

## **The Beginnings of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Columbia Maryland**

In the 1960s James Rouse and his company developed a bold plan to take about 14,000 acres of farm land in Columbia Maryland and plan a community from the ground up. Columbia was intended as an ordered response to chaotic postwar sprawl and as an integrated, self-contained community. As the plan developed for various reasons worship spaces found it economically expedient to create interfaith centers where several religious faiths could share worship spaces, office space, class rooms and maybe most importantly parking spaces. The Rouse company approached several religious faiths to participate in this planning. At first the Catholics held off but then there was a ground breaking event in the history of the Catholic church that changed that.

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council concluded and issued a series of documents that would change the way Catholics understood and practiced their faith. Catholics began to look at other faiths in a very different way and started to reach out to work with other religions. The spirit of ecumenism was born and guided much of the Catholic participation in the religious planning for Columbia

Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, the Archbishop of Baltimore in the 1960s, led the Catholic faithful in their incorporation of the interfaith concept. He assigned Fr. George Zorn, S.J., to the Columbia Planning Group to work in developing the religious response to the planning of Columbia. Cardinal Shehan established a Catholic congregation under the leadership of Reverend John Walsh as pastor. St. John the Evangelist parish celebrated its first Mass in September 1967. Masses were celebrated at several facilities in and around the Wilde Lake area, mostly at Slayton House until a permanent building was erected.

On June 22, 1969, a ground breaking service was held for the city's first Interfaith Center, the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center. This center was dedicated on August 30, 1970. The Oakland Mills Interfaith Center, also known as The Meeting House, opened in May 1975 as the second interfaith center in Columbia.