

Summary

“Beginnings”

1. What first attracted you to our Parish?

Many were *“born and raised in Conneaut”* and even some as a *“third generation cradle Catholic of this parish.”* Some expressed a sense of pride that *“family has helped found(ed) the parish.”* Another noted being born into the parish: *“lived in the neighborhood; attended St. Mary School with my two brothers”* and was an altar server. *“The school involved me with the parish. The school was a building block in my parish involvement, socially and religiously.”*

Others experienced a *“conversion to the faith,”* even as a teenager, while others *“moved into the area and went to the parish school.”*

One *“felt Catholicity was basis of Christianity;”* another went to a non-Catholic church only to decide *“to come back to the catholic church.”*

“When I first came to Conneaut ... I was impressed with the convenience of the four different Masses on Sunday. ...there was always a Mass that fit my work schedule.”

Another liked the *“fellowship of the church;”* and *“liked that our community joined together our churches into one body of Christ.”*

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2. What were your initial excitements and impressions when you began as a member?

Some expressed a *“deep feeling of spirituality that can’t be put into words.”* Others spoke of a *“small church and community”* with a *“comfortable environment”* that *“helped me feel closer to God;”* also an *“enthusiasm of the faith community, the pastor and staff”* as well as *“the smiles of the greeters.”*

For some it was the celebration of the Sacraments as one person noted, *“making First Communion and being Confirmed made me feel closer to God and richer in my faith”* while another expressed *“attending Mass with my family...”*

Others spoke about the impact of the school in their lives saying I *“attended grade school at St. Mary’s with HM nuns”* and have *“many good memories and experiences;”* another starting school at Mother Cabrini with Dominican nuns. *“School was an extension of family”* as well as *“growing with the sacraments, attending the catholic schools and being involved with family.”* *“The school was intertwined with the church.”* When Cabrini opened its school some expressed the excitement of *“going to a NEW Catholic school.”*

Others spoke about *“the parish had old fashioned nuns in traditional habits; there was the choir; the church was full; there was the use of incense; the traditional music was used and there were extra lights at Christmas Eve.”*

Some spoke about coming into the Church saying *“she joined the Church when she married a Catholic and wanted her family to attend Church together... the Dominican nuns were a big influence in her life.”* Others said *“I was very impressed with Fr. Rich.”* *“The parishioners were welcoming and Fr. Thomas was reassuring and comforting. I felt like I was home.”*

Some spoke of ministries referring to the *“various ministries, altar server, lector. Life revolved around the Church. Every Sunday for one hour, all thoughts and troubles disappear;”* being *“...asked to become an RCIA sponsor, it was rewarding going through the process. Becoming a Eucharistic Minister and bring home the host for Mother,”* and *“being a part of the church society”* and *“the Parish Life Committee and enjoyed the activities it did.”*

Some spoke of returning to Conneaut saying, at the *“1st Mass (I) saw a person I hadn’t seen for 8 years. I felt so welcome. Instantly felt a part...”* Another said, *“When we returned to Conneaut ..., I went to the parish with people I knew from the school I attended. As time went by I realized it doesn’t make a difference because of other people I got to know. We ought to be happy having two parishes in a small town.”*

Whereas some expressed a *“feel of belonging,”* *“the church felt like a loving family,”* *“attended grade school at St. Mary’s with HM nuns (with) many good memories and experiences,”* *“enjoyed going to Catholic school, felt safe, enjoyed the nuns,”* *“as a young person, communion, CCD with the sisters (Oblate), confirmation, receiving foundation of faith.”* However, for others there was some feeling that the *“members seemed cold and not friendly.”* They were *“Disappointed because of clannish people”* saying the *“Church should be more than a club.”* Another noted *“There was a lot of confusion at time of change during the 90’s in regard to posture, i.e. standing during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.”*

One final note, there was expressed *“the specialness of the Holy Events (which) gave opportunities to be a part of the special ceremonies. Participation gave me confidence in myself and made me feel honored, special and gave importance to my religion.”*

“Best Moments”

3. Looking at your entire experience in our Parish, can you recall a time when you felt most alive, most proud and committed, most enthused about the parish? Tell the story of what made this such a fulfilling experience... What was it about you and others that made it so?

There is a sense of pride in the parish.

The sacraments and RCIA bring people together as is reflected in many of the quotes: *“My kids were all baptized at St. Mary’s and all of them went to St. Mary’s School, First Communion were special!”* *“Being present for her sisters’ marriage... Godfather walked her down the aisle*

when father was unable to, but in the pew.” “Sister’s marriage when Italian family from Niles, Ohio were excited about the church...” “My daughter’s wedding was at St. Mary’s and it was very special! I never felt like an outsider at the church or at any of the activities.”

“During Adult RCIA I had my 2nd child. At the Easter Service all my family was at the service. I felt like everything was the way it was supposed to be.” “Being a sponsor for my nephew while he went through RCIA (he was older) (his father is not Catholic). The service was beautiful.”

Being involved is important and makes people feel they are a part of the parish. Various involvements were named: *“Participation in choir - was welcomed- started 1975.... Enjoyed socialization of choir” “I feel very supported in my faith when I see people who do so many good things – parish leaders, people in the choir, people involved ecumenically. – Lenten services and the Easter vigil -- it is very impressive and a joy to see someone welcomed into the Church.” “The parish was a significant part of our lives. Other people in the parish were welcoming to us and wanted our involvement.” “When the Parish Life Committee existed at St. Mary’s, people were involved and committed to the activities for the parish. It got different people from the parish out and involved together in the pizza parties, sandwich Sundays, picnics and baseball outings to Cleveland.”*

Helping with the upkeep of the buildings is important for some: *“I started getting involved in repairs to the buildings & felt more worthwhile and accepted as a human being because of it.”*

Having the family involved together with liturgical service was also significant: *“I was a reader and Eucharistic minister. My daughter was a reader. My two other children were altar servers. My husband even attended church occasionally.” “... reading at Mass makes me feel like I’m part of something.”*

Participating in the merger both in planning and with the bishop coming to celebrate with us gave others a sense for the future. One said *“When she was planning for the merging of the parish.”* Another said *“The Bishop coming to celebrate the formation of St. Mary/St. Frances Cabrini”* along with *“...the procession, the beautiful Mass, music, and unity of our two parishes.”*

In the past, the various liturgical service e.g. 40 hours and exposition and May crowning were highlights. One noted *“Childhood experiences: processions, 40 hrs. ceremonies, 1st Communion, Confirmation. Rituals of the past never left me. Always very special to me and part of my life.”* Another said *“Always will remember fondly the 40 hours and processions. I was an altar boy then, and it was absolutely a big deal. Many priests attended and concelebrated. Very impressive and memorable.”* Also was noted *“St. Frances had a May Crowning.”*

Some remembered people coming together as family when working for the school and festivals saying *“When we helped at the church Festival, it was a family event. I was always excited to work as a religious family and being able to work with and see all of our religious friends.”* Another said they enjoyed being with *“parish friends.”* Another remembered the *“Old day parish festivals with the large crowds they drew.”*

In more recent history some noted that socialization was good as we come together to help others saying, *“St. Vincent de Paul Society and how the people have contributed to it to make it so successful. It's helped so many people”* and *“Prayer Shawl Ministry - we all are praying for the ill person.”* Even on an ecumenical level one noted *“Involved in LEAF project. Working with people of all faiths; confirmed my faith.”*

The schools were always a significant part of people's lives and a way of bringing people together. People said, *“Going to school I graduated from St. Mary's. While going to school I felt it orderly. We were taught by the nuns and the priest.”* Others noted *“Going through 8 grades at St. Mary School was rewarding such as choir & involvement serving younger students.”* *“Experience in the south as Eucharistic Minister and other involvements in Catholic schools.”* Another said, I *“Felt alive when children were at the school-our social life; had a vibrant school & parental involvement, not so with public schools. Involvement of parents with their children.”* Others said, *“Watching my children grow up with the Catholic faith, they had a great education in the Catholic school.”* *“Being close with the priests and Oblate Sisters and when our children attended SFC School. It gave us a sense of being loved, warmth and acceptance.”* *“When we sang for the Christmas Mass as students of Cabrini School.”* *“After 8 grades of Catholic School, I was interested in what was the role of being a member of the parish. I was contemplating becoming a priest.”*