



## *St. Mary of Magdala Church*

*An Ecumenical Catholic Community*

### **A HISTORY OF ST. MARY OF MAGDALA CHURCH**

Around the year 1999 Jim and Marie, as their young daughters both moved toward the college scene, began to experience a call to return more fully to ministry, specifically to the ministry of retreat and spirituality work. The idea came to them to set up a retreat center by finding an Inn that could pay its mortgage by operating for a limited season. It could then be used as a retreat center for the rest of the year. They did a lot of research on what it would mean to run an inn. They also began to explore inns for sale throughout New England. In early 2001 they began a physical search for the right inn. With the help of a close friend who knew a lot about real estate and development they finally found the Harbor Breeze Inn in Harwich Port.

In June 2002 papers were signed and Jim and Marie became the owners of the Harbor Breeze Inn. The very first summer, after delving into inn management, they began to set up the first season of Evensong Retreat & Spirituality Center. What that meant for the first year was coming up with a room to serve as a chapel. We took the furniture from Room 3 and moved it into another room for storage. With some creativity we turned what had simply been a "one room suite" into a small chapel able to accommodate up to twelve people, and we began having Mass and prayer in that room. Just Marie and Jim at first, but then a few people (some still with us!) began to join in from the wider community.



The chapel in Room 3 remained in use for Evensong from 2002 through spring of 2005. In March of 2005 Marie was ordained a deacon in that chapel by RCWP Bishop Patricia Fresen (picture below). The early chapel was retired in 2005 when our present chapel was dedicated. Harbor Breeze Inn renamed Room 3 to the "Cathedral Room" in 2002 - an 'inside' joke!

Later that year Marie was ordained as a priest in international waters on the St. Lawrence River. The timing of her ordination coincided with the chapel under construction at Evensong. In fact, Marie's first mass was in St. Mary of Magdala Chapel before it was fully completed - we set up lawn chairs on the cement floor!



There was quite a bit of publicity about both, and more and more people began to attend Mass. When the Chapel was dedicated in October of 2005 there were some 60 people in attendance. For the first couple of years we ranged from 12 - 18 people on any given weekend, and continued to grow slowly. In Lent of 2006 the fledgling community spent the season praying about whether or not we wished to consider ourselves an "intentional" community. That means that we were discerning whether or not we simply gathered here each week at random, or did we wish to commit ourselves to one another as a community that gathered intentionally to worship. The community decided that we were intentionally gathering together to worship in our Catholic Heritage. A small group was formed and commissioned to write an "Identity Statement.," which later became our Mission Statement. We have adopted the custom of reciting it together each Sunday after the Creed.

## Part II

In 2007 Habitat for Humanity began a project in Harwich to build a small neighborhood of homes. All of the Harwich Churches were invited to join together in what is called "An Apostle's Build," which means that the Churches together would take responsibility for completing one house. All the churches agreed enthusiastically, including our community. We committed ourselves to help financially, with volunteer labor to engage the build, and other volunteers to help feed the workers. Work on the project began in summer of 2008.



One Sunday, some of the volunteers came back describing a problem they had. When people asked what church they were from, they didn't have an easy response. They replied, "Well, we meet at Evensong Retreat Center's Chapel." But that didn't really explain it. We began again to pray together to better discern who we really are. After several weeks we met to see what the fruits of the prayer were. What came out of that meeting was that we would now call ourselves St. Mary of Magdala Church, for as our Identity Statement said, "...as the church in this place, at this time..." Jim and Marie asked the community if they thought the Chapel should be renamed to St. Mary of Magdala Church? The response was clear: "No - WE are the Church; we meet in the chapel." And so, St. Mary of Magdala Church - an Ecumenical Catholic Community came to be.

At this time, we had grown to somewhere around 20 members. We continued to gather each Sunday for Mass, and we began to establish some customs and traditions. For example, though we continued to operate informally at this time, the community started to meet twice per year so that everyone could have a voice in any decisions that affected us all. Led by Jim and Marie, we also began to develop a good and regular sense of liturgical practice, and traditions that we engaged each year during the various liturgical seasons.

The community continued to grow slowly, and each summer we added additional members to our worship. The summer members began to become "regulars" who would be here each year. We involved our first altar servers or "acolytes," and we even had a young person who requested to become a candidate for Confirmation. The community worked with Ben Swiszc for a year, and he was confirmed while we celebrated the Easter Vigil. By this time, we were approaching a regular attendance of about 25 people at Sunday Mass.



### **Part III**

In Lent of 2010 Jim and Marie began to get a sense that the Lord was calling St. Mary of Magdala Church to another step of some sort, so they approached the community and shared this information, asking everyone to begin praying and trying to discern if that was the case, and what that "next step" might be. At its spring community meeting the community considered how God was calling us to live out our calling for the next six months. It was decided

that we should consider organizing ourselves more formally, and an Advisory Committee was formed to look at what that might involve, including registration as a non-profit.

The Advisory Committee met through the spring and summer of 2010. It submitted its report and recommendations to the entire community in early September. On September 26, 2010 the community met and accepted the Advisory Committee's recommendations. This meant that a Finance Committee was established to begin the process of registering as a non-profit, and to set up a community budget. The Focus Circle was also established, a group that was to serve as a permanent successor to the Advisory Committee (see the separate article on this group in the September 2012 newsletter).

In October of 2010 Jim was consecrated as Coadjutor Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Diocese of America. The ordination took place in Harwich at Pilgrim Congregational Church, and representatives from other Churches in Harwich were present. Present at the ordination were Bishop Peter Brennan (Prime Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Diocese of America) and Bishop Andrea Johnson (Roman Catholic Womanpriest Bishop of the Eastern Region). At the end of the ceremony St. Mary of Magdala Church formally asked the two bishops to witness their call of the Revs. James and Marie David to serve as co-pastors of St. Mary of Magdala Church.



In December of 2010 the entire community voted to adopt the by-laws and budget crafted by the Finance Committee and file applications with the Secretary of State's Office. In January of 2011 St. Mary of Magdala Church became a registered not-for profit corporation in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Sunday Mass continued to see a gradual increase in attendance, and summer of 2011 produced some of our most crowded to date. In autumn of 2012 the Finance Committee asked the community to approve of a process by which, each year, parishioners would be asked to present the Finance Committee with their financial commitment for the next year. This allowed the Finance Committee to come up with a viable budget for the coming year, which includes compensating our pastors and paying rent for the space we use.

In March of 2012 the film Pink Smoke Over the Vatican became available on the Cape. Some three hundred people attended the first showing at the Cape Cinema, and several other showings in Harwich were well attended. As a result, people became aware of St. Mary of Magdala Church. Many people came by to check out who we are, and quite a few of them have stayed so that our community currently consists of some 58 members.

In December of 2012 the Bishops of the Ecumenical Catholic Diocese of America (ECDA) and the St. Barnabas Mission (SBM) met in synod to discuss a path forward for these two entities which have been in partnership since the 1980's. Each organization has the mission of developing and supporting local ministries. The synod agreed upon a plan which included that Bishop James David, the coadjutor Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Diocese of America, would be released from his duties as coadjutor Bishop to establish an independent Ecumenical Catholic Diocese of New England and to serve as the Prime Bishop of that diocese. Several New England priests and their various ministries, including St. Mary of Magdala Church, are now affiliated with the Ecumenical Catholic Diocese of New England.

In 2013 Jim and Marie talked about future plans to eventually sell the property. The question arose as to what SMMC would do at that time. An advisory committee was formed to explore what we might do should we have to move. Input was sought from parishioners, and the report from the committee recommended three steps. First, that we have a plan for what type of space our parish would need and want should we move from here. The committee itself sought input on that and a basic plan for space was developed. Second, that we have an interim space to which we might move should that become a sudden necessity. That step was completed by negotiating such a contingency with St. Peter's Lutheran Church. Third, that a small capital campaign be undertaken that we might be financially ready should we need to move. That campaign was successfully undertaken, and was completed in Dec. of 2016.

## **Part IV - Summer 2017**

In summer of 2017 Jim and Marie sold the property known as Allen Harbor Breeze Inn, and transitioned Evensong Retreat Center to Evensong Ministries. The parish community engaged a plan that had been in place for some time, and moved to St. Peter's Lutheran Church in East Harwich. St. Mary of Magdala Church gathers for weekly Mass on Saturdays at 4:00pm, at St. Peter's.

Where are we headed in the future? We will continue as we have for the past 15 years - praying and working together to discern how God is calling us to live out our mission statement each year. Over the years, many among us have said at different times that what is happening here is clearly God's work. Yet it is our work too - co-creating with God all that St. Mary of Magdala Church is meant to be.

