

How It All Began

As related by Sr. Mary Elizabeth Lagoy - 1978

In 1978, Fr. Tom McKeon approached Anna Dyer with the thought of having a celebration of Native American culture at St. Lucy's. Anna brought together a group of Natives that included Julie Daniels, Josie Shenandoah, Mary Garrow, Madeline George and Sandra Wolfe. In this same year, Fr. Carey was assigned to St. Lucy's Parish. The first celebration was in December. Sr. Kateri Mitchell and her group from Akwesasne came down to help celebrate.

In the summer of 1979, Fr. Carey, through the office of Bishop Harrison, applied to the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions for a grant to work with Native Americans.

On November 16, 1979 there was a Native American Memorial Liturgy. The Onondaga Gospel Singers and Sr. Kateri Mitchell's Akwesasne Mohawk Singers and Dancers came to help celebrate this Native Mass.

In January of 1980, Native People were invited to St. Lucy's for a meeting at the Rectory.

Anna Dyer, Cissy O'Brien, Peter Buckshot, Sarah Hassenplug, Sandra Wolfe, Peg Bova, and Julie Daniels were among those in attendance. At this meeting, that I attended, Fr. Carey explained that they had received a grant of evangelization to work with Native People. The questions that were asked were; who did we expect to evangelize? How were we going to evangelize? What about Kateri Tekakwitha's Beatification?

I said I was willing to work with them and assist them in coordinating a group. Using the networking method, each person at that first meeting agreed to bring someone else to the next meeting.

After a couple of meetings, we learned about Kateri Tekakwitha's Beatification set for June 22, 1980.

On April 18, 1980 a Liturgy was held for the 300th Anniversary of Kateri Tekakwitha. At that Mass was Fr. James Carey, Fr. Joseph McBride, SJ, Vice Postulator, Fr. Ronald Schults, OFM from Fonda and Fr. George Wurzt. Akwesasne Mohawk Singers and Dancers were there along with our own Kateri Tekakwitha Akokiohkwa Singers and Dancers.

The name of the committee at that time was Kateri Tekakwitha Akokiohkwa. Mary Eunice Spagnol did the monologue on the Life of Kateri as "She Might Tell Her Story from Heaven." Delores Kelly sang the Lord's Prayer and Marla Wolfe signed it in Indian. Lorri Bova was the flutist. Readers and servers were all Native People.

Raffles were held to defray the cost of the trip to Rome, Italy in June for the Beatification at the Vatican. Those in attendance were Peggy Bova, Anna Dyer, Eleanor Edwards, Loretta Harris, Sarah Hassenplug, Christina Burns, Melissa Miller, Monica Cook and I.

Bishop Harrison came to say a Mass at St. Lucy's on June 15, 1980 and commissioned the group to represent the Diocese of Syracuse.

In the Fall of 1980 a request was made to the Parish to renovate the choir room that was being used for daily liturgy, into a Kateri Chapel. St. Lucy's Parish Council put it to a vote, that was overwhelmingly approved and the work began. Raffles were held and people canvassed the neighborhood stores for donations. Over eight

thousand dollars was collected. Evenings saw Native People sanding and varnishing all the woodwork. The entire room was renovated; a new carpet for the floor, wainscoting put in, two Tiffany style circular stain glass windows were designed by James Snyder (Mohawk) and the glasswork was done by James Freeman of Tiffanique, Ltd. The Kateri Mural was done by Ophelia Mitchell (Onondaga/Mohawk), the Woodland Scene by James Snyder, Circular Black Ash Splint/Sweetgrass weaving by Evelyn Tarbell (Mohawk), Silver Maple Altar by James Stout of Landscape Architecture, John Gaza did the beamed ceiling and Stewart Kresklay installed the carpet.

On June 12, 1981 the dedication of the Kateri Tekakwitha Chapel at Saint Lucy's Church was held. Bishop Thomas Costello celebrated the Mass with many other priests concelebrating. About 15 red stoles were made for the celebrants by Harriet Ellis, Peg Bova, Julie Daniels and Josie Shenandoah.

November 22, 1981 we held the annual Memorial Liturgy that has since become the Fallen Leaves Mass.

On April 24, 1982 the annual Kateri Tekakwitha Mass and Feast was held. In addition to the regular Liturgy, the Kateri Dramatization was enacted by Native Americans. This was written and directed by Sarah Hassenplug assisted by myself with Shirley Lockwood as the drama advisor. The lighting technician was Edward Conley.

December 1982 we began the Christmas Party for the Native American children.

The Tekakwitha Notes Newsletter had begun and by-laws were adopted for the committee.

During all this time, I made daily visits to the elderly and sick Native Americans. Committee members were also trained to do home visitations by Della Chartrand in 1982.

I had been given a first class Kateri Tekakwitha Relic by my community that I presented to the Kateri Committee for its use.

My feeling was that "these women were dedicated in their own way. They were a group of Holy women with a purpose and wishing to love God and Kateri. They had tremendous energy and devotion to do most anything."

After I left in December of 1982, Della Chartrand took over the home visitations for a while.

This is only a condensed version of Sr. Lagoy's memories that are too numerous to mention here. Her letter was filled with wonderful recollections that left the reader in awe of the tireless efforts, strength and dedication of the people that made it all possible. We honor them today.