A salute to an Impish Rector
Pgs 2, 3
By now much has been said and written about Monsignor O’Neill. An Irish priest with an impish sense of humor, who almost became a farmer or veterinarian. And the restorer and defender of the Cathedral, who always yearned to be a simple parish priest.

So as I sat down to write this story, what else was there to be said. I thought back to when, despite his protestations that “I am not a Cathedral guy”, Billy Oliver came downtown to be the Rector of our historic church, which was then in a state of serious disrepair. It was not only the structure that needed to be rehabilitated, the vitality of the Cathedral Parish really needed resuscitation. It may be hard to believe today when you look at the size and dynamism of the Cathedral Parish, but back in 1996 its population was less than 500 households versus 1400 today. And it’s various parish organizations were practically moribund.

A woman told me one Sunday at Mass that the Cathedral was a very cold, unfriendly place and she was thinking of going to services at a Lutheran church, where she was always warmly greeted upon arrival. That prompted Monsignor O’Neill to call a meeting of the ushers to review the need for greeting our parishioners warmly upon arrival at Mass. This suggestion was summarily dismissed by the then usher corps. One of them even commented, “What are you trying to do, make this like a Protestant church.” So we started a separate Greeting Ministry which lasted until the old ushers retired and the new crop, logically assumed the greeting function.

The Parish Council was more of the same. Members were on the council for many years and elections were rarely held. Monsignor changed all that to our current system where we elect new members every two years and then have a 2 term limit, thus preventing career membership and regularly injecting new blood into the council.

The Cathedral Council of Catholic Women is one of the most dynamic parish organizations we have today, but back in the late 1990’s it didn’t do much except hold a monthly luncheon for a group of elderly women who lived at the Rose of Sharon. In 2003, with Monsignor O’Neill’s blessing, Joan Schaaf initiated the effort to revitalize the CCW. According to Joan, “All women in the Parish were invited to join the CCW. Forty Ladies signed up and a slate of officers was appointed at the first meeting. The following year the ladies nominated and elected the officers and we were launched. And the CCW has been serving the Cathedral Parish since then.”

The only social outreach activity at the time was the Annual Food Drive to benefit the Social Apostolate led by a member of the Parish Council. During Msgr. O’s tenure, the Christian Service Committee was formed and over the years it has become another vital force in the Parish. From the Item of the Month to the Personal Hygiene Packs and the Giving Tree, there is...
always something positive happening from that group.

The Parish Life Committee was also formed as a result of a pulpit appeal to join in helping to make our community more alike a family. That first get together was a revelation as the meeting room was full of various energetic people who wanted to be part of that revitalization effort and had good ideas about what we should do to make it happen. Parish Suppers were held monthly plus Coffee and Doughnuts were regularly scheduled after Sunday Masses each month. Slowly but surely attendance grew and we got to know many more of our fellow parishioners better.

One of the most notable developments early in his term was the initiation of the publication of Twin Spires. As stated in the first issue, we began the publication to inform the parishioners about what was going on in our parish, give them an insight into the history and features of the church, as well as build a sense of community. All of that has certainly happened and then some.

In addition, Tour Guides are on duty every day to give visitors insight into the history and beautiful décor of the Cathedral. And the Heritage Balls and Galas, began to build up the Cathedral Endowment which now stands at almost $2 Million. Through it all, Monsignor O’Neill found good people to lead these efforts, did not interfere with their activities and supported them fully. His modus operandi was to put the right people in place and just let them go.

To many people, he is most recognized for his success in restoring the Cathedral structure to its former glory. But I believe his revitalization of our Parish is his greatest accomplishment. He came along, charmed us with his blarney and reenergized our faith community.

In her toast at Monsignor O’Neill’s Celebration Dinner, Parish Council Chair Anna Kaluzne eloquently expressed how we all feel about him, “Monsignor O’Neill, thank you for being our pastor. You were there for us in good times and bad times. You shared in our joys and our sorrows. You’ve taught us the true meaning of giving service to our Lord, our faith, to our beloved Cathedral and our grateful parish. We are better, more dynamic, because of your leadership and unwavering faith.”

When I asked Monsignor O’Neill for his thoughts, he summed it up this way....."I give thanks to God for my fifty years of priestly ministry in America. I am most proud of bringing life to this previously stagnant parish with only a few parishioners."
Have you noticed there seems to be more children in church sitting in the pews during Mass, serving at Mass, taking up the gifts and attending religious education? This past year we enrolled 90 children in Children’s Religious Education (CRE) which meets Sunday mornings September to May. We just finished our biggest enrollment year in recent memory which required additional classroom space, textbooks and catechists to support the program.

Our CRE year ended with 4 big events starting with 1st Reconciliation on Saturday, May 6. We prepared 24 children to receive their 1st Reconciliation administered by Father Schreck and Msgr. O’Neil. Although the children were apprehensive, their thorough preparations included visits to the confessional and frequent visits from Father Schreck throughout the year which eased their nerves. After receiving reconciliation and completing their penance, each child was presented with a Reconciliation pin and a certificate from their catechist, Mrs. AnaLisa Love which brought smiles to their relieved faces.

Mrs. Love, assisted by Catalina Velez, prepared our students to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist on Saturday, May 13. First Eucharist usually takes place during the 10AM Mass on Sunday, but the size of the class prompted moving the celebration to Saturday at 10AM. We had a wonderful Mass filled with the families and friends of our children. Some parents
chose the Latin Mass on May 14 for their daughters’ 1st Communion with Father Firmin presiding. After both Masses there was plenty of time for communicants’ pictures with clergy and families in front of the altar. It was a memorable time for the children, their families and our catechist, who could not be more proud of her students’ accomplishments. Take a look at the photos highlighting the children’s holy faces on their 1st Communion day.

Our next event was our end-of-the-year celebration. This program gave the CRE children an opportunity to present to their families and friends something they learned while increasing their faith during the school year. Julie Estvander’s kindergarten and 1st graders presented “The Gifts of the Spirit”, Mrs. Love’s 2nd and 3rd graders presented “Our Favorite Bible Stories”, Kristin Ensley’s 3rd and 4th graders presented “What Easter Means to Me”, Shannon Lancaster’s 5th and 6th graders presented “Judgement of the Nation” from Matthew 25:31–46 and Amy Schuler’s class presented “Twas the Night before Confirmation” written and directed by Caroline Whalen. The presentations were wonderful, priceless and totally faith based. It was a proud and rewarding day for all.

Our final event was the celebration of Confirmation. We prepared 8 students to receive this sacrament administered by Bishop Gregory John Hartmayer. The CRE
students worked very hard to ensure that they were ready to receive their final Sacrament of Initiation guided by Mrs. Schuler and her assistant Sarah Whalen. Sarah was a valuable asset, be it sharing her own Confirmation journey or helping with the many tasks required of each student. The Bishop spoke at great length during the confirmation ceremony about what it means to be a fully initiated member of the Catholic faith. The confirmandi were thoroughly questioned about their saint name and why they wanted to be confirmed. All passed their oral exam and went on to receive the sacrament. Thank you Mrs. Schuler and Sarah! Representatives from the Cathedral’s Council of Catholic Women and the Knights of Columbus prepared a delicious meal and presented special treats for each of the newly confirmed. Thank you to all who made this memorable evening happen with grace and piety.

The Children’s Religious Education program is here to help parents with their children’s faith formation. We have a goal to enroll each child in the Cathedral who is not attending Catholic school. Please help us meet this goal and register your child in September. Have a great summer and remember to talk about your Catholic faith every day.
An easily-overlooked but beautiful Feast, the Visitation, is celebrated every year on May 31. In this year’s liturgical calendar, it was sandwiched between the Ascension of our Lord and Pentecost, so it is no wonder that it went by mostly unnoticed. Begun by St. Bonaventure among the Franciscans in 1263 A.D., it became a universal Feast in 1389, during the papacy of Urban VI.

The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is most well-known to us as the second Joyful Mystery of the Holy Rosary, which celebrates the visit of Mary, the Mother of God, with the child Jesus in her womb, to her cousin Elizabeth who was six months pregnant with Saint John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ.

At the Annunciation of the Lord, the angel Gabriel, in response to Mary’s question “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” (Luke 1:34), had told her that “Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” (Luke 1:36-37). The evidence of her cousin’s own near-miraculous conception had called forth Mary’s fiat: “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

The Church teaches that it was at this moment that the Baptist was freed from original sin. In 1208 AD Pope Innocent III wrote: “John the Baptist had been sent from [God], holy and righteous and filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb of his own mother”.

This feast is quite significant because of the cleansing of John the Baptist from original sin in the womb of his mother at the words of Our Lady’s greeting, Elizabeth’s proclaiming of Mary—under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—as Mother of God and “blessed among women”. Hearing herself addressed by the most lofty title of “Mother of the Lord” and realizing what grace her visit had conferred on John, Mary broke out in that sublime canticle of praise proclaiming prophetically that henceforth she would be venerated down through the centuries: Mary’s singing of the sublime hymn, Magnificat, which has become a part of the daily official prayer of the Church which is taken directly from St. Luke’s Gospel chapter 1:46-55...

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.
The Mighty One hath done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.
He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
but lifted up the lowly.
The hungry he has filled with good things;
the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering his mercy,
according to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

And so when we pray the Rosary and meditate on the Visitation, we are acting out the prophesy that Mary will be blessed by all generations.

Sources: Catholic Encyclopedia
ThoughtCo
Several years ago, Fr. Schreck suggested we do a Mother’s Day Rose project here at the Cathedral, which had been done at St. Anne Church, his former parish in Columbus. The Cathedral Council of Catholic Women (CCW) liked the idea and a tradition of dedicating a rose in memory of our moms or to honor significant women was born.

Two weeks prior to Mother’s Day weekend, our Council Women began selling Mother’s Day Roses on the Cathedral plaza. The roses, offered at $5.00 each, would be used to decorate the Cathedral on Mother’s Day weekend. We are always overwhelmed by the support of our parishioners, who honor and remember mothers, grandmothers, sisters and daughters. We are delighted when we meet visitors who purchase a rose. Quite often we hear them say: “I would love to have my mother remembered in such a beautiful Cathedral.”

This year, a visitor from New York mailed us an order for five of her family members. We typically order over 500 roses but this year, 600 roses were delivered on Thursday. The CCW and the Cathedral’s Flower Ministry prepare the roses, which usually includes stripping thorns, trimming the roses and soaking them in large buckets of water overnight. Friday is decorating and arranging day. Our members, under the guidance and counsel of Lynne Everett and our Flower Ministry (Jane Pruitt and Kay Regan) prepare the arrangements seen all over the church. The Blessed Virgin Mary Altar in the Marian Chapel, the primary focal point for the Mother’s Day Roses, was decorated with shades of white and pink roses. And a special arrangement was done and placed next to the painting of our Lady of Good Counsel, the patron of the CCW.

Many arrangements containing roses of all shapes and colors, were displayed and drew attention to the special beauty of the Cathedral. Visitors touring the Cathedral asked about the roses, and were taken with their beauty and the special dedication to all mothers.

The Mother’s Day Rose project is really a labor of love, not only to honor all mothers and significant women, but for our parish family. Our CCW members enjoy the time and fellowship working on this project. And we are grateful for the parishioners who faithfully support us every year. But, this is not just a CCW endeavor and cannot be accomplished without help from the Cathedral Flower Ministry, our Parish Staff, Fr. Schreck, Msgr. O’Neill, and Fr. Peyton. The proceeds from this fundraising event are used to subsidize the CCW’s “goals for giving.”

Most recently, the CCW made contributions to the Carmelite Monastery Building Fund and the National Council of Catholic Women’s Vocation Purse Club. Both worthy causes, which honor women and are a fitting tribute to the Mother’s Day Rose project.

Roses to Honor and Remember Our Mothers

Article and Photos by Alizon McLaughlin
Artistic Talent Showcased at First Fine Arts Night

By Melanie Brooks
Photos by Paul H. Camp

On Sunday evening, May 21, the parish hall was transformed for our first Fine Arts Night. The work of 19 talented artists filled the hall from the stage to the Abercorn Street doors and piano music filled the air. Elegant and tasty hors d’oeuvres were offered and bars at both ends of the hall served adult beverages. Volunteers staffed the nursery so even our smallest parishioners enjoyed a special evening.

The objective of the evening was to display artwork for the enjoyment and appreciation of our parishioners. All were invited and there was no charge to attend. Well-known local artists, Mary Lawrence Kennickell and Sharon Saseen helped chair the event. It was wonderful to have so many talented Savannah area artists, many of whom were Cathedral parishioners, sharing their work with us.

The artists represented a range of ages - the youngest was a freshman at SCAD and the oldest a long-established artist. They also represented a range of mediums — oils, charcoal, fiber, stained glass and more plus a range of subjects from portraits to seascapes as well as landscapes to still-lifes. Several artists specialized in religious representation in their various art mediums. All of the artists were eager to engage guests in conversation about their inspirations and their works.

The evening was an unqualified success and many guests requested another art event in the future. Other events showcasing Cathedral talent were also requested. If you have any ideas along these lines, please contact the parish office and let us know.

The tables are down and the artwork carefully wrapped for removal but the memories of that special evening still resound for those of us privileged to enjoy it. Stay tuned … there will be more fun to come.

Participating artists included:
We have all passed it many times but may not have paid much attention to the plaque in the Cathedral lobby dedicated to the Rt. Rev. Edward Barron.

So my question to Monsignor O’Neill was, “What did he do to deserve a plaque in the Cathedral?” Looking into it, here is what we found out.

Edward Barron (1801-1854) was an Irish born missionary bishop who led the Catholic mission to Liberia. Born on June 18, 1801, one of ten children of Pierce Barron of Ballyneale, Clonea, Rathgormack, county Waterford and Anna née Winston, Fethard, county Tipperary.

At age thirteen, Edward was sent to boarding school in England; several years later he moved to Paris and then back to Dublin to study law at Trinity College. Edward spent three years at Trinity but did not take his law degree exams because he had decided to enter the Catholic priesthood at St. John’s College in Waterford. In 1823, Dr. Kelly, the Catholic Bishop of Waterford sent him to study at the Propaganda College in Rome to complete his studies, gaining a Doctorate in Theology. He was ordained at St. Agatha’s Church in 1826.

Dr. Barron returned to Waterford where he was appointed a professor in St. John’s College and taught for seven years, after which he volunteered for the missions in the United States. He accepted an offer from Bishop Kenrick of the Diocese of Philadelphia, to take up the appointment as Pastor of St Mary’s Church and President of St. Charles Borromeo’s Theological Seminary. He also served as Vicar General of the diocese.

In 1840, when the Holy See requested the American bishops care for the negro Catholics of Liberia, Africa, he offered his services with those of the Rev. John Kelly of New York, and left Baltimore, December 21, 1841, for Cape Mesurado. The work there was successful at first, so Barron returned to Europe and the United States for more help.

While in Rome, on October 3, 1842, Pope Gregory XVI appointed him titular Bishop of Constantia and Vicar Apostolic of the two Guineas, a vast territory comprising the Gold Coast, the Ivory Coast and Liberia. He returned to Africa in November of 1843 and on March 2, 1844, he was made the Titular Bishop of Euphrasia. He continued his labors in the missions until 1845, when he was forced by a fever he had contracted to resign his vicariate and return to the United States. Here, as far as his impaired health allowed, he again took up the duties of a missionary priest and assisted in the work of the episcopate in Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Florida.

Since he knew Bishop Gartland from the Diocese of Philadelphia, he came to Savannah to assist him caring for the sick during the yellow fever epidemic. Sadly he succumbed to the fever two short weeks after arriving in Savannah and died on September 12, 1854. Bishop Gartland, visiting victims sick with yellow fever, also died a victim of the disease a week later on September 20, at age 49. They are buried side by side in the Catholic Cemetery.

Monsignor O’Neill has seen the monument, erected in his memory in precincts of the Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity in Waterford, which declares him to be “The African Missionary.” It proclaims that after serving in the missions in Africa, he died of yellow fever in the “Wilds of America”

As the plaque in our lobby states:

“… Who though a stranger to our people, came to their help in their hour of greatest need and died in their service.”

Source: Catholic Encyclopedia
Father Tom Peyton recently retired from active ministry and took up residence in the Cathedral rectory. He previously served as Pastor of St. Michael Church on Tybee Island for the past 8 years. But what about before that?

I sat down with Fr. Tom recently to learn more about him. He was originally from Baltimore. He was always interested in teaching so he went to Towson State Teachers College in Towson, MD, but after a year he was not happy there. He sought guidance from a young parish priest who summarized his interests as follows: “You want to be a teacher; you want to work with children and the elderly; you want to be involved in community; have you thought about being a priest? Sounds like you may have a calling. Why don’t you try it out for a year?”

“This was in August, so that September, I was in the seminary.”

In retrospect, it did not seem all that strange to Fr. Peyton. His family always prayed after dinner every night. And every evening, his father prayed that God would bless their family with a vocation. He had one brother and two sisters and they had all decided that his sister Pat would go into the convent. But Fr. Tom became a priest instead.

He entered St. Charles College, one of the seminaries in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, in 1967. During his first year, Fr. William Coleman, the Rector of St. John’s Minor Seminary on Isle of Hope, came up to visit his students at the seminary. During his visit he solicited volunteers to come to Savannah to work at Camp Villa Marie on Isle of Hope, teaching catechism to rural children in a two and a half week program. Fr. Tom volunteered to come down along with two other seminarians and he liked it so much that he came back for the next seven summers and ultimately relocated here.

I asked Fr. Tom why he came back and ultimately changed his affiliation to Savannah? “I was taken in by the sense of community in the Diocese of Savannah, the friendship between the young priests and seminarians, as well as the involvement of the Sisters of Mercy. Plus of course the bishop, who at that time was Bishop Frey. The attraction was that I was interested in doing mission work. So working in the Mission Diocese of Savannah Georgia, which I’d never heard of, became the seed that grew into a 43-year priestly vocation,” he replied.

He was ordained on April 27, 1974 at his home parish, Immaculate Conception in Towson, MD, by Bishop Lessard. According to Fr. Peyton, requesting an episcopal consecration from another diocese while still in the seminary, was very complicated, “a terrible ordeal”. Then, Bishop Frey was moved, just as he had begun the process of “incardination” from Baltimore to Savannah. Bishop Boland, who was then the Vicar General of the Diocese, helped arrange with Bishop-Elect Ray mond Lessard, who was in Rome at the time, to formalize his transfer to Savannah.

His first parish assignment, while still a deacon, was a pastoral year at Our Lady of Lourdes in Columbus and he also taught at Pacelli High School. After ordination, he returned briefly to Our Lady of Lourdes and then was assigned to St. Anne where he served for 3 years and continued teaching at Pacelli. Next he came to Blessed Sacrament for 5 years and then went to St. John the Evangelist in Valdosta for 3 years. All four of his first parish assignments had schools and according to Fr. Tom, he was always happiest working with the children in the parish schools.

His first parish assignment as Pastor was at St. Joseph Church in Waycross, where he stayed for 2 years and was also the Dean of the Valdosta/Brunswick Deanery. He next came to Sacred Heart Church in Savannah where he stayed for 7 years. Fr. Tom then went to Rome on a sabbatical and returned to Augusta where he ultimately became the Pastor of St. Teresa of Avila Church. During his 11 year tenure, the parish was relocated to Grovetown and a master plan was developed which led to the building of the education center/school, administration center and worship space; after he left the new church and rectory were built. Bishop Boland said in acknowledging Fr. Peyton’s retirement, “Moving St. Theresa to Grovetown was a historical moment for the diocese.”

After his recent 8 year ministry at St. Michael Church on Tybee Island, he is now here with us at the Cathedral in residence as a retired priest.

For Fr. Tom, being a history buff, living downtown in the Historic District is a dream come true.
Confirmation 2017

Whenever Bishop Hartmayer, administers the Sacrament of Confirmation in various parishes around the diocese, he always has private meetings with the confirmandi. During these sessions, he asks them to consider the possibility of a religious vocation. Since candidates who are soon to be confirmed will be strengthened as they receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, what better time for them to ask the Lord, “What do you want me to do with my life?”