

THE STORY OF THE STATION CHURCHES

The story of the Station Churches traces its roots as far back as the late second or early third century. The Bishop of Rome would celebrate the liturgies of the Church year at various churches throughout the city. Since Rome was made up of such diverse communities of many cultures, this practice served to unify the various groups into a more cohesive whole. Once Christianity became legal in 313 A.D. and public worship was permitted, feast days were celebrated at churches with a special link to that celebration. Many of the churches of Rome held the relics of the early Christian martyrs and the memory of the early history of the church in Rome. As time passed the schedule of these visits, which earlier had followed an informal order, took on a more formalized structure. By the last half of the fifth century, a fairly fixed calendar was developed, having the order of the places at which the pope would celebrate Mass within the city of Rome throughout the year. During Lent the stations were originally organized so that the Masses would be held in different areas of the city each day.

The order of the Station Church's has undergone several changes over time. The current order followed in Rome was fixed around the time of the Council of Trent, with a few changes made since that time. Other cities such as Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Milan once had similar station liturgies. Today Rome is the only city that continues these in some regular form during the Lenten season.

The Station Churches come down to us as a monument of the early church, a living connection to those days when the witness of the martyrs was still fresh and the echo of the apostles voices could still be heard in the city streets.

The Station Churches of Mercer County is an opportunity for us to glean a bit of history as we make our way to the various churches throughout our county, as we move from church to church we can imagine the thousands of people who have journeyed to these churches especially during the Lenten season to offer their prayer and worship. We can unite our prayers with theirs and join our voices with this great crowd of witnesses who over the past two hundred years have found many ways to give glory to God, and public witness to their Catholic Faith. During this Lenten season, we can intensify our resolve to be a sign of unity and an instrument of peace in Mercer county and throughout the world.

Each Church that we will visit has a special history and its own particular treasures. Each has been the place of baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals and a place where countless numbers have encountered God. This Lenten pilgrimage takes us to Holy Ground throughout Mercer County. Some of our Churches will provide a history, some will provide a tour, some may offer a cup of water and others may not. The Churches are welcome to plan out their evening as they wish. Join in as many visits as you are able, asking God's blessing on all who journey with you through this Lenten Pilgrimage.

