

The Story of Ascension Parish

The history of any parish in the great Archdiocese of Detroit, no matter how short and insignificant, is essentially bound up with the beginnings of Catholic life in southern Michigan. Each parish in this historic territory is an offshoot of the mustard seed first planted by the missionaries and now in full bloom, strong and sturdy in one of the world's greatest cities.

When the first priest guided his canoe into Detroit waters in the year 1670, he found amidst the primitive beauty of this lovely land an altar to a pagan god venerated by the Indians. Father Dollier had come from Quebec and was passing through the Detroit River in search of the Potawatomi Indians who had expressed their desire to see a missionary. They lived along the Mississippi. Father Dollier tells this story: "we pursued our journey accordingly toward the west, and after making about 100 leagues on Lake Erie arrived at the place where the lake of the Hurons, otherwise called the Fresh Water Sea of the Hurons, or Michigan, discharges into this Lake. This outlet is perhaps half a league in width and turns sharp to the north-east, so that we were almost retracing our path. At the end of six leagues we discovered a place that is very remarkable and held in veneration by all the Indians in these countries, because of a stone idol that nature has formed there. To it they say they owe their good luck in sailing on Lake Erie, when they cross it without accident and they propitiate it by sacrifices, presents of skins and provisions, when they wish to embark upon it. The place was full of camps of those who had come to pay their homage to this stone, which had no other resemblance to the figure of a man than what the imagination was pleased to give it. However, it was all painted, and a sort of face had been formed for it with vermillion. I leave you to imagine whether we avenged upon this idol, which the Iroquois had strongly recommended us to honor, the loss of our chapel. (The party had lost all their Mass equipment in a storm on Lake Erie). We attributed to it even the dearth of provisions from which we had hitherto suffered. In short, there was nobody whose hatred it had not incurred. I consecrated

one of my axes to break this god of stone, and having yoked our canoes together, we carried the largest pieces to the middle of the river, and threw all the rest also into the water, in order that it might never be heard of again" (The Catholic Church in Detroit, 1701-1888). This idol was located somewhere between the mouth of the Rouge River and the army post at Fort Wayne.

When Cadillac landed at the sight of the new outpost of Detroit in 1701 he brought with him two priests, one a Jesuit, the other a Franciscan, who were to establish a mission. Mass was offered for the first time two days after the landing and the first church was soon built of log timbers. It was, of course, the famous St. Anne's.

With the French settlement now situated on the Detroit River many of the Indian tribes returned to the rich fields of southern Michigan. Before the founding of Detroit they had hesitated to remain in Michigan because of the proximity of the fierce Iroquois to the east. There were some Indians in the territory, of course, but they were forced to keep constantly moving about. Now within the range of Fort Detroit they felt more secure and they settled down, some of them in the vicinity of Baseline. From the small chapel within the stockade the priests went out to bring the teachings of Christ to these primitive peoples. Any progress was later halted by a fresh outbreak of Indian wars.

In these years God's Grace has been with us. Where once the Indians paid worship to an idol, there now stand some 250 altars on which the Divine Lamb is offered daily.

Macomb County was founded and settled by some few white men in 1818. The Catholic Almanac of 1844 gave the Catholic population of the Detroit Diocese as 25,000 faithful. The first Catholic church near our locality was the "Chapel of the Assumption", erected in 1847 to serve some German families living along Gratiot Road. This chapel later became Assumption Grotto Parish. In 1865 Bishop Le Fevere dedicated Sacred Heart Church in Roseville and the next year Mass was said for the first time in Utica.

The earliest baptismal record of St. Clement Church in Center Line is dated 1854. The parish itself, however, was not officially organized until some years later. These pioneer parishes continued to provide religious service for the growing Catholic populace in the new community.

Throughout the early years of 1900 the locality became a sizeable nest for the Ku-Klux Klan. In their terroristic manner they tried to keep the faithful from moving into Baseline and Van Dyke. Their fiery crosses and cries of bigotry, were quite familiar to our early residents. The Cross of Christ was soon to take the place of the emblems of these misled zealots.

And so it was in the midst of the roaring, rowdy Twenties that the idea of a new Catholic church for the community began to occupy the thoughts of a few good souls. Calvin Coolidge was in the White House, Ty Cobb was managing the Tigers, and Henry Ford was turning out hundreds of Model T's. Everybody was going wild over the Charleston: jazz was born. It was a great time to start anything in these United States.

By 1926 there were many Catholics living in this area of Baseline and Van Dyke. Some of them were the descendants of pioneer Detroiters, others were immigrants recently arrived from across the seas. Most of them came to this small community to earn their livelihood from the expanding industries of Greater Detroit.

From the beginning, of course, there was the usual problem of a convenient place to fulfill their religious obligations. The closest parishes were then Holy Name, Assumption Grotto, St. Clement in Center Line and Sacred Heart in Roseville. All of these churches were several miles from this locality. St. Clement's performed the greatest service to our people in those early days since it was the only thriving center of Catholic life within a reasonable distance. Our Lady, Queen of Heaven Parish was not as yet organized in the Outer Drive district.

It was under these trying circumstances that a group of zealous laymen decided to petition Bishop Michael J. Gallagher to send them a priest to establish a new parish within the boundaries of Baseline and Van Dyke. Pressed and burdened on all sides by the thunderous

growth of his diocese, the venerable Bishop nonetheless graciously granted the request and assigned Father Henry Podsiad to the task.

Father Podsiad had every reason in the world to feel like a Jesuit missionary as he surveyed the locality in which he was to plant the Cross of Christ. Though the Indians had long since disappeared Father found himself without funds and with no place to live. His only asset was his will to succeed. For some time he continued to live at St. Albertus Church, his former appointment, and commuted to the sight of the proposed church in an effort to get the project under way. The first building committee was organized and included: Mr. Wilczek, John Kostera, Edward Jaroszewski and Joseph Pershon. Upon their advice a parcel of land was purchased from Otto and Theodore Henkel at a cost of 28,000 dollars. These areas were a part of the extensive farm owned by the Henkel family. Father Podsiad set about to establish credit and to secure a loan to pay at least part of the cost of the land. The Albert Bach family advanced the sum of 4,000 dollars and another 2,000 dollars were borrowed from another party, unfortunately forgotten. And so in those early days of financial insecurity, by the heroic efforts of so few, the foundation was at last laid for the better things to come. A debt of thanks is certainly due to those who with much foresight advanced the funds which Bishop Gallagher was unable to grant.

On November 2, 1926 everyone rolled up their sleeves and began to build the present church themselves. John Kostera was the chief construction man. With the help of the other parishioners he gave his time and talents generously without pay. Father Podsiad himself was the contractor and he did a major portion of the carpentry and all the electrical work on the new edifice. He was often seen scaling the roof top nailing down shingles. Xavier and Mary Prebe donated the altar and Edward Jaroszewski presented the church bell. Mass was first celebrated in the new building on Christmas Day, 1926. Without pews or heat or electric lights the scene was truly reminiscent of the First Christmas. The deep spiritual joy of the Holy Season was there in abundance.

Father Podsiad was appointed officially as the full time Pastor on February 1, 1927. Shortly after, Auxiliary Bishop

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Among the early parishioners to share in the first fruits of their labors were those bearing the family names of: Ciesielski, Dolenga, Groth, Grzybowski, Jaroszewski, Joswicki, Kolaczynski, Kostera, Kulesza, Kowalski, Kruszka, Krol, Koss, Lipski, Marheffo, Mantel, Maday, Miskiewicz, Nowak, Nowicki, Ochendalski, Pershon, Radlinski, Rucinski, Rachocki, Sliwinski, Skotzke, Skowronek, Szymanski, Surant, Stachnik, Stanczak, Stanley, Schultz, Swieczkowski, Szczordrowski, Schmidt, Tomczyk, Wilczek, Walentowicz, Zarek.

With not too much help from a gasping organ Joseph Zarek formed the first choir in June 1927. There were thirteen members, viz: Joseph, Frank and Stanley Schultz, Edward Skotzke, Paul Ciesielski, Frank Ruscinski, Frank Rochocki, Helen Pershon, Anna Swieczkowski, Mary Kostera Carlu, Sophia Zarek, Helen Kruszka and Frances Sliwinski.

The success of any parish depends largely on a school. Both the Pastor and the people desired to have one but with such meager means at their disposal the problem was apparent. Father Podsiad struck upon the idea of conducting classes in the church building. He began to search for a Sisterhood to assume the teaching responsibilities. Mother Mary Clara, the provincial Superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph, of Garfield Heights, Ohio, promised to send some teachers to



First Convent, built 1927

open the school if proper housing could be provided for them. The Pastor then purchased a lot from the Kroll subdivision for 1200 dollars and built the house at 8258 Fisher Avenue for 6,000 dollars. This home is now occupied by the Joseph Hudak family. The first convent was completed in October of 1927 and three Sisters arrived to begin their work. That year 142 children enrolled in the makeshift school, a rather sizeable group for such primitive accommodations. Sister Mary Paul and Sister Evarist struggled along bravely and the first class of seven



First Graduating Class, 1928

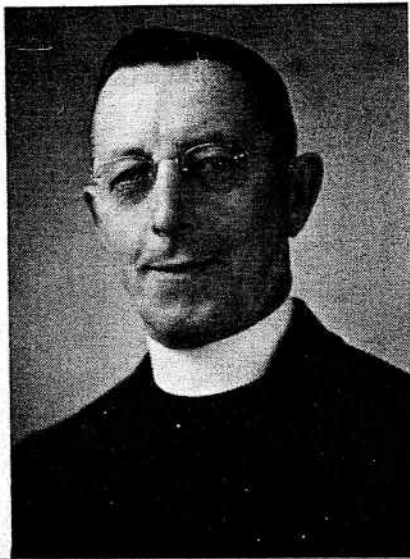
students graduated in the Spring of 1928. The class included: Grace Groth, Louis Kowalski, Leonard Schultz, Henry Dolengo, Francis Swieczkowski, Raymond Skupny, Frank Kostera and Thaddeus Borawski.

It was soon obvious that better school facilities would have to be provided. Once more Father Podsiad called upon the pioneer parishioners to get out their tools. This time they constructed the hall, which is still used, at a cost of 3,000 dollars. Immediately it became both a school and a social center. During the



The Hall

day the hall was partitioned lengthwise into two classrooms. In the evening these were set aside to make room for adult parish activities. And so in midyear of



1928 everyone could at least say that they had more elbow room. The school enrollment rose slightly to 154 children.

During all this time Father Podsiad was living in the sacristy of the church. The community itself was mired down in a sea of mud. Water could be obtained only across Van Dyke Avenue which was not as yet fully paved and daily the Sisters and Father had to bring in a supply in buckets for their needs.

Finally the Pastor bought a house on Fisher Avenue with his own savings where he was able to perform his parochial duties with some facility. During these years Father Podsiad received very little salary.

The financial picture began to grow darker. Those were booming days in Detroit but not so in this suburban community. The dark hand of the depression was already reaching out to seize its victims. The Parish was faced with dozens of smaller debts. To dissolve them, the Pastor borrowed 42,000 dollars from the bank. The long range payment plan offered by the bank was the only hope of survival. Father was freed for a time from the large number of creditors. Finally in June of 1929 he was relieved of his tasks here and appointed to St. Mary's Church in Kinde, Michigan, where he still is stationed. There is very little that we can say to this devoted priest who did so much for Ascension.

His reward will come from Our Lord Himself, but from us — a grateful "Thank you, Father".

On June 29, 1929, Father Alexander Jarzembowski, an assistant at St. Louis the King Parish became Ascension's second Pastor. This man was faced with the same difficulties which so harassed the founder of the Parish. Though new people settled in the community there were not enough of them to adequately support a growing parish.

Notwithstanding this fact Father Jarzembowski set about to erect a permanent



The Rectory

rectory. How he managed to build the house during the height of the depression remains one of the mysteries in the annals of our history. Nonetheless, with Joseph Kastler as the architect, it



Banquet scene following the blessing of the rectory, 1931. Know anyone in the picture?

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was completed in 1930 and blessed early in 1931. Nobody could ascertain to what extent the Parish would grow. The rectory has since become very inadequate for the amount of work that goes on within it.

These years were characterized by a marked spiritual growth at Ascension. Father Jarzembowski originated some of the lovely devotions to which we have all become attached, especially the Novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help. In the trying days of the early Thirties there was much need for confident prayer. When material progress was impossible it was wise indeed for both the Pastor and his people to devote all their efforts to spiritual progress. In this they succeeded admirably.



Sanctuary view before 1941

On September 19, 1940, Archbishop Edward Mooney appointed Father Anthony Kolanczyk to be the third Pastor of Ascension and Father Jarzembowski was transferred to St. Josaphat Church in Detroit. Father Kolanczyk had served with Bishop Plagens at Sweetest Heart of Mary Church and also as an assistant at St. Florian Church. He always had a premonition that if he became a pastor it would be at some country parish which was nearly bankrupt (Class of 1928 can testify to this). His fears were fully realized. In 1940 Baseline was still farm land. There were few homes, fewer roads and oceans of mud in the spring and fall. And the Parish was poverty-stricken. The annual income was 7,800 dollars in 1940.

Father Kolanczyk was much encouraged by the sight of a capacity crowd of friends who attended his first Mass here on Sunday, September 22, 1940. Among them was a large delegation of his family from Chicago, Father's home

town. He delights in telling how his sister, Catherine, greeted him with tearful eyes and asked, "What have you done that the Bishop has sent you here?"

Certainly it wasn't anything that Father had done that brought him to Baseline, but it was what he was expected to do for the good of the Parish. Archbishop Mooney had asked him to try to pull Ascension out of debt and out of the mud. And he added that if this was impossible the Parish would have to be closed and disbanded.

First, of course, something had to be done which did not cost too much money. And so sidewalks were laid in October, a decisive victory over some of the mud. The Sherman brothers, Joseph and Carl, and Joseph Swieczkowski led the pick and shovel crew that accomplished this task. Then someone brought in a bag of grass seed and trees and shrubs were planted so that the place would not float away. A few little alterations were made in the church and the altars were renovated. At least something was going on besides F.D.R.'s New Deal. The people were delighted even with these minor improvements and they began to attend Ascension rather than going long distances to churches with better facilities. Father Alex Mayer of St. Clement, Center Line, was especially helpful when he encouraged Baseline and Van Dyke residents, who were accustomed to attend his church, to return to their rightful Parish. Soon four Masses were being offered each Sunday to accommodate the new parishioners.

With these encouraging signs all thoughts turned immediately to a new school so badly needed. Father Kolanczyk visited the Archbishop to lay before him the financial condition of the Parish and the plans for the school. He was happily impressed by the progress. The income had trebled in a few short months and 256 families had pledged fifty dollars each toward the new school. The Archbishop graciously gave us a loan of 40,000 dollars and on May 11, 1941, on a beautiful spring day before 2,000 parishioners ground was broken and the new building was under way. Indeed the Parish was at long last on the way to better things.

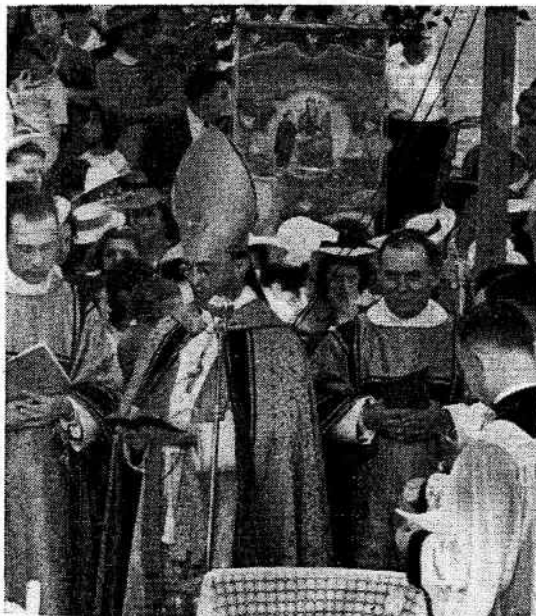
The cornerstone was laid by Bishop Stephen Woznicki on July 13, 1941. In the cornerstone was cemented a copper box containing all the historical notes of



The Pastor Fr. Kolanczyk, using a golden spade, marked the spot for the school site. In the ground breaking ceremony, he was followed by Sisters of St. Joseph who came from the six Michigan missions, then by hundreds of parishioners.

the Parish that were available, likewise the daily papers, an account of the ceremony, the signatures of the participating clergy, photographs of the Bishops of the Archdiocese and of the Pastor, some

coins, the Ascension Bulletin and pictures of the Parish buildings. Most important of all, a sheepskin on which were inscribed the names of the donors for the building was included.



Bishop Woznicki "Blessing the school cornerstone" July 13, 1941



The Archbishop, shortly after congratulating Ascension people at the school dedication, October 12, 1941

In September 353 delightful children carried their books into the new school. The original building, the middle section, contained nine modern rooms, a clinic and the principal's office.

On October 12, 1941, Archbishop Mooney came to dedicate the new building. He appeared highly pleased with our efforts especially when he learned that the school had cost only 45,072 dollars. He had wagered it would cost much more and he presented the Pastor with a box of cigars as the winner's trophy.

Hardly had the joy of these full days struck us when the awful sorrow of history's greatest war was upon us. With Pearl Harbor all thought of Parish progress was set aside as we prepared ourselves to get the job done — to win the war. 186 Ascension boys and five girls marched off to battle. The girls were:

Rosemary Kuhn, Loretta Sklar, Bertha Kolaczynski, Shirley Reed and Mary Brewer. The Parish devoted itself to constant prayer for peace and for the safety of its sons and daughters. Four Ascension men gave their lives on the field of battle. They were: Stanley Grunalt who died in the battle of the Bulge; Orlando Romano who died in New Guinea; Nelson Klanosky who gave his life on the Island of Leyte; and Stefen Polowek who likewise sacrificed his life in the Pacific. We shall always remember these gallant men. May they rest in peace!

During the war years the community grew with record speed. New industries moved in and with them thousands of new residents, a good portion of them Catholics. Father Edward Sobczak was the first resident assistant-pastor ap-



The Archbishop and the Pastor at the Dedication of the School, 1941.

pointed to Ascension; he came on July 7, 1941. In the spring of 1942 another Sunday Mass was added and that necessitated securing additional help. It came from St. Mary's College at Orchard Lake, Michigan, in the persons of Father Torzala, Father Cyran and Father Cendrowski; each of whom successively filled the post. Finally in 1943 Father Wallace Filipowicz, of the same St. Mary's College became our Sunday assistant and he is still with us.

A mere three years after the ground breaking for the school the debt was wholly dissolved. The 256 parishioners who had pledged a generous sum of money had made their promises good. To celebrate this great event a banquet was held in the hall at which Bishop Woznicki, now Bishop of Saginaw, hon-

ored us with the principal address. Father Peter Walkowiak, the Pastor of St. Florian Church in Hamtramck and our good friend and advisor, was the toast-



Speaker's Table at "Mortgage Burning Banquet" May 11, 1944

master. A capacity crowd attended this noteworthy occasion. Certainly it was a time of grand celebration; Ascension had not seen so much money, in all its history.



The moment of Mortgage Burning, 1944.

About this time our attention was turned to the reorganization of parochial activities in accordance with the plan of the Most Reverend Archbishop. The Rosary Confraternity consisting of twenty-six ladies and the Holy Name Society having only nine members were in dire need of regeneration. Certainly the spiritual and material welfare of a parish is increased by group activity. Elsewhere in this book you may read the history of these societies and the marvelous account of the progress they have made. At present there are thirteen groups actively engaged in every type of parochial work. Thirty percent of all Ascension people belong to these various organizations.

During these years the spiritual life of the Parish became more intense. Various devotions were included in the liturgical year; all designed to give the people added opportunity for works of piety. Monthly Holy Hours, First Friday devotions and Novenas to St. Therese, St. Anne, St. Jude, St. Rita, St. Anthony, St. Joseph, and to Our Lady of the Rosary are anticipated by all the parishioners. The devotion to Our Lady of Fatima for peace is held on the first Saturday of each month after the eight-thirty Mass. We have always been proud of the extraordinary attention the message of Our Lady of Fatima has received at Ascension Parish. On most first Saturdays every seat in the church is occupied and all the priests are needed to hear confessions. It is indeed a very gratifying sight and we feel confident that Mary will hear our prayers.

Our people have always been encouraged to take their Religion home with them; not leave it in church. For this reason family prayer, in the form of enthronements of the Sacred Heart in the home, the block Rosary and night adoration, is consistently on the increase. It is impossible to determine the great spiritual wealth which these devout practices have brought to the entire community.

The most insignificant devotion on our schedule often secures tremendous graces; the Rosary is recited every Thursday evening of the year for the conversion of hardened sinners within our territory. Only the priests know the value of these humble prayers.

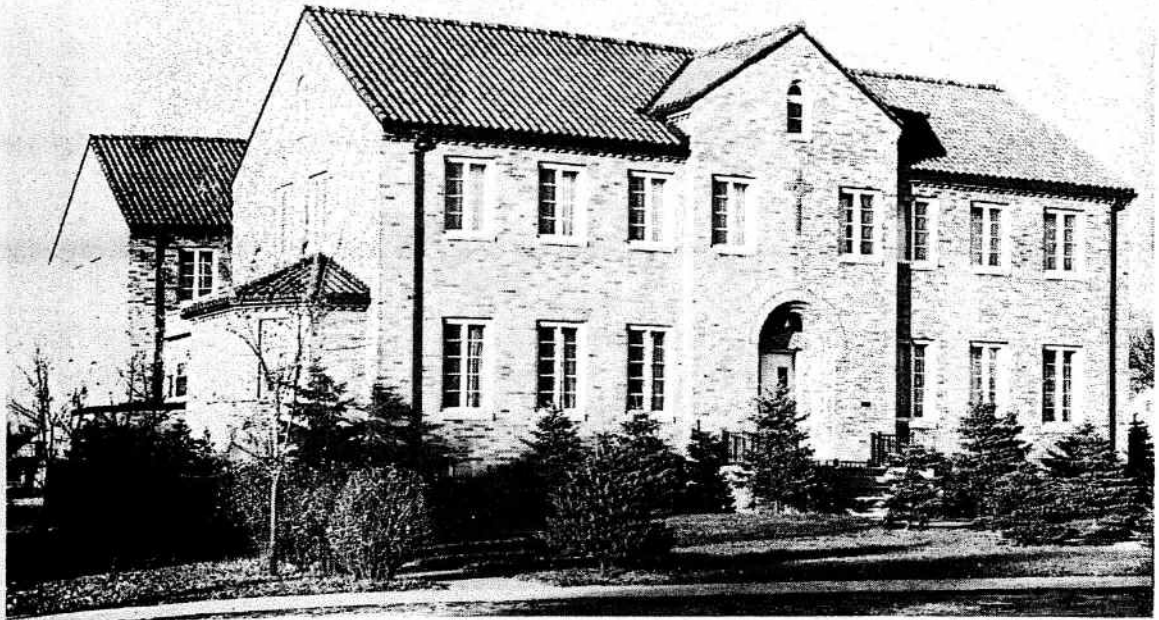
The love of our people for the Blessed Sacrament is magnificently shown throughout the quiet hours of Holy Thursday evening and Good Friday

morning when they participate in the all night vigil before Our Eucharistic Lord. Ascension Parish was one of the first in the Archdiocese to adopt this admirable practice. Entire families join with the various societies in the continuous Holy Hours which are led by the priests and by the lay people themselves. The sight of such piety defies description.

We must return again to the material growth of our Parish. Another milestone in our history was reached in October, 1945, when all debts of every kind were marked paid. In 1940 when Father Kolanczyk came to Ascension a debt of 70,000 dollars remained from the lean years dating back to 1926. Despite this burden the school was built and paid for in record time. And happily in 1945 Ascension breathed freely with the dissolution of these past obligations as well.

Now the way was paved for more action. By 1946, 659 children were enrolled in our nine-room school. Half-day sessions were reluctantly introduced as an emergency measure. An addition to the school was surely necessary but it could not be undertaken until the Sisters were more adequately housed. At the time twelve sisters were still living in the original convent by now much too small. Plans were quickly drawn up and presented to Cardinal Mooney for his approval. Once again he kindly gave his permission for Ascension's second big building operation. Ground was broken on March 19, 1946, and the next day construction was under way. Fortunately the Government had recently relaxed its restrictions on building and though they were invoked again soon afterwards all our bids for scarce materials had been made.

As always the parishioners came forth generously to answer the Pastor's appeal. Contributions were numerous and 176 families donated one hundred dollars for the building. Suddenly a critical labor shortage developed and the people themselves took up the work. We recall the evening when twenty-nine men were nailing down the roof. The hammer blows echoed for miles. Later some forty-two men were engaged in finishing the interior of the home; laying the floors and painting the walls. Soon after a crew of thirty women hurried in to clean up the house after the actual construction had been completed. Never were Ascension people so overwhelmingly united in one project. Everyone was intent on giving the Sisters



The new home of our Sisters.

a fine place in which to live. Seventeen months later on September 6, 1947, the sisters moved into the new convent.

The building ranks among the finest convents in the Archdiocese. It is ideally laid out; it has fifty-seven rooms, each designed to give the sisters every possible convenience. There are some few parts of the building where better materials could have been used but these were not available at that time. In every other way it is an excellent piece of work and

a monument of our appreciation to the Sisters. The cost of the building and its furnishings was 108,000 dollars; a price recognized by everyone as ridiculously low for a home sufficiently large for twenty-four sisters.

On October 1, 1947, Bishop Woznicki consecrated the altar in the chapel and



Bishop Woznicki consecrating the Convent Altar



Convent Chapel

blessed the other rooms. Thus was concluded another happy page in the history of Ascension Parish.

Now with the sisters all out of the rain the time was at hand to enlarge the school. Again the Pastor went to see the Cardinal; by now Father Kolanczyk was a familiar visitor. And again the permission was granted, plans were drawn up and approved and work was begun on June 15, 1947, immediately after classes were suspended for the summer. A new wing was erected on each end of the original school, giving us eight more

tized, 419 adults had not made their Easter Duty, 122 had not been confirmed. It was discovered that 254 children attended a public grade school and 194 fellows and girls were attending a public high school. This was a shocking picture to be sure, but it could be far worse in as much as Baseline and Van Dyke has long been considered an "escape" community. The only alternative was to get busy. The priests assisted by the men of the St. Vincent De Paul Society set out to gather the stray sheep back to the fold. On August 20, 1950, thirty children were baptized. Many marriages were convalidated and dozens of negligent adults returned to the Sacraments. Special effort was made to make the work of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine more effective and a record number of public school children enrolled in the two instruction classes. This work still continues daily; in many ways it is very discouraging. But such is the work of Christ at all times and in all places.

Since informed Catholics are holier Catholics, all parishioners receive the Archdiocesan weekly newspaper, *The Michigan Catholic*, free of charge. The wisdom of this new service has been frequently manifested.

On November 30, 1951, one of the final hurdles in our program was happily passed. It had always been of some concern to us that a sizeable parcel of land running straight through the church grounds did not belong to the Parish. It belonged to the Henkel farm, and on various occasions it was sought but the Henkel Estate refused to sell. Finally the Rivard Brothers, headed by Mr. Loyola Rivard, purchased the entire Henkel property for the expansion of their own business and they presented the desired piece of land to the Parish

as a most generous gift. We all have great reason to thank those thoughtful gentlemen who have always been outstanding parishioners.



1951 Parish Committee: (Left to right) Joseph Jankowski, Loyola Rivard, the Pastor, Paul Buback. Missing are: William Romano and Joseph Kargula.

This is the end of the story of Ascension Parish. The past twenty-five years of its history have been but small part of the two-hundred and fifty years of Catholicity in Greater Detroit. Yet no one will deny that it has been a significant part.

We thank God and Our Blessed Lady, today, for the wonderful graces that have been ours during the past years.

To His Eminence, Cardinal Mooney, the Parish expresses deep gratitude for his interest and confidence in us and for his counsel and encouragement.

May all the priests and sisters and lay people who have worked for God at Ascension Parish be rewarded an hundred fold in Heaven.

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classrooms, a library, several storage rooms and a new heating plant. This work was completed by the next fall at the cost of 89,000 dollars. The school is modern in every way, though there are luxuries which could be there, but which very few parochial schools can afford. Old-fashioned desks given to us by other schools are still in use; these will soon be replaced by new ones.

In 1949 a few more acres were added to the Parish property and an athletic field was made and equipped. In 1950 two additional lots on the north side of the grounds were purchased and a road was put in to make the parking lot easily accessible. Usually there are some four-hundred cars, parked around the church on Sunday mornings, rather an amazing sight for those who recall the bleak days. Few people remember that the church property was little more than a mud puddle as late as 1940. Some 3000 loads of dirt were required to fill in and to level the athletic field and parking lots. The companies who built the Briggs plant and paved so many Detroit streets supplied us with the fill dirt; much also came when the sewers were being constructed in Baseline in 1942.

On June 15, 1949, Cardinal Mooney sent a second full-time assistant to Ascension. This was Father Leo Totte, who is still with us. With another priest in the

house and more rectory business being transacted it was necessary to enclose the porch of the rectory to make more office space. This is now a very pleasant spot.

On January 29, 1948, the drive for the new church was officially opened. This is our dream now; a fine church, a worthy house for Our Eucharistic Lord! Though our people are all of modest means they have responded heartily to this latest appeal. At this writing the fund exceeds 77,000 dollars. Over 370 families have contributed their share of one hundred dollars. Some sixty-six young single people have donated fifty dollars each. Despite high prices it is evident that we must build; Father Podsiad's hand made church will soon tumble down. 1952, we hope, will be Ascension's biggest year! Elsewhere in this book you can read about all the plans for the future.

In the summer of 1950, four Dominican Sisters took up a general census. This terrific task took almost two months to complete; during which time all 2,595 homes in our territory were visited. Of this number 1,392 were Catholic homes with 4,749 souls. The result of the census clearly laid out our work for future months. It was found that 224 couples had attempted marriage outside of the Church, 107 other couples were separated, 122 children had not been bap-



Baptizing the 31, after the census 1950.

HISTORY

Warren Township, founded in 1837, was a rural community with a population of less than 2,500 in 1900. But the streetcar extension from Detroit to Center Line in 1901 enabled Detroit workers to live outside the city and thereby aided in the growing settlement of the southend.

Through the early 1920's, wells, septic tanks and good sized farms were the rule. The largest in this area was the Henkel farm with their house on Van Dyke near Westminster. Catholic residents could choose to go north two miles to St. Clement or south two miles to Holy Name Church. The area was called "Baseline" because of its nearness to Baseline Road (8 Mile).

Land companies began to buy farm land for

eventual development because with the paving of Van Dyke in 1925 and the promise of water service, the area was sure to grow.

Early in 1926, a delegation of Baseline Catholics with some 50 names petitioned Bishop Gallagher to establish a parish. Father Podsiad from St. Albertus Parish, was appointed to direct this task on September 9th. Working with a building committee, composed of Wilczek, Kostera, Jaroszewski and Pershon, a plot of land was purchased October 20th and construction commenced November 2nd.

Fr. Podsiad and John Kostera directed the parish volunteers and it was finished in time for the first official mass, December 25, 1926. One month later, Fr. Podsiad was officially made pastor.



First church and rectory on Ascension (Vivian) Street

Establishing a parish school was the next goal. The Sisters of St. Joseph (Garfield Heights) sent three teachers in 1927 to conduct classes in the church building starting September 12th. They lived in the newly completed convent on the south side of Fisher Street.

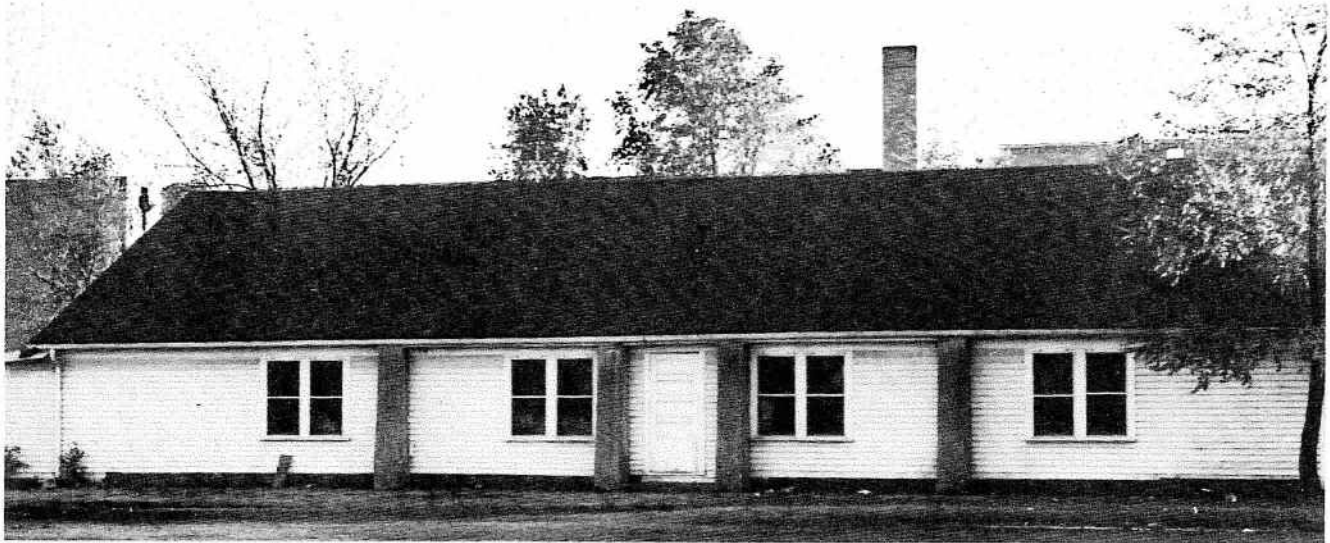


First convent - 8258 Fisher

A parish hall was built by November, 1928 to house the students and to be a social center for the area. Thus, in two years, Ascension parish had grown from a petition to a church, school and convent at considerable debt to a Catholic community of under 200 families.

On June 29, 1929, Fr. Podsiad was replaced by Fr. Jarzembowski and before the effects of the stock market crash were felt, the rectory was completed in October, 1930.

For the next ten years, the Ascension community, like everyone else, simply tried to outlast the Depression. Annual income was around \$6,000 while not much of their \$60,000 debt had been erased.



First school and social hall razed 1969



Parishioners at first rectory dedication dinner in 1931

In 1940, Fr. Kolanczyk was appointed pastor. He quickly realized that the Ascension spirit of 1926 had another chance to grow now that the defense industry was beginning to expand the economy and spur a population growth in southern Warren Township. The community responded to his leadership by increasing their support enough to undertake financing \$45,000 for a new school. It opened in September, 1941 and almost doubled the school population to 400 students.



Fr. Kolanczyk, late 1940's

Baseline was still rural in that local streets were impassable with spring rains. Motorists would take to the high ground around the school and church to bypass the quagmire. And there were complaints about horseback riding on private property. But the construction of war plants also brought government funds to build sewers, drains and a post office. By the end of the war, the parish had about 500 families.

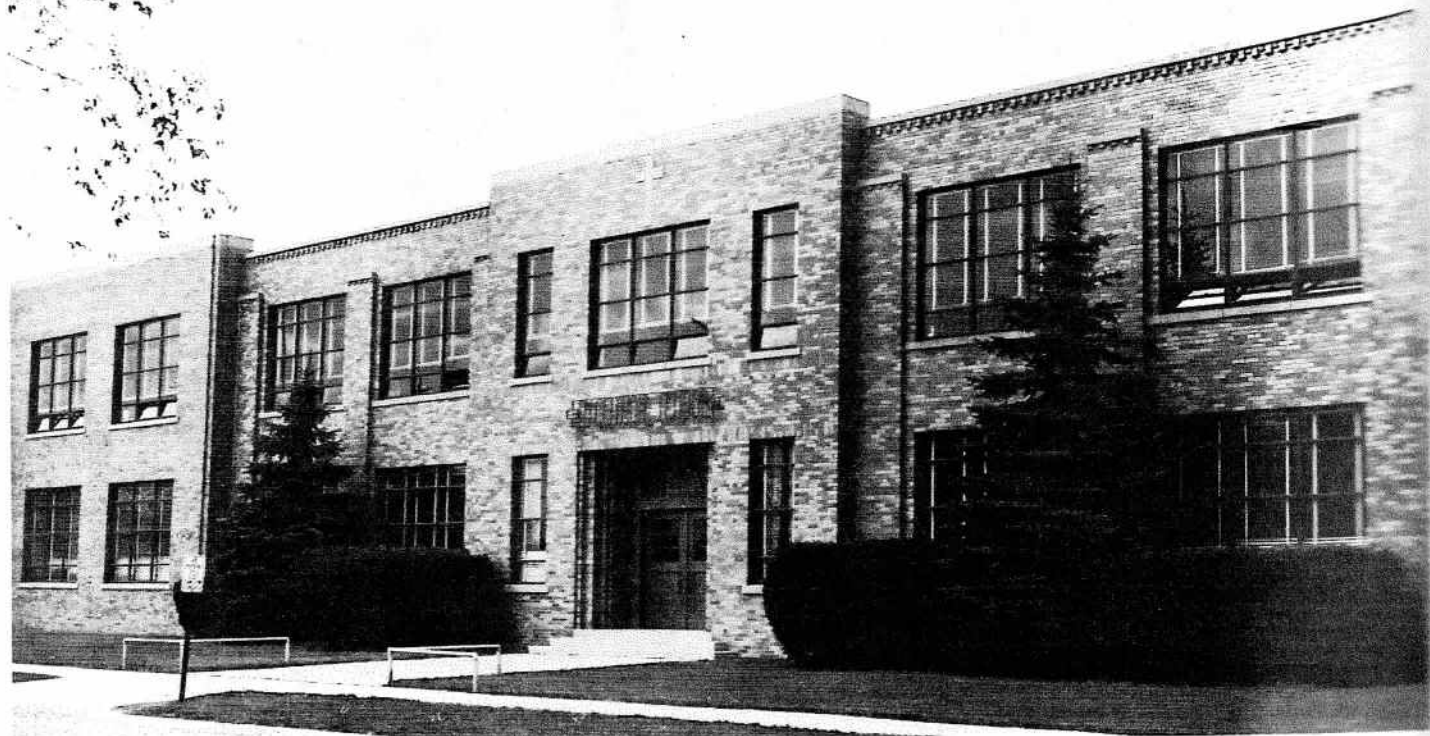
Fr. Kolanczyk concentrated on building a religious and community spirit through the revitalization of old parish societies and the establishment of new ones. The parish responded and building funds were launched to change Ascension from wood to brick.

In the midst of the postwar boom, Ascension

added six rooms to the school and built a new convent. Volunteer help kept the cost to \$160,000. But still the big goal was to build a church without borrowing money. Besides the building fund commitments by individual parishioners, every form of fund raising was employed to raise money.

As the parish completed its 25th year celebration, some \$80,000 were in reserve for the church. The parish population passed the 1000 family mark and Ascension had three priests in residence for the first time.

A vision of the future of the 25th anniversary of Ascension called for more building after the church. These included a rectory, auditorium, gymnasium and a high school.



Second school (now St. John Deaf Center - first floor)



Interior of first church, early 1950's

After a seven year church drive, ground breaking took place in May of 1953 and two years later the dedication mass of the new church was celebrated. This was a proud time for the parish as the \$367,000 church was the newest and largest in Warren Township. The architecture and appointments were modern but with a classic touch. Many newspaper feature stories were written on the unique windows and statuary.



Second church - first Mass November 25, 1954 (Thanksgiving)

The mid to late 50's were years of prosperity and peak activity for the parish. Church support was growing along with the parish families as 1600 enveloped packets were claimed in 1956. Bazaars and festivals were deemed outmoded. Devotions, novenas and the rosary were attended by full congregations.

A great number of Ascension's 32 professed nuns responded to their vocation call at this time. Membership in the Holy Name and Rosary Society reached their historical peaks.

A credit union was established, rectory built, and the 3½ acre parking lot and field area was purchased for \$60,000. "Baseline" was no longer...as Warren Township became a city in late 1956.

Although the school was enjoying a stable population, serious talk was starting on the cost of Catholic education to the parish and Catholic families. Due to some unusual circumstances, Ascension had seven different

priest assistants during 1954 to 1958.

Ascension entered the 1960's with a great momentum. The distinguished choir and championship football team crowned its achievements in both the liturgical and social areas. Priest assignments seemed to reflect its energy as it had two newly ordained priests as assistants. Population reached over 1500 families and 2,000 envelope packets. Parishioners were signing the tithing pledge. By 1964, \$150,000 was on deposit for the social center.

Other significant developments were taking place. A shortage of vocations forced a reduction of teaching sisters and lay teachers had to be hired for the school. The parish subsidy to the school reached \$40,000 in 1964. The rosary no longer seemed to be the devotional preference of the parish. The start of renewal was signalled by the introduction of the dialog mass. Lay people began to lead hymns, read prayers, teach CCD and discuss the form and meaning of religion.



Sisters at second convent, now Faith Development House



Msgr. Anthony J. Kolanczyk Social Center, 1968

Pope Pius XII's long term as Pope ended. Pope John XXIII initiated the most significant event in the history of the Church in the previous 400 years. He convened the Second Vatican Council in 1962 and "opened the windows of the Church." Pope Paul VI was elected the next Vicar of Christ after John's death and officially closed the Council in 1965.

No one was prepared for what was going to take place at Ascension during 1965 to 1971. Liturgy, school, religious, finance, social issues and the pastorship were dramatically affected. The world and the Church were changing and the parish was swept up in it all. Some aggressively supported change. Others questioned its speed and completeness. There was hardly an aspect of parish life left untouched by renewal.

Although the basic articles of faith and worship did not change, the form and style did. This was a difficult idea for many Catholics to understand because other conditions were altered. Lay people were to lead and participate. Priests were to share certain responsibilities. And sisters were disappearing as school teachers.

Even though the parish saw its dream of a social center completed in 1968 at a cost of \$329,000 and the removal of the old church and hall in 1969, it also saw the end of a 44 year tradition with the closing of the school in 1971. On June 30, 1971 Msgr. Kolanczyk retired after 31 years as pastor.

Unlike Fr. Podsiad, who founded the parish as the pioneer families had petitioned, Msgr. Kolanczyk had built Ascension by leading parishioners toward an active contemporary worship, a full complement of property and buildings, and a strong pride in the community.

It was up to the next pastor, Fr. Krawczak to consolidate all that had come before -- the style of parish worship, organizations, buildings and administrative programs. Because times were different, renewal in the Church nearly completed, religious and social attitudes of the world had changed, Fr. Krawczak drew upon the resources of the parish council and commissions to bring the third birth of Ascension. He was nominated a bishop in February 1973.

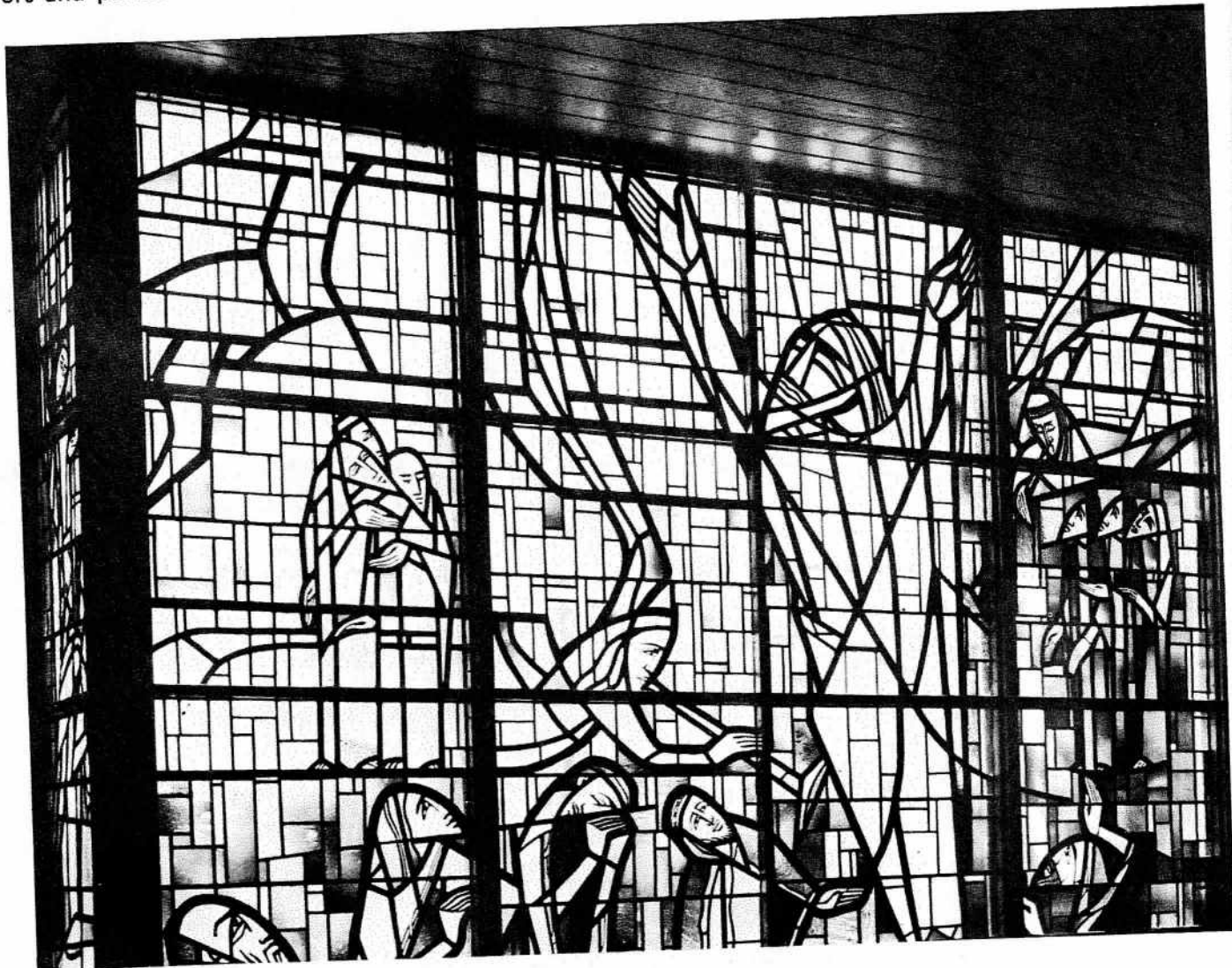
The last five years until the 50th Jubilee saw changes which were to aid this rebirth. The first floor of the school was rented to the Archdiocese of Detroit to become St. John Deaf Center. Fund raising through festivals and bingo were heavily relied upon for financial support as the number of active envelope users had declined to 1100. The church's altar and pews were re-arranged for better participation in the liturgy. The parish allocated money to hire a part-time professional staff to enhance the worship at Ascension.

The greatest change was the effort to provide life long religious education from pre-school to retirees by having salaried education directors and parishioners as teachers conduct full

programs. In 1971, the convent became known as the Faith Development House.

Many experiments and re-arrangements of both the pastoral team and the parish council were necessary to provide sound education and meaningful worship services within the limited parish budget.

As each year passes, the shock of renewal lessens for many parishioners and the dedication of younger generations begins to show in greater parish service and contributions. Amidst the many different forms, ideas and personalities of the last 50 years, Ascension has always been a parish serving God and His people.



Stained glass window -- Church front -- scene of Christ's Ascension

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