

## **4.1 - Records of the Houses - Alexandria, Georgetown, Washington**

### **Background on Mission Churches, Seminaries, and Schools**

#### *Holy Trinity Church*

The patronage of several wealthy Catholic families enabled former Jesuits to establish Holy Trinity Church in 1787 as the pastoral partner of Georgetown College. Constructed in 1791, Holy Trinity was the first Catholic church in the territory that later became the District of Columbia. From the time of its founding, priests traveled to Tenleytown, Montgomery County, West Falls Church, and Fairfax County to minister the sacraments. Until the Civil War, the parish consisted of equal parts elite urban merchant-planters, enslaved and free Black people, and Irish immigrant working people. In 1805, Francis Neale, S.J., purchased a house from a free Black man named Mann Butler, which successively served as a House of Probation (Novitiate), the building for the Free Male School opened in 1823, and the residence for Holy Trinity priests.

Holy Trinity's priests worked closely with the Georgetown Visitation Monastery, which established an academy for girls in 1799. In 1819, John McElroy, S.J., opened a short-lived Sunday School for enslaved and free Black people. The parishioners included Anna Maria Becraft (1805-1833), a free Black woman who between 1824 and 1831 operated the Georgetown Seminary, a school for free Black children. The parish of Holy Trinity also established burial grounds for parishioners, first at Georgetown College (in 1817) and Holy Rood Cemetery (in 1833). Both sites included enslaved and free Black people. In 1953, Georgetown University removed the College Burial Ground, transferring a portion of its graves to Mount Olivet Cemetery. In October 1923, the Black congregation separated from Holy Trinity and formed Epiphany Church, also in Georgetown. Its cornerstone was laid in July 1925, and in 1926, the parish for Black Catholics opened.

#### *St. Mary's Church*

Since the first Catholic Church was not established in Virginia until 1809, St. Mary's Church in Alexandria was significantly smaller than Holy Trinity Church. St. Mary's Church served missions in Piscataway, Maryland, and Fairfax, Virginia. In 1891, the Jesuits transferred it from Alexandria to the diocese of Richmond (from which the Diocese of Arlington was subsequently created).

#### *Washington Seminary*

In 1818, the Jesuits erected Washington Seminary on property adjacent to St. Patrick's Church, the first church built in Washington City. Upon the direction of Special Visitor Peter Kenney, S.J., the Jesuits transferred the scholasticate from Georgetown to Washington Seminary. In 1824, the Jesuits repurposed the Seminary to serve as a preparatory school open to day students and boarders. The Jesuit Curia, however, disapproved of the acceptance of tuition money, and the Seminary closed. In 1848, the Province revived the Washington Seminary and moved it to its present location on North Capitol Street. In 1858, Washington, D.C., issued a charter to the school under its present name, Gonzaga College High School. In 1859, St. Aloysius Church opened as the pastoral seat of this school and served the poor Irish, Italian, and Black

communities near the Capitol, including Swampoodle, a neighborhood constructed over Tiber Creek.

#### *Georgetown Preparatory School*

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Province began plans to separate the Georgetown preparatory school from the rest of the University. In 1919, it opened Georgetown Preparatory School in Garrett Park, Maryland.

#### **Bibliography**

Devitt, Edward I. "History of the Maryland-New York Province XIV Gonzaga College and St. Aloysius' Church," *Woodstock Letters* 64 (1935): 41-57.

\_\_\_\_\_. "History of the Maryland-New York Province XIII Holy Trinity Church," *Woodstock Letters* 64 (1935): 24-41.

"St. Mary's Church and Residence, Alexandria, Va." *Woodstock Letters* 13 (1884): 344-356.

Warner, William W. *At Peace with All Their Neighbors: Catholics and Catholicism in the National Capital, 1787-1860* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994).