

A Salute to the Priests of St. Louis Parish

Over the past 100 years, St. Louis Parish has been blessed with a series of good men who have served as Pastor and St. Louis' assistant pastors. Below, we have tried to capture some of their many accomplishments.

Our founding pastor, **Father Louis F. Hagus** was a member of the first graduating class of Cathedral High School and the first native Coloradoan to be ordained for the Denver Archdiocese. He arrived at St. Louis in 1911, having just built a church in Greeley and immediately launched into building another. Among his contributions to the new church was the construction of the main altar. He served the parish until 1916, when the opportunity came up to exchange places with Father Neenan, then pastor of the Victor, Colorado parish. Father Hagus died in 1937 as the pastor of the Pauline Chapel in Colorado Springs.

Father **William S. Neenan** served St. Louis as pastor for just a year, but in that brief time engaged the first two sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet to come and teach catechism to the parish, laying the groundwork for the future St. Louis School.

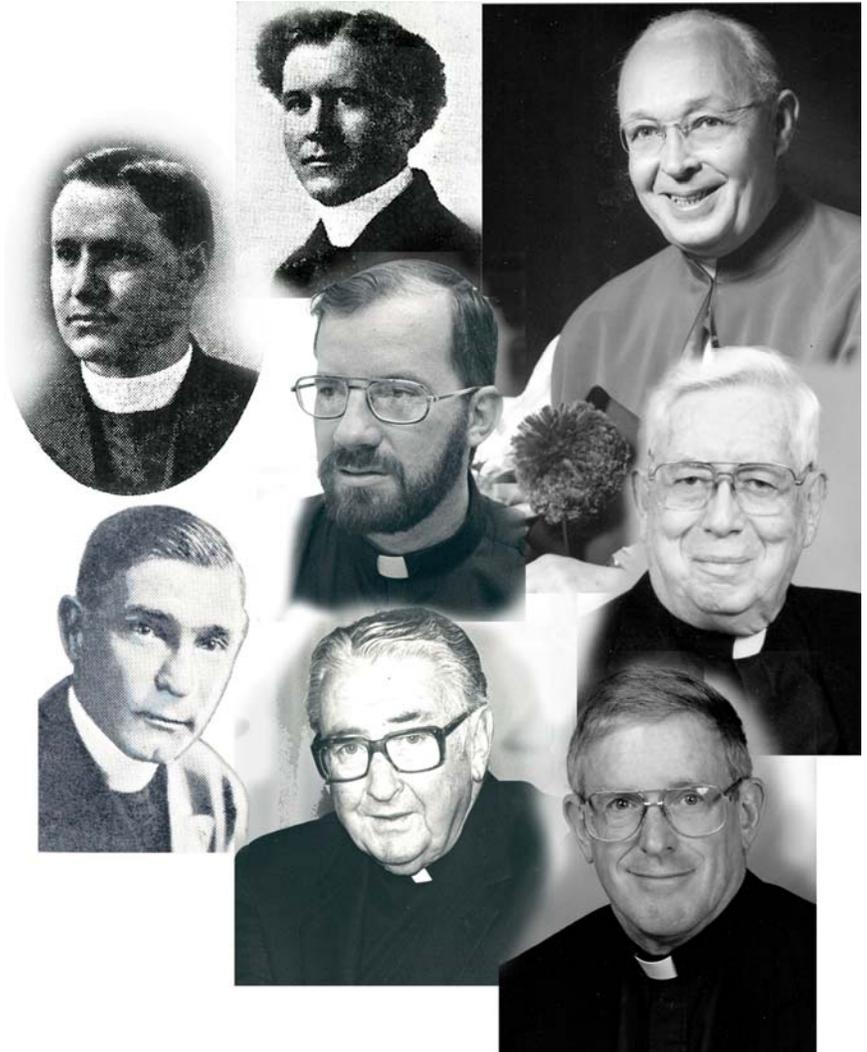
Father Neenan was followed by **Father Christopher V. Walsh** in 1918. Remembered as a colorful personality, Father Walsh would take up the collection himself and if a person did not "donate" would shake the basket in front of the parishioner until the contribution was made. During his time, he built the rectory and the first school building – Concordia Hall, both of which have since been razed. Father Walsh was known for heading the Denver Catholic School Red Cross Unit with much distinction and claimed to have baptized Buffalo Bill Cody at the time of his death.

Monsignor Joseph P. O'Heron was appointed pastor in 1929 and served the parish for 27 years until his death in 1957. Under his leadership the parish grew dramatically adding 500 some converts. One of his most unusual converts was a Presbyterian minister, Harvey L. Eisenor. Msgr. O'Heron converted Concordia Hall for school use and later oversaw the construction of the school building at 3301 S. Sherman Street, followed by the convent, and the rectory at 3310 S. Sherman Street. He took great pride in the school and the accomplishments of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. At the time of his death, there were 819 students enrolled in eight grades with a faculty of 15 (9 religious and 6 lay).

"He was a good, dear person. When we went to confession here under the curtain where he sat, a dog's tail was wagging. Was he petting the dog while he was listening to us? Also, his cat made a visit to the altar when he said mass. My spaniel dog followed us to Mass one Sunday. While I knelt for Holy Communion, my dog came through the posts that held up the railing and licked my face. I looked up. Msgr. O'Heron smiled at me."

Mrs. Marie McRae

Msgr. Bernard J. Cullen was the 5th pastor of S. Louis, remaining with the parish until his retirement in 1983. His assistants during that time included **Rev. William C. Vollmer**, **Father Emil Weber**, and **Father Thomas Kelly**. A native of Pueblo, Colorado, Msgr. Cullen celebrated his 25th, 40th and 50th anniversaries of his priesthood at St. Louis Parish and led the parishioners in the celebration of the parish's 50th anniversary. During his time a new convent was completed, Cline Hall was constructed and property south of the school purchased for a playing field. St. Louis reached a high of 4144 parishioners by 1965. New parishes and new parochial schools were opening in the area, however, and



Clockwise from the top: Father Walsh, Msgr. O'Heron, Father Durrie, Father Reycraft, Msgr. Cullen, Father Neenan. Father Hagus, Center, Father Mollison.

school and church numbers fell as members of the St. Louis community moved to the new parishes.

"Not having any family here in Colorado, Msgr. Cullen was like a father to me. He advised and counseled me on various matters, baptized my last four children and administered to sacraments to all of my six children."

Austin Gnomes

Following Msgr. Cullen's retirement in 1982, **Father Robert I. Durrie** came to St. Louis Parish from St. Joan of Arc, where he had been pastor for 13 years. Born in Saratoga, Wyoming, Father Durrie graduated from high school in Fort Collins and managed a small business in East Denver. He served for four years in the U.S. Navy during World War II, returning home to enter St. Thomas seminary in 1946. He was ordained in 1954 and took up his first assignment at St. John the Evangelist in Denver.

Father Dennis K. Ryan joined St. Louis at the same time to serve as Father Durrie's assistant and also taught at St. Louis Catholic School. **Father Harold J. Stansell**, S.J., a retired full professor Jesuit educator who taught history at Regis College for 37 years, helped out for four years as a visiting supply priest.

Upon the retirement of Father Durrie, **Father Roger W. Mollison** was appointed pastor in 1989. In 1991 he was joined by assistant pastor **Father Gaston Muyombo** of Zaire (now Congo) who served St. Louis Parish until 1997. A Denver native, Father Mollison graduated from East High School, studied at CU for a year, briefly explored life as a monk and then attended St. Thomas Seminary, where he was ordained in 1964. At St. Louis he started St. Vincent House, was instrumental in beginning St. Louis's relationship with its sister parish in Congo, and began the parish's involvement in the Neocatechumenal Way. Under his leadership, Jesus Our Hope Heritage was launched up Deer Creek, the youth program was re-established in the parish and the first girl, as well as third grade servers servers took their place beside the altar. In 1999, Father Mollison was forced to retire early due to ill health. In recognition of his many gifts to the community he was the first recipient of the Legacy of Hope award given by the House of Hope.

"Father Roger Mollison was very pastoral and kind. One morning he looked out and saw a man sleeping on the front lawn. The man had a loved one in the hospital and could not afford a motel room. That gave Father Roger the idea to have a place that could help such people – that was the start of the St. Vincent House."

Priscilla Jeffers

Father Robert J. Reycraft, our current pastor, joined St. Louis in 1999 and we hope will be with us many more years. A native of Chicago, Father Reycraft originally came to Colorado as a member of the U.S. Air Force and was stationed at Lowrey for three years. During that time he completed a year of college at CU, but found his real interest was in the priesthood. He attended St. Thomas Seminary and theology school earning a Master's degree in Theology. Ordained May 31, 1975, he has served at numerous parishes throughout the archdiocese including St. Joseph in Ft. Collins; Holy Ghost, Holy Family and Guardian Angels parishes in Denver, as well as St. Anthony's Parish in Sterling.

Among his many accomplishments on behalf of the St. Louis parish are the Pro-Life memorial, the refurbished church interior with its new altarpiece, the stained glass windows, and expanded parish involvement from the Knights of Columbus Council to the Croatian mission, Corpus Christi procession, Totus Tuus program and many facilities enhancements at St. Louis School. Father Reycraft's pilgrimage tours to historic churches throughout Colorado and to the Holy Land have left a lasting impact on many members of the St. Louis community.

