

# She is 75 But Looks and Sounds Better Than Ever

Story and Photos by Amanda Keller

One of Westhampton's largest faith communities, *St. Bridget Catholic Church*, is turning 75 years old.

Everything began with the generosity of a Westhampton woman by the name of Annie Irvin, who in 1948 left \$200,000 in her will for the building of a new Catholic parish in the West End of Richmond. She further requested the parish be named for St. Brigid of Ireland but be spelled "*Bridget*" in memory of her mother, Bridget Murphy Irvin. And so was laid the foundation of *St. Bridget Catholic Church*.

St. Bridget Parish was formally established on May 18, 1949, by Bishop Peter Ireton, who appointed Father Francis J. Byrne as the founding pastor. On September 11, 1949, Fr. Byrne celebrated the first parish Mass. The parish church and building were still under construction, so the first St. Bridget parish Mass was celebrated in the Westhampton Theater.

On May 21, 1950, the Bishop came to dedicate and bless the completed St. Bridget Church at the corner of Three Chopt and York Roads. The original structure was designed by a Philadelphia architect who directed Italian marble to be used for the altar, ambo, statues, and baptismal font. Many top artisans of the



*Mosaic of St. Bridget*

time were employed to create the stained-glass windows and the *Stations of the Cross*. Annie Irvin's loving contribution initiated this project, but many other Westhampton parishioners brought the project over the finish line. Some of those other patron's names are noted at the bottom of the stained-glass windows flanking the side aisles. At that time St. Bridget parish served an area that stretched from Hamilton Street to Fluvanna County.

Since then, the parish has grown in parishioners to 2,183 registered families

equaling over 5,000 individuals and its interior and structural footprint has increased as well. The physical building serves the community, but it is not an event hall, it is a sacred place of worship that is beautiful on the inside and outside. St. Bridget Parish strives to aid people in need by providing the Word of God, facilitating the physical requirements of food and clothing, but also offering beauty which the human soul desperately requires for calm, inspiration, and well-being.

In 2013 a world-class Opus 42 pipe organ crafted by John Paul Buzard was installed



*Stained glass of Sts. Michael, Ann, Bridget and Patrick*

which, due to the tailor-made fitting of the new organ, allowed the gorgeous stained-glass windows of Sts. Michael, Ann, Bridget, and Patrick to be seen again for the first time since 1975. Now the heavenly tone of the pipe organ is complimented by the visual glory of the stunning stained glass.

Not just sight and sound but all five senses are awakened, touched, and elevated during the liturgical celebrations and practices that take place every day at St. Bridget. Daily Mass is offered Monday through Saturday at 8 am, Adoration occurs Tuesdays from 5:30 to 6:30 pm, and Third Sundays 7-8 pm. Saturday Vigil Mass takes place at 5:30 pm with Sunday Masses celebrated at 7:30 am, 9 am, and 11 am. The church is open all day during the week for private prayer as well.

Another recent addition to the original church which enhances worship is St. Bridget's bell tower. It was started in 2018 along with the new plaza leading to the bell tower entrance.

The structure draws the soul in where one is welcomed by a vibrant mosaic of St. Bridget mounted over the doorway. The bell tower has three bells with the largest bell weighing in at 1,500 pounds.

Church bells have profound meaning in the Catholic faith. They are a call to worship, God's voice calling to his people. The functions of the church bells are to signal prayer times such as daily Mass and one of three times a day to pray the Angelus. The bells can also be rung for certain sacramental moments such as weddings which enhance the joyous celebration. Unlike weddings, funeral tolls are rung in a slow, sorrowful manner to honor the deceased and call the community to pray for their soul. The church bells for Catholics are more than musical instruments, they are powerful symbols of faith, tools for spiritual instruction, and markers of time and tradition.

St. Bridget parish will begin their *75th Anniversary* celebration on September 7, 2024, with Mass followed by a *Casino Night*.



*Sanctuary with choir loft and organ*



*Sanctuary of St. Bridget Church*

On September 15th, an old-fashioned *Parish Picnic* will take place for all ages to join in.

*Stew & Brew*, an annual Richmond community event happening this year on October 18th will have a *75th Anniversary* theme as well. The evening is family-oriented, featuring Brunswick stew made onsite and an array of craft beers and wines to enjoy. Hamburgers and hotdogs are also provided along with water and soft drinks. There will be games for the kids and live entertainment.

*Pastor, Fr. Ken Shuping*, along with *Music Minister, Allen Bean*, have planned a *Sung Requiem* and evening prayer remembrance of all those gone before us. This will take place on November 3rd, the evening after All Souls Day. Fr. Ken said, "We always take time at All Souls' to remember those who have passed away during the previous year. This time we'll be praying for all deceased who were part of the parish for the last 75 years."

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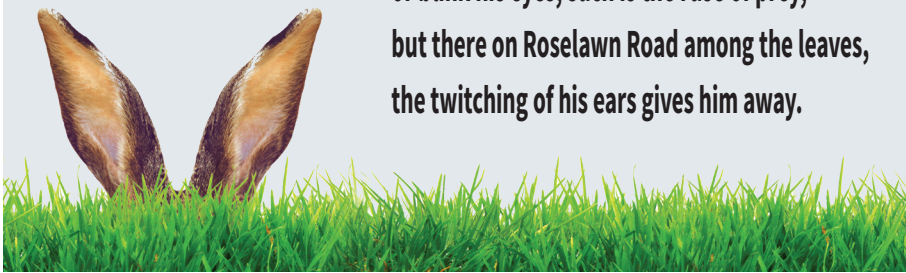


By Mary Kay Williams  
*Westhampton  
Resident*

## Rabbit Ears

The rabbit takes no chances to be friends  
with men or hawks. He darts to safer ground,  
an instinct to some signal nature sends,  
to wait it out in camouflage of brown.

The wily guy does not appear to breathe  
or blink his eyes, such is the ruse of prey,  
but there on Roselawn Road among the leaves,  
the twitching of his ears gives him away.



## St. Bridget Catholic Church

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Parishioner and 75th Anniversary Committee Chair, Ron Campbell added, “With some dates to be determined, there will be other anniversary events over the next few months.”



The anniversary festivities will end on February 1st with the *Feast of Saint Bridget*. “St. Bridget Parish came to Westhampton 75 years ago to serve the needs of the community,” added Campbell, “and is still doing that today, and for another 75 years, we pray.”

For more information on Saint Bridget Parish and any of the upcoming anniversary events go to [www.saintbridgetchurch.org](http://www.saintbridgetchurch.org).