

## **Where Did We Go for Sunday Mass Over the Years?**

**Joe and Mary Rekus**

As people first began to move into Columbia, the Catholic faith was also making its presence known. Before construction of the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center was completed, daily and Sunday Mass was celebrated in the parish rectory, in parishioners' homes, and in neighborhood centers. As more Catholics moved into the area it was increasingly necessary to find larger and larger spaces for Sunday Masses until WLIFC was ready for use.

Columbia's first Library was situated on the Wilde Lake plaza. Before the stacks were filled the parish used it for Sunday Mass. Making a circle with chairs and including the altar and a musician or two was all that was needed to provide a worship space for the new, growing parish family. Shortly after that endeavor began, the books were shelved and the library opened, so our congregation moved the Sunday liturgies to Slayton House where they remained for the next two years until WLIFC opened on September 20, 1970.

Once the first worship center was dedicated, St. John's shared the space with three other participating congregations. It very soon became evident that the Roman Catholic family still needed additional space to serve the continuing growing Catholic population for the multiple masses that were celebrated each weekend. Kahler Hall in Harper's Choice was rented each weekend, and that facility also drew a crowd.

Our community was also growing "on the other side" of Rte 29 and a search for interim worship space produced The Other Barn in the Oakland Mills Village Center as an ideal space. "A real barn" where farm animals once lived was very appealing to the young families coming out on Sunday. Mass was also offered at Thunder Hill Elementary School. Again, the auditorium was filled each week as we awaited the completion of The Oakland Mills Meeting House which opened in 1975. St. John the Evangelist was now "one parish in two buildings" as we would explain it to inquiring minds. Our primary worship space has been in the two interfaith center buildings ever since, with one notable exception that involved religious education:

The parish's religious education program began in 1970 with small groups meeting in individual homes. When the program grew too large to manage in that setting, our parish rented Howard High School for several years. Sunday mornings included religious instruction for children as well as for parents. The mornings ended with Sunday mass in the Howard High auditorium, making mass attendance very convenient for the families.