

On February 2, 1914, Right Reverend D.J. O'Connell, Bishop of Virginia, and Father John Doherty, Pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Norfolk, along with several laypeople from Norfolk and Virginia Beach, met to begin plans for a small chapel beside Lake Holly at Virginia's oceanfront resort. For years, a Catholic community of 55 resident families and many more regular vacationers had been celebrating Mass in an Ecumenical Chapel adjacent to the Princess Anne Hotel and conducting catechesis in the home of Mr. and Mrs. James E. Allen. Land for the chapel was acquired on April 7, 1914 from Mr. James Groves who donated one parcel and sold another adjacent parcel to the Diocese at a discounted rate of \$500.

John Kevan Peebles, a leading architect and a native son of Petersburg who studied at the University of Virginia, was selected to design the structure. Peebles was quite famous in the area for designing St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church in Portsmouth and having recently completed a much-touted renovation of the State Capitol building in Richmond where his design echoed many of the lines and themes of the original architect of the edifice, Thomas Jefferson. He would go on to design St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Norfolk following a devastating fire in their original building.

After a full year of work, the Catholic community at Virginia Beach, led by Mrs. Emma Post and Mr. Esby Smith, finalized all the details and, on June 4, 1915, a large crowd gathered to watch Father Philip P. Brennan as he laid the cornerstone for the new Catholic chapel.

Father Brennan was an associate priest at St. Mary's and would lead the new community for the next 35 years, eventually becoming the first Pastor of Star of the Sea Parish. Completed in only two months under the supervision of Mr. R.E. Johnson, the new chapel was a small red brick structure with a green slate roof and seated 200 worshipers. The interior was constructed of a lighter brick, framed by wooden rafters, crossbeams and unique corbels. The sanctuary contained a marble altar against the back wall. The entire structure was less than 1,800 square feet.

A dedicatory High Mass was celebrated on August 8, 1915 by Father Brennan. The sermon that day was delivered by Reverend Father Eliot of Washington, D.C., one of the most gifted orators in the Catholic Church in America at the time. The first regular Mass in the new Church was one week later, August 15, 1915, a Holy Day in honor of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In 1925, Star of the Sea became the first Catholic Parish in what would become the City of Virginia Beach 38 years later. Rapid growth of the Catholic community placed additional space demands on the small chapel and, in the same year, the first of many major renovations occurred: an expansion of the sanctuary area to include a large sacristy and also the construction of small wings on both the north and south sides of the original structure.

Upon his arrival in 1950, Father Nicholas Habets undertook as his first project a further expansion of the south wing, doubling the seating capacity of the church. It was during the tenure of Father Habets that Star of the Sea School was established. In addition to the eight classrooms in a new building, Father Habets converted the parish house to serve as a cafeteria and rebuilt a private home to serve as a convent for the Sisters he hoped to recruit as teachers for the school. In 1958, Father Habets was able to convince the IHM Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a teaching order based near Westchester, Pennsylvania, to take on the challenge of staffing Star of the Sea School.

Early in the 1960's a fire destroyed the organ in the choir loft above the front door, completely burned the confessional in the back of the church, and blackened the original marble altar. The men of the Parish repaired the fire damage and spent their nights and weekends on a "Marble Repair Crew" restoration effort that lasted for months.

In 1962, Father Francis Bambrick expanded the north wing of the church and in 1972 Father Paul Gaughan removed the small portico at the church entrance and replaced it with a large vestibule and brick porch, allowing parishioners more space to greet one another. Father Gaughan also answered many summer worshipers' prayers with the installation of an air conditioning system.

Later in the 1970's, there was a need for a school playground. The parish had owned property across Arctic Circle, on the lake front, for several years. However, there was a house on the property that had belonged to the famous psychic Edgar Cayce and was the original home of Cayce's Association for Research and Enlightenment. To avoid having to pay for demolition of the house, parish leaders offered the house first to the Edgar Cayce Society to be moved to their properties on 67th Street. When they refused the gift, it was offered to the Virginia Beach Fire Department for practice in fighting fires. In September 1976, a large crowd gathered to watch the firefighters burn the house to the ground, and the land for the playground was cleared.

A new Pastor, Father Raymond McIntyre, came to Star of the Sea in 1981, and during his tenure another renovation of the church was deemed necessary. Shortly after the close of the school year in 1994, demolition of much of the existing structure began. The interior columns, which had always obstructed the view of many worshipers, were removed. Construction proceeded with great speed while daily and weekly Masses were held in the gymnasium where several parishioners had built the "Church in the Box." The new worship space was dedicated by Bishop Sullivan amid much celebration on May 20, 1995.

Through the 1990's and into the 21st Century, the parish community continued to grow, beginning with several strategic land acquisitions by Father James Dorson.

In 2004, construction of an 18,700 square foot Parish Hall was initiated by Father Kevin O'Brien and brought to realization by Father Esteban "Steve" DeLeon. To make room for the newest addition, the former Rectory and a Winter Chapel, built in the 1950's, were razed. The Parish Hall, named Crawford Hall in honor of Father Robert Crawford, C.M., was equipped with a partitioned dining area and a full commercial kitchen on the first floor and meeting rooms on the second floor.

On Saturday August 15, 2015, Star of the Sea commemorated the 100th anniversary of the original chapel at the Oceanfront with a celebration of faith and community. Bishop Francis Di Lorenzo celebrated Mass at 5:00 PM followed by a Gala Dinner at the Virginia Beach Convention Center. The Bishop was joined by Father Steve, several former pastors, government officials, ministers of the local inter-Faith Community, former employees, Religious and friends for an evening of reflection and socialization.

The final element of the four-year-long Centennial Celebration was a Pilgrimage to the Marian Shrines of Europe. Father Steve, the Liturgy Committee and a group of parishioners traveled to Fatima, Santiago de Compostela and Lourdes for ten days starting September 7, 2015. They also visited Lisbon, Portugal and Paris, France.

Contributions to this story were made by the staff and archives of Star of the Sea Parish and also by Lynn Hess, Chuck Joyner, Kevin Bowser and Patrick Kane. Facts and images were borrowed from *The Virginian Pilot*, *The Virginia Beach Beacon*, *The Catholic Virginian*, *The Old Parish Churches of Virginia* by Francis Marion Wigmore, *Commonwealth Catholicism* by Gerald P. Fogarty, S.J. and *Star of the Sea 75th Anniversary Memorial Booklet* by Margaret Towne, et al.

The Pastors of Star of the Sea Parish

1915	Father Philip P. Brennan	1995	Monsignor William J. Sullivan
1950	Father Nicholas J. Habets	1996	Father James E. Dorson
1962	Father Francis B. Bambrick	2002	Father Kevin J. O'Brien
1971	Father Paul T. Gaughan	2005	Father James C. Griffin
1981	Father Raymond T. McIntyre	2006	Father Esteban DeLeon

100th Anniversary Prayer

Heavenly Father, send your blessings upon Star of the Sea Parish. Like the people of old, you formed our family here at Star of the Sea 100 years ago to be a sign of your presence in Virginia Beach. Bless all those persons who sacrificed their time, talent and treasure to make Star of the Sea a shining beacon of hope at the oceanfront. Help us, Lord, to be hands and feet to your word, that it be made alive in our minds and in our hearts as we strive to love ourselves and each other as you have loved us. We pray, Holy Spirit, for an awareness of opportunities to influence people to join the Mystical Body of Christ and we pray for your guidance in our words, actions, and deeds. Holy Mary, pray for us. St. Joseph, pray for us. All you Saints of God, pray for us. Amen.