

The Pastors of St. Anthony's, 1924 - 2025





ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA PARISH

As summer is upon us, and we have the bulletin space available, we will spend the next few editions highlighting the Pastors that St. Anthony's has been blessed to call their own. This week, we begin at the beginning with our founding Pastor, Father Tucker...

**Vy. Rev. J. Francis Tucker,
OSFS
1924 - 1949**



St. Anthony's first pastor was also its youngest, at 35, to assume the role. Father Tucker was among the first 12 students to enter Salesianum. He became the first American-born Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, and served as a military chaplain in Europe in World War I.

It was in September of 1924 when Father Tucker received a short, two paragraph letter from Bishop John J. Monaghan that would direct him to found St. Anthony of Padua Parish. With the words, "You are hereby appointed Pastor of the Italian people of Wilmington, with direction to build a church for their use as soon as possible", St. Anthony's was born!

Under Father Tucker, the parish was established, the church built, and the spiritual foundation laid that would come to define the parish in all the years to come.

The first organized, full-scale "Carnival", also known as "Il Carnivale", (the precursor to the Italian Festival) took place in 1933. It was started by Father Tucker as a way to "extract money in a painless manner from people afraid to part with it any other way."

Father also started another great St. Anthony's tradition before that decade was out – the Via Crucis. Presentations were suspended throughout World War II, and for several years thereafter.

In his final years as pastor, Father presided over the construction and dedication of Fournier Hall, a facility unique in the Diocese – both then and now.

Father celebrated his last Mass as pastor on July 10, 1949. This event was broadcast live on WDEL. Father would later go on to play a significant role in the bringing together of Prince Rainier of Monaco and Grace Kelly. Father Tucker's extraordinary life came to an end on All Souls Day, November 2, 1972, at the age of 83.

(Excerpted from "The Pastors of St. Anthony of Padua Parish", 2005.)

100 YEARS

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The postwar years ushered in a period of great growth and expansion of the parish, led by our second Pastor, Father McCoy.

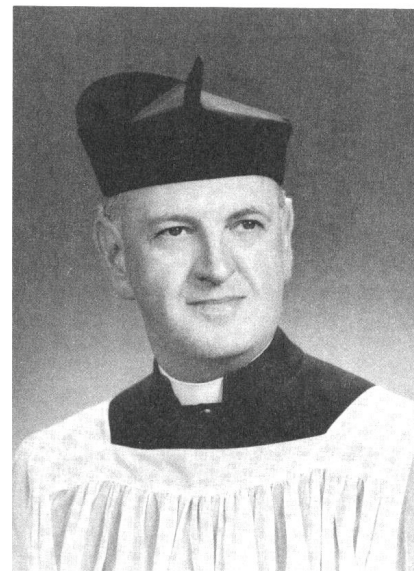
Rev. Joseph L. McCoy, OSFS
1949 - 1959



Father McCoy is probably best remembered as the parish's "Education Pastor." It was under his direction that the Grade School, as we now know it, and Padua Academy were established. At its peak enrollment, there were close to 1,000 students attending daily classes in both the current Grade School building and at "Number 11", or as it's often called, "The Old School", on the opposite side of 9th Street. (This figure includes all students – Grade School and Padua Academy.) Father passed away on April 16, 1967



A young Father Roberto at the dedication of the cornerstone of St. Anthony's Grade School in 1954.



Another view of Father McCoy.

(Excerpted from "The Pastors of St. Anthony of Padua Parish", 2005.)

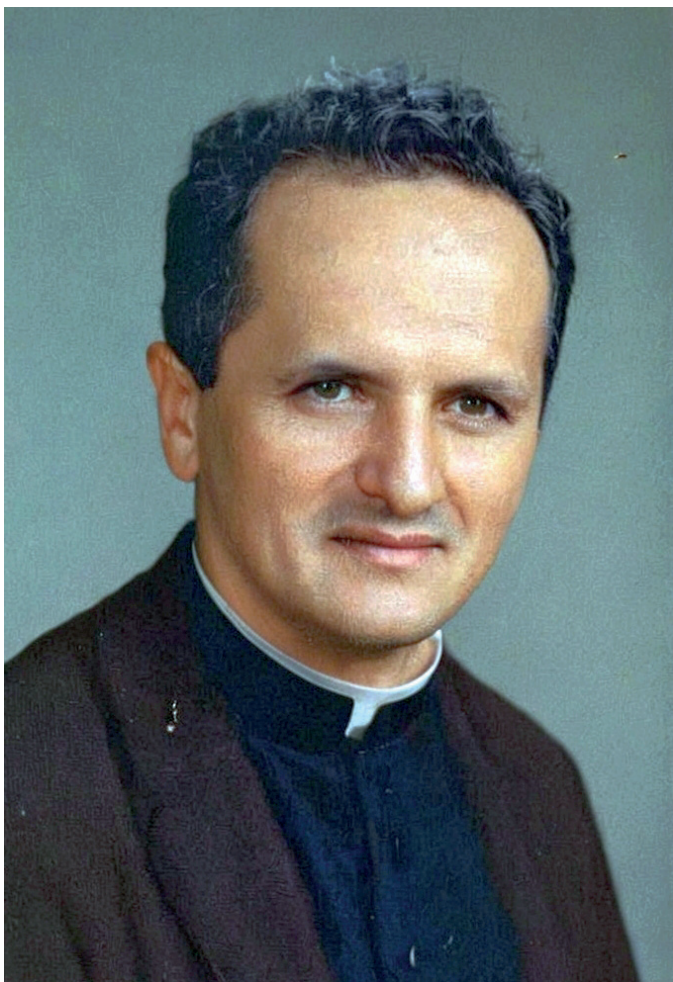


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We continue the series with the third Pastor of St. Anthony's, Father Roberto.

Rev. Roberto Balducelli, OSFS 1959 - 1988



Originally recruited in Italy by Father Tucker to come to St. Anthony's, which he did in 1946. Father Roberto was our "living link" to the Father Tucker era at St. Anthony's. He served as Pastor for 29 years. Intimately involved with the construction and establishment of many parish facilities, including the Grade School, Padua Academy, the Antonian, the Community Center, the Rectory, and St. Anthony-in-the-Hills. Father is also responsible for much of the artwork in the Church, Grade School, and in the hallways of Padua Academy. Often described as a true *Renaissance Man*, Father was equally at home celebrating Mass at an Altar, delivering a lecture to an attentive audience at a school or other community venue, or working with his hands – be it touching up a work of art with a fine brush, or using heavier tools in the fields and on the buildings out at St. Anthony-in-the-Hills. When his pastorship ended, he continued to perform priestly duties well into his nineties such as Baptizing babies and presiding over weddings and funerals. Father died August 9, 2013.



Father at St. Anthony-in-the-Hills with a friend.



Father Roberto in front of Padua Academy.

(Excerpted from "The Pastors of St. Anthony of Padua Parish", 2005.)

100 YEARS

ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA PARISH

We continue the series with the fourth & fifth Pastors of St. Anthony's...

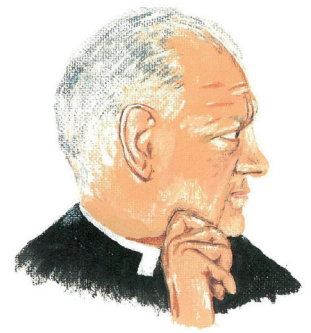
Rev. William J. Keech, OSFS
1988 – 1995
&
Rev. James T. Dever, OSFS
1995 – 1996



Among Father Keech's contributions to the parish are the establishment of the Parish Business Office and an ambitious remodeling of the banquet room at Fournier Hall. Father Keech, like many other Oblates, had a flair for being artistic. Perhaps his best-known work among St. Anthony's folks is his painting of the four pastors – the three that preceded him plus himself – included on this page. Father Keech passed away October 14, 2023.



Very Rev. J. Francis Tucker, O.S.F.S.



Rev. Joseph L. McCoy, O.S.F.S.

*Pastors of
Saint Anthony's*



Rev. Roberto Balducelli, O.S.F.S.



Rev. William J. Keech, O.S.F.S.

Wm. J. Keech

Father Dever's term as Pastor was among the shortest. Nevertheless, Father is responsible for major improvements in the church – including the backdrops behind the crucifix, the modernization of the sound system in church, and the remodeling of the sacristy. Father also instituted a more practical and responsible fiscal policy for the parish. Today, Father is a retired Oblate at Our Lady Star of the Sea in Cape May, New Jersey.

(Excerpted from "The Pastors of St. Anthony of Padua Parish", 2005.)



100 YEARS

ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA PARISH

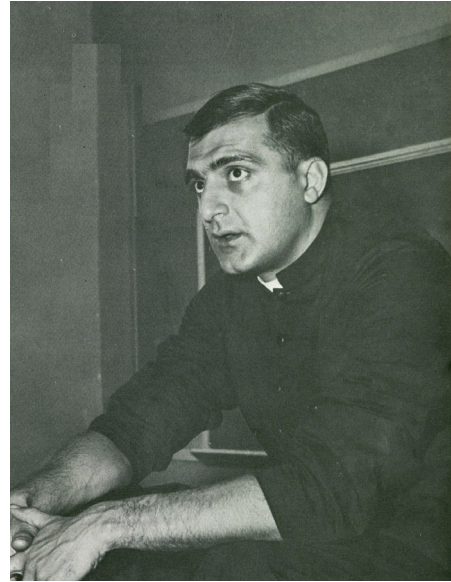
We continue the series with the sixth & seventh Pastors of St. Anthony's...

Rev. Anthony F. Silvestri, OSFS 1996 & Rev. Mark A. Hushen, OSFS 1997 – 2001



Although Father Silvestri's term as pastor was the shortest of the twelve men who served in that capacity – just two short months – his contributions were nevertheless significant – both as pastor and in prior years. Father was perhaps best known to the parish as a Religion teacher at Padua Academy. As pastor, it was Father Silvestri's will that St. Anthony's establish an Easter Sunrise Service at St. Anthony-in-the-Hills. Father also gave permission to have the flags of the different nationalities of the parishioners purchased and displayed at certain times of the year in the church. Unfortunately,

illness and the untimely passing of Father Silvestri on November 26, 1996 brought a far too early end to his stewardship of the parish. Known to everyone simply as "Father Anthony", Father remains beloved and missed by all who knew him.



A young Father Silvestri teaching at Padua Academy.

Second youngest priest to assume the role of Pastor of St. Anthony's, "Father Mark" brought a youthful optimism and a new perspective to St. Anthony's. Father energized and reinvigorated the parish's youth ministry. He saw clearly that the parish's young people were the well-spring on which the future of St. Anthony's depended. After four years of his guidance and leadership, Father left parish ministry to serve God in counseling those troubled with drug addictions.



Fr. Mark leading the Procession of Saints at the 1998 Italian Festival.

(Excerpted from "The Pastors of St. Anthony of Padua Parish", 2005.)

100 YEARS

ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA PARISH

We continue the series with the eighth & ninth Pastors of St. Anthony's...

Rev. Anthony J. Larry, OSFS
2001 - 2002

&

Rev. John F. McGinley, OSFS
2002 - 2012



Father Larry's brief term as Pastor (2001 – 2002) was marked by a return to a more conservative approach with regard to the parish's Liturgies and procedures. A devout believer in Liturgical correctness, Father made every effort to bring the parish in closer harmony with Vatican policies and teachings. Father passed away September 10th, 2018.



Father McGinley's tenure was largely devoted to addressing the long-standing financial problems of the parish. He worked tirelessly to reduce the parish debt and to increase its income. Under Father John, the parish established a Pro-Life Committee, reconstituted the Holy Name Society, and began consolidating parish-owned facilities. In 2004, the parish became the first in the Diocese of Wilmington to adopt a tithing format for parishioner giving. In 2007, Father oversaw the Continue the Legacy of St. Anthony's Capital Campaign, which raised funds for much needed projects in the church, school and rectory. "Father John" had a big personality, always brimming with positive energy and a can-do spirit. Father saw a future bright with facilities improvements and renovations – tied together with a fiscally sound and healthy financial administration. Father died September 6th, 2023.



Always jovial, here was Father John in his younger days.
(Excerpted from "The Pastors of St. Anthony of Padua Parish", 2005.)



ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA PARISH

We continue the series with the tenth & eleventh Pastors of St. Anthony's...

Rev. Nicholas R. Waseline, OSFS

2012 - 2018

&

Rev. Mark J. Wrightson, OSFS

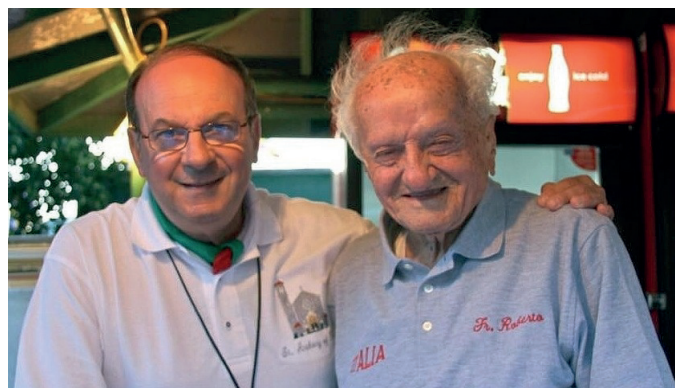
2018 - 2024



"Father Nick" devoted much of his time and effort here to enhancing the liturgical life of the parish. One example of this was Father instituting an after-Mass reception on Pentecost Sunday where much of the food was red (the liturgical color for Pentecost). Father took on the challenge of reinvigorating and restoring the relationship between the parish and Padua Academy, which succeeding pastors would build upon.

While actively serving as Pastor, Father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He continued in his role as leader of St. Anthony's right up to his death on April 18, 2018. The then Oblate Provincial, Rev. James J. Greenfield, OSFS, said of Father Nick, "We Oblates are deeply saddened by the loss of Fr. Nick. He was a man of quiet strength who served generously wherever he was missioned. His love of the Gospel and his belief in its power to change

hearts were sources of inspiration. He had deep confidence and faith in the ability of people to work together to achieve greatness for others, especially those in need."



Our 10th Pastor, Father Nick, in company with our 3rd Pastor, Father Roberto at the Italian Festival.



Father Mark celebrating Mass.

Parochial Vicar at St. Anthony's at the time of Father Waseline's passing, Father Mark was chosen as the 11th Pastor. Father continued to make progress strengthening the relationship between the parish and Padua Academy. He also guided the parish through the Herculean adversities that the COVID pandemic brought. For a time, all churches were closed. Easter, as an in-church event, was cancelled. Everywhere. By summer of 2020, Masses returned, albeit on a reduced schedule. To attend Christmas Masses that year, you had to make a reservation! The pandemic eventually loosened its grip, but there were lasting scars. Several areas of ministry, especially those relying on parishioner volunteers, did not return, or were very slow to get reestablished. Mass attendance improved each year after COVID, but was still close to historic lows.

Like his predecessor, Father suffered from several physical ailments that made even celebrating Mass difficult. In the summer of 2024, Father finished his term as Pastor and went into retirement. Today, he lives at the Oblate facility in Childs, Maryland.

100 YEARS

ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA PARISH

We finish the series with the twelfth Pastor...

Rev. Vincent A. Kumar, OSFS
2024 - present



Father Vincent is the first Pastor of St. Anthony's from India. As an Oblate, Father has served as an associate pastor and superior of Minor seminarians in India. Later, he was Pastor of parishes and Associate Dean in the Archdiocese of Munich, Germany. He then served as Regional Superior of Oblates in India just before coming to St. Anthony's.

Father Vincent has helped us celebrate the parish's 100th Anniversary through a series of special

Jubilee Masses – each Mass focusing on a different aspect of parish life.

Father also reconstituted Parish Council, the parish advisory board that laid dormant since the COVID Pandemic.

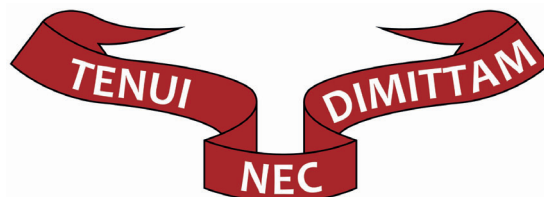
This June, he celebrated his first full year at St. Anthony's. As he guides the parish into its second century, he looks forward to the new school year about to begin at our Grade School and Padua Academy, to the administering of Sacraments to our parish families, and Father will spiritually prepare us for the Advent season and beyond.



Father Vincent, Father Wrightson, and Father Sleeva.



Father Vincent on the altar of our beautiful church.



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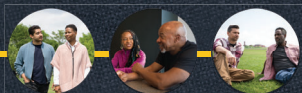
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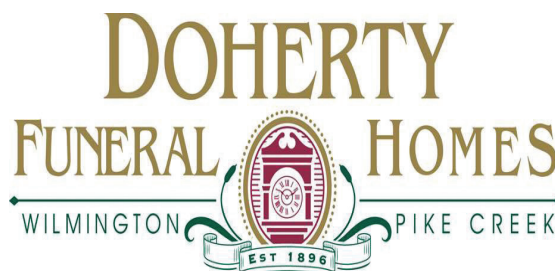
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