. Priests, deacons, altar servers, and parishioners followed Bishop Curtis up a rough, muddy construction path. An altar boy assisted the Bishop in digging the hard ground.

Construction began in earnest with the aid of many talented parishioners. Carmine and Mario Primiano were the general contractors, and John McMurray volunteered as clerk of the works. An unsalvageable house on the property was torn down, except for its foundation and chimney, around which the present rectory was built. The Parish Center, which contains offices for the parish secretary, and Religious Education assistants, was constructed behind it at a later date.

Among the more serious crises in the church construction occurred when a shipment of beams, manufactured in the state of Oregon, was delayed due to a rail strike. The beams arrived stripped of their protective covering and were water-stained. Members of the construction crew and Church volunteers cleaned the beams to reduce the staining.

After two and a half years of construction activity, the church began to take shape. Although much internal work remained to be accomplished, it was decided to hold Christmas services on the new site.

On Saturday December 24th 1978, the electricity was connected, the boiler was working, and the first Mass was celebrated. Parishioners brought chairs to Church as the pews were not yet installed. The floor was covered with sawdust, a temporary barn door was the entrance, a rough-hewn altar stood on a small platform, and a family provided a creche from home. A tall spruce tree was centered behind the presidential chair: an orange crate. For the 400+ people in attendance who had approached the church from Advent Road, this stable-like atmosphere was a meaningful reminder of the nativity

Work continued, and the church building was officially dedicated on September 29, 1979

Some features of the church building include:

- The Church is built in the shape of an equilateral cross. The main entrance is at the foot of the cross, with the main altar at the top which occupies the center of the elevated Sanctuary. The two wings of the cross contain pews seating about 400 worshipers.
- The permanent altar is constructed of white oak, weighs 800 pounds and cost \$10,000 . It contains relics of St Stephen, the first martyr, and a bone fragment of St. Elizabeth Seton.
- Above the altar, a crucifix replaced the plain pine cross in 2004. The Corpus Christi, Body of Christ, was hand-carved in Linden wood at the Demeti Art Studio in northern Italy. It is dedicated to the memory of Deacon Bart Mauceri.
- The Stations of the Cross are made of cedar shakes, and the original porcelain stations from Regan Road. A next-door neighbor, artist Adeline Anderson, dedicated eight years of her talents to paint the present Stations, and the art tapestries.
- Robert Basset made the tabernacle and Fred Schreiber constructed the baptistery.

Father Frances Medynski remained pastor of St. Elizabeth Seton until his retirement in 1996.

On August 2, 1996, Most Reverend Edward M. Egan, 3d Bishop of Bridgeport, officiated at the installation ceremonies for Father Joseph Prince, the newly appointed Pastor. (On May 11, 2000, Bishop Egan was appointed Archbishop of New York, with subsequent elevation to the College of Cardinals on January 21, 2001. He was succeeded by Bishop William E. Lori, 4th Bishop of Bridgeport on January 23, 2001).

Since Father Prince's appointment, the parish and grounds have blossomed under Father Prince's care, and he has continued to enhance the spiritual and physical welfare of the parish with many new spiritual and physical additions and improvements. These include:

- Daily Mass is celebrated in the Jubilee Memorial Chapel, with increased attendance at the Eucharist.
- a 5:00 PM Sunday Mass is celebrated.
- initiated the annual November Memorial Mass for the deceased of the Parish
- implemented the annual Advent Mission
- the active Prime Timers (Seniors) group was formed
- a new space for vestry was added, and improved lighting was installed in the Church.

- a Memorial Garden was created in memory of Mrs. Louise McKeon,
- trees and shrubs dress the property landscape, and a brand new entrance sign greets parishioners and visitors.
- the Marian Shrine has been restored, and
- new siding was installed for the Rectory and the Parish Center.

In the **Great Jubilee of the Year 2000**, Father Prince led a group from Ridgefield on a Pilgrimage to Rome Italy to celebrate the Great Jubilee.

In the year 2001, twenty-five years after St Elizabeth Seton was formed, the growing congregation was made up of many young families with children who needed religious education. Since the church facilities could no longer provide sufficient classroom space, it had been necessary to revert to holding religious education classes in parishioners' homes.

Under Father Prince's leadership, a committee was formed to determine the present and future space needs for this parish. A three-year study included: focus groups, surveys, questionnaires, site visits, and meeting with architects. With a new vision, and after overcoming the obstacles of fund-raising, a design which would not compromise the structural integrity of the church, the many necessary approvals, and repeated trips to the Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Board, plans were initiated in 2001 - the year of St Elizabeth Seton Parish's Silver Jubilee -- to begin the expansion project. The new building expansion was named the "**Jubilee Memorial**" as a means of recalling the Parish's Silver Jubilee as well as the meaning of the Great Jubilee Year

On January 16, 2004, the Capital Campaign was initiated to fund the expansion project. The scope of the project provided:

- ◆ meeting rooms to prepare our young people for their sacraments
- ◆ meeting rooms for various ministries and social groups
- ◆ office space for the Religious Education staff
- ◆ reception areas (for after sacraments, after funerals, etc).
- ◆ Improvements to the existing church:
 - + air conditioning
 - + elevator (principally for the elderly and handicapped persons)
 - + bathrooms to accommodate handicapped persons
 - + widened stairway between the main floor and first floor
 - + an expanded and improved McKeon Hall including a new kitchen
- ◆ new and improved parking lots and spaces for the handicapped
- ◆ improved lighting along Advent Road.

While the Church building itself was not expanded physically, a new multi-purpose room in the Jubilee Memorial building was designed to serve additional Liturgies, such as a Children's Mass or additional Christmas and Easter Liturgies.

Thanks to the response and hard work of a team of volunteers and the parish community willing to sacrifice, the goal of \$2.1 million was met by Spring 2004. \$1.5 million were collected of the monies pledged in order to start building.

- ◆ The architect was Leigh Overland Architects.
- ◆ Roche Incorporated provided construction management and were the general contractors.
- ◆ Ground breaking took place on August 7, 2005
- ◆ Bishop Lori, 4th Bishop of Bridgeport, dedicated the Jubilee Memorial on June 25, 2006.
- ◆ The Certificate of Occupancy from the Town of Ridgefield was issued on August 7th, 2006.
- ◆ "Move in" commenced on August 14, 2006.

Though relatively young in years, St Elizabeth Seton Parish is steeped in faith and solid in growth. Presently, it is the place of unity and worship for more than 1000 families, and the religious education center for more than 750 children.

With solid faith and unwavering hope, the growing family that is the parish of St Elizabeth Seton will continue to work, to pray, and to worship together for the glory of God and the blessings of His Holy Spirit.

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