

# Pastor stresses humility, service at parish's anniversary celebration

By Stacey Daly  
Correspondent

NORTH PLAINFIELD — Proud parishioners of The Church of St. Luke gathered to commemorate its golden anniversary Oct. 18. Both young and old participated in the Mass of Thanksgiving, which was celebrated by Father Lancelot McGrath, pastor.

In his homily, Father McGrath asked, "How can we judge ourselves? We make this reflection on 50 years of a journey and hopefully many, many more years ahead. Is there any mark or measure of what we should do?"

To answer this question, Father McGrath pointed to the Gospel (Mark 10:35-45), in which James and John asked to sit one at Jesus' right and the other at the left. Jesus said to them, "Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

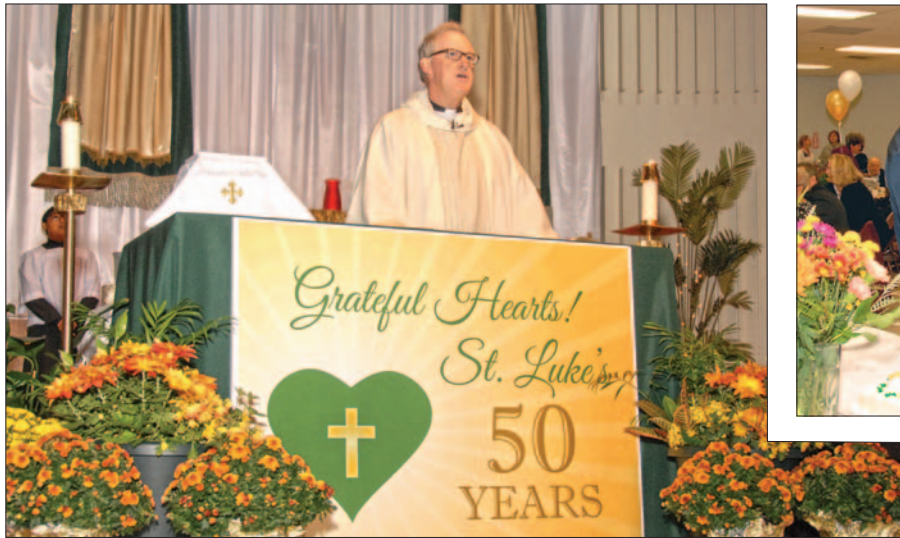
Father McGrath explained, "We want to judge our parish on humility and service." He added that Jesus calls them, as he called the Apostles, to see life differently and to pass on the thirst for power and recognition, in exchange for the joy of quiet service. "We need to suppress our instinctive desire to exercise power and control over others, and to truly want to be humble."

He pointed to Jesus as the model for the parish of St. Luke, hanging on the cross. "We must become close to that Jesus who has lived, was humble and has served," he said.

Father McGrath added that what makes a parish strong is each individual and the importance of their combined strength to form a strong community.

Highlights of the Mass included music by parish musicians and a vocal solo of "Awesome God" by 14-year-old Kyra Anthony. Special offertory gifts included the parish community logo, sacramental records, a "heart-to-heart" basket and a tree to be planted by children of the parish.

At a reception, Father McGrath elaborated on the strengths of the parish community.



"There are so many groups which keep you going," he said, citing the work of the Spirituality Committee, the Finance Committee, the Building and Grounds team, and especially the Religious Education program. "This core group is fabulous."

Since becoming pastor at St. Luke's, Father McGrath started a "heart-to-heart" program which promotes the idea that all people are equal in the eyes of God. No one is above or below anyone else, regardless of what they have or may need. He added that is in line with what the Gospel reading was about.

"This is what Pope Francis is trying to do with all of us," he said. "It is a lockdown with our Lord. We can't be disconnected from that. It is about Christ's sense of humility and to make us more aware of what that hearkens. It is from that relationship that people are giving and people are participating. That's what we are seeing today — super volunteers. And, we really need more people to step up and volunteer."

Anthony, one of the day's youngest volunteers, was baptized at St. Luke's.

"It means a lot to me to be a part of this celebration," she said. "Father Lancelot heard that I am part of a theatre group and that I sing, and I have also been singing in the children's Christmas choir since I was in kindergarten, so he asked me to be a part of this."

She added that while this was a great

experience, her favorite times in the parish are the candlelit processions during the Christmas pageant.

Louise Parenti, who proudly wore a 50-year ribbon, explained that she and her husband were part of the parish from the beginning.

"My husband, Albert, was a deacon here for 26 years. He was one of the first deacons ordained by Bishop [George] Ahr," she said, adding that he died 10 years ago. "Originally, he wanted to be a priest. I guess I changed his mind," she joked. When asked what the parish needs most, she smiled and exclaimed, "A deacon."

Another original parishioner, Peter



Left, Father Lancelot McGrath, pastor, Church of St. Luke, is shown at the altar at Mass and helping young members of the parish cut an anniversary cake at a reception. — Tom Mullen photos

Romeri, said his children were three and four years old when the parish was started.

"A lot has changed through the years," he said. "We are holding strong. A lot of these small churches are shutting down, but this won't shut down. It's too strong. St. Luke was established to meet the growth in the western section of North Plainfield.

Sunday Mass was first celebrated at North Plainfield High School and the Italian-American Club. The first Mass was celebrated at the new church Easter Sunday, March 29, 1970; Bishop Ahr dedicated the church June 14.

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Some original members of The Church of St. Luke pose for a photo after Mass. When the parish was founded, Sunday Mass was first celebrated at North Plainfield High School and the Italian-American Club. The first Mass was celebrated at the new church Easter Sunday, March 29, 1970.