



# PILGRIMAGE TO OUR PAST

*Celebrating 225 Years of Parishioners for Others*

February 2019

## Slavery & Holy Trinity

In 1745, Scottish merchant and wealthy landowner George Gordon established a tobacco inspection house on the Potomac River near what is now the foot of Wisconsin Avenue. The site was chosen because it was the farthest point that ocean-going ships could navigate upriver before reaching the fall line of the Potomac.

From this nucleus, a community developed. In 1751, the legislature of the Province of Maryland authorized the organization of this community as the "Town of George" and the town would be eventually incorporated in 1789. The town grew, fueled by the export trade in tobacco from the plantations and farms of Maryland.

### Involuntary Migrants

The influx of new residents from Maryland also brought slaves, and Georgetown became a hub of the slave trade. Around 1760, merchant John Beattie set up the first slave market near the waterfront. Other slave markets in Georgetown, sometimes called "slave pens," would soon follow.

African-Americans constituted a large segment of the new town's population. The 1800 census reported that of the 5,120 Georgetown residents, 1,449 were enslaved and 227 were free blacks.

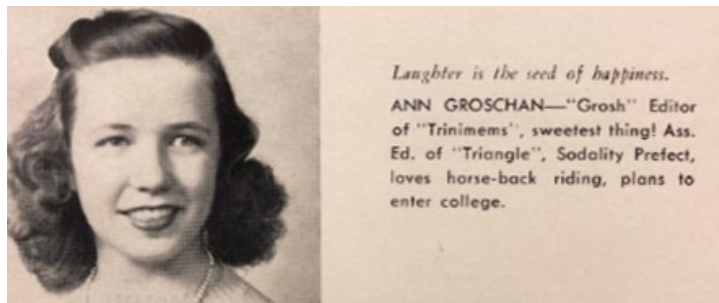
Once Holy Trinity was established in 1787, African-Americans also formed a significant portion of the initial parish community. In the early 19th century, the migration of Irish and German Catholic immigrants contributed to the Catholic population of Washington. Consequently, African-Americans—dubbed by William W. Warner as the "involuntary immigrants"—were being brought to Georgetown by Catholic families who moved to Georgetown from Maryland.

By 1820, there were 1,521 slaves and 894 free blacks in Georgetown. The free blacks at that time constituted 12 percent of Georgetown's population. By 1830, the census lists 1,115 slaves (a decrease of around 400 from the last census) and 1,204 free blacks in Georgetown. This change in the enslaved and free black community may be attributed both to owners freeing their slaves and to those enslaved who were able to earn money and purchase their own freedom.

### Jesuits' Role

The American Catholic Church and the American Jesuits (once the order was reestablished in 1814), accepted slavery as part of the American fabric. They held slaves and sold slaves, though they regularly stressed the obligations of masters toward their slaves and opposed the separation of mar-

*Cont. on page 2*



## Parishioner Reflections

### *An Interview with Alum Ann Groschan, HTHS '45*

*Ann Groschan Brent Murphy (Holy Trinity High School Class of 1945) may be the oldest living graduate of the former high school. In her 90th decade, she lives in her own home. Her seven children weave for her a safety net of immense love and care. Recently, her godchild and cousin, Jeanne McCauley (HTHS '56), spoke with Ann about her memories of Holy Trinity.*

### **What do you remember about high school?**

I loved those days! It was more fun! We walked over the [Key] bridge. And in the afternoon, we met up with the boys from St. John's and Gonzaga, also heading home to Arlington and Falls Church. The fellows in the Coast Guard would wave to us from their boats in the Potomac. And we could look from the school windows and see the Georgetown ROTC boys practicing.

During the War, the President said we all should exercise. I don't think the nuns knew the word, but they had us out there doing exercises. We brought our lunches to school, and weren't allowed to leave the campus. But sometimes we would find our way out to a local store to buy lunch. We were not allowed to go into Sugar's [now Saxby's Coffee], because that was where all the Georgetown boys would go.

It was wonderful being all girls, though I think our grandchildren couldn't imagine such a thing! We weren't shy, and we made better friends. There were 35 in our class. I called the roll. *And here Ann begins to call out the names she remembers from the roll book.*

Tuition was \$3 a month. And on First Fridays, we had the best hot chocolate and donuts in the world! Most of the class did not go on to college. *Ann went to Trinity College.*

### **Who do you remember?**

Father James McCarl, S.J., the pastor. He would always tell us, "Dare to be different!"

*Cont. on page 3*

## Slavery, *cont. from page 1*

ried slave couples. In 1749, George Hunter, S.J. said, “Charity to Negroes is Due from all particularly their masters. As they are members of Jesus Christ, redeemed by his precious blood, they are to be Dealt with in a charitable, Christian, paternal manner.”

Later Jesuits would adopt this same point of view. Although Francis Neale, S.J. (Holy Trinity’s founding pastor, serving from 1790-1817) did not challenge the institution, he and others sought to promote this “paternalistic” treatment of enslaved African-Americans.

### Sacraments

Fr. Neale recorded 111 marriages and baptisms of African-Americans during the first 10 years of the parish. During that same period, there were 254 marriages and baptisms of white parishioners. Extrapolating from these statistics, it is probable that one-third of Holy Trinity’s early congregation consisted of enslaved or free African-Americans.

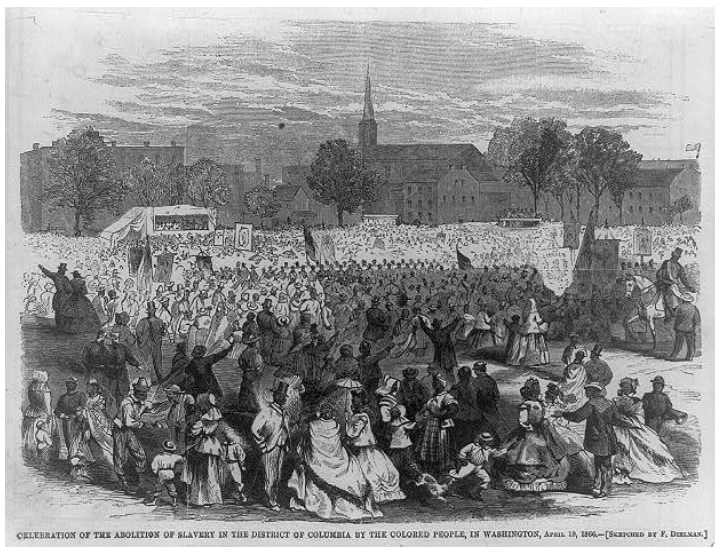
The first marriage listed in the parish registry was celebrated January 1, 1795. It was between David Thomas and Phillis, both listed as slaves. Slaves were listed as “property” and had to receive permission from their owners to marry—David and Phillis were listed as the property of Elizabeth Doyle. The second marriage registered in the parish, celebrated April 6, 1795, was also of a slave couple, Nancy and Benjamin. Nancy and Benjamin were owned by different masters, and the register listed the assent of the two owners. The first recorded marriage at Holy Trinity of a free African-American was that of Edward Butler, who married Bett (listed as a slave) on May 2, 1787. Their marriage was witnessed by Susanna Sewall, Mary Sewall and John Carbery. The register lists “many others” as having attended the wedding.

The very first baptisms listed in the parish registry were celebrated in February of 1795. The fourth child to be baptized, named John, is listed a slave. John was the son of Charles and both were the property of Martin Waring of Georgetown. Two other enslaved children were among the seven children to be christened that month: Anthony, the son of Catherine (property of Dolly Barber) and Mary, daughter of Nathaniel and Maria (property of Ignatius Smith).

Two free African-American women, Lucy and Liddy Butler, had a tremendous impact upon Holy Trinity during its early years. William Warner writes that they, “did more to bring together a strongly committed black Catholic community than the combined efforts of the Church itself or the white laity.” During the parish’s first quarter of a century, the two sisters served as godmothers to 65 of the black children baptized in the parish. The apostolic zeal of the Butler sisters was emulated by George and Patience Sibourne, both free African-Americans, who served as godparents to 30 children from across the District and Montgomery County. According to Warner, the Sibournes were just as willing to sponsor both and enslaved and free children, and—in their desire to bring all within the care of the Church—did not hesitate to sponsor children born out of wedlock either.

### Education

In 1819, John McElroy, S.J. (who would later serve as pastor in 1845 and 1846), opened a Sunday school specifically for African-American children. The classes were taught by volunteer white parishioners. McElroy said that this project was intended first “to prevent Catholic Negroes from schools kept on Sundays by Methodists, etc.” and, second, “to teach them their prayers and Catechism at the same time they learn to spell and read.” If any of these young African-



In 1866, Black District residents celebrate the national abolition of slavery that occurred just months before. *Library of Congress.*

Americans were enslaved at the time, it was not only unusual but also quite significant that an ancillary purpose of the Sunday school was to teach them to read.

An endeavor to provide further education for African-Americans was launched by Anne Marie Becraft, a daughter of a prominent free black family. In 1824, she opened a school for girls in Georgetown. She ran the school for eight years. However, in 1831, Becraft entered the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore, the first African-American religious order. (In 2017, Georgetown University renamed McSherry Hall—originally named after former Georgetown president William McSherry, S.J., who was involved in the sale of 272 enslaved blacks—in her honor. Anne Marie Becraft Hall was the first building at Georgetown University to be named after an African-American woman.)

### Segregation

Black Catholics constituted approximately 30 percent of parishioners until after the Civil War. Although white parishioners accepted black Catholics, they were not necessarily integrated into parish life.

From the beginning, there was a gallery in the church for “the colored.” Black parishioners had to reach this segregated balcony by an outside staircase. They were also required to wait until all white parishioners had received Holy Communion before they could approach the Communion rail.

When Theodore DeTheux, S.J. (pastor from 1818 to 1825) organized the first parish confraternity, the Confraternity of the Living Rosary, 130 black parishioners joined. Though they constituted 34 percent of the confraternity’s members, the confraternity was still segregated.

One instance in which parishioners were not segregated was in death. White and black parishioners alike were buried together in the parish cemetery at Holy Rood.

### A New Parish

After the Civil War, the percentage of black parishioners at Holy Trinity declined. Wagner attributes this either to the end of slavery and demographic changes in Georgetown or to dissatisfaction with the parish’s segregation. In the early 20th century, Holy Trinity’s African-American parishioners numbered 357. By 1923, this remnant withdrew and accepted the offer of the Josephite Fathers to build their own place of worship, Epiphany Catholic Church, in the eastern section of Georgetown. ■

—Bernard A. Cook & Rosemary Cook



## Parishioner Reflections, *cont. from page 1*



### *An Unexpected Performance from Mary Lou Williams*

In the late 1970s, my new wife and I arrived for the 9am Mass on a Sunday morning. We were surprised to see a concert grand piano, double bass and a drum trap set to the left of the main altar – about where today's ambo is located. The celebrant, probably Father English, announced that Mary Lou Williams, the world famous jazz pianist and composer, had written music for a Mass and would perform it during our service.

To my immediate left in the pew was a very proper female octogenarian. She was dressed elegantly, had white gloves and wore a proper Sunday hat. I immediately thought this dear lady was not going to understand the music. Throughout the Mass, I felt increasingly uncomfortable for her.

At the end of Mass, when Mary Lou Williams finished the recessional, the lady put her hand on mine and looked me in the eye and said "Sonny, that's the Saint Louie Blues."▪

—Michael Gick

*\*Editor's note: Mary Lou Williams was a pianist, arranger and composer who was known as the "first lady of the jazz keyboard." Raised a Baptist, Mary Lou converted to Catholicism and was baptized at St. Ignatius Loyola in New York City in 1957. Guided by her faith, she wrote music for liturgy including "The Mass for Peace" and "Mary Lou's Mass."*

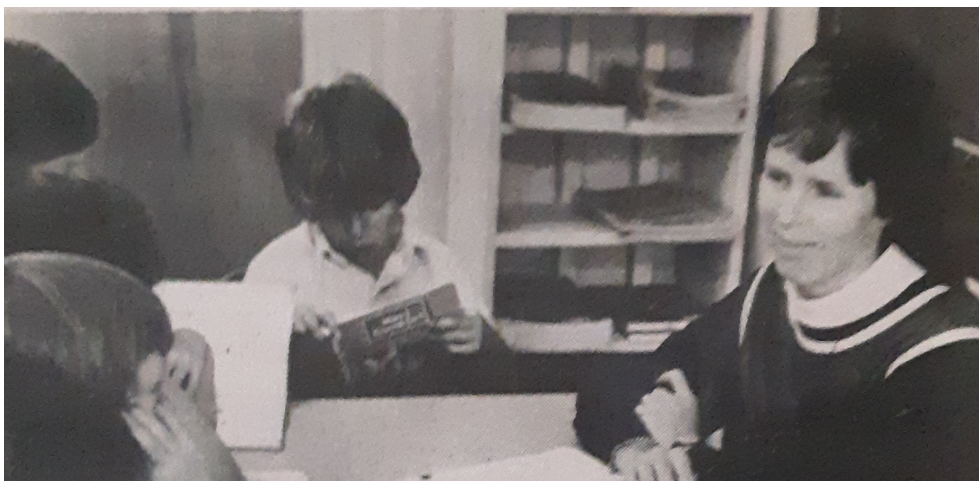
### *The Flying Nun*

When I arrived at Holy Trinity in August 1976, the Bicentennial was still being celebrated, and I had a view of the Washington Monument from my bedroom window in a former church built in 1794. I was immersed in history. The school was a model of the UN with students from so many parts of the District of Columbia and beyond.

The convent housed Sisters who taught in Holy Trinity and other Sisters who were students at Georgetown and surrounding colleges. The spirit of Vatican II was alive at Holy Trinity as Father Jim English along with Father Tom Gavigan, worked with the laity to create a Spirit-lead community.

Father English had a talent in preaching to both the children around the altar and adults in the pews, a rare gift in ministry. Sunday coffee/donut seminars would find people like Monika Hellwig or Bernard Haring, C.S.S.R. sharing their insights on the faith as we gathered in the lower school cafeteria.

Trinity Players was making a comeback



in 1976, using the wonderful stage and auditorium in the Upper school. "Oliver" was their first musical. Sister Ann Moriarty sang in the chorus while I worked on set building. During the shows I was in the fly loft, raising and lowering the flats. For the next few years I had a new name, The Flying Nun! Over the past 38 years I have held onto rich memories from Trinity. Stories are shared whenever I visit with

the Geier family who now have some of their grandchildren in Holy Trinity.

When I reflect on my brief five years in teaching and living at Holy Trinity, I am always thankful for those years and the many blessings I still carry on my journey. Congratulations, Holy Trinity on 200/225 years of Spirit-filled service with so many people.▪

—Sister Kathleen Beatty S.S.J

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Rev. Lawrence J. Kelly, S.J., *History of Holy Trinity Parish Washington, D.C., 1795-1945*, (Baltimore: John D. Lucas Printing Co, 1945), p. 19.

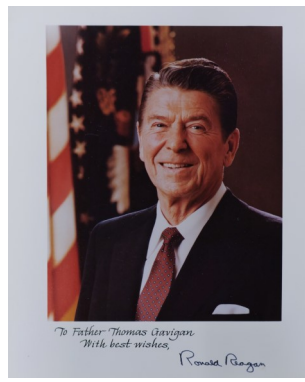
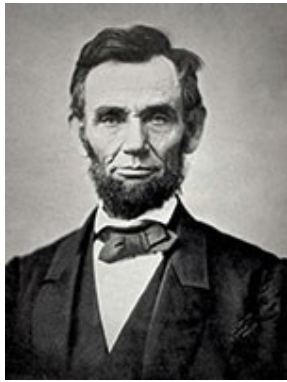
The marriage was celebrated on January 1, 1795. Lesko, Kathleen, Valerie Babb, and Carroll R. Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered: A History of the Black Community from the Founding of "The Town of George" in 1751 to the Present Day*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991), p. 4.

Mary Beth Corrigan, "Enslaved and Free African-American in Early Nineteenth Century Georgetown," Humanities Council, September 14, 2013. [https://www.tudorplace.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Enslaved-+-Free-in-early-19th-c-Georgetown\\_2013.pdf](https://www.tudorplace.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Enslaved-+-Free-in-early-19th-c-Georgetown_2013.pdf)

Andrew Stephen, "Georgetown's Hidden History: First, it was a slave port. Later, it was a thriving center of black life. Today, it's a virtual all-white enclave. Why?" *Washington Post*, Sunday, July 16, 2006; B01; and Mary Beth Corrigan.

# Hail to the Chief! Presidents (and a VP) at Holy Trinity

For 225 years, Holy Trinity has been the place of worship for a diverse congregation—sometimes including presidents! *Clockwise, from top left:* Laura and George W. Bush meet with Holy Trinity School students; President & Mrs. Kennedy leave Mass in 1961; HTS students run with Bill Clinton for American Heart Month in 1994; Barack Obama attends Tim Russert's funeral in 2008; Ronald Regan sends best wishes to Fr. Thomas Gavigan; Joe Biden leaves Sunday Mass in 2009; President Lincoln attends the funeral of General Amiel Weeks Whipple in 1863.



## 225TH ANNIVERSARY LECTURE SERIES

### March 13: Birthed from the Side of Jesus

Sr. Barbara Reid, O.P. will explore the images of death and rebirth in the Gospel of John from a perspective of feminist biblical interpretation. In this time of crisis in the church and the cosmos, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ offer hope and new life that come only in passing through birth pangs. Reception begins at 6pm. Trinity Hall

### May 19: A Bus Tour of Maryland Jesuit Sites

Join Father Gillespie and members of the 225th Anniversary History Committee on a tour of Jesuit Maryland. The all-day bus tour will include historic Old St. Mary, St. Inigoes, St. Ignatius Chapel/St. Thomas Manor, and a Vigil Mass at Loyola on the Potomac Jesuit Retreat Center. Seating is limited. There is a fee for this event. Itinerary subject to change.

### Week of June 17: Art & Faith

The National Gallery of Art will have a large exhibition on Tintoretto - the Renaissance artist who produced a significant number of important religious paintings. Parishioners Marta & John George are scheduling a lecture and private tour of the public space as well as four behind the scenes tours. The tours are free but will be limited.

*For more details and to RSVP, please visit [www.trinity.org/225](http://www.trinity.org/225)*