

Recollections of the Martin Families on this the 60th anniversary year (1961) of the founding of the Holy Cross Parish, Garrett Park, Maryland.

Rarely are there times when procrastination serves a good purpose but it was not until this past week that I started my response to Cindy Kratz' request for Holy Cross history contributions when I read Bob Hubbard's excellent recollections. The lives of Bob, Charlene, Anne and I, parallel one another in this 60-year span, and even earlier. Bob was a year behind me at St. John's High School when the school was located on Vermont Avenue, off Thomas Circle in DC, and when the whole school was all male, all in uniform, and the faculty all Christian Brothers. Next to the Redskin games, the biggest annual sporting events in DC was the St. John v. Gonzaga, and the Catholic v. Public School championship football game.

The Martin families, at the corner of Oxford Street, and Clermont Avenue, were also charter members of Holy Cross parish. Actually, only my older brother Francis, now deceased, and his wife Patricia, were officially charter members as Anne and I followed within about five years, but still close enough to call ourselves "charter." Francis bought a house in Garrett Park Estates, in the mid-1950s shortly before our founding pastor, Msgr. Quinn, purchased a house on Clermont Avenue as a rectory, only two doors from where my brother would have his home a few years later. In early 1962 Francis came into the office one day and told me about two lots for sale in old Garrett Park, which were a little overpriced at \$5,000 each, but we bought them anyway. Since Francis found the lots, he insisted on taking the corner lot, which I was only too delighted for him to take. I designed and built both houses in 1963, where we still reside.

Bob Hubbard's reference to my father building Holy Cross has a related interesting story that predated construction. To us, Holy Cross was to be an important part of our lives, but to my father it was a consolation prize, not a winner. My father moved his family from Chevy Chase, DC, to Kensington, in 1955, when I was a sophomore at Catholic University, in the School of Architecture. We attended Mass in the Holy Redeemer School hall while plans for the new Holy Redeemer Church progressed. My father was looking forward to the day when the plans would be completed and he could build his parish church. While my father's brothers were the preeminent church builders in the Washington area, having built almost one hundred churches (1923 to 1963), they could not be considered to build Holy Redeemer, as they were non-union.

The Catholic hierarchy had close ties to the union movement of the early 20th century so they required their buildings, in the Washington diocese, to be built union, likely resulting in a cost of 10% more than non-union. It was a blessing that my father had only built a few projects for the diocese, as he invariably lost money on them, but this was different as this was to be his parish church. However, this was not to be as another parishioner, Joseph Nebel, turned out to be the low bidder, and won the contract. Normally, my father would show little emotion on either winning, or losing a bid, but this was personal. Since I was still in college at that time, I had little knowledge of the matter but I will tell you now, I would not have wanted to build that church. I don't know how Joe Nebel came out on that job, but I have no regrets. The plaster ceiling alone gives me a headache just thinking about performing that task.

My father likely paid little attention to the fact that his oldest son, Francis, had recently bought a house in the newly created Holy Cross parish area, and that the pastor was planning to build a church soon. Now, I am not saying that my brother, who was the estimator, would foolishly underbid the Holy Cross job in order for his family to at least build one parish church, but who knows. Frankly, if this did happen, he will need to answer to someone for this unrecorded contribution to Holy Cross as this sounds like Faith Indirect, not Faith Direct. Be it a “winner” or a “consolation” prize to my father, my father greatly enjoyed working with Msgr. Quinn throughout the entire building process. The children of George and Celeste Martin dedicated the west stain glass transept (Ecce Homo) to their parents in memory of this event.

In 1959, I graduated from Catholic University, joined the West Virginia Air National Guard, and married the following year when I also joined my father’s firm about the same time of the Holy Cross contract signing. While still having other duties, I assisted the project manager and superintendent on Holy Cross not imagining that Anne and I would soon be members of this parish, and like Francis, having five children going to Holy Cross School. I am pleased to see in Bob Hubbard’s article the photo of the interior of Holy Cross Church during construction. I am embarrassed to admit that unless it was a contract obligation to provide monthly construction progress photos, constructors during that period rarely took photos of their work in progress.

While I was a student at CUA there was emerging radical changes in church design that allowed architects to experiment where I believe many lost sight of the essence of what a house of worship should be. In the US, we never had before, or after, the booming church construction period like that of the 1950s and 1960s. Some church design experimentation worked, but most were expensive to achieve, and failed the test of time. Prior to having the privilege of starting his own parish Msgr. Quinn enjoyed his role as a reviewer of church designs being considered for the diocese. This task must have greatly influenced his decisions when given the opportunity to select the architect, and making decisions for the design, of his own church. While the school design was typical of that age, parishioners of the last thirty years will not have known that the original classroom size was twice as large as now as the teachers were managing up to fifty students per class. Reduced class sizes, and computer technology classes, resulted in these classrooms being partitioned to make room for two classrooms, out of each of the original classrooms.

Now here I go into the dangerous territory speculating on Quinn’s thinking at that time, but in some matters, I have his own words. Unlike Holy Redeemer, Quinn could not imagine building a church without building a school at the same time. Wishing in this regard puts one into the age-old “chicken or the egg” question of what comes first. What you desire as a mission (church & school), you can’t afford, but parishioner financial support would be difficult without the complementary educational formation. It is a rare pastor that would have the design/cost background that could make both work at the same time, but Quinn was such a man, and he was ready for the challenge. It is a fact that in the end, he built both a church and a school for less than the average cost for a standalone church in the diocese at that time. He did this administrative miracle while still being primarily focused on his sacramental duties.

