

HISTORY OF ST. MARY'S CHOIR

If you regularly attend 9:45 Mass, you're familiar with the choir which sings at that Mass from September through June. But you may not know much about this group, which has been a part of St. Mary's for more than half a century. Four of the current members (Lola Marino, Pat Gagan, Sue Stubbs and Gene Donofrio) started singing with St. Mary's choir as children, although Lola admits to being "thrown out for talking during practice." Organist/choir director at the time was Gerald Conroy, but the choir dissolved upon his death in December 1964. In the late 1960's, Msgr. Cuffney requested that a choir be once again formed, and it was restarted under the direction of John Stuart, with Kay Askew at the organ. Several of the current members joined at that time. Mr. Stuart was followed by directors Paul Brechue and Beverly Navarro.

In 1972, West Middle School music teacher Bob Stabile took over the choir and many more of the current members joined under his leadership. A graduate of SUNY Potsdam, Bob's unusual music style led the choir down many new paths. Under his direction, the choir learned the difficult Carl Wilhowsky arrangement of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," which was Msgr. Cuffney's favorite hymn and often requested by him. Bob's talent and knowledge of Ragtime, Vaudeville and English music hall numbers was also enjoyed by the choir and Msgr. Cuffney at many social events.

Bob left for the West Coast in 1976 and was eventually replaced by David Correll, who remained Choir Director until May, 2008. For the first ten years of David's tenure, the choir performed annually at a concert in celebration of St. Cecilia, martyred Patron Saint of Music. During that time, they tackled such works as Henry Purcell's "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day," Antonio Vivaldi's "Gloria," and Gabriel Faure's "Requiem." David had introduced the choir to music from early Gregorian to modern, and in addition to English and the Latin you might expect from a Catholic choir, they've also sung in Italian, German, French, Spanish, Hebrew and Polish. Holidays generally feature a wide range of music including traditional favorites as well as new pieces. Midnight Mass at Christmas is preceded by a half hour of music by both the choir and soloists.

Colleen Liggett joined St. Mary's as Choir Director and Cantor in September 2008. She has degrees from Eastman School of Music and Rutgers University, and additional study in Gregorian Chant, medieval song, vocal technique, and choral conducting. She regularly attends the International Medieval Congress. She had been Cantor at St. Anne Church in Rochester since 1997, and for her last two years (2006-2008), directed their choir program. She had been Director of the Latin Mass Choir which sang for the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite, and for many years taught Renaissance Singing at the Hochstein School of Music. In 1999 she founded *Schola Feminarum*, a Rochester-based women's chant ensemble. In addition to her church work, Ms Liggett performs many types of music. Since the late 1980's she has directed *Musica Transatlantica*, selecting singers to join her in presenting medieval and renaissance vocal music. She is known in the Rochester area for early music concerts and theater productions, for singing Shaker Spirituals, and for singing and playing traditional music. In addition she teaches singing, plays several early and folk instruments, and teaches 5-string banjo.

Organist Muriel Hickey, originally from Syracuse, is a graduate of Syracuse University, with a Bachelor of Music Degree and a Master of Science in Elementary Education. She has studied with such notables as William S. O'Brien, Will O. Headlee and David Johnson, and is a member of the Syracuse chapter of the American Guild of Organists. In 2000, Muriel traveled with a group of St. Mary's parishioners to Oberammergau, Germany, for the Passion Play. While on this tour, she had

the chance to try out organs in several European churches. Muriel has been organist at St. Mary's since 1971. In December 2003, she was presented with a plaque commemorating the start of her fourth decade of service to St. Mary's.

Choir Directors/Organists/Cantors at Saint Mary's:

Gerald Conroy, James Hennessey, John Stuart, Beverly Navarro,
Paul Brechue, Jr., Robert Stabile, Kay Askew, Darwin Parker,
Muriel Hickey, David Correll. Colleen Liggett

The following are the current members of the choir and the year they joined.

Colleen Liggett, Director (2008)
Muriel Hickey, Organist (1971)
Bonny Blair (1979)
Dia Carabajal (1997)
Janet Carroll (2004)
Gene Donofrio (1949)
Pat Gagan (1942)
Paris Hanson (2008)
Diane Howard (1979)
Pat Jensen (1960, 1978 as adult) Gary Lalonde (2005)
Sherene LaMontagne (2009)
Therese LaMontagne (2009)
Windy Nguyen (2010)
Lola Marino (1952)
Carol McNeill (1992)
Barbara Murphy (1972)
Michael Nye (1986)
Theresa Oughterson (1970)
Ron Pease (2002)
Adrienne Peltz, flute (2008)
Aric Potter (2009)
Andrea Price (2004)
Roseann Spinelli (1999)
Susan Stubbs (1965)
Marie Taylor (1988) Steven Taylor (1988)
Marchell Teodecki (1972)



St. Mary's Choir, Easter Sunday 2011

HOW DO I JOIN THE CHOIR?

The choir rehearses on Thursday at 7:00 in the choir loft. Reading music is not a requirement for singing with the choir. Everyone is welcome to join-if you're not sure, try out a rehearsal or two. There are no auditions, although Colleen might ask you to sing a note or two to hear your range. Basses and Tenors are especially welcome, and will receive a standing ovation just for showing up!

PRESERVING OUR HISTORY

The choir is currently in the process of compiling a scrapbook. If you have any photos or other memorabilia which would be of interest to the choir, we would like to borrow it to make copies for our records. We'll make sure you get it back. Just contact any choir member!

ST. MARY'S CHOIR ON TOUR!

Over the years, the choir has been invited to sing at numerous festivals, dedications, and celebrations including weddings, baptisms, and funerals in and out of the Auburn area. They've often sung at our Confirmation and First Communion Celebrations. They've sung in over half the churches in Auburn, including St. Francis, Holy Family, St. Alphonsus, Sacred Heart, Ss. Peter & Paul, Trinity Methodist,

First Presbyterian, First United Methodist, the Church of the Nazarene, and Westminster Presbyterian. They've also traveled to St. Patrick's in Aurora and St. Patrick's in Seneca Falls. In addition, the choir was chosen in the 1980's to sing during the Christ Mass at the Cathedral in Rochester and for a Diocesan festival at the Keuka College Chapel.

Locally they've performed for various celebrations at Hoopes Park, Cayuga County Nursing Home, Auburn Nursing Home, and Mercy Health and Rehabilitation Center. They've greeted area residents with Christmas Carols on the steps of City Hall after the Thanksgiving Parade and in Emerson Park at the Festival of Lights, and have sung while riding on a float for the County Centennial parade. Choir members sang in 1989 at the Ecumenical Service for the CANUS games in Auburn. They've celebrated various holidays at Willard Chapel and most recently sang for the dedication of the Mausoleum at St. Joseph's Cemetery. And twice, at the invitation of the Catholic Chaplain, they've sung at Mass for inmates in Auburn Correctional Facility.

Many members of the choir take part in annual Messiah concerts and Interfaith Choir Festivals, several of which have been held at St. Mary's. In 1999, the choir hosted a concert featuring the Auburn Chamber Orchestra and the combined choirs of Auburn churches performing Vivaldi's "Gloria," which was attended by nearly 700 people. In December 2002, the choir hosted the New York Baroque Orchestra in a performance of Handel's "Messiah." The piece was sung by members of the Marcellus Chorale joined by over 100 other local vocalists including St. Mary's Choir. The performance was a re-sounding sellout with standing room only-and over 100 people were turned away! On December 21, 2003, members of the choir joined other local artists onstage at Cayuga Community College in "Christmas in the Finger Lakes," a celebration of song and dance, produced locally by Sean McLeod of New York Institute of Dance. The choir participated in the 2008 Founders' Day Parade in Auburn and sing at the annual BID (Business Improvement District) Christmas Celebration in downtown Auburn.

RECORDING HISTORY

Several recordings of various concerts and holidays have been made over the years. These include record albums in 1977 and 1978 of the St. Cecilia's Concerts. In a 5-hour marathon session in the church on May 28, 1998, the most popular selections in the choir's repertoire were recorded for production of a CD titled "The Bells of St. Mary's." This recording was dedicated to Anita Gower and Jack Dalziel, choir members who had recently died. A follow-up album, "The Christmas Bells of St. Mary's," was produced the following year. Tapes and CD's of both are still available at the church office.