

## **OUR PARISH HISTORY**

Founded in 1974, Stella Maris is a Roman Catholic Church within the Archdiocese of Kingston, Jamaica. The name Stella Maris is the latin translation for "Star of the Sea". This designation was used to emphasize Mary's role as a sign of hope and as a guiding star for Christians.

### **History of Stella Maris Church (excerpt from Stella Maris 40th Anniversary Magazine)**

#### ***Building a church and community***

In 1963, the Legion of Mary from the Holy Cross parish in Kingston, together with their moderator, Fr. Gerrard Curley, started a mission in Grants Pen at 5 Morgan's Lane. They would gather the children every Monday evening for one hour at 5 p.m. to teach about the Catholic faith. Each week, the group grew and after about 4 months, Fr. Curley decided that exposure to a Mass was important.

He consulted Bishop Carter and permission was granted to use the New Day Primary school to host a Mass, which was held on Sundays at 8:00 a.m. Members of the Holy Cross parish, who lived in the Norbrook area, such as Dotty Phillibert and her family and the Delvailles, started attending this Mass, along with the children and mothers from Grants Pen. This became routine for 4 years.

After consistently hosting Mass at New Day Primary, it became necessary to build a church in the area since the classrooms at New Day were no longer adequate. Bishop Carter and Bishop McEleney agreed to look for possible locations. In 1968, with no luck, Bishop Carter approached Mother Mary Stephanie of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, seeking permission for the use of the Sisters' Chapel to host Sunday Masses. She happily gave her consent to the request and they then appointed two Jesuit priests, Fr. Cruchley from Holy Cross and Fr. Glavin from St. Theresa's to officiate. Now known as the Stella Maris Mission and owing to a larger congregation, the priests offered two Masses instead of one, in the Chapel; at 7 a.m. and 9 a.m.

Some parishioners of Holy Cross and St. Theresa's followed the priests to Stella Maris. Fr. Glavin, along with his close supporters such as Herbert Lewis, Neville Bacquie and W.D. Roberts, started discussions and held meetings about the growth of the community. After 2 years of using the Chapel and having not found a suitable area for the church, Mother Mary Stephanie, the Superior, along with her community, offered the undeveloped land beside the Prep School at Stella Maris to be the site of the new church. In 1970, based on this new development, official plans started on the construction of the Stella Maris Catholic Church.

#### ***Building a Church***

Herbert Lewis, who was then working at Caribbean Construction Company, arranged for an architect to commence the drawing of plans for the building. "Herbie" was very instrumental in getting the work done at a reasonable cost. The cost was covered from the combination

of parishioner contributions, particularly the Abraham family as well as Wilfred and Norma Chang and a few others, and with some fund-raising.

With a lot of hard work and support from the community, the church building was completed in 1974, spearheaded by Fr. Tom Glavin along with Frs. Gerard Bowman and Dennis Cruchley. Gerald Strudwich, who was with BH Paints, had the company donate the paint for the church, free of cost. When the church was built, there was no choir so the singing was led by Sr. Maureen Clare. As time passed, a choir was started, directed by Mrs. Carmen D'Azevedo while Ms. Lisa Narcisse played the organ. The Notices were read after Masses as there was no facility for the printing of a bulletin.

### **Ministries Begin**

Fr. Glavin started the Sunday School group and just before he retired, 100 children made their First Holy Communion. During his tenure, Fr. Gerard Bowman and Richard Wynter started the outreach programme which consisted of packing non-perishable food items in bags and distributing them to the indigents on Saturday mornings.

The Society of St. Vincent De Paul Conference was started by Fred and Norma Chang in 1976. At this time, the Ministries existing were St. Vincent De Paul, The Ushers, Sunday School and the Daughters of Stella Maris. In 1985, Monsignor Stanley Shearer became the first Archdiocesan Priest to come to Stella Maris.

In the beginning there were three Masses – Saturdays at 7:00 p.m. was known as the Youth Mass, where they sang, played the guitars, drums and organ. On Sundays, the Masses were 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Msgr. Shearer oversaw not only the St. Vincent De Paul Society but two other outreach programmes, namely, Family outreach and the Homework School in Grants Pen. He started the Prayer Group and the Praise and Worship, building the faith in its prayer life as he was deeply spiritual. During his tenure, we had the first Crusade. Before the Crusade, some members from the Church Council investigated and had a census done in all the churches in Jamaica. It was then learned that the Catholic Church made up almost 9% of the worshippers in the island. Church members went from house to house, advertising this Crusade and sought out lapsed Catholics. The Crusade ran from Sunday night and ended Thursday with the Mass. Each night, a different speaker spoke on different topics. The attendance was excellent, with a full house every night. As a result, many people started going back to church.

The Catholic Women's League sponsored children at New Day Primary school with books and lunch money. They built a Homework centre there and even paid a teacher to oversee and help the children in the evenings as well as hold summer classes for them. They also adopted the Ozanam Home for the Aged and built the fence, visited the residents weekly and took them out on outings.

For fund-raisers, the Catholic Women's League had Tea Parties approximately twice per year and sometimes Barbeques with entertainment. The Ushers had their Christmas Dinners which was wonderful fellowship. There was an active and vibrant Youth Group which did Corporal Works of Mercy, visiting the Maxfield Park Children's Home and other places. They had socials and Deacon Vincent Hemming and Anne Marie Thomas were in charge of them. After Hurricane Gilbert, it was Msgr. Shearer who repaired the damages sustained by the church, covering and grilling the Palm Court area as well as grilling the church and Rectory, paving the parking area and building new fences. He had a plan for a church Hall but was re-assigned to another church before it could be built. Msgr. Shearer spent 11 years at Stella Maris and his associate Priests were Frs. Gerard Bowman and the late Fr. Kenneth Kong.

### ***Ministering to the Poor***

Msgr. Richard Albert came to Stella Maris in 1991, after distinguishing himself at the St. Patrick's and St. Jude's churches and other troubled communities. His top priority was ministering to the poor and indigent of Grants Pen, Barbican and other poor communities in the Parish. In 1997, he was instrumental in establishing the Stella Maris Foundation. Under his watch, the Ministries grew to 53, as he felt very passionate about Stewardship. It was his way of getting the church community involved. He had a vision for the church to grow and saw the need for a church hall. As a result, he spearheaded the building of the beautiful Pastoral Centre, which includes the Hall, Church Offices, Meeting Rooms and a Chapel. This Centre not only serves the needs of our church community but also the needs of our brothers and sisters in Grants Pen.

There was Pre-Cana Counselling, Educational and Skills training for everyone. This was known as Project 2000. The associate Priests at this time were Frs. Kenneth Kong and George Phillips.

### ***Youth and Young Adults***

Msgr. Michael Lewis came to Stella Maris in 2004 and his emphasis was on the Youth and Young Adult Ministries. He was appointed by the late Archbishop Burke, to co-ordinate the young members of the Catholic Church. Also, it was during his tenure that the Catholic Women's League refurbished a wing at the Ozanam Home for the Aged. In 2011, under the chairmanship of Eddie Shoucair, a very successful fund-raising dinner was held at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel. It was the first of its kind for the church and it also served as a farewell to Msgr. Mike, who left shortly afterwards to become pastor of St. Richard's Church. During his term, his associate priests were Fr. Kenneth Kong and Fr. Richard Brown.

### ***Dramatic Homilies***

Fr. Howard Thompson came to Stella Maris in 2011 from St. Richard's where he served for eleven years, the longest serving Pastor of the Parish. He is very creative and sincerely involved with the youth of the Parish. His homilies are deep and thought-provoking. During the Advent and Christmas Seasons, he introduced an interesting and different style of

celebrating the Birth of Christ, highlighting the star that guided the shepherds and wise men to the manger. He also writes and directs plays which he prefers to label as “dramatic homilies”, capturing the message and imagination of the congregation. The Masses for these events took on a concert atmosphere and found favour with many worshippers. The energetic and spiritually fulfilling Crusades, as well as his launching and personal involvement in the Pilgrim’s Way Bible Study have brought a deeper level of spirituality to the Parish. The use of technology through Facebook, Website and a projector system in the Church are all used as tools of ongoing formation, evangelization and community involvement. He currently is sowing the seeds to establish a Mission in the Grants Pen community

His concern and love for the less fortunate motivates him to be involved with the Stella Maris Foundation. Mass and monthly Prayer Meetings have been strategies utilized for ongoing evangelization for the Grants Pen area. In 2013, Fr. Howard officiated over another very successful fund-raising dinner at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel, continuing the tradition which was started with Mr. Eddie Shouchair. He is currently the Vicar for Priests, and was appointed by the Archbishop as the Chair for the newly formed Commission for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, and oversees the foreign priests in their inculturation. His ongoing efforts to upgrade the structure of the Church and modify the grounds to be more eco-friendly is evident through the installation of solar panels and proposal for a future water catchment system. Although he is the only Priest at Stella Maris, he takes joy in collaborating with his parishioners to meet the needs of the Parish through discernment, empowerment and decentralization.

*“No great thing is created suddenly, any more than a bunch of grapes or a fig tree. If you tell me that you desire a fig, I answer you that there must be time. Let it blossom, then bear fruit, then ripen.” Epictetus.*

These words aptly describe the over 40 year history of Stella Maris Church. It is fitting that we treasure our past and nurture hope for the future.