



## *Did you know?*

**Our Pastor, Father Paul Kochu traveled over 10,000 miles from his home in India and served Catholic parishes and communities well over thirty-six years, before arriving in Palm Harbor, Florida at St. Luke the Evangelist in July, 2010.**

His journey began in Kerala, a state on India's southwest tropical coast of Malabar, near the city of Kottayam. Born November 9, 1947 to devout Catholic parents, Father Paul was one of five children. As the youngest son living at home, he would rise early, help with chores and accompany his mother to daily Mass. Motivated by the example of his parish priest and encouraged by his parents, he said he always felt drawn to the priesthood, declaring his intentions, at the tender age of five.

As a boy, Father Paul attended a nearby parochial grade school. He was active in sports, scouts and not surprisingly was an altar server, but knew he wanted to do more to help others, and serve the Lord. Those who also recognized Father's calling were pleased when he was selected to attend a prestigious boarding school geared to promoting priestly vocations. Soon after graduating high school, he followed his discernment and entered the seminary in Nagpur, India.

He became a professed member of the Society of Catholic Apostolate, an International Community founded by a Roman Catholic Priest, St. Vincent Pallotti (1795 – 1850). Father Paul was ordained a priest in India on October 23, 1974. He chose the Society, commonly referred to as "Palatines", because of his close interaction with its priests and brothers who spend their lives serving parishes, conducting retreats, educating the poor and underprivileged, caring for orphans and the homeless and promoting evangelization.

Shortly after his ordination, Father was assigned to a large Mission Parish. He wore many hats; Associate Priest, Principal of the school, Director of Social Services and also oversaw the hundred plus children who attended the boarding school or lived in the orphanage. Later Father Paul served as a Rector at the Society's Learning Institute and Seminary and was eventually named Director of a Lay Pastoral Centre which operated between eleven different Dioceses.

Father Paul accomplished many things in the eighteen years he served in India but was ready to do more. In 1992 he was given the assignment to relocate to the Island of St. Lucia. What might sound like the start of a perfect vacation turned into his becoming the Pastor of 6,000 parishioners, with four schools and three Mission churches. With the help of lay members, Father Paul served both the administrative and priestly needs of his congregation. Six years later in July, 1998 he was called to another "tropical" locale, this time in the States, right here in Tampa, Florida.

Father Paul's first assignment was in the St. Petersburg Diocese as an Associate Pastor at Holy Cross from 1998 -2000. He was reassigned to the Most Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Gulfport serving as an Associate from 2000 - 2002 and later that same year was appointed Pastor of St Peter Claver in Tampa where he served for five years.



During the course of this time, Father Paul officially became a priest of the local diocese. While no longer a member with official standing in his Province of the Epiphany of the Lord in India, he did not forget the Pallottines' mission "*to serve the poor and promote evangelization*", which is perhaps why he was asked by the late Msgr. John Scully to assist with the Society of the Propagation of Faith. Upon the Monsignor's retirement, Father became the Diocesan Director of both the "Society" and the Pontifical Missions, a position he has enthusiastically held for over fifteen years.

Given his administrative background and ability to address the needs of parishes in transition, Father was reassigned in 2007 to Holy Cross Parish again, this time as their Pastor. In 2010, Father Paul was chosen by Bishop Lynch to move north to Palm Harbor and become the sixth and current Pastor of St. Luke the Evangelist.

Upon arriving, his first and foremost concern was to serve the spiritual needs of the parish. In addition to his assigned priestly duties, Father ministered to the changing needs of the Catholic Community by offering weekly Mass year-round at area nursing homes, arranging visits to hospice centers, and encouraging ministries for the home-bound.

He also worked quickly to develop a plan to reduce the operating cost of the parish and address the deferred maintenance issues in spite of shrinking financial reserves. After conferring with parishioners about cost-saving programs, a number of unpaid volunteers stepped forward "*in the Spirit of St. Luke,*" to offer their time and talents; a practice that continues to this day.

Thanks to the efforts of many, Father had the time and funds to repair the multiple roof leaks, replace the failing HVAC systems, upgrade the carpet and flooring in the church, enhance the sacristy and build the new Parish Hall. However, he is the first one to state "there's much more work to be done" and would prefer to talk about his "To Do List" for the parish: resurfacing the parking lots, upgrading the exterior lighting, repairing the irrigation system, and improving the landscaping rather than any of his personal accomplishments.

What Father Paul is most willing to talk about is his desire to see the parish family grow in size and in spirituality. He is also quick to express a genuine appreciation for the services of our Associate Pastor, Fr. Camilo Simoes, Sr. Vigy, Deacon Joe Reid, the parish staff and all the volunteers. He is grateful to God for calling him to priesthood and has found great joy serving St. Luke the Evangelist parish. He recognizes the sacrifices the parish community has made in the spirit of giving and asks for our continued prayers and support.

## Did you know?

- St. Luke the Evangelist Catholic Church had its actual beginnings forty-three years ago when the Diocese of St. Petersburg, under Bishop Charles McLaughlin, acquired eight and one-half acres of land on the corner of Alderman Road and Cinnamon Hill.
- Some eleven years later on February 19, 1985 it was announced at St. Ignatius, our mother church in Tarpon Springs, that a new, mission in Palm Harbor was being established.
- The first Mass was celebrated by Fr. Patrick Rahill, administrator of the new mission and founding Pastor, on Saturday, May 11, 1985 in the Presbyterian Church on Nebraska Avenue.
- Less than a month later, on Sunday, June 9, 1985 more than 400 families registered.
- By that September 260 students were attending the CCD School of Faith Program conducted by the Sisters of St. Clare at the Methodist Church.
- During the next eighteen months true ecumenicalism and cooperation among the area Churches was apparent for Fr. Rahill was able to hold six Masses on Sundays, not only at the Presbyterian Church but also the Lutheran Church of the Palms and the First United Methodist Church. Masses were also celebrated at Baywood Village Clubhouse and Palm Harbor Middle School.
- By a decree dated October 18, 1985 the feast of St. Luke the Evangelist, Bishop W. Thomas Larkin raised the mission to the status of a parish.
- Construction began January 20, 1986 on a building to meet the worship, social, educational needs of the community and by December 7, 1986 Bishop Larkin blessed the new parish facility.
- Our Parish grew from a few hundred families to nearly three thousand in a span of fifteen years.
- Over the years the parish has benefited from the dedicated work of priests, deacons and religious including the Sisters of St. Clare and the Sisters of St. Anne.

Reverend Patrick Rahill	Founding Pastor	5-12-1985	12-31-1987
Reverend John Murphy	Pastor	1-12-1988	5-1-1989
Reverend Donald Leininger (RIP 1-25-08)	Pastor	5-1-1989	7-1-2000
Reverend Ron Poirier	Pastor	7-1-2000	5-25-2004
Reverend John D' Antonio	Pastor	5-25-2004	6-30-2010
Reverend Paul Kochu	Pastor	7-10-2010	present