



Beehive Behind These Walls

SAINT RAPHAEL SCHOOL—Greenville

"This country was founded by the bold and cannot be maintained by the timid."

Emerson

Saint Raphael School of Greenville began on August 28, 1946, when three Sisters Adorers of the Most Precious Blood opened the books of the new school for registration in a building on Fifth Street which was one of the finest representations of Southern architecture in town. The first registration numbered 16, but by the end of the year had increased to 24. The school enjoyed a remarkable popularity. By 1952 there were 134 pupils in six grades, with nursery and kindergarten. But the progress of the school was cut short by a fire on December 2, 1952, which completely destroyed the building.

A new site in east Greenville was selected by the Most Reverend

Vincent S. Waters, D.D., Bishop of Raleigh, and construction began in April of 1953. By October of that year classes were resumed. Today there are 104 pupils enrolled with three Sisters and a lay kindergarten teacher staffing the school.

The building, modern and fire-proof, has six classrooms, a cafeteria, library, principal's office and a large auditorium. It is located in one of the new developments destined to serve a large area of the growing community. The good will of the people toward the school is as evident today as it was when it first opened its doors. The Right Reverend Monsignor Charles J. Gable is pastor.

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Good Listeners

We have Rhythm



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HISTORY OF SAINT PETER CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Saint Peter Catholic School (formerly known as Saint Raphael's School) opened in 1946 on West Fifth Street in Greenville, N.C. The Sister Adorers of the Blood of Christ, a religious community, came from Pennsylvania to open a parochial school. The Sisters lived on the second floor of the house, and classes were held on the main floor. A fire destroyed the convent-school on December 1, 1952, and the school was relocated to a temporary house on East Fourth and Latham Streets. Within a few days after the fire, the Bishop of the Diocese of Raleigh selected a new site on East Fifth Street. On March 29, 1953, the groundbreaking was held. Construction was completed on October 15, 1953, and the faculty and students moved into the new building on October 21, 1953. The structure is now the present Middle School and cafeteria. Over the years, there were several additions to the original building such as an additional classroom and

space for a library (science lab), and the parish hall (present library). The Church sanctuary was formally established in the present cafeteria in the 1960's. Later, the cafeteria (present computer lab) was relocated to the parish hall, and that space became a classroom. The name of the school was changed to Saint Peter in 1976. The Sisters concluded their ministry in Greenville in 1985. The Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn, NY, assumed the educational ministry of the school in August 1985. Further changes took place with the addition of the Primary and Intermediate wing, and the gymnasium in the early 1990's under their leadership. In 1994, Saint Peter Catholic School was the first school in the Diocese of Raleigh to be accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (now AdvancED.) The school is accredited by AdvancED through 2020.

A POPULAR HISTORY OF SAINT PETER'S

By Ada Jones

The early history of St. Peter's is vague due to lack of records. The earliest date we have been able to discover indicating a Catholic presence in Greenville was found in some old records in Washington, NC showing that the Reverend Patrick Joseph Coffey visited Greenville on January 24, 1845. On this visit he baptized Catherine Jesse, daughter of a Dr. and Mrs. Randolph. There are also records during this period of a plantation owner named Hanrahan who had Father Coffey baptize his slaves. Little else is known about this family. To this day, however, a sign exists on the railroad between Ayden and Grifton which says "Hanrahan." Other records show that a priest came to this area at least once a year to take care of marriages and baptisms. There are records of visits made by Father John Reilly through 1883. The priests came on horseback until the Norfolk and Southern Railway completed tracks and then the clergy rode the trains—in the caboose during the summer and in the engine with the engineer during the winter months.

In 1884, Father Thomas Price, co-founder of the Maryknoll Fathers, was a regular visitor to Greenville and purchased a frame building for \$50 that had been used by the Episcopalians. This little church was moved two blocks from its original site to 2nd Street and was placed on a small lot given by Colonel Harry Skinner. This little frame building was the beginning of St. Peter's.

In 1895, the bishop of Charleston,

South Carolina, whose jurisdiction included North Carolina, came to Greenville. Records indicate that his visits were a delight to all. Hospitality was extended to him by Colonel and Mrs. Harry Skinner and family. At that time, Colonel Skinner served in the United States House of Representatives.

After some time, the Benedictine Fathers of Belmont Abbey assumed the responsibility to care for the Catholics of eastern North Carolina. Abbot Haid was the Ordinary. A number of priests came and went during this time. There are records of Father Joseph Gallagher and his twin brother Father Francis Gallagher visiting Greenville, New Bern, and Washington. In 1914, Father Joseph Gallagher baptized Lena Saieed as well as David and Joseph Hatem.

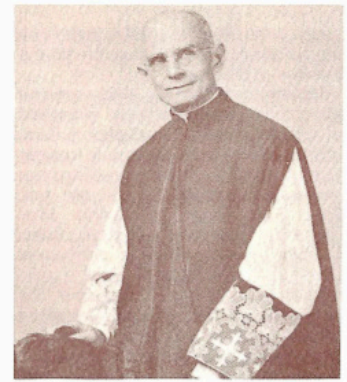
In 1915, Abbot Haid placed Greenville under the care of Nazareth House in Raleigh. Father George Woods and his brother, Father Matthew Woods, gave the little parish more attention with regular visits and Sunday Masses each week. During one of Father George Woods' visits in 1917, he baptized Josephine Saad, daughter of Mrs. and Mrs. N. G. Saad. The congregation at this time numbered approximately 45, most of whom were Syrian. The John Saieed family, the Robert Saieed family, the Hatems, and the N. G. Saad family were among this group and were very active in the parish.

Mr. John Karsnak came to Greenville from Scranton, Penn-

sylvania in 1922 to make Greenville his home. Mrs. James (Lucy) Ficklen married a Greenville businessman in 1922 and moved to Greenville where she lived until her recent death in April, 1984. Mr. Karsnak and the N. G. Saad family are the only current members of the parish who worshipped in the first church building, as far as is known.

When Father Charles J. Gable arrived at St. Peter's in 1922, he discovered an active altar society who, with great devotion, kept the little church clean and always ready for Mass. This group was led by Mrs. Harry Skinner, Miss Winnie Skinner, Mrs. A. M. (Nell) Moseley, and Mrs. Helen Scott.

The first bishop of the Diocese of Raleigh, Bishop William Hafey, visited St. Peter's in the late summer of 1926. He was shocked at the condition of the little church and felt it was unsafe for the people. He instructed Father Gable to make arrangements for a new building. Father Michael, OSB, drew up plans for a new church with an apartment attached to the side to serve as a rectory. Father Gable contacted the Catholic Church Extension Society for funds. The construction of this building was a subject of much local discussion as it was actually constructed by just one man, Mr. I. W. House of Maysville. The plumbing and heating was likewise installed by one individual, Mr. A. M. Dooley of Brooklyn, N.Y. Mr. Dooley's wife had read a story about this church in the Extension Society's magazine and wanted to help. Mr. Dooley made three trips with his truck from Brooklyn to Greenville and gave the materials and labor without asking for



Rt. Rev. Msgr. Gable

payment. During this time services were held in a vacant house donated for this use by a Greenville businessman, Mr. W. H. Dail. This house was located on the corner of 4th and Pitt Streets.

When the church was completed in 1927, appointments were needed for the church. Mrs. Harry Skinner, Mrs. A. M. Moseley, Mrs. Herbert (Lotta Skinner) Bateman, and Miss Winnie Skinner gave the marble statues of the Blessed Mother (now in the school hall), St. Joseph, and the Sacred Heart in memory of Mrs. Harry Skinner's son, Francis X. Skinner, who had died as a young man in 1926.

In 1928, Mr. and Mrs. James Worsley moved to Greenville from Rocky Mount and blessed the parish with six fine children. The Reverend Stephen Worsley, presently a deacon serving at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Raleigh, is a grandson of Mr. and Mrs. James Worsley. He will become the first priestly vocation from the

parish when he is ordained in the not-too-distant future for service in the Diocese of Raleigh.

Between 1928 and 1933 several Greenville residents were accepted as converts into the Catholic faith. Among them were a young banker named Frank Patrick, Margaret Jenkins Laughinghouse and her son, Dail, Ada Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Gurganus and their daughter, Rose, and Mr. John Ivy Smith, a prominent Greenville gentleman. Ada Jones' mother, Susan, was baptized by Bishop Hafey. Mrs. Gurganus was the church organist for many years. Mr. John Ivy Smith's conversion caused a great deal of conversation and disapproval among his family and friends.

Father Gable gave the little parish all the liturgy that was known at that time. Each Sunday there was a High Mass sung by as few as six singers from the parish. They were assisted, however, by a non-Catholic lady known as the "Songbird" of Greenville, Miss Jesse Moye. She was present for each choir practice as well as on Sundays and made the singing of the Latin Mass a beautiful occasion. Another indication of the generosity of this lady was seen in her donation of an iron stand upon which the sanctuary lamp rested. This stand is still in use.

Father Gable had several assistants during this time, among them Fathers Dennis Lynch, Millard Neale, Lennox Federal (who later became a bishop), James Noonan, and Herbert Harkins. These young priests learned firsthand of the difficult life of the missions of North Carolina.



Saint Peter's Catholic Church, Second Street

Children were given Christian education by Father Gable, assisted by Elsie Zahniser, a convert. Each summer after the closing of school, the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters of Scranton, Pennsylvania, who were teaching at Mother of Mercy School in nearby Washington, came for two weeks of training.

In January 1946 it was announced that the home of Mr. Joseph Moye on West 5th Street had been purchased to be used as a school. On August 27, 1946 the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood from Columbia, Pennsylvania, arrived to open the school. The first registration numbered 16 but by the end of the year had climbed to 24. It was not long before the character of education and the splendid discipline became known in the town and the school immediately created a popularity that increased the enrollment every year. The school was named St. Raphael by Father Gable due to his great devotion to the Archangel.

On December 1, 1952, the school was destroyed by fire. The fire started in the furnace area before the classes arrived. A vacant house was obtained shortly after the fire and classes continued. Within a few days after the fire, Bishop Waters selected a new site on West 4th Street for a new school. He also purchased the home of Mr. Fred Rogers for the sisters, where they currently reside. Work on the construction of a new school began immediately and the new school was dedicated by Bishop Waters on December 13, 1953 with an enrollment of 134 students. Part of the construction of the new school included a cafeteria, stove, refrigerator, china and silver. These gifts were donated by Mr. and Mrs. James Ficklen in memory of their son Warren, who died in service during World War II.

During this time, the congregation continued to grow until the little church on 2nd Street was overflowing and the fire department suggested that another building be secured for services. Father Gable made the transition to the school auditorium, using folding chairs and an altar at floor level. The stage was left for school functions.

In 1955, Father Gable was appointed a Domestic Prelate and given the title of Monsignor. The parish was pleased that recognition had been given for the years of work done by this priest. In 1958, Father Gable was transferred to Our Lady of Consolation Church in Charlotte. As a farewell gift, the parish gave Msgr. Gable a new car. This gift seemed most appropriate in light of the fact

that Msgr. Gable's old car, a Buick, could be heard blocks away and it was felt that Charlotte had enough noise already without adding to it.

Father John Hyland, a man of tall stature and a splendid sense of humor, followed Msgr. Gable. Unfortunately, Father Hyland was not well and while in Greenville was diagnosed as having "Lou Gehrig's Disease." In 1960 Father Hyland was transferred to Greensboro to be in residence in a local parish. He died in 1977.

Father Steven Sullivan arrived at St. Peter's in 1960. He found the living conditions so poor at the 2nd Street rectory that for several months he resided at Greenville's one hotel, the Proctor Hotel (now the Minges Building). Finally, Father Sullivan purchased the present rectory and moved in. In 1963, Father Sullivan exchanged parishes with Father Maurice Spillane, who was then serving in Mount Airy. At the present time, Father Sullivan resides in Long Island, New York.

Father Spillane came to St. Peter's with a brogue that could be cut with a knife. In a few months though, the members of the parish became accustomed to the language of County Kerry. During Father Spillane's tenure, the Voice of America selected Greenville as a location for their transmission stations. The first people to arrive with Voice of America were electricians, carpenters, plumbers, and an architect, headed by Max Swoboda. Father Spillane organized a Men's Club which was made up of these generous and talented people. The

PREVIOUS PASTORS



Reverend Stephen Sullivan
1960-1963



Reverend Maurice Spillane
1963-1976



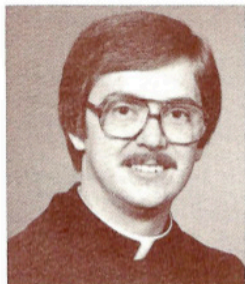
Reverend J. Paul Byron
1976-1981



Reverend Harry Webb
Administrator, 1979-1980



Reverend Clifford Frost
1981-1983



Reverend Michael Clay
1983-

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

One of the earliest records of the faith in Greenville, North Carolina is found in the U.S. Catholic Miscellany. It notes that in March of 1828 some Catholics were living in Greenville and the surrounding vicinity. The old Baptismal records in Washington, NC records that Fr. Patrick Coffey visited Greenville in January of 1845. Mission priests served Greenville until Fr. Price began his regular visitations in the 1880's.

In 1884, the parish of St. Peter was established in Greenville. Fr. Price purchased a frame building for \$50 that the Episcopalians had used. This little church was moved two blocks to 2nd St. and was placed on a small lot given by Colonel Harry Skinner. This building served as the church until 1926 when Fr. Charles Gable, the first resident Pastor, built a combined rectory and church with the help of the Church Extension Society.

Link to Church Website

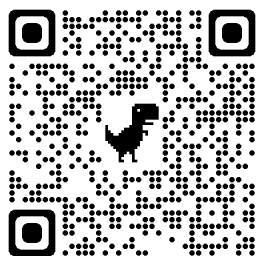
During Fr. Gable's 36 years as Pastor, a school named in honor of St. Raphael (later renamed St. Peter's) was opened in 1946. The Sisters of the Most Precious Blood from Columbia, PA administered the school. There were 54 students at its opening with six grades. In 1953, a new school and auditorium were built. In 1985, Fr. Michael Clay obtained the services of the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn, NY who administered the school until this past year. Today, it is considered one of the finest elementary schools in the state with classes K through eight, with over 500 students attending.

In 1987, through an agreement with the Passionist Community and Bishop Joseph Gossman, five Passionist priests came to Greenville to serve the Catholic Community.

The 1990's saw tremendous growth in the parish. A multi-million dollar building program was begun by Fr. Joseph Jones, C.P. It resulted in a new church, parish hall, parking facilities, new

gymnasium and two extensions to the school. In 2010, a beautiful, two-story Spiritual Life Center facility was built and completed under Fr. Justin Kerber, C.P., Pastor from 1998 through 2013. Numerically, the parish numbered 36 parishioners in 1922. In 1981, there were 450. In 1987, there were 1,160. In 2022, there are over 4,300 registered parishioners (1,500 families).

Saint Peter
Catholic Church online



stage of the auditorium was converted into a sanctuary and the folding chairs were replaced with benches and the church was painted. The auditorium was now more readily identified as a church.

Father Spillane purchased the land across from the school and the lots on 5th Street for a new church. Father Spillane obtained new hand-carved Stations of the Cross, statues of the Blessed Mother and the Sacred Heart, and a crucifix which would hang over the high altar. He also organized a Women's Club who provided the parish with funds for the many changes that occurred. The Women's club paid off the loan on the 5th Street property before Father was transferred.

The school was given a new classroom. Father Spillane loved the children in the school and almost everyday could be seen doing lunch hour duty on the playground. It was also during this time that Burroughs-Wellcome located a major plant in Greenville. This occurred in 1970. This caused the parish to grow significantly as many of the employees of the newly opened plant were Catholic. In 1976, Father Spillane was transferred to St. Paul's in New Bern and Father J. Paul Byron arrived to become the new pastor.

One of Father Byron's major influences on the parish was the new liturgy of Vatican II. Under his guidance, the laity became involved as lectors, commentators, and eucharistic ministers. The sanctuary was renovated. An altar, donated by Dr. and Mrs. Tullio Pignani, was obtained during Father Byron's pastorate and is still in use today. The



Saint Peter's Catholic Church, inside, today

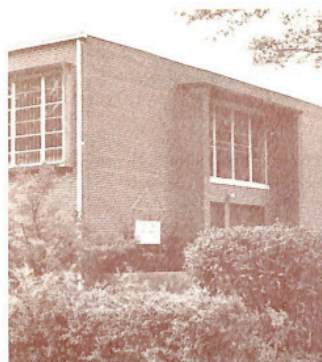
Blessed Sacrament altar was obtained by Father Byron from the private chapel used by Bishop Waters in his residence prior to his death in 1974. Father Byron obtained the loan for the construction of a new parish hall that has been enjoyed by many.

In 1979, Father Byron went to Canada for a year of study and Father Harry Webb came as Administrator of St. Peter's. After Father Byron's return, Father Webb went to Tennessee where he is currently residing.

Father Byron's friend, Father Phillip Walsh, was also a part of St. Peter's during the pastorate of Father Byron. He was involved in many aspects of parish and university life.

Father Byron gave much of himself in the way of liturgy, music and personality. One example of his interest in music was a fund drive towards the purchase of a new organ. In 1981, Father Byron was transferred

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Saint Peter's Catholic Church, today

to St. Thomas More Church in Chapel Hill and Father Clifford Frost came to St. Peter's.

Father Frost brought many gifts to the parish, among them being his gift as a preacher. His sermons were powerful and enjoyed by many. He also used a style of preaching unknown to many of the parishioners: he walked up and down the aisle while delivering his sermon. Father Frost was characterized as a very caring person. He was very interested in the underdog and worked to help the poor. He was also noted for his sense of humor. In July 1983, Father Frost was granted a year's sabbatical. While on his sabbatical, Father Frost died at his home on the Outer Banks. He died on August 17, 1983. His death was a time of great sorrow in the parish.

On July 7, 1983, a 30-year-old priest was named pastor of St. Peter's. On

that date, Father Michael Clay became a pastor for the first time and is the youngest pastor in the diocese. Upon his arrival, he discovered some 30 men, women and children working to spruce up the rectory and officially welcome him with their enthusiasm and generous spirit. During his first year as pastor, the church, rectory and grounds have been renovated and spruced-up. Father Clay brings with him many talents, especially in the area of liturgy and music. His love of the liturgy is especially apparent in his reverence for the Word of God and his endeavors to instill the same reverence in the parishioners. Father Clay began the first Catechumenate in the parish and has been working very closely with the school to help it in a time of transition and renewal. During Father Clay's first year, the N. G. Saad Memorial Library at St. Peter's School was officially dedicated. The library was a gift of the Saad's in 1982. Mrs. Theresa Hewett was and continues to serve as the librarian. Father's spirit of caring and his sense of humor are a source of attraction to many.

This history of St. Peter's cannot come to a close as of September 1984 without making note of a lovely lady whose friendly voice says, "Good morning. St. Peter's Catholic Church." Mrs. Vivian Branch has been the church secretary since 1975 and has won, through her generosity and willingness to help any and everybody, the admiration and love of everyone connected with the parish and school. Hopefully, her generous and loving service will continue to be recorded in our parish history for years to come.

HISTORY OF SAINT PETER'S SCHOOL

St. Peter's School (formerly known as St. Raphael's) opened in 1946 on West Fifth Street under Rev. Charles J. Gable, pastor. The teachers were members of a community of nuns from Pennsylvania—the Sisters Adorers of the Blood of Christ. Sister Crescentia, Sister Mary Lawrence, and Sister Carolita Marie arrived in Greenville on August 26, 1946.

Because of a fire which destroyed the building on December 1, 1952, a new school was built at the present site.

St. Peter's School is accredited by the North Carolina State Board of Education and the Diocesan Commission of Education in Raleigh. The school is also a member of the National Catholic Educational Association.



Saint Raphael School, 1946



Saint Peter's School, 1984

HISTORY OF ST. GABE'S

In 1935, Bishop William J. Hafey pointed to an empty lot overgrown with weeds in the poor western part of Greenville and said to Father Maurice Tew, a young Passionist priest from Boston, "This is your parish."

The parish, at Father Maurice's first glance, consisted of a lonely cow grazing, but this would soon change. On March 1, 1936, contributions from benefactors in the north helped Father Tew build his church.

It was dedicated in honor of the Passionist, Saint Gabriel of the Sorrowful Mother, as a "mission to the colored." Two years later the rectory was built, and by 1940 the parish had grown to 72 members.

The parish hall, which became the social center of the parish, was added in 1948. Father Tew's building program had come to completion in 1956 with the addition of a Catholic school and convent. The Sisters of Christian Charity served and taught the children of Saint Gabriel's for the next 30 years. All of this allowed the parish to grow

from its original intention of a mission church to a vastly diverse and integrated parish.

Declining health forced Father Tew to leave the parish in 1965 and it seemed that the Passionist mission in West Greenville had ended. Diocesan priests staffed St. Gabriel Church from 1965 until 1987 when the Passionists returned to Greenville.

St. Gabriel's School closed its doors in 1994, but not without God opening another door. The facility now houses a Head Start program serving more than 120 preschoolers from the West Greenville neighborhood. In the 1990's, the church welcomed many new Spanish speaking families. The Hispanic population continues to grow adding to our numbers and diversity

In September 2003, St. Gabriel's broke ground for a new worship/education center. This all became possible with the acquisition of an 88 acre farm by the Diocese of Raleigh, and the generous gift of another benefactor, Mr. Thomas Arthur, who gave St. Gabriel's a generous \$1,000,000 gift in memory of his mother, Marie T. Ficklen. Our new location is less than three miles away from the original church and in West Greenville.



Sister M. Imelda, Principal

PRINCIPALS

- Sister Crescentia—1946-52
- Sister M. Imelda—1952-53
- Sister Hilary—1953-56
- Sister M. Barbara—1956-62
- Sister M. Geraldine—1962-64
- Sister M. Beata—1964-71
- Sister M. Imelda—1971-74
- Sister Clea Marie—1974-75
- Sister Mary John—1975-77
- Sister M. Celeste—1977-80
- Sister Wilma Louise—1980-83
- Sister M. Imelda—1983—

LIST OF PRINCIPALS

Beginning August 23, 2010, St. Gabriel's hosted the inaugural class of John Paul II Catholic High School. Starting with 25 students, the high school has rented classroom space from the parish, supplemented with mobile classroom units on the west end of the building. The high school graduated its first class in 2014 and is currently enrolling all four high school grades in their new location on 14th Street.

In 2012, the parish broke ground for the St. Martin de Porres Pastoral Life Center, a 10,000 square foot multipurpose facility that serves as a gathering hall for the parish and a gymnasium for JP II High School.

Nearly 80 years later, St. Gabriel's is still here and continues to grow. The diversity in our parish still thrives and we have members from a dozen different countries who come together to worship!

Our current pastor is Fr. Romen Acero. Sister Maria Sanchez and Sister Angelica Arce serve as the Director of Religious Education and Pastoral Associate. Mia Romero Washington and Maria Melendrez de Kelley are on the office staff, and Karen Rainey is the music director. Please visit our website to contact any of the above-mentioned staff members if you have any questions!

1946-1952 Sister Crescentia
1952-1953 Sister Imelda
1953-1956 Sister M. Hilary
1956-1962 Sister M. Barbara
1962-1964 Sister M. Geraldine
1964-1971 Sister M. Beata
1971-1974 Sister Imelda
1974-1975 Sister Cleta Marie
1975-1977 Sister Mary John
1977-1980 Sister M. Celeste
1980-1983 Sister Wilma Louise
1983-1986 Sister M. Imelda
1986-1997 Brother Robert LaFave, O.S.F.
1997-2000 Brother Simon Jaworski, O.S.F.
2000-2004 Mr. J. Ramon Espinoza
2004-2008 Mr. John Fencik
2008-2010 Mrs. Page Watson
2010-2015 Dr. Joseph Nelson
2015-2017 Mr. Doug McMillan
2017-2019 Mr. Doug Jones
2019-2021 Mrs. Joan Alexander
2021- present Mrs. Debbie Sommer

LIST OF PASTORS

1922-1958 Monsignor Charles J Gable
1958-1960 Reverend John Hyland
1960-1963 Reverend Steven Sullivan
1963-1976 Reverend Maurice Spillane
1976-1981 Reverend Paul Byron
1981-1983 Reverend Clifford Frost
1983-1987 Reverend Michael Clay
1987-1988 Reverend Kenneth Walsh, C.P.
1988-1998 Reverend Joseph Jones, C.P.
1998-2013 Reverend Justin Kerber
2013-2021 Reverend Samuel James Buchholz
2021- Present Reverend James Magee



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Saint Peter Catholic School

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