

# HISTORY OF ST. MARY'S PARISH AUBURN, N.Y.

## THE BEGINNING

The Diocese of Rochester was established by the Vatican on January 24, 1868 with the appointment of the Rev. Bernard J. McQuaid of Newark, New Jersey as its first bishop.

One of the first acts of the new bishop was the division of Holy Family parish in Auburn and the announcement of a new parish, which was to lie west of State Street and the Owasco River. The new parish was organized on August 15, 1868 and called ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION, in honor of the feast of the day.

In August of 1868, the Rev. Thomas A. Maher, the first pastor of St. Mary's parish, came to Auburn and rented a house at 34 State St. where he celebrated Mass. He later made use of Tallman Hall at the corner of State and Dill streets. Records tell us that the following notice was published in the Auburn Daily Advertiser on September 12, 1868: "St. Mary's (new) Catholic Church service Sunday, September 13, 1868 at Brown's Commercial College..." A certificate of incorporation was issued to Father Maher, pastor, and Michael Kavanaugh and Patrick Kelly, trustees, on September 26, 1868.

## THE FIRST PASTOR AND CHURCH

The congregation grew so rapidly that Father Maher purchased the property at the corner of Clark and Green streets, known as the Button property. He erected a temporary wooden structure, 50x70 feet in size, at a cost of approximately eight hundred dollars. The structure became known as the "Shanty Church" because of its unimposing appearance. In September, 1869, Bishop McQuaid transferred Father Maher to Scottsville and appointed Dr. Miles J. Loughlin, D.D. as pastor of St. Mary's.

## THE SECOND PASTOR AND A NEW PARISH CHURCH



Dr. Miles J. Loughlin, D.D. came, not a stranger, to his new appointment as pastor, formerly having been an assistant at Holy Family Church and at one time a resident of the city. Dr. Loughlin, both cultured and enthusiastic, was impressed with the needs of his people. The little wooden structure was not capable of accommodating the growing congregation so he purchased the adjoining lot, known as the Cheney property. P.C. Kiely of Brooklyn, an architect skilled in the styling of Gothic churches was hired to draw up plans for the new church. At first it was determined to erect a brick structure; other counsels, however,

prevailed. A stone building was deemed more fitting and finally agreed upon. Excavations for the structure began in 1870 and the cornerstone was laid on September 18, 1870.

It was the determination, the courage and self-sacrifice of Dr. Loughlin and his power to inspire the people that created St. Mary's beautiful Church on the corner of Clark and Green streets. During its construction, Dr. Loughlin toiled and labored as arduously as any workman upon it. For over six years he acted as superintendent, architect, builder and pastor, and scarcely a day during this period ever saw him absent from his labors. So intimately was he connected with it and so untiring did he work that it was said there was not one stone of the entire structure, which he did not select for its place.

Dr. Loughlin, in 1873, foreseeing the need for a school for the parish, purchased the Willis Carriage Factory at 81 Clark St. for a school. In 1870 the parishioners realized the need for a new school, and a second school was erected on the site of 11-13 Clark St. The school opened on January 7, 1881. This school became known as the "Gray School".

But too arduous and exhausting had been the labors of Dr. Loughlin. The strain had been too much and was more than he could stand. Almost worn out he was transferred, at his own request, to the quiet mission of St. Rose of Lima and in the following spring he died, after a brief illness, in St. Mary's Hospital at Rochester.

## **THE CHURCH**

St. Mary's Church was dedicated with imposing ceremonies on April 29, 1877 by Bishop Bernard McQuaid assisted by Bishop Ryan of Buffalo and Bishop Lynch of Charleston, South Carolina. Into the church the delighted people went with gratitude to God, and pride for their fine church building and beloved pastor. The accomplishment of such a work is strong proof of the greatness of the sacrifice and the power of united action in the work of God.

St. Mary's Church building is an excellent example of modified Gothic architecture, a style characterized by great point and height, with delicacy and precision in design. The edifice, built entirely of gray limestone, is 135 feet long and the ceiling is 65 feet high. The interior, with its clustered columns, its molded arches and finely vaulted ceiling, is consistent and perfectly planned. The unusual center decoration - a star-shaped formation between the transepts - is formed by ribs in the vaulted ceiling. The leaf and flower arrangements at the cornices, on the windows and around the arches are intricate and delicately sculptured. The triple arch, symbolic of the Trinity; the triangular windows, (one over the main altar with the Lamb of God in the center tracery, one in each of the transepts with the dove and the pelican in the center tracteries); the beautiful stained glass windows with their jewel-like hues, their leaf and flower drawings characteristic of Gothic churches; the symbolic emblems (the keys, harp, nails, pulpit, crown, cross and chalice) in the tracteries all proclaim the beauty and symmetry of this magnificent edifice.

An observer at the time commented, "St. Mary's people are to be congratulated upon the possession of such a magnificent church. It would, indeed, be hard to find a more beautiful structure. Its interior is art crystallized, its architecture is devotion idealized, and its symmetry is art immortalized. Outside it hangs together like a picture, inside it pours down on you all the grandeur, devotion and magnificence of a cathedral." Another said, "Art is frozen music, but art and architecture such as St. Mary's are religion, not frozen, asleep, but with open eyes. Look at it; go into the church, and everything there, the walls, the pillars, the triple arch, the altars, the ceilings, furnishings, all speak mutely but eloquently of God, of Jesus, of Heaven and its inhabitants." The exterior of the structure with its lofty lines, pinnacles, buttresses, crosses, niches, high-pitched roofs with wrought iron fencing, pointed windows and doors, is as impressive as the interior. The cost of erecting the building amounted to \$79,350.40.



### **THE THIRD PASTOR**

The Rev. William Mulheron, was appointed by Bishop McQuaid to carry on the noble undertaking of Dr Loughlin. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, 1877, Father Mulheron assumed charge of St. Mary's and a better choice could not have been made.

Coming in under most adverse circumstances with an enormous debt of \$60,000 upon the people, and a financial depression then passing over the country, ordinarily a man would hesitate undertaking such a task. True, the church was built, but the furnishings were inadequate and not in keeping with the beautiful edifice; an unsanitary school building, a poor dilapidated convent for the sisters, a parsonage hemmed in on all sides—these were the conditions under which Father Mulheron commenced his labors at St. Mary's. With a loyal and faithful people and with implicit trust and confidence in God, he set about to lift the debt and improve the church property. After 31 years of persistent effort, St. Mary's Church and surrounding buildings were regarded as a credit to pastor and people, an ornament to the city and an honor to religion.

On July 30, 1905, St. Edward's Parish was erected in the southwestern part of the city, at a cost of over \$14,000, for the accommodation of parishioners in that vicinity. At first it was attended by parishioners from St. Mary's but in course of time was to have its own pastor. Eventually St. Edward Parish was dissolved when Mercy Hospital (Rehab today) was begun. Fr. Mulheron was busily engaged in looking after the interest of the Italian population of the city. A site had been purchased in lower Clark Street, in the center of the Italian settlement, on which already had been built a parochial residence, costing nearly \$3,000. It was expected that in a very short time the work on the new church, to be known as "St. Francis of Assisi," would begin. To both these enterprises St. Mary's people, although taxed heavily to meet their own demands, contributed generously and in the same kindly and charitable spirit that has been so characteristic of them in the past.

It would not be amiss to enumerate some of the work performed under Father Mulheron's administration. The second school building was erected on the site at 11-13 Clark Street. The property was purchased from the McCrea family. The Francisco property, between church and school, was bought for \$10,000. The cornerstone of the new school was laid in 1880, and the school was opened on January 7, 1881. The building was 78 x 40 feet, had eight classrooms and a third floor was used for a Convent. This building was used for a school until June 1961. The third building opened on September 1961 on property on 17 Clymer Street with plans for other buildings in the future.

New pews were placed in the church, altars remodeled, the interior decorated at a cost of \$4,000, new and modern heating apparatus was installed in church, parsonage and school, a new pipe organ (one of the finest in the city) was procured for the sum of \$6,000. The new parochial residence cost \$10,000. The Shimer property on State Street, which enhanced the beauty and appearance of St. Mary's, was purchased for \$5,000. All of these together with the annual running expenses of church and school for the previous 31 years totaled over \$400,000 which were received and disbursed during Father Mulheron's pastorate. The debt on the church property was reduced to \$12,000, which by the generosity of St. Mary's people was in a few years, entirely liquidated. A tower upon the church with its chime of bells was lacking. It was the fond hope of pastor and people that the completion of the tower and the acquisition of bells would in the near future be accomplished and acquired.

And notwithstanding all this, although deeply involved in temporal affairs, Father Mulheron, during all these years, never lost sight of the spiritual welfare of his flock. He was ready day and night to attend to their many wants. Nowhere, it can be safely said, had better opportunities been presented for the practice of religion than those held out by Father Mulheron for his people both young and old. Under his supervision various societies were organized. He always took a deep interest in the welfare of these societies and his efforts in their behalf were recognized and appreciated by all. His religious zeal and activity for the welfare of his parishioners resulted in the following organizations—the Young Ladies' Sodality, which, carried the reputation of the largest in the diocese, if not in the state or nation; the Children of Mary, the Holy Name Society, the Rosary and Scapular Society and the Boy's Sodality of the Holy Name of Jesus.



Father Mulheron always had the interest of Catholicity at heart. He was instrumental in establishing the Auburn Orphan Asylum, fully recognizing the necessity of such an institution in Auburn, where the fatherless and motherless little ones might receive proper religious training under the guidance of the Sisters of St. Joseph. He threw his whole soul and energy into the work, and ever since its establishment has been its loyal and devoted friend. Father Mulheron died on February 1913.

### **THE FOURTH PASTOR**



Bishop Thomas Hickey, second bishop of Rochester, appointed the Rev. William Payne pastor; he began his duties on July 11, 1913. Father Payne's task was to repair, replace and improve the buildings and to complete the payment of the church debt. It was Father Payne who began the movement to install bells in the church tower and raised the funds to accomplish this. During World War I, he labored zealously for the Red Cross and was active in many other civic affairs. He it was who made the final payment on the church debt in 1921. Father Payne was instrumental in the founding of Mercy

Hospital where St. Edward Church had been located. He died on Palm Sunday in the year of 1925, bringing to a close 12 years of untiring service on behalf of the parishioners.

### **THE FIFTH PASTOR**



The Rev. John J. McGrath, at one time an assistant to Father Mulheron, succeeded Father Payne as pastor on July 12, 1925. It was during his pastorate that the dream of the previous pastors and the parishioners was realized when the bells were installed in the tower. Bishop Thomas Hickey, second bishop of Rochester, blessed them on September 21, 1926 and they rang out for the first time on October 3, 1926. The three bells constitute the chord of the major scale of E flat. The largest bell, donated by the Holy Name Society and members of the church, has the name of Jesus-Joseph; the second bell, donated by the Rosary and Scapular Society, is called

Mary; the third bell in memory of John Stack, is called John. The work on the church tower began on May 10, 1925. William Reilly was the builder.

Father McGrath celebrated his 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary on September 29, 1929 and was appointed Dean of the Auburn Deanery. Father McGrath died on February 26, 1932.

## THE SIXTH PASTOR



The Rev. William E. Cowen, D.D. was appointed by Bishop John Francis O'Hern, the third bishop of Rochester, to St. Mary's as the sixth pastor and came to Auburn on June 25, 1932. A graduate of St. Mary's school in the class of 1892, he was baptized in St. Mary's Church when the parish was only ten years old.

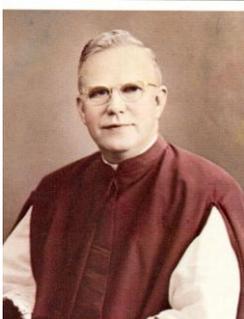
To Dr. Cowen fell the task of many repairs for the church. A new floor was installed, a new entrance was added to the Green Street side of the church and the church was in need of redecoration. A rededication service was held on March 20, 1938 with Bishop James E. Kearney, newly appointed bishop of Rochester, in attendance.

On September 28, 1947 Dr. Cowen was one of three Auburn priests named Right Reverend Monsignor by Pope Pius XII. He celebrated his Golden Jubilee of his ordination to the priesthood in 1952. On June 22, 1952, fifty years to the day he offered he offered his first Mass in St. Mary's Church, Monsignor Cowen celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving.

Dr. Cowen was an active leader in the civic life of Auburn never sparing himself for the welfare of the community, regardless of creed. On June 25, 1957, the parishioners of St. Mary's joyfully celebrated with their pastor his Twenty-fifth Anniversary as pastor.

Throughout his pastorate, Monsignor Cowen had been a strong shepherd who acted only for the welfare of his people, a great promoter of catholic education and an outstanding ecumenical leader. He passed to his reward on September 5, 1961.

## THE SEVENTH PASTOR



The many years of active work took a toll on Monsignor Cowen. Age finally caught up with the energetic priest and on June 24, 1958 Monsignor James D. Cuffney came to St. Mary's as administrator. He was not a stranger as he served as assistant pastor from 1940-1941. He came from St. Bernard's Seminary where he was the business manager and business teacher for many years. He accepted his appointment to St. Mary's with the knowledge that he would improve the church property and oversee the erection of a new school building. On July 31, 1959 he was appointed a domestic prelate. On

June 6, 1960 he celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a priest. Ground-breaking for the new school happened on September 26, 1960 for the new school at 17 Clymer Street. The “Gray School” building at 11 Clark stood until 1975 when it was sold to Urban Renewal. The new school at 17 Clymer Street was dedicated on October 15, 1961 with an enrollment of 438 pupils and by 1965 the enrollment was up to 503 students using 14 classrooms with a faculty of 15 teachers: 8 nuns and 7 lay teachers. Places on the on the front of the building a beautiful mosaic of the Virgin Mary with the inscription “Gratia Plena –Mother of God”.

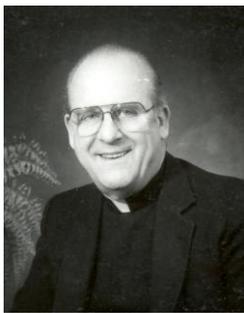
In 1965, the church was completely renovated in light of the liturgical changes inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Mr. Millard, an artist from New York City was contracted to paint a 15 foot mural of Christ behind the altar as the dominant feature of the renovation. The work was completed on April 19, 1966 with a rededication service led by Bishop Lawrence B. Casey, auxiliary bishop of the Rochester Diocese.

This zealous and energetic pastor was remembered for carrying on the spirit of ecumenism of his predecessors. It was reported that at an ecumenical service held at St. Mary’s on May 15, 1966 over 1000 people were in attendance. As one thumbs through the history pages, foremost on every page there is evidence of Monsignor's love of God. Noticeable is the care he took to arrange programs to meet the religious needs of the people. He foresaw the future of the church and tried to prepare St. Mary's parishioners to meet the challenge.

In 1979, Monsignor reached the age of 70 and on August 15, 1979 the 111<sup>th</sup> parish anniversary, he officially retired. An antique organ was dedicated on June 3, 1979 in his honor as a gift of friends and parishioners and placed in the sanctuary area in hope to encourage congregational singing.

His retirement years were largely spent in Auburn where he served the parish as needed. He died on September 10, 1988.

## **THE EIGHTH PASTOR**



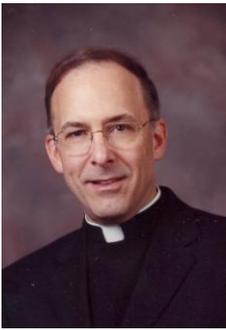
On August 13, 1979 the newly consecrated Bishop of Rochester, Most Rev. Matthew H. Clark appointed The Rev. Edward A. Zimmer to be the eighth pastor of St. Mary's. Father Zimmer, like Father Payne, the fourth pastor, came to the parish at a time when the buildings were in prime condition.

However, Father Zimmer was not to have an easy journey during the next 13 years. He was the pastor who would witness the decline of the number of priests which necessitated a parish pastoral staff of all lay people. Father Zimmer was a peacemaker. Long hours and many days were spent reconciling difficulties. He loved the children and the children's Mass, which he offered so frequently.

In addition to his many duties at the parish, he was chaplain of the Auburn and Fleming Fire Departments, president of the United Way and chairman of the Annual Campaign and a life member of NAACP. At the time of his retirement in 1992, he was the regional coordinator of the Seneca-Cayuga Region and served on 17 advisory boards.

During his 13 years of leadership at St. Mary's, Father Zimmer truly spread the good news to all. He died on January 7, 2001.

## **THE NINTH PASTOR**



On June 30, 1992, the Rev. Robert J. Schrader assumed his duties as St. Mary's ninth pastor. Among his early duties during his 12 years here was the supervision of the Diocesan Synod in the parish and the spiritual renewal of the parish using the three-year national program entitled "Renew". He saw to the proper celebration of the Quasiquicentennial anniversary of the parish.

Like many of our pastors, Father Schrader undertook a major renovation and restoration of the church and basement hall. The renovation was contracted to the Rambusch Company of New York City. The remodeling included a new tile floor, new altar and seating arrangements, new color scheme to bring out all the intricate architectural details of the interior of the church, new restroom and children's room, new lighting, restored doors, new sound system with hearing assistance systems. The basement of the church was air-conditioned together with a new floor and professional style kitchen and meeting room. The renovation was completed with the "Rite of Dedication" presided over by Bishop Matthew Clark on April 21, 1997.

In commemoration of the extensive work done under the pastorate of Father Schrader, the Parish Pastoral Council passed a resolution to change the name of Lyceum Hall (the parish hall below the church) to The Father Robert Schrader Hall.

Father Schrader organized a committee to plan monthly pasta dinners in the renovated church basement. The first pasta supper was held on September 9, 1999. It continues to this day to be a wonderful venue of community social life and financial support.

During Father Schrader's pastorate, two long time rectory staff members passed away. Maryrose Barron served as parish secretary and archivist for 57 years. She was waked on June 25, 1997, in the midst of construction in the church that she loved. Hannah T. Wilkinson served as rectory cook for 36 years. She died on October 2, 1999.

The Clymer St. School which had operated from 1960 to 2002 was now vacant due to the amalgamation of all the Catholic Schools in Auburn into Saint Joseph School on the

campus of St. Alphonsus Church. The Clymer Street School was leased out to BOCES, with the intention of eventually selling the building.

## THE TENTH PASTOR



In June of 2004, the Rev. Frank E. Lioi was appointed by Bishop Clark as the tenth pastor of St. Mary's Church. As previous pastors of St. Mary's (Dr. Cowan, Msgr. Cuffney, Fr. Zimmer), Father Lioi had served on the faculty and administration of Saint Bernard's Seminary during the years of 1975-1981. Subsequently, he was a staff member (Director of Development from 1981-1989 and additionally Vice Rector from 1986-1989) at The American College of Louvain, a seminary in Belgium under the auspices of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Father Lioi comes to St. Mary's with a wealth of administrative, liturgical and pastoral experience at the service of a parish which is richly blessed with a diversity of racial and ethnic heritage. The first major celebration upon Father Lioi's arrival was the Alumni Reunion (1921-1960) of the Clark Street "Gray School" in August, 2004.

Working with a newly formed Buildings & Grounds Committee, Father Lioi concerned himself with the donation to the parish of the building to the west of the church, the sale of the Clymer Street School and the replacement of the church boiler and installation of air-conditioning in the church. The building to the west of the church was razed in the summer of 2006 and the land turned into an unfinished parking lot; the Clymer Street School building was sold to Tyburn Academy of Mary Immaculate on June 5, 2007; the boiler was replaced and air-conditioning installed in church during the summer of 2008. During the summer of 2009, moveable walls were installed in the parish hall to accommodate multiple use of the hall, flat screen television monitors mounted on the walls and the sound system readjusted.

On Sunday, June 3, 2007, Father Lioi celebrated his 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination with a festive Mass in the morning, a luncheon at Highland Golf Club at 1:00 pm, and a choral concert at 4:00 in church followed by a reception. On August 15, 2008, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Mary's Church observed its 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a magnificent Flower Festival, which, along with the parish picnic, has become an annual tradition around the August 15<sup>th</sup> patronal feast day.

With the inauguration of the parish Cultural Arts Committee, Saint Mary's has become a welcomed venue for concerts and cultural events. Performances at Saint Mary's in recent years have been The American Boychoir, Cornell University Orchestra and Chorale (Mozart's *Requiem*, Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*), *Madrigalia*, *Musica Spei*, duo organists George Damp & David Jackson, *Musica Transatlantica*, Finger Lakes *Camarata* and, during the Year for Priests (2009-2010), the St. Luke Productions of *Vianney*, the life and

ministry of St. John Vianney (1789-1859), known as the holy Curé of Ars. Many of the musical performances mentioned above have become annual events. In November 2010, the historic 1892 Carl Barckhoff Pipe Organ celebrated its 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of installation with a gala concert performed by organist David Fedor, a native of Auburn and boyhood parishioner of Saint Mary's.

Saint Mary's Church continues to reach out to the wider community and is an active participant in ecumenical and inter-religious events in Auburn and Cayuga County.

## **Priests who ministered to St. Mary's parishioners**

### **Pastors**

|                              |           |
|------------------------------|-----------|
| Rev. Thomas A. Maher         | 1868-1869 |
| Rev. Myles J. Loughlin, D.D. | 1869-1877 |
| Rev. William E. Mulheron     | 1877-1913 |
| Rev. William F. Payne        | 1913-1925 |
| Rev. John J. McGrath         | 1925-1932 |
| Rev. Msgr. William E. Cowen  | 1932-1961 |
| Rev. Msgr. James D. Cuffney  | 1961-1979 |
| Rev. Edward A. Zimmer        | 1979-1992 |
| Rev. Robert J. Schrader      | 1992-2004 |
| Rev. Frank E. Lioi           | 2004-     |

### **Associate Pastors 1868-1932**

Rev. Dr. Massan  
Rev. John B. Doran  
Rev. Dr. Lynch  
Rev. John R. Fitzsimons  
Rev. Eugene Pagani  
Rev. E. J. Dwyer  
Rev. W. Thurston  
Rev. S. J. Byrne  
Rev. J.H. Russell  
Rev. Patrick J. Smyth  
Rev. William Morrin  
Rev. Arthur LeMay  
Rev. J. H. Connolly

Rev. William E. Hayes  
Rev. Max Casimir  
Rev. Daniel Quigley  
Rev. Joseph Hendricks  
Rev. Victor J. Hurley  
Rev. John Donnelly  
Rev. Charles E. Muckle  
Rev. George V. Burns  
Rev. Raymond Quigley  
Rev. F.J. Burns  
Rev. Samuel J. Houghton  
Rev. James H. Day  
Rev. Francis B. Burns  
Rev. James Hickey  
Rev. John P. O'Beirne  
Rev. F. J. Burns  
Rev. John J. McGrath  
Rev. John M. Ball  
Rev. Joseph P. Quinn  
Rev. Leo Mooney  
Rev. John F. O'Hern  
Rev. George Macauley  
Rev. James J. Gibbons  
Rev. Joseph Margrett  
Rev. Timothy J. McGrath

### **Associate Pastors 1932-1980**

Rev. Armand Benoit (Albany)  
Rev. James D. Cuffney  
Rev. Dennis W. Hickey  
Rev. Robert H. Fennessy  
Rev. Edwin Agonis, O.M.C.  
Rev. J. Joseph O'Connell  
Rev. Richard T. Tormey  
Rev. William D. Tobin  
Rev. E. Leo McMannus  
Rev. Walter Carron  
Rev. John F. White  
Rev. Ralph Meyer (New York)

Rev. Leslie G. Whalen  
Rev. Charles Langworthy  
Rev. Joseph McNamara  
Rev. John Patrick Norris  
Rev. Paul J. Lynch  
Rev. Charles L. McCarthy  
Rev. Robert J. Downs  
Rev. Robert G. Smith  
Rev. Robert J. Kanka  
Rev. Charles Irwin Sullivan  
Rev. Edwin B. Metzger  
Rev. Guy J. Wertz  
Rev. William Cosgrove  
Rev. Gerald J. Guli  
Rev. Robert L. Kress  
Rev. Arthur J. Hack  
Rev. Ignatius St. George  
Rev. Conrad Sundholm  
Rev. Ronald Gaesser  
Rev. James C. Enright  
Rev. Anthony Valenti  
Rev. David Gramkee

**Parochial Vicars 1980-2011**

Rev. Bernard Casper  
Rev. Robert T. Werth  
Rev. Joseph Catanise  
Rev. Thomas Corbett  
Rev. David Faraone  
Rev. Patrick Guiany Sullivan  
Rev. Lee P. Chase  
Rev. John D. Dillon  
Rev. Steven Lape  
Rev. B. Munjalu Wakhungu (Kenya)  
Rev. John Kenneth Coffie (Obuasi, Ghana)  
Rev. Joseph Osei Bonsu (Obuasi, Ghana)