



Father Narcisse Martin

Servant of God, Pastor of St. Peter's

Father Narcisse Martin, S.S, professor, theologian, pastor, served for 29 years as pastor of St. Peter's Church. From 1894 until his death in 1923 at age 78, Father Martin devoted his life to the spiritual well-being of the people of St. Peter's Parish – African-American, Native American, and White alike. His extraordinary devotion to serving God through the people of our parish laid the foundation for our church as we know it today.

There is little reason to think that in 1894 a priest with the credentials of Father Martin would be found in a parish like St. Peter's. It had a small congregation dispersed over a large area, requiring long buggy rides. It was poor and had few assets beyond the overgrown, run-down farm on which the church building stood. It was surrounded by Protestant churches. So the question remains: What brought an eminent theologian and scholar to such an isolated parish?

As our current pastor, Msgr. Parent, pondered this question, he recognized an opportunity for our parish to more fully explore the life and service of Father Martin. When Alain Colliou, a French-speaking seminarian, was assigned to St. Peter's last summer, a project was born! At Msgr. Parent's request, Deacon Colliou and parishioner Sandy McGraw teamed up to recapture the life and times of Father Martin to bring his spirit alive for our parish.

There is much to learn, but here is a thumbnail sketch of what we know. The spiritual journey and work of Father Martin as it relates to his time in Southern Maryland had its roots in his early life with his family in France. He was one of twelve children born to a family noted for public service and concern for the poor. He was not the only cleric in his family. His uncle was also a Sulpician theologian, and two of his sisters became Sisters of Charity.

While Father Martin's career as a Sulpician professor and theologian began in France, he later emigrated to Canada, where he became a noted professor at the Grand Seminary in Montreal. It was there that he authored a *Treatise on the Blessed Sacrament*, a highly regarded book published in 1882. Not long after its publication, Father Martin left Canada and arrived in Baltimore at St. Mary's Seminary. After three years of teaching, Father Martin asked to be assigned as Chaplain of St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore, a facility that served the poor and indigent.

This was an unlikely choice for a noted theologian – to forsake classrooms and learning for sick rooms and suffering. And, after nine years at St. Agnes, our former pastor made an even more unlikely request – to be transferred to St. Peter's Parish in Charles County, a train ride and a world away from his life in Baltimore.

Father Martin took our parish with its dilapidated church and its neglected congregation and infused it with vitality. As was written by many, his zeal was untiring. He devoted all of his time and much of his own money to bringing the people of his parish to God. He was dedicated to seeing that sacraments were administered, regardless of time, place or weather. He rarely left the parish for fear that his parishioners would think he might not return. And he devoted the rest of his life to the men, women, and children of St. Peter's.

Without question Father Martin was a servant of God. As Jesus asked, he dedicated his life to feeding God's lambs, tending His sheep -- first as a professor, then as a theologian, and finally as a pastor. Wherever God's work took him, be it in a classroom, at a bedside, or on a tobacco field, Father Martin was there, serving with love, committed for life. *May his soul rest in peace and may his spirit inspire new generations of Christians!*