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*A Popular History of SSCC in the Bahamas.*

*(Popular Because We as SSCC Were Popular)*

*Reflections by Fr. Michael Kelly, ss.cc.*

*In Ministry in the Bahamas from 1971 to 2010*

*SSCC Community in Ministry in the Bahamas from 1961-2011*

*Part One*

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*Our Sacred Hearts Community has grown in tandem with the Archdiocese/Diocese of Nassau. The Diocese was established in 1960; our Community involvement in ministry began in 1961. We served under the leadership of three Bishops, two of whom became Archbishops, and one of whom is the first Bahamian Archbishop. We shared in their history. They are part of Our Story and we forever a part of Theirs.*

**I**n the “Golden Years”, the first Fifty Years of the Diocese, which celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 2010, our Sacred Hearts Community celebrates its Golden Jubilee of service in 2011. We shared in ministry under Bishop Paul Leonard Hagarty, OSB (1960 – 1981), from the USA; Bishop/Archbishop Lawrence A. Burke, S.J. (1981-2004) from Jamaica, and the current Archbishop Patrick C. Pinder, the first Bahamian Bishop/Archbishop (2004 - Present). The latter two received the benefit of Fr. Stan Kolasa’s, SSCC skills and talents used in the building of the new St. Francis de Sales Church, Abaco, as he used his artistic skills, and creative arts to help renovate, repair and remodel the Hermitage on Cat Island, made famous by the legendary Hermit of Cat Island, Father Jerome Hawes (1897-1956). The skills and talents of Fr. Martin Gomes, ss.cc. were evident in the building of the new St. Joseph’s Church in Nassau, and later the new Parish Center.



THE HERMITAGE ON CAT ISLAND

Bishop Hagarty had invited our beginners to Abaco, while Bishop/Archbishop Burke, gave great support, especially when the St. Francis de Sales Church burned in 1988, and Archbishop Pinder now recognizes the “sad time” of our withdrawal from Ministry in the Bahamas in 2011, as he wrote: *“It is with much sadness ...”* in his letter of November 25, 2010.

**T**he years of SSCC ministry spanned five Superior Generals: Henry Systemans (1958-1970) visited Abaco in 1963; Jan Scheepens (1970-1982); Patrick Bradley (1982-1994) visited Abaco and Nassau in 1985 & 1992; Enrique Losada (1994-2006) visited Bahamas in 2005; and Javier Álvarez-Ossorio (2006 – present) visited the Bahamas in 2010. Provincial Superiors who supported the missions in the Bahamas are: Columban Moran (1948-1952) who was Provincial just prior to our arrival on Abaco; William Condon, (1952-1963); Daniel McCarthy, (1963-1969); Fintan Sheeran, (1969-1976); William Davis, (1976-1982); William Heffron (1982-1988) Richard McNally, (1988-1991); Columban Crotty, (1991-1997); Patrick Joseph Fanning, (1997-2000) David Reid, (2000-2006); and William Petrie (2006-2011).

In 1961 in the USA, the Civil Rights *“Peaceful Freedom Riders”* rode buses into the Deep South, in an attempt to integrate and bring equal rights to people, black and white. 300 Peaceful Freedom Riders were put in prison, especially in Parchman Prison in Jackson, Mississippi. More than 400 black and white Americans risked their lives, and the chance of savage beatings and imprisonment, as they travelled together. Federal National Guards had protected them in Alabama, but as they came to Mississippi singing *“Buses are Coming”* they were not given a *Welcome*, but only *Violence*.

**I**t was in 1961 that a *Welcome* was given when our SSCC members first put their footprints into the missionary sands and soil of the Bahamas, on the Island of Abaco, one of a cluster of islands, all beautifully belonging to the Family Islands. It lies in the northern section of the Bahamas and from north to south the island is approximately 120 miles in length. When the roads were not graded or paved, this presented a challenge to drivers. Care needed to be taken lest the potholes became pitfalls, and many a vehicle lost the battle, with punctured tires and broken windows. The Eucharistic Sacrifice was celebrated regularly at St. Francis de Sales Church in Marsh Harbour, and at Sts. Mary & Andrew Church in Treasure Cay.

An early report from 1961-1962 by Fr. Damien Veary to the SSCC Community is adapted here:

***“The present status during this off season is as follows. We were able to reach the following in our trucks: Marsh Harbour – 400 people: Catholics: 12 Bahamian, 6 American; ... Dunders Town: - 200 people: Catholics: 6; ... Murphy Town – 150 people: No Catholics; Lake City: 300 people: 9 Catholics; Spring City – 100 people: No Catholics; Campbell Town: - 55 people: All Catholics (Haitians) ... S & M Farms; 150 people: All Catholics (Haitians). Snake City: headquarters for Owens-Illinois Corporation - (eleven miles from Marsh Harbour): Catholics: 4 Americans, 5 Canadians; Lake City (twenty miles further north into the woodland); Dunders Town on the waterfront four miles from Marsh Harbour; Murphy Town is eight miles further on; Beyond Murphy Town is woodland with no roads or settlements for forty miles; Hope Town on Elbow Cay is located just off the coast of Marsh Harbour and new developments are underway there. The development will go on for years. At the other end is White Sound under development by Mr. Arens (Catholic); The other Cay, Man-O-War, is being developed at both ends with the native population living in the center. Burl Ives has a home on Hope Town. On June 6<sup>th</sup> .... I went aboard a transport freighter which visits all the ports of Great and Little Abaco ... all the passengers were Bahamians ... I had hoped to offer Mass on the boat, but this was not possible as the water was quiet rough. I went ashore at Green Turtle Cay ... met Anglican priest, Fr. Jones ... we had tea and crackers together ... There are about 450 people on island ... no Catholics ... others are Episcopalians, Pentecostals, Plymouth Brethren and Holy Rollers. The boat left for Cooper’s Town (northern part of Abaco) ... About 550 people ... no Catholics. Others are Baptists, Episcopalians, Pentecostals, Federated Brethren. Visited by boat Cedar Harbour ... 80 people, all Holy Rollers, also very poor. Later it was Wood Cay on Little Abaco; 100 people, no Catholics. Grand Cay has about 150 people, with a Baptist and a Methodist Church. After other visits I arrived back at Marsh Harbour on the eve of the Feast of the Sacred Heart ... asking His blessings upon this great new adventure of our Congregation.”***

**I**n more recent times the farm attached to the Treasure Cay area had its small church, Queen of Peace, clustered among the orange trees and citrus, where Mass was celebrated regularly. Periodically, home Masses were celebrated on Green Turtle Cay and Man-O-War Cay, Hope Town. Just a short ferry boat ride on Albury’s Ferry from Marsh Harbour, was the place for the regular Sunday “*Outdoor Mass Liturgy*”, with the beautiful sky and sea as a backdrop. Over the years our men in ministry went north, south, east and west throughout Abaco Island to celebrate the Liturgy and connect with people, residents, immigrants, farm workers, tourists and visitors, people from the Bahamas, from Haiti, from the USA, from Canada, Europe, North and South America, and other places across the globe. The early years of ministry were connected with, though not limited to, migrant farm workers employed at the BAIL Sugar Company, south of Marsh Harbour, but it closed in the 1970’s.

The setting around St. Francis de Sales, Marsh Harbour, was a mixture and mingling of the rich and the poor, the well-to-do and the needy. We thank our benefactors for their generosity to the Church and its peoples. Some seed money, the gift of Bishop Hagarty back in 1961, was \$500.00. In the early days, a family provided a place for the Church to gather, the home of Fanny and Dora Archer at Marsh Harbour. Others, like William D. Edwards, his brother and family gave land on which the Church could be constructed. Leonard Thompson provided transportation for materials. The Catholic Church Extension Society provided \$10,000.00 for the St. Francis de Sales Church. By January 1963 plans for the new church were approved and the cost of \$15,000.00 was paid to Mr. Arens toward construction.



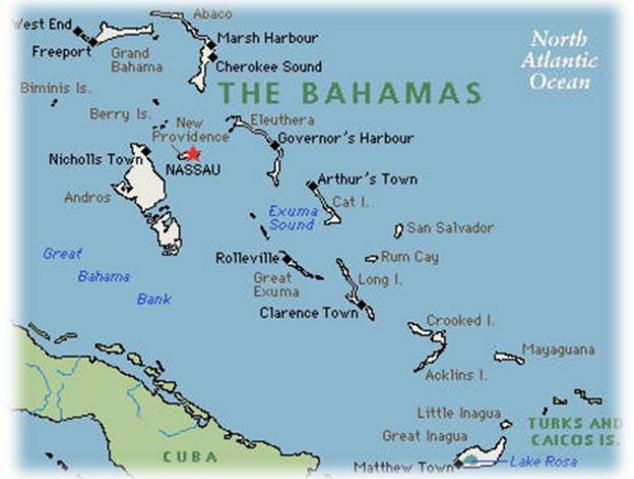
ST. FRANCIS DE SALES. MARSH HARBOUR

The church at Treasure Cay, donated by Mr. Ted Munchek in memory of his parents, hence the name "*Mary & Andrew*", was built in 1972. A visitor to Treasure Cay, David Price, later provided a large school bus, for the "*Catholic*" Church to transport its scattered members. Never mind if they dropped the "h" out of Catholic on the outside of the bus. It's not the first time the "h" was knocked out of Catholics. The blessings of God were extended through the generosity of many benefactors. Remember them all with gratitude and prayer. At all church locations the choirs and congregations took their singing seriously, as voices vibrated through the space for worship of God, whether indoors or out.. Visitors expressed delight and amazement at the depth of faith and sincerity expressed through song, worship and divine praise.

Lay leadership was evident, and shared wisdom came from Parish Councils, groups and organizations. Truman and Lynn Major worked with the Church on Hope Town, volunteering their time and skills. They have seen different SSCC members come and go, but they have been a constant presence and support. At Marsh Harbour, Parnell Darville assisted the Church in its growth, as did Odiles Paul, a lay leader of the Haitian Community. At Treasure Cay, Ann Bootle graciously gave of her time and gifts, and at the Farm where Haitians were employed, Robert Guerrier was a most active and generous lay leader. Later, in the 1990's, Ray Chandler gave important work, service, advice and skill as the new St. Francis de Sales Church was built. Young and old participated in a variety of ways according to their talents and treasures. Many helpful people—local, immigrant and visitors, gave of their time, treasure and talent sharing together and spreading the love of God and neighbor, guided by the love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

The Bahamas is a “*Nation of Islands*” and the Ministry of Tourism has its slogan connected with 700 islands. The Nation celebrated its Independence on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1973, and happily recalls that event yearly.

Places with a (\*) are places in which our SSCC members have ministered. Starting in the north we have Abaco, (\*) roughly 200 miles from the U.S. borders yet close to Grand Bahama Island, about 105 miles from the United States, with Bimini (\*) the closest to the United States, about 50 miles. South of Grand Bahama are the Berry Islands, and moving to the right we have Eleuthera (\*). The capital, Nassau, located on New Providence Island, (\*) one of the smallest islands, is close to the largest island, Andros. The cluster of islands in the South East include Cat Island, San Salvador, Conception Island, Great Exuma, Rum Cay, Long Island (\*), Ragged Island, Crooked Island, Mayaguana, Acklins Island, and way down south Little Inagua and Great Inagua.



The “*Bahamas Handbook*” for 2010 gave population figures of 209,505 for 1980; 255,049 for 1990; and 303,611 for 2000; Figures for New Providence for 2000 are 210,832; for Grand Bahama 46,994 and for Abaco 13,170; In 2010 the population of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas is listed as 305,655, with 60% living on New Providence Island (Nassau), and 85% black, and 15<sup>th</sup> white of mixed. The current Governor General since April 14, 2010, is Sir Arthur Foulkes. The Catholic Church has a presence on New Providence of about 11 parishes; on Grand Bahama with four parishes with a Catholic Population. In addition, listed alphabetically, islands with Catholic populations are Andros, Bimini, Cat Island, Eleuthera, Exuma, Long Island, and San Salvador. The 2010 Liturgical Calendar & Directory listed a Catholic population of 49,015. That represents almost 50,000 for the 50 years as a Diocese/Archdiocese. As of 2011 the following parishes have no regular priestly presence: Andros; Bimini; Cat Island; Exuma; San Salvador. They are attended to by Deacons, Sisters, Lay Leaders or Lay Catechists, with a priest “*visiting*” from time to time. Deacon Frank Tremblay and his wife Ginny previously connected with our SSCC Retreat House in Wareham, are now in Ministry on Andros Island.



FRANK & GINNY TREMBLAY