

HISTORY OF ST. MICHAEL CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Spirit-filled parish of St. Michael Catholic Church has grown from 40 parishioners at its founding as a mission church under St. Andrew Parish in 1975 to a dynamic church community of 2,899 registered families in 2008. St. Michael opened its doors to Catholic residents and visitors on the southern end of the Grand Strand in 1976 under the supervision of the Rev. J. Fleming McManus of St. Andrew Catholic Church, assisted by Abbot Edmund F. McCaffrey, O.S.B., former Abbot-Ordinary of Belmont Abbey, as priest-in-charge. The first Mass was celebrated by Abbot McCaffrey on July 18, 1976.

Bishop Ernest L. Unterkoefler, Bishop of the Diocese of Charleston, presided at the dedication, naming the new parish St. Michael Catholic Church in recognition of the early Spanish settlers on the Waccamaw Neck who invoked the protection of the Archangel for the first Carolina colony in the new world.

So quickly did the new parish develop that its designation as a mission church was changed to that of a fully-fledged parish in May 1979 and Abbot McCaffrey was named as the first pastor. In the ten years he served as pastor, Abbot McCaffrey supervised the building of a new rectory and convent and the expansion of the original warehouse structure into a full church seating 850 people.

On August 11, 1979, Sisters Gloria, Martha, and Claudette of the Little Franciscans of Mary moved into the new convent. As the needs of the parish grew, Sr. Helga of their order joined them to serve the retired and shut-in parishioners.

Abbot McCaffrey was succeeded in June 1986 by Rev. Joseph Hanley, Jr. Father Hanley supervised the building of the McCaffrey Center, an administrative/classroom facility, which was named after our founding pastor. Bishop David Thompson, Bishop of Charleston, dedicated the center on October 15, 1994. During Father Hanley's tenure, the parish was also served by Sister Carmelita Hagan, a Mercy sister, and Sisters Kathleen Kane and Mary Jane Golden, both Sisters of St. Mary of Namur.

Father William Bleiler succeeded Father Hanley in September 1994. Father Bleiler oversaw the expansion of St. Michael Church to a facility that could seat an additional 900 people. In 1995, Sister Isabel Haughey, OSF and Sister Jane Clare Simon, a School Sister of Notre Dame arrived to serve as pastoral associates. When Father Bleiler left the parish during Holy Week of 1997, Bishop David B. Thompson appointed Sister Isabel as Parish Administrator until the arrival of a new pastor.

Msgr. Thomas R. Duffy, VF, MSW was assigned to pastor St. Michael Church in July, 1997. Under Msgr. Duffy's leadership, a Parish Activity Center was added to the church campus and an elementary school, grades K through 4, was begun. Sister Roberta Thoen, a Sister of St. Mary of Namur, arrived to serve as principal and oversee the establishment of curricula and staffing. Under Sister Roberta's leadership, the school has added one grade each year and graduated its first 8th grade class in 2004.

Msgr. Duffy and Sister Roberta oversaw the addition of four classrooms, a faculty room and a state-of-the-art science lab that were dedicated by the Most Rev. Robert J. Baker, Bishop of Charleston, in February, 2003. Additional land was purchased and the school continued to grow.

Msgr. Duffy presided over the opening of the Adoration Chapel on December 8, 2000. Since then, St. Michael Church has been blessed with Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and adorers worship 24 hours each day. During Monsignor Duffy's tenure, St. Michael also began to participate in the building of homes for Habitat for Humanity. The parish has both financed and helped to build a Habitat house each year since 2000. We are currently building our seventh house.

Msgr. Duffy was diagnosed with a terminal illness in 2003. He was well enough to preside over the graduation exercises of St. Michael School's first graduation class in the spring of 2004. He died on September 25, 2004. During his long illness, Sister Isabel once again supervised the day-to-day operations of the parish. From January through June 2004, Fr. Stanley Smolenski served as interim priest.

In September 2004, Father Raymond J. Carlo became pastor of St. Michael Catholic Church. Fr. Carlo brought his mother, Janet, to reside with him in the rectory and she immediately was taken into the hearts of the entire parish. Janet Carlo was called to God on March 14, 2008. The parish joined Father Ray in celebrating the gift of her presence in our lives and her new life in God.

When Father Carlo arrived, the parish was in the midst of constructing a new addition to the school that would include a gym, cafeteria and auditorium complex. Under Fr. Carlo's guidance, it was completed and was dedicated as the Duffy Center in April 2005. In October of that year, the new Hanley Library and Media Center was dedicated. The school also added a Pre-K program for four-year-olds and an after school program. Our church campaign and building project was completed under Fr. Carlo and the church was dedicated on August 17, 2012. He also oversaw the addition of a columbarium at the parish during this time. After taking a sabbatical in 2013, Father Carlo was assigned to Corpus Christi Catholic Church in Lexington, SC.

Our current pastor, Father Edward W. Fitzgerald, JCL was assigned in October of 2013. Our school has expanded again under his leadership to include a program for 3 year olds and enrollment continues to grow. He also oversaw the expansion of our parking area, along with the addition of more columbarium units to include development of an adjoining site near the current one. Also, under Fr. Fitzgerald, a Parish Life Center campaign was undertaken in 2019 and plans to break ground and start construction in late 2022 or early 2023 are anticipated.

St. Michael has been blessed with both diocesan priests and several priests from India who have served as Parochial Vicars over the past several years. Fr. Matthew Alapatt, MSFS, served from 1997 to 1999. He was replaced briefly by Fr. Robert J. Sayer, a newly ordained priest who was soon reassigned. In late 1999, Fr. Hayden Vaverek arrived and stayed until October 2000. Fr. Anthony Pasala then served for approximately one year and was replaced by Fr. Michael J. William. Fr. Michael was with us until December 2003 when he was diagnosed with cancer and returned to his native India where he died February 8, 2004. Fr. Ananda Reddy Mekala became Parochial Vicar in February 2004 and left in October 2005. Fr. Bob Morey was Parochial Vicar from August 2006 to April 2007. Fr. Jesuprathap Narichetti arrived in May 2007 and served until February, 2008. Fr. Andrew Trapp served a parochial vicar from August 2008 through June 2011. Father William Hearne served in that capacity from July 2011 through 2012. Father Johnbosco Duraisamy served from 2012-2016 along with Father Patrick Eyinla who was with us for a short period in 2015. Following that, Fr. Dan Papineau was parochial vicar

from February-June 2016. Our current parochial vicar who was here from 2007-2008, Fr. Jesuprathap Narichetti, returned to us in September 2016 and served through April 2019. Currently Fr. Christopher Beyou and Fr. Orlando Serrano serve as parochial vicars.

St. Michael is especially graced with dedicated Deacons. Rev. Macey Sattelle was our first Deacon and assisted both Abbot McCaffrey and Fr. Hanley. Deacon Frank Schickel served from 1997 to 1999. Deacon Ken Barth served St. Michael from 1994 until his death in 1997. Deacons Donald C. Efken and Charles Fiore arrived in 2000. Both eventually retired and moved away to be near family. On May 19, 2007, St. Michael parishioner Robert Starr was ordained to the Diaconate. Deacon David Hanson was with us for a short while in 2010. Deacon Robert Davis joined us in 2015 along with Deacon Manny Acosta. Deacon Andrew Thomas was appointed in 2017. He left in 2020 to pursue a position in Texas. Deacon Jeff Pierfy joined us in 2019 and Deacon John Tomasicchio joined us in 2020.

Since the beginning, the people of St. Michael Catholic Church have been dedicated to living the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity in their daily lives and through their parish activities. God has graced us with holy and dedicated pastors. We go forward, confident in God's love and divine providence.