The Missionary Apostolate

Bishop John A. Duffy (1937-1944) conceived of a program to evangelize the rural areas of his Diocese when he read about a program whereby a French bishop had some of his priests trained specially for rural evangelization. Bishop Duffy was so impressed with this idea that he decided to do something similar. His idea gradually broadened into the concept of training the priest and then developing a missionary clergy.

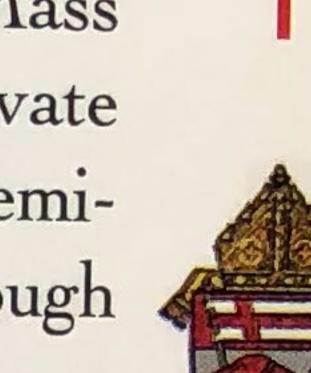
In 1964 the Rev. John M. Ryan summarized the development of this program in the 25th anniversary booklet prepared on the Missionary Apostolate:

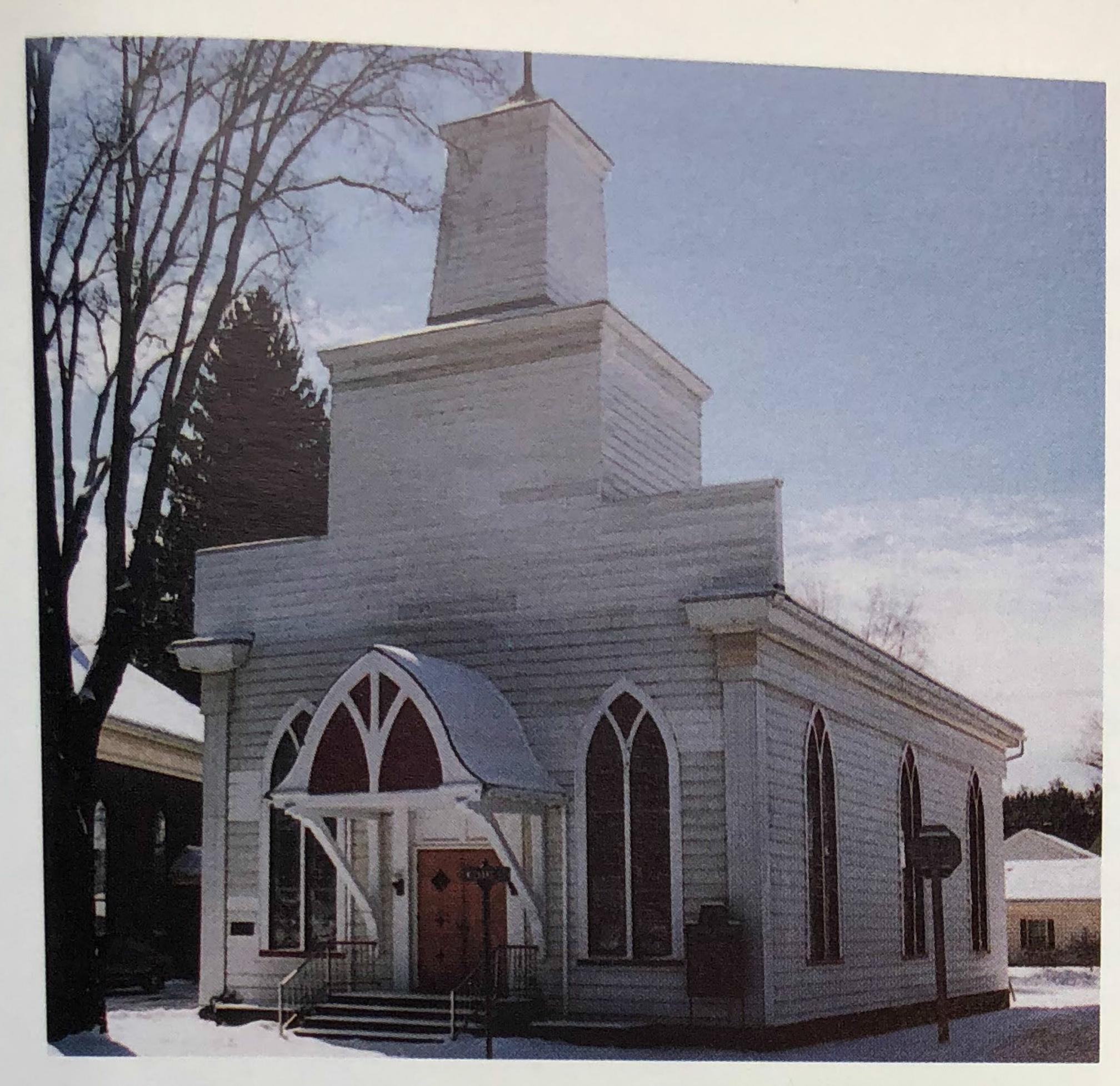
The missionary apostolate traces its origin to the instruction sent by Bishop Duffy to Father James J. Navagh, pastor of Our Lady of Mt.. Carmel Church, Brant, New York, on September 6, 1939. The bishop expressed his desire to form mission areas within the Diocese and directed Father Navagh to begin the preliminary steps in their development. He selected the area in which he felt there was the greatest need and outlined the purpose of the program and the method to be followed. The area selected for the initial activity was principally Chautauqua County, exclusive of those sections in which the Church was well established. The Missionary Apostolate has since spread to five other counties in the Diocese, multiplying many times the original area. But the original purpose and the original method bave remained essentially the basis of all activity for a quarter of a century; 'a more intensive development of the Church' by means of 'religious activity and personal contacts in the field.' The pastoral formation of newly ordained priests which has become an essential part of the work of the Missionary Apostolate developed naturally from











The Church of the Sacred Heart on Park Circle in Angelica, NY, above, sits in a beautiful setting in Southern Allegany County.

On the facing page on top is St. Mary's Church, 36 Washington St. in Cattaraugus, NY. There are about 100 families in the parish. At center is St. Helen's Church in Hinsdale, NY. The tiny church is the focal point for Catholics in this small village in the footbills of the Allegany Mountains.

At bottom is Church of the Blessed Sacrament on North Main Street in Delevan, NY. One of the larger of the mission parishes, there are 160 families in the congregation.

Below is the Church of St. Mary in East Arcade, NY. Located on East Arcade Road, the parish also has a historic old cemetery across the street. The parish is in an area of farms and small villages.



Bishop Duffy's custom of assigning each year's Ordination Class to staff the missions; a custom which was continued by his successors.

The first mission opened was St. Elizabeth's at Cherry Creek in November 1941. The Missionary Apostolate became possible when Father Navagh was appointed pastor at St. Joseph's Church, Fredonia, moving from his assignment at Brant. Soon the Cassadaga mission was opened and others were established at Sinclairville, Bemus Point, Frewsburg, and South Dayton. Mass usually was first celebrated in a private home or a rented building before a semipermanent chapel was established although some began with the latter.

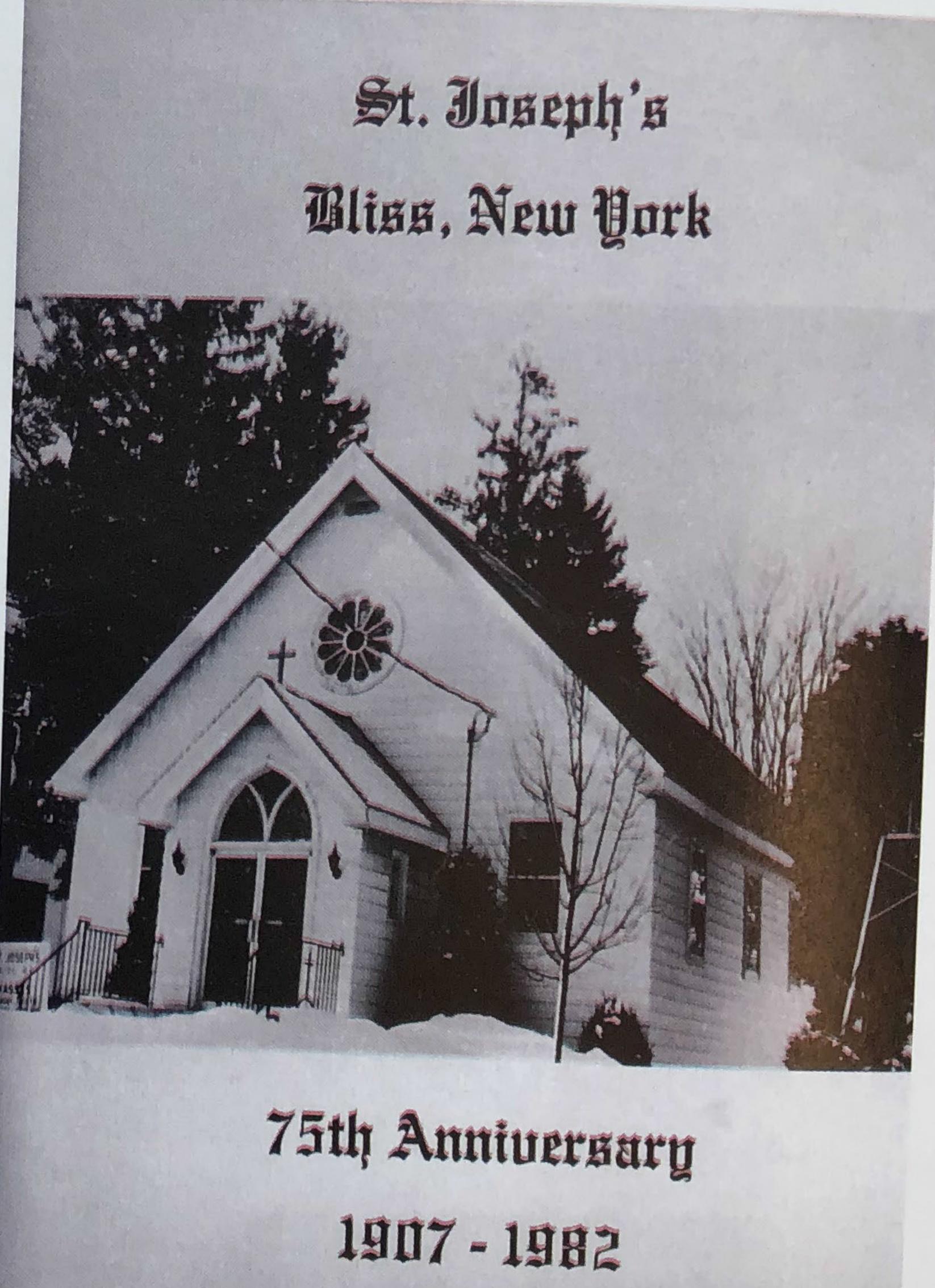
Eventually permanent chapels were established at each location. In 1941, the headquarters of the missions was moved to the Village of Mayville, where it was more centrally located. A Trailer Chapel was used during the summer months to reach out farther than the existing churches and newly started missions. The young priests were required to report at weekly meetings at the headquarters. The director made regular visits to the individual missions to offer advice and encouragement.

In July 1946, the headquarters was moved to Panama, NY. New permanent chapels were opened at Sheridan and South Dayton. In the summer, Mass was offered to the temporary residents at Lime Lake and Rushford. In 1947 missions were opened at Hinsdale and Delevan. Each mission's success was judged in the light of its ability to become an independent parish. That happened at St. Mary's, Mayville, Our Lady of Lourdes at Bemus Point, Our Lady of Snows at Panama, and St. Isaac Jogues at Sherman and St. Thomas More in Ripley, NY. Also, two new communities were added to the growing list in 1947 when the villages of Cattaraugus and Little Valley received missions. This expansion required further action in relocating headquarters.

The new center was established at St. Mary's, Cattaraugus.

Through the ensuing years headquarters was moved from Panama to Mayville again, and then to Delevan. Large facilities were built at Delevan for the priests to stay overnight, prepare the next Sunday's homily, to hear about the next program, to hand in reports, and to exchange ideas and discuss problems. The missions were excellent training grounds for the young priests. The first director, Father Navagh (later Monsignor), was succeeded by Father John Neylon, and then Father Richard Rutecki. From its beginnings in Chautauqua County, the Missionary Apostolate spread to Cattaraugus County, then to Wyoming, Genesee, Allegany and the southern part of Erie County. Besides their parish work, the Apostolate priests also served among the Native Americans of the Cattaraugus and Allegany Reservations. Other duties were to serve as chaplain at the Gowanda Hospital, with the migrant workers from Puerto Rico throughout the Diocese, and with Catholic students at State University at Alfred as Newman Club directors.

The results of their work in the Apostolate helped establish twenty-four new parishes, and gave thousands of young priests a "missionary" view, training and experience. Tens of thousands of Catholics were enabled to receive the sacraments, and attend Mass in their own communities, strengthening the bonds to their church. The end came for the Missionary Apostolate in 1970 as a clergy shortage developed in the Catholic world. New deacons preparing for the priesthood are required to serve a year of pastoral experience before ordination, giving them similar experience as the Missionary Apostolate in some ways. Unlike the Missionary Apostolate, they stay in a definite parish working closely with the pastor, religious and parish staff. Listed in the appendix are the various Missionary Apostolate Parishes, which were built up by the zealous, youthful priests of the Apostolate. Many today are substantial parishes; others remained small and rural because of their unique setting. Like the priests who served them, they were all enriched by Bishop Duffy's desire to create a missionary clergy.



Eastern Rite Parishes

There are nine parishes of the Eastern Catholic Rites in the Diocese of Buffalo. Five are Byzantine Ukrainian (Diocese of Sanford); two are Byzantine Ruthenian (Diocese of Passaic), and two are Maronite (Diocese of St. John Maron, Brooklyn).

The Missionary Apostolate Parishes

Alfred, St. Jude's Chapel, (University)
Almond, St. Brendan
Angelica, Sacred Heart
Bemus Point, Our Lady of Lourdes

Bliss, St. Joseph

Brant, Our Lady of Mount Carmel - 1st Headquarters of the MA

Canaseraga, St. Mary's

Cassadaga, Immaculate Conception

Cattaraugus, St. Mary, 4th Headquarters of the MA

Cherry Creek, St. Elizabeth

Collins Center, St. Francis Cabrini

Delevan, Blessed Sacrament - 5th and last Headquarters of the MA

East Arcade, St. Mary

East Bethany, Immaculate Conception

East Otto, St. Isadore

Fredonia, St Joseph - 2nd Headquarters of the MA

Frewsburg, Our Lady of Victory

Hinsdale, St. Helen

Little Valley, St. Mary

Machias, St. Mary -

Mayville, St. Mary - 3rd Headquarters of the MA

Panama, Our Lady of the Snows

Ripley, St. Thomas More

Rushford, St. Mark

Sardinia, St. Jude

Sheridan, St. John Bosco

Sherman, St. Isaac Jogues

Sinclairville, St. John the Evangelist

South Dayton, St. John Fisher

Whitesville, St. John of the Cross

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