
of two very active parishes. Lenten programs that called parishioners to a deeper love of Christ were combined, culminating in Lent of 1997 with a combined Mission Week. This Lenten Mission, for the many who attended the morning and evening sessions, was a highlight of the collaborative efforts between the two faith communities.

By early 1997, joint Parish Pastoral Council and Finance Council committees were commonplace. In February 1997, the joint Parish Pastoral Council commissioned a sub-committee of six members from both parishes to "vision" for the future of the two parishes as the millennium approached. In an effort to plan for the future, and an acknowledgment of the great collaboration that was already taking place, the sub-committee proposed to the Pastors and the Parish Pastoral and Finance Council members that Sacred Heart and St. Joseph Parishes should be merged into one parish. Under the proposal both Church buildings would remain open under their dedicated names of Sacred Heart and St. Joseph and all other parish buildings would continue to be used.

It was Pentecost Sunday, May 1997, that the Parish Pastoral Councils of Saint Joseph and Sacred Heart Parishes formally adopted the proposal to merge, calling for an immediate discussion in the wider parish community. The proposal was then presented to the parishes at the Sunday Masses in late May and during the next three months open forum meetings were held to explain the proposal to parishioners, to listen to their concerns, and to answer any questions. In October of 1997, the proposal was presented by Fathers Buckley and Casey to Cardinal Law and the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Boston for approval. In March 1998, Cardinal Law decreed that Sacred Heart and St. Joseph Parishes would be merged into one new parish, Holy Family Parish, effective at 4:00pm on Saturday, May 30, 1998, the Feast of Pentecost.

Coming Full Circle

In recent years, because of the decreasing number of priests across our nation, as well as economic pressures to deal with rising costs, the American Catholic Church has been taking a hard look at the demographic and geographic distribution of its parishes. Throughout the country, parish boundaries have been re-drawn, and parishes have been consolidated, or even closed.

During this time, the leadership of St. Joseph and Sacred Heart came together, and soon realized that Amesbury's Catholic community would best be served by cooperation between the two parishes. Like the early founders of Sacred Heart & Saint Joseph before them, Fathers Martin, Morin, Kiley, Casey and Buckley envisioned and led the Catholic parishioners of Amesbury to look to the future needs and vision a new parish into being. It was, however, the parishioners themselves who joined together in the name of the Holy Spirit to strengthen the faith of every Catholic in Amesbury, by coming back together as one as was the case in the late 1800's. Like the song we sing during this Easter season of 1998, we do come together to "bring the gifts that differ, and in splendid varied ways, we sing a new church into being, one in faith and love and praise".

Nearly a century ago, one parish became two, but today, we celebrate two parishes uniting as one. We have come full circle, and once again, the desire to build a stronger sense of community has been the driving force behind the creation of this new parish.