

St. Ignatius Martyr

Our Parish Story

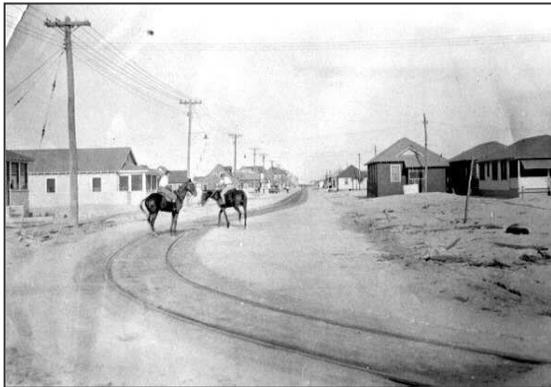
In an effort to put together the story of our parish, we began with many facts, dates and a few photos. As we progressed, a story emerged of a continuing faith community with a rich tradition of prayer, social action and *joie de vivre* that stretches through generations and continues today.

The parish community of St. Ignatius Martyr was conceived in the hey day of the 'Roaring Twenties' when the city of Long Beach was only 3 years old and born in the West End which to most who live there, a special place.

This history is a composite of the memories of many Long Beach folks who love their heritage and the numerous stories that go with it.

The Beginning

The Twenties changed the little place called Long Beach considerably. As the town became a full-fledged city and proceeded on its building program, many folks who came to Long Beach decided to stay. A good portion was Catholic. The first pastor, Fr. Cass, often spoke about the West End colony of Irish pioneers: the Morrisons, the Callahans and the Moriartys. These hardy residents stayed after the summer visitors left to brave the sandstorms and flood-tides of winter and were a part of the beginnings of St. Ignatius.



The West End at New York Ave. about 1926.



Park and Minnesota Ave with trolley track.

During the early 20s, the building restrictions that prevented many people from owning a house in the city were lifted. New building markets were made available in the Westholme section with smaller tract homes for people with modest means. Prefabricated bungalows were assembled in the West End on streets named after states and the military style houses that remained from the U.S. Army de-embarkation activities during World War I were used as summer bungalows and became known as "The Walks".

Many of the new citizens were immigrants or children of immigrants working in construction, as domestics or operating small shops. And another new phenomenon was taking place! Many Catholic families from the New York City were beginning to allow themselves to enjoy a seaside vacation spot. The times were good and they flocked from Flatbush Ave, the Grand Concourse and Stuyvesant Town to purchase or rent a bungalow and enjoy the seashore.

Charlie and Agnes Murphy of Brooklyn bought a summer bungalow kit from Kolb Construction Company in 1923 and had it built on Maryland Ave. Although they remained summer residents, their daughter, granddaughter and great granddaughter were married in our church. Five of their grandchildren are now permanent residents of Long Beach and 4 great great grand children were baptized here ! Ryan, Connor and Kate Troy are fifth generation parishioners of St. Ignatius. This is not an uncommon story, as many current families will attest.

The West End did not have a lot of the constrictions that the rest of Long Beach had. It was a bit freer and more accommodating for both the year 'round and summer residents to live. It also had a unique trolley line that ran all the way to Tennessee Avenue from the railroad station and the new 'Million Dollar Bridge' over Reynolds Channel brought the age of the automobile to our shores.

During this time, the only Catholic Church was St. Mary of the Isle in the East End of Long Beach. The pastor, Father Edward Hoar, saw the rising need for a Catholic presence in Long Beach and established a summer mission in the West End in 1918. The Catholics there heard Mass in a series of intriguing, if not very elegant "chapels" over the next few years.

The first was at Mr. Carroll Tompkins' home in the West End, where the piano from Moriarty's Hotel was set up as an altar. The next was a Red Cross hut at New York Avenue and Beech Street. Then in 1920 arrangements were made to have Mass said every Sunday in the West End Movie Theater, an airy, barnlike structure on Beech Street at Tennessee Avenue. The theater was adequate, if not very comfortable (trying to kneel on a pewless, sloping concrete floor led many parishioners into some weird contortions for the summer months). Those relatively few hardy souls who had become permanent residents still had to make the long trip to Monroe Boulevard in the East End to attend Mass at St. Mary of the Isle during the winter months.

Father Hoar's dream of a new church in the West End took a few years to materialize, but finally actual construction was begun in January 1926. The cathedral-like structure with its Moorish tower was to be built right in the middle of the western end of the new city. In September 1925, a decision that was to affect the history of the parish for the next forty years was made. Father John Cass, a 37-year-old curate recently transferred to St. Mary's from Brooklyn, was permanently assigned to the West End. Father announced at all masses in the theater that he would be with the Catholics of the West End all winter. The summer mission was at last emerging as the full-fledged parish of St. Ignatius Martyr.



The first day of the new K of C council, Nov. 26, 1926 at Tennessee Ave. and Beech St. Fr. Cass stands in the middle and yes, that is a trolley car.

Progress on the church building was slow and by the end of April, 1926 it consisted of little more than a foundation and concrete floor. Brickwork was begun in June, and the Cross was placed on the roof in mid-September. Father Cass described the progress—or rather the lack of it—in moving from the theater to the regular church with characteristic wit: “As the shadows of autumn lengthened and the days grew shorter and colder, the parishioners watched with increasing interest the slow progress of the building. It was

obviously impossible to offer Holy Mass in the structure, so the Bishop reluctantly continued the privilege of holding religious services in the cold and drafty movie house. In an early ecumenical gesture, the manager of the theater extended the season without additional charge. Permission was also granted to offer the mass on weekday mornings in the rectory on a temporary altar.”

However, within a few months, there appeared a glimmer of light at the end of what seemed an eternal tunnel. The parish of St. Ignatius Martyr was officially established on October 9, 1926, and the word went out that the congregation would be out of the movies and into the church by Christmas. Father Cass recalled “We closed the season in the theater on December 4, in

some excitement. Winter had broken early that year, and as the snow fell outside, the congregation heard a promise that Mass would be said in the new church the following week.” All the struggle, discomfort and hope culminated in that first Mass on December 11, 1926.

Furniture and furnishings were moved in during the next few months, and when Bishop Molloy came to dedicate the church on Sunday, August 7, 1927, he found it almost completely and permanently appointed. The ceremony brought together many of those who, from the beginning, were associated with the spiritual life and progress of Long Beach, including priests from parishes in Rockville Centre, Lynbrook, Baldwin and Far Rockaway.

Meanwhile, the parish was growing. In February 1927, a census showed a winter count of 110 families and 375 persons; only 18 months later, the figures noted 600 persons in the winter and about 5,000 in summer.



Grand Blvd. and Penn Street in 1925. The land designated for the church is on the left.



St. Ignatius Church on Feb 22, 1927. It was completely finished in August.

The Early Years

Many of our present organizations were founded during the start up years including the Rosary Altar Society, the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Daughters of America.

The Dominican Sisters of Amityville, who were to play such an important part in the parish over the years, began making the long trip from St. Agnes Church in Rockville Centre in 1927, to help serve the parishioners and their children.

In 1927, Father Cass, who had not been well when he came to Long Beach, was granted a leave of absence to regain his health. He was not to return again to take charge of the parish until 1935.

In the interim, St. Ignatius had two administrators: Father Owen J. Smith (1927-1931) and Father Leo Kelly (1931-1935). During Father Smith's stay, the church's property was considerably extended. Father Kelly built a new rectory. As part of this construction program, a new sacristy and a new side entrance were added to the church.

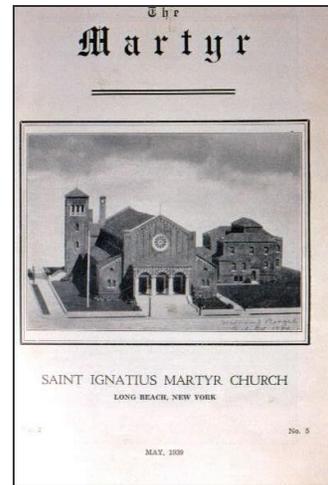
The depression of the 30's was hard on all in Long Beach. Many families who had summer bungalows could no longer support two houses and moved to Long Beach permanently. They would add heating to those little bungalows and begin their new lives as citizens of Long Beach and full time parishioners of St. Ignatius. Although money was hard to come by, during the summer of 1935, a group of women prepared weekly hot luncheons at the home of Mrs. Hamilton on Beech Street. The charge was .50 and all the food was donated. At the end of the season, Fr. Kelly was presented with a donation of \$1,000.00.

Mike Delury was the sexton from the first days of the parish. He came from county Cork in Ireland after a serving as a sergeant in the British Army in World War I and also assisting the IRA during the "Troubles" with England and the Black and Tans. There are many stories of his bold and dangerous exploits. For over 35 years, Mike was a sexton extraordinaire being well regarded by all, from the earliest settlers to the youngest altar boy. His duties went well beyond the maintenance of a clean, orderly church as his skill around the altar and his knowledge of ceremonies made him an unofficial Master of Ceremonies during Holy Week or Forty Hours devotions. Although Mike is long gone, his grandsons remain in Long Beach and his great-grandchildren attended our Catholic school.

Soon after Father Cass resumed his pastorate, he began to consider building a Catholic school, and in 1937 formally presented to Bishop Molloy a plan for construction of a complex that would include both an elementary and high school. The Bishop looked favorably on the plan, but suggested that the project be limited to the elementary level for the time being.

Father Cass immediately undertook a fund-raising campaign by selling "Bricks" toward the completion of his dream. However, shortly thereafter World War II started, and plans for the school had to be put aside.

During this period, Father Cass began to publish a monthly parish newsletter called "The Martyr". Fr. Cass filled this tiny publication with current parish events, reflections and musings about religious themes and an occasional poem or prayer. A listing of the monthly parishioner donations by name and address filled the back pages and Father's own tongue-in-cheek comments on the times dubbed "Conversations With a Termite" appeared on the back cover.



The Whitbread Family lived across from the church and watched it being built. Ruth remembers that the family was "Just a whistle away" from last minute assignments such as playing the organ for benediction, serving mass or helping a parishioner push a car out of the sand. For several years, Bill Whitbread drove Fr. Cass's Lincoln Zephyr to St. Agnes to bring the Dominican nuns to the Children's Mass on Sundays. Their home was sold to the parish in the forties and was attached to the home next door to form a larger convent. A beautiful chapel was built in what was once a three-car garage. The chapel remains in use today by the sisters.

The "Martyr" for April 1939 gives us a good understanding of the status of the parish at the end of the decade. The Catholic Daughters were hosting their State Convention in Long Beach at the Lido Hotel and many of the related events were held in the parish. The regent for the St. Ignatius Court was Mrs. Margaret Mc Hugh. An open forum on the labor encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII and Pius XI was held every Wednesday after devotions. These talks centered on the rights of the workingman to form labor unions. The Knights of Columbus also held a series of talks concerning Christian Justice and the current propaganda with its attacks on God and Religion. There was a call to all Holy Name Society men to attend the Nassau County Holy Name Rally at Freeport Stadium and there was an announcement that the construction of a room over the garage for the housekeeper was underway. The Special Easter collection total for the month was \$709.83.

There are many fond memories of the Franciscan friars and sisters who while vacationing in Long Beach, assisted the church in many ways. Many remember Fr. James Salvo, a wonderful pianist and soloist who spent many summers at the church singing and teaching Marian hymns.

The Franciscan presence remains with us as the Graymore sisters still have a summer residence on Penn Street and our Secular Franciscan Community in Long Beach was started in the 1980's with the encouragement of Fathers Hogan and Salvo.

Father Vincent Brown (1935-43) left a great impression during his stay here helping to form the Legion of Mary and beginning of a long history of social service to the sick and the poor. Father was also somewhat of an athlete. A parishioner strolling along Broadway would be not be surprised to see Father in the middle of a football scrimmage with the parish boys on the large empty lot.

A unique way of parish fund raising during this time was the holding of parties throughout the summer on various blocks in the West End. George Whitbread donated a portable wooden dance floor that traveled from block to block. Bazaars were also held on the adjacent church lot and many remember the visiting priest, Fr. Benno, enthusiastically marshalling the numerous volunteers into action.

During the war, Long Beach was again a Navy embarkation center for troops. While the parish welcomed the boys regularly to Mass, the Rosary Altar Society supplied homemade cakes and desserts to the USO every Saturday. Navy veterans from Long Beach, notably Bob Harrington, Tom Moriarty and Steve Buckley were mustered out in their hometown.

The bell tower was a beautiful addition to the church's architecture and for many years the bell rang at 7 a.m., 12 noon and 6 p.m. at which time many parishioners would recite "The Angelus". During this time, the church itself was a safe haven for all neighbors during the frequent hurricanes that hit our shores.

End of Part 1