

Reverend Enrico (Henry) De Vivo

February 25, 1876 - ?

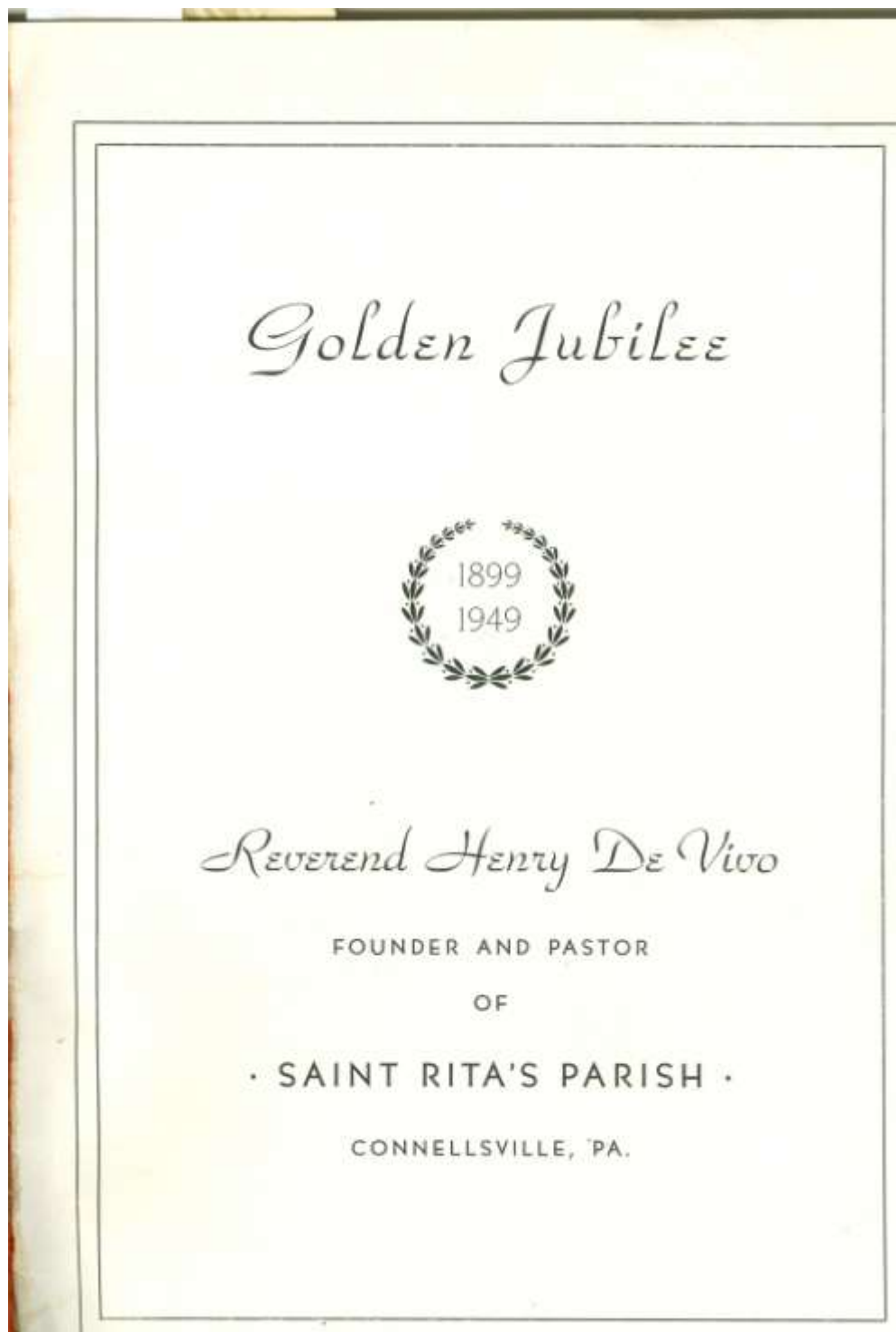
A Brief Historical Sketch of the Life and Accomplishments of Reverend Henry De Vivo from Paduli



Reverend Enrico (Henry) De Vivo was born in Paduli, became a priest and immigrated to the United States where he became pastor and founder of St. Rita's Church in Connellsville, Pennsylvania. In 1949 he was celebrated with a Golden Jubilee marking fifty years as a priest. The brochure of the Golden Jubilee was generously made available to us by Joseph Avella, previously of Long Island City, New York and currently of Puerto Rico. We are grateful to him for providing us with this opportunity to remember a noted citizen of Paduli who came to the United States. The quoted text in this biographical sketch is

from that brochure written in 1949. I have added a few footnotes and notes in brackets to aid and understanding. I also added the final item on Father De Vivo's family.

Alexander DeAngelis – 24 August 2011



Reverend Henry De Vivo

“In the land of sunshine and warmth, pastoral beauty and ancient cultures lies the tiny Italian village of Paduli, the birthplace of Father De Vivo. It is situated on the summit of a high hill on the Appian Way near the medieval city of Benevento. The hamlet, surrounded by olive groves, has long been a center of higher learning and the home of pious and learned men. Till this very day [August 1949], Paduli is still honored by the residence of an Abbot¹ and has been fostered and enriched by the famous Cardinal Coscia and the Orsini Cardinals. The abbey church [La Chiesa Madre di San Bartolomeo] prides itself in its distinctive treasures, among which are massive candlesticks of pure gold and several beautiful tapestries which escaped the plundering bands of ancient Saracens.

Father De Vivo was born on February 25, 1876, the third son in a family of four boys and four girls.² His father, a textile manufacturer, Luigi De Vivo, and his mother, Emiddia Massimiano De Vivo, wished this son to become a soldier. However, at the age of 12, after having completed his elementary training in Paduli, he chose to enter the ecclesiastical seminary at nearby Benevento where he studied for ten years. His deportment and scholarship won for him a most distinctive award, the gold medal of honor. On August 6, 1899, His Eminence, Donato Cardinal Dell’Olio, Archbishop of Benevento him to the Holy Priesthood in the cathedral.³



¹ At the time of the Jubilee for Father De Vivo, the Abbot of the Abbey of San Bartolomeo in Paduli was Father Giovambattista Follo. In a letter written in 1949 to Michele Zullo, an immigrant from Paduli living in the United States, Father Follo referred to Father Enrico De Vivo as his “nipote” or nephew.

² Father De Vivo was still alive in 1953, but I do not know when he died.

³ The Golden Jubilee brochure states that the Cathedral was bombed to the ground in World War II by U.S. forces but that plans existed in 1949 to rebuild the cathedral at a projected cost of 29 billion lire and that Father De Vivo had made a contribution in response to an appeal to all former seminarians. The rebuilt cathedral stands today in Benevento.

On August 15, the Feast of the Assumption, the newly ordained priest celebrated his first solemn high mass in his home parish, in the Church of Saint Bartholomew. The young priest spent the next three years in Naples as an instructor in the College of Nobles and in the Institute of the Barnabite Fathers. Meanwhile, he continued to advance himself in higher classical and literary studies. At the age of 26 [1902], Father De Vivo sailed for America. Upon arrival, he was assigned to St. Patrick's Cathedral by Cardinal Farley, then Archbishop of New York. Here he served as assistant pastor for five years until his archbishop appointed him as pastor to organize a parish in the Bronx.⁴ In less than two years, Father De Vivo built a beautiful Romanesque church and rectory. The newly established parish was completely organized. Although he had many opportunities to distinguish himself further, he humbly chose instead to pursue the missionary field.

During one of Father De Vivo's missionary engagements in the Pittsburgh area, a fellow priest suggested a visit to Connellsville. He came to Connellsville in December, 1914, and was immediately encouraged by the response of the people as well as by the kindness of the late Reverend John T. Burns, then pastor of the Immaculate Conception Church. Father Burns permitted the enterprising young missionary to use the church basement for celebrating mass. On Christmas Day less than 100 persons attended two masses. However, the zealous priest was determined to proceed with his undertaking. During January he conducted a successful Italian mission. Those attending the mission formed the nucleus of a small congregation which was to assemble regularly for Holy Mass in the church basement during the year that followed."

St. Rita's Church

"Meanwhile, the persevering pastor made plans for establishing St. Rita of Cascia parish. In March, 1915, he purchased on South Second Street a plot of ground on which stood a small frame house, which became St. Rita's first rectory. Shortly after, ground was broken for the church and on October 24 of the same year, Father Burns laid the cornerstone.

Father De Vivo quickly gained the confidence and support of his parishioners as well as the citizenry. A condemned three-story stone and brick school building on Immaculate Conception Church property provided basic material for building the church. Members of the new parish, devoted to their pastor, offered to raze the building which had been donated to Father De Vivo. For six weeks 25 men worked at this task daily without compensation. The new pastor's enthusiasm won the esteem of the late Bernard O'Connor, a contractor, who loaned two teams of horses and drivers for four weeks to haul the materials. The bricks numbered 74,000. Rimonti Gagliardi, another contractor, followed suit and contributed 480 sacks of cement for the new church structure.

Just as the beautiful European cathedrals were built as community projects where every able-bodied citizen of the vicinity participated in the actual labor, so too, St. Rita's Church was erected in the very same spirit and with the same enthusiastic cooperation of the parishioners. Practically all of the excavating was done by members of the parish who frequently worked from the time they left their own jobs at the end of the day until two and three o'clock the following morning using the light of lanterns. The women and children also lent their service by scrapping the bricks which were to be used for the inside of the building. Father De Vivo even drafted the unemployed who gladly responded. And so, the

⁴ The name of this church/parish is not identified in the Golden Jubilee brochure.

new parish, without any financial backing, except a loan of \$2,000 and the proceeds of benefit parties, bravely set forth on this venture.

At midnight on Christmas Eve, 1915, Father De Vivo celebrated High Mass in the new but unfinished edifice for the first time. The plastering was still fresh and the church was bare; there were only chairs for the worshippers and six coal stoves, which provided meager heat. But apparently the parishioners preferred to hear the Christmas Midnight Mass in the parish church which they now felt was their very own. Despite the cheesecloth coverings over the window openings, the first Christmas Mass at St. Rita's was a beginning for what has become a traditionally impressive service and which is now broadcast annually over the local radio station, WCVI.

In 1922 the present platform in front of the Church was erected and the bell tower was added to the Church. Mrs. Frank Maddas, of Jeanette, Pa., donated a new 1500-pound church bell. In January, 1923, the bell was named 'Laura' for its donor and was subsequently placed in the tower."

"A citizen of distinction, Rev. Henry De Vivo enjoys life and does not confine his contacts to the parish. In addition to the many routine duties of a parish priest, other enterprises command his attention. He takes time to be active politically and to advise the many friends and associates who seek his counsel. He loves the fine arts, particularly sculpture and architecture. When the opportunity arises, he likes to listen to classical records from his own extensive collection.

Play Ball!



A stranger looking for the pastor of St. Rita's is apt to find him personally supervising a bricklayer on the church property or entertaining a group of friends at a fine Italian dinner. His reputation as a gourmet as well as a perfect host is far famed. A brilliant conversationalist, he delights his guests with his razor wit and his skill at repartee.

When Father De Vivo came to Connellsville, he faced failure and disappointment with a determination to succeed. He built from nothing upon the ruins of the vain attempts made by his nine predecessors. Due to poor management, the Italian Roman Catholic Church and Rectory, built in 1902 on Baldwin Avenue,

had been sold at auction in 1912. Nothing remained but humiliation and discouragement. Financial credit and interest in things spiritual were lost. In fact, even an Italian Protestant mission had been started on South Eighth Street.

However, Father De Vivo's patience, perseverance, and magnetic personality have in a large measure been responsible for welding together the Italian people of this locale. As individuals, the Italians now command the esteem and admiration of their fellow citizens. They are well represented in business and in professions and are much attached to their Church.

Father De Vivo made himself responsible for many Italian born obtaining their American citizenship papers. For a period of over 20 years, the pastor of St. Rita's has personally accompanied nearly 300 of his parishioners to court for this very purpose.

The Italian government has recognized Father De Vivo's work among his nationals, and on February 19, 1939, he was named a chevalier. Dr. Nino Calabro, then acting vice-consul of Pittsburgh, represented King Victor Emanuel of Italy and formally presented him with the Cross of the Crown of Italy.

Maddas Hall --- St. Rita's School

"As the number of parishioners increased, parish activities grew. The pastor, with his usual forethought and eagerness to do for his people, saw the need for a recreation hall. In May, 1916, he purchased, at auction for \$500, the public school building on North Seventh Street, which was about to be razed. Volunteer labor again came to Father De Vivo's assistance. Members of the parish became the demolition squad and moved the materials to the church plant to provide the beginnings of the new hall. The building was inaugurated in October, 1916, for the reelection of Judge Van Swearingen. In recognition of the generous benefactor, Frank Maddas, the structure was named Maddas Hall. Until 1925 the building functioned as a social center."



BISHOP BOYLE AND FATHER DE VIVO
on the occasion of Confirmation at St. Rita's Church, April 7, 1938

St. Rita's Rectory and Garden

“Upon his arrival in Connellsville, Father De Vivo established his first residence with M. J. Roland, proprietor of the West Side Hotel. Here, Father De Vivo remained until July 4, 1915, when he occupied a small house on the newly purchased church property. Later this house was torn down and a new rectory was built. In 1922 the rectory was enlarged. Now the building is St. Rita's Convent, providing adequate housing for the Sisters Zelatrices of the Sacred Heart, who comprise the teaching staff of St. Rita's elementary School. A new rectory was essential. Through the efforts of Mayor John Duggan, Father De Vivo was able to purchase a house and lot adjoining the church property. The house was enlarged and remodeled to become the present rectory. It was made ready for occupancy in 1926.”

The De Vivo Family

Although the name De Vivo appears prominently in the histories of Paduli, it seems that there are no De Vivos left in Paduli today.

Father Enrico De Vivo was one of 8 children, 4 boys and 4 girls, of Emiddia Massimiano and Luigi De Vivo. It appears that most of his family, if not all, followed him to the United States. His sisters' names were Clementina, Elisa, and Vincenza, and Carmela, all of whom are included in the list of Padulesi who came to America (www.paduli-in-america.net). Father De Vivo's mother, Emiddia Massimiano, arrived in the United States on the S.S. Re D'Italia in November 1913, together with her youngest daughter Carmela De Vivo. Emiddia was approximately 64 years old at the time and Carmela was probably 22. Emiddia listed their destination as “son Enrico De Vivo, 923 Tinton Ave., NY.” Emiddia's name is listed as “Emiddia De Vivo” on the Bronze Plaque that resides in the Church of St. Bartholomew in Paduli. Carmela's name also appears on the Bronze Plaque. Both had never been to the United States prior to this arrival.

Clementina, Elisa and Vincenza arrived together nine years earlier on the S.S. Prinz Adelbert on August 11, 1904. They listed their destination as “brother Enrico, 344 Nash (?) St., NY. They too had never been in the United States prior to this voyage. Clementina was 30. Elisa was 26. Vincenza was 22.

Father DeVivo's three brothers are harder to trace. In the list of Padulesi who came to the United States there are 8 males with the surname De Vivo in addition to Enrico. These are Antonio, Francesco, Giovanni, Giuseppe, Michele, Luigi, Rocco, and Vincenzo. All that I know about Antonio, Giovanni and Giuseppe at this time is that their names are on the Bronze Plaque in the Church of San Bartolomeo in Paduli. Francesco and Rocco were brothers. Luigi bears the same name as Reverend De Vivo's father. I conjecture that Luigi may have been the oldest of the four De Vivo brothers.