



# OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP HISTORY

Seventy-six years ago, on a little knoll overlooking the harbor of Charlotte Amalie, in the area commonly known as Mafolie, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Chapel was born.

On April 25, 1926, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Chapel at Mafolie was dedicated. The Mafolie chapel was built to replace the former chapel located on Kongens Gade, which at that time was the nearest Catholic place of worship for the people of the Northside area.

The original chapel was in existence for 69 years but had to be closed because of the physical deterioration of the building. The Redemptorist Fathers, then in charge of the Roman Catholic congregation, felt that instead of going to the expense of repairing the original chapel, a new place of worship should be erected in the Northern part of the island. They were cognizant of the difficulties the people of this area, who were considered the backbone of the farming activity on the island, were experiencing by attending services in town.

In 1924, Father Superior, Joseph Leddy C.S.S.R. was granted permission to start construction of a new chapel in Mafolie. Mr. Joseph Sibilly, a well-known and highly respected resident of Mafolie, donated the property on which the new Chapel was to be built. Father Richard Keenan was appointed to design the church and to supervise its construction. Work was started in the summer of 1924 but was soon stopped as Father Keenan was required to work on building a school. Construction of the chapel resumed in the fall of 1925. Shortly before the completion of the construction, however, Father Keenan returned to the United States due to serious illness. The chapel was completed in April 1926 under the guidance of Father Dirscherl.

The dedication of the new chapel took place on Sunday, April 25, 1926 at about 9:30 AM with solemn and impressive ceremonies officiated by the Very Rev. Joseph Murphy, C.S.S.R., Rev. Joseph Quinland, C.S.S.R., and Rev. John Driscoll, C.S.S.R. The blessing of the chapel was followed by a Solemn High Mass with Rev. Murphy delivering the sermon. A sermon was also delivered in French by Rev. Jean Guillo, C.S.S.R. because the majority of the residents of the area were French farmers who had migrated from the island of St. Barthelemy. Although Father Keenan, who started this project could not be present at the ceremonies due to illness, a telegram was sent to him congratulating him on the completion and dedication of the chapel.

Due to the obvious need for educational facilities in the Mafolie area, an agreement was reached between the Board of Education and the Redemptorist Fathers to use the Mafolie chapel on weekdays for the education of the children of the northside. This arrangement continued until a public school was constructed nearby in 1938.

Major renovations of the chapel began in 1941. The floors were resurfaced, a new mahogany altar and altar rail replaced the original concrete altar, and some improvements were made to the sacristy. The upkeep of the premises was undertaken by the Sisters of Charity who, once the public school was built, commenced holding religious classes at the chapel on weekends.

Until the mid sixty's little maintenance was required to the chapel building, although new benches and kneelers were made. All maintenance work has always been done under the supervision of the priest assigned to the chapel. This also includes the cemetery adjacent to the church, the only primarily Catholic cemetery on the island.

With an increase in evening masses, the need for adequate lighting and ventilation became apparent. Therefore in 1963, additional lights and ceiling fans were installed. Work was also started in the restoration of the church grounds. The old wire fencing was replaced with an attractive ornamental stone wall around the church, the entrance walkway to the cemetery was paved, and the fencing of the cemetery was completed.

In 1965, a beautiful picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was donated to the chapel by Bishop Edward Harper. The sculptured replica of Our Lady was artistically enshrined by Mr. Pierre LaPlace who sacrificed many hours patiently working to achieve this masterpiece of fine stone work.

In 1966, under the leadership of Rev. John Fitzpatrick, major improvements began at the chapel. The sanctuary was paneled, retaining walls were completed, plants were restored, the lawns were reestablished, and the entire church grounds were developed. In addition, a community clubhouse was built which serves as an adjunct to the church. To complete all these major improvements required much support from the community in terms of volunteering of physical labor, materials and supplies, raising of funds through church and community activities including food sales, plant sales, dances, and many other activities.

On July 25, 1967, Mr. Joseph Sibilly was selected and numbered among the Oblates of the Most Holy Redeemer, as signed by William Gandrean, Superior General and Rector Major of Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. Mr. Sibilly was the first Virgin Islander to be so honored for his many contributions on behalf of the Northside community.

In 1974, it became obvious that the Church roof was deteriorating rapidly and had to be repaired. Under the leadership of Rev. John Murphy, this major repair project was undertaken. Again, through the continuing use of the clubhouse for fundraising activities, and the generosity of the parishioners and friends of the parish, the ceiling was redone with sheet rock. At the same time, the confessional was relocated, the choir loft steps were eliminated, the sanctuary was rearranged and enlarged, the sanctuary and center aisle were carpeted, the floor was tiled, a new door was installed, and the sacristy was repaired including the installation of new cabinets.

Throughout the years, many members of Our Lady of Perpetual Help community have given and continue to give much of their time and service assisting the chapel in many important ways. These range from cleaning and decorating the church, ensuring the priest's vestments and altar dressings are always clean and pressed, scheduling and serving as lectors, ushers, altar servers, organists, keeping the grounds clean, opening and closing the church, preparing church bulletins, scheduling masses, handling the finances of the church, arranging for choir activities and many other activities too numerous to mention. Our deepest appreciation to each and everyone of you for your dedication and service to Our Lady of Perpetual Help's Church. We pray for your continued support.

Over the years, we have witnessed a new phase in the ever changing, ever growing life at Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Since October 4, 1987, the Chapel through its growth and self sustainment, has become a full Parish, with its own assigned Pastor. This has meant expanded responsibilities and duties, including daily masses, missions, triduums, establishing a Parish Council, a Finance Council, Religious Education, Youth Groups, Eucharistic Ministers & Lectors. The Parish must maintain its own records of Baptisms, First Communion, Confirmations and marriages, and issues its own certificates of same. It must also plan and schedule its own religious programs and activities. The Parish must also develop and manage its own budgets to include its church collections, financial support of its Pastor, and payment of its Diocese assessed fees, and many other responsibilities.

A major enlargement and renovation of the church was again undertaken in the 1990's to accommodate the growth experienced by the Church in the last 20 years, but also to repair the devastation resulting from Hurricane Marilyn not only to the Church but also to the Clubhouse. Many of the Parishioners also experienced devastating losses from this Hurricane. This most recent renovation project also included the installation of stained glass windows in the Sanctuary as well as over all windows and doors in the church, all donated by parishioners. It also involved a complete rebuilding of the Parish Office and replacement of all equipment and furnishings. Additionally, the Clubhouse had to be totally refurbished to include a new kitchen, bathroom facilities, and lighting system.

The spirit and determination of Our Lady of Perpetual Help's parish members are ever present. Today, we witness the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those men and women of faith, along with new neighbors and friends who have made this small church into their parish, working together to help achieve its goals.

The late Mr. Joseph Sibilly, along with the many others who labored over the years to ensure Our Lady of Perpetual Help's growth and well-being, can be justly proud of those who carry on the work that they started. The Church has indeed become a beautiful and lasting legacy to its mentor and namesake, Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

- Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel Fiftieth Anniversary 1926-1976
- 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish 1926-1991
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