

ORIGINS

Once upon a time, a group of Detroit men who wished to make a weekend retreat had to make the long trek to Parma, Ohio, to St. Stanislaus Retreat House. They longed for a retreat house nearer Detroit, and Fr. John Donoher, SJ, encouraged them. He may be considered the first Director of the house (1921-1925).

In 1923 they incorporated as *The Laymen's Retreat League* and bought land in Grosse Pointe Park. But the site lacked public transportation. It was imperative for men without cars to be able to get to the house. So the search for a new site began. Fr. Donoher died in 1925, and Fr. William Cogley succeeded him (1925-1945).

In 1926, the Edsel Ford Estate bought the Grosse Pointe Park property, and the proceeds went toward the purchase of the *Deepdale Estate* on the corner of Woodward and Quarton, midway on the streetcar line between Detroit and Pontiac.

The 39-acre estate had been developed by William Murphy, one of the builders of the Penobscot Building in Detroit. This beautiful, rustic property was the setting of his small farm, and a tributary of the Rouge River ran through it.

Murphy built the manor house, a tile barn for cattle, a caretaker's house, a barn for equipment, and a pump house powered by a waterwheel that fed water via an underground sprinkling system throughout the vast gardens. The estate featured a silo shaped like a lighthouse, from which Mr. Murphy, once a Great Lakes pilot, could survey his domain. Mrs. Murphy, however, couldn't abide country living, so the property was put up for sale.

The Jesuit Provincial, Fr. Jeremiah O'Callaghan, SJ, approved the purchase, and while he said the Jesuit Superior General wished the property and retreat house be owned and controlled by the Jesuits, he left the property and assets under the management of the Laymen's Retreat League. The actual transfer to the Jesuits was made decades later.

The manor house could hold 23 retreatants. Sixteen made the first retreat there under Fr. Cogley on September 23-26, 1926. It was such a struggle to meet costs that Fr. Cogley worked a garden and raised cattle to keep the table supplied. The outdoor Way of the Cross, the Lourdes shrine, and the stone front gateway date from this time.

DISASTER AND REBIRTH

When the depression came in the early 1930's, the expenses became almost insupportable. Then disaster struck. On March 22, 1934 the manor house burned to the ground. Despite the economic difficulties, the retreatants raised the funds to build a new house on the ashes of the old. The cornerstone was laid in early 1935, and the building was completed by August 27, 1936. Fr. Marshall Lochbiler, SJ, directed the first retreat for 31 retreatants, the capacity of the new facility.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Laymen, priests, and some younger boys made regular retreats. In those days men from a single parish would make a retreat together. It would end with Benediction at 4 PM on Sunday and the diocesan pastor normally participated.

Retreatants recall that the heaviest penance was the food. One retreatant remembers overcooked lima beans for breakfast! Table waiters were frequently boys from the University of Detroit High School, working off their punishment for infractions of the school rules.

Fr. Cogley, the "founding father" of Manresa, died on July 2, 1945. But thanks to his twenty years of ministry here, the apostolate of Manresa had taken solid root.

EXPANSION

Retreatants continued to grow in number. In 1951 Fr. Gerald Fitzgibbons, SJ (1945-1952) built the chapel wing with rooms on the second floor, which brought the capacity of the house to 42. Fr. Clement Singer, SJ (1952-1963) considered a second retreat house, but decided to increase Manresa's capacity even more.

Fr. Bernard Wernert, SJ (1963-1977) moved the retreat offices from the Gabriel Richard Building in downtown Detroit onto the Manresa grounds, and formed a committee to plan a new addition which included a basement assembly room. On Palm Sunday, April 3, 1966 ground was broken for the new wing, and on May 21, 1967, 1400 people celebrated the dedication. The house could now hold 70.

From 1961 to 1969 youth retreats, under the guidance of Fr. Paul Cavanaugh, SJ, flourished, and funds were gathered to build a youth retreat house on the property. But the Church and society changed and the facility for boys was cancelled. Most donors left their contributions as a fund to help sustain Manresa through the years that followed. Youth retreats have continued at Manresa especially in the form of high school "Kairos" retreats. Along with other changes ushered in by Vatican II Manresa opened its doors wider and inaugurated retreat programs for women.

GOLDEN JUBILEE

On September 12, 1976 Manresa celebrated its Golden Jubilee with an outdoor Mass at which Bishop Walter Schoenherr presided. Over 1200 people attended, a crowd reminiscent of the grand Corpus Christi celebrations held by Frs. Cogley and Fitzgibbons in the early days of Manresa. The following year for reasons of health Fr. Wernert retired from his 14 years of service to Manresa.

MORE IMPROVEMENTS

In 1977 Fr. Eugene Simon, SJ (1977-1990) became the new Director. In 1979 the dining room was enlarged and joined to the new wing. The chapel was air-conditioned. A second floor "cave" chapel was built. The kitchen and store rooms were enlarged. In 1980 a new dining room was built for the Jesuit community, and Peter Grande donated the statue of *Our Lady of Manresa*. In 1981 the Sacred Heart Court was added, and in 1982 the Administration Wing, with its entrance lobby, Wernert Lounge, and administrative offices, was dedicated. The new main entrance is graced with a statue to the Holy Spirit, the gift of a Jewish family. In 1987 the chapel was enlarged and enhanced with new sanctuary furnishings.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In 1990, Fr. Simon was reassigned and Fr. John McGrail, SJ, became Director for a year, and then Fr. James Riley, SJ, for four years. During this time the lay Advisory Board changed into a full Board of Directors.

In 1995 the Internship in Ignatian Spirituality, which had been functioning at Colombiere Center in Clarkston for 15 years, became part of the Manresa apostolate. This two-year program, grounded in the spirituality of St. Ignatius accepts about 25 new people each year.

In 1995 also Fr. James Serrick, SJ (1995-) succeeded Fr. Riley, who was called to Rome. The whole facility was improved in 1997 to provide: a new kitchen, an integrated fire and smoke alarm system, fire escapes, an elevator, heat controls in all rooms, air-conditioning of the whole building, and rooms for the disabled. The former pump house with its signature waterwheel was converted into a small, rustic chapel. A statue of Our Lady of Montserrat became the focal point of a small first-floor chapel, and the "cave chapel" was relocated on the second floor.

TODAY AND TOMORROW

Today Manresa is home for many different ministries. Weekend and mid-week conference retreats bring in about 2,600 men and women each year. Individually directed retreats, from three to thirty days in duration, take place throughout the year. Cottages on the property frequently house these retreatants. AA and other groups meet regularly at Manresa. The Manresa staff gives ongoing spiritual direction to many. Each year the Ignatian Internship trains up to 50 people of various Christian denominations and backgrounds. Days of Recollection and a variety of workshops and meetings take place throughout the year.

As the new millennium unfolds, we believe that God will continue to bless the work of Manresa. The Fr. John A. McGrail, SJ Endowment campaign and other recent undertakings have put the house on a more solid financial footing.

The conference retreat program will encourage the participation of younger retreatants and strive to fill each retreat so that as many people as possible will be able to take advantage of the graces to be found here. More people want to experience individually directed retreats.

In increasing numbers graduates of the Internship Program reach out each year to minister to God's people, especially the poor. And new and as yet unimagined ways of helping people grow in their relationship with God will be discovered and implemented on this holy ground.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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