

SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE CHURCH

PARISH HISTORY


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In the early days of the Catholic Church in Columbus, the settlement called Taylor's Station, which was about two miles east of St. Thomas Church, had Mass at regular intervals. There were fifteen families there, and the priests of Saint Patrick Church and Saint Joseph Cathedral attended to their spiritual needs. Several times, an effort was made to build a church, but the project never met with success.

Besides the Catholics living at Taylor's Station, there were quite a number of Catholic farmers living in the vicinity, and the building of the Steel Plant at Rarigville, now East Columbus, brought a few more. On May 26, 1900, Reverend Andrew J. Johnson, who had been pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Licking County, took up the work of gathering together these families and establishing a parish under the patronage of Saint Thomas the Apostle. The first efforts of the new congregation were towards the erection of a suitable church. In the meantime, services were held in the local public school. The altar used for these services had to be carried to the school on Saturday evening and back again to the home of one of the members of the parish on Sunday afternoon.

In 1901, Mr. Thomas D. Cassady donated a 200 by 300 foot lot at the northwest corner of Fifth and Cassady Avenues for the building the church. Immediately, plans were made for a small brick church of Gothic architecture. The building was started, and the work went on rapidly. The cornerstone was laid on April 6, 1902. The work was completed during the summer, and on August 10, the same year, it was dedicated by Bishop Henry Moeller, assisted by the pastor, Father Johnson, and Reverend Albert Reinhart, O.P.; Reverend J.D. Pendergast, O.P.; Reverend Lucas Rath, C.P.P.S.; Reverend R.A. McEachen and Reverend D.P. Quaily. The choir from Saint Patrick Church sang the Mass for the occasion, and two

companies of the uniformed Knights of Saint John and the Hibernian  English
escort for the Bishop. The day was a happy one for the little congregation which now possessed a church of its own.


There was still no parish house for the priest, so Father Johnson lived for a time at Saint Mary of the Springs and later at the home of Mr. Thomas D. Cassady which was near the church. The next effort was to provide a suitable home for the pastor. Plans were made and work was begun on the new house in the latter part of 1903, and it was finished and ready for occupancy in 1904.

During the following years many immigrants moved into East Columbus—principally Polish, Slavic, Czechoslovakian, and Hungarian people—and by 1918 nearly one half of the parish membership consisted of immigrants of these ethnicities.

In the summer of 1913, as Father Johnson's health began to fail, it was necessary to have another priest take his place most of the time. He celebrated Mass for the last time on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1915. Just over a year later, he died at Mount Carmel Hospital on December 15, 1916. His funeral was held from Saint Thomas Church on Monday, December 18, 1916. Reverend T. J. O'Reilly, Pastor of Saint Dominic Church, celebrated the Mass of Requiem, assisted by Reverend C. J. Norris as deacon and Reverend J. B. Hughes, O. P. as subdeacon. There were forty-two priests present to pay their last tribute of respect to their deceased brother priest. Bishop James J. Hartley was present in the sanctuary, and after the Mass gave the last absolutions. Father Johnson's body was taken to Brooklyn, New York—which was his former home—and interred in Holy Cross Cemetery. Reverend John H. O'Neil was appointed pastor of Saint Thomas Church on June 23, 1916, and immediately took charge of the parish.

Father O'Neil who succeeded the founding pastor, Father Johnson, was a very warm and gifted speaker. He made strangers feel welcome, especially immigrants. He was transferred to Holy Name Parish in 1923.

The third pastor of Saint Thomas was Father William A. Schaefer. Remembrances recorded about Father Schaefer include that he was a happy person who liked to walk. During his pastorate, Saint Thomas School was started, and he was a real part of the life of the school especially as he periodically taught the children himself. He was a generous man. The parish had many "socials" and bazaars with the various organizations of the parish taking care of the booths. Father Schaefer served as pastor for nearly ten years from 1923 and until his death in March of 1932.

The fourth pastor, Father Herman Tague, had the difficult task of ng the Depression years. He was a quiet and shy person who did not particularly like speaking in public. He, however, had other gifts. During his pastorate a soup kitchen was started for the poor of the area. The food was provided by many of the farmers in the parish who generously shared what they had.


In December of 1935, a young priest who was an associate pastor at Holy Rosary Parish came to Saint Thomas. His name was Father Harry A. **Estadt**, and he made an impression from the moment he arrived. He repeated many times the story that Bishop Hartley called him into his office and said, “Boy, go out to Saint Thomas until I can find a man to replace you.” It was not until forty years later that Father **Estadt** was eventually replaced.

During Father **Estadt**’s years as pastor, the school flourished, the Holy Name Society, still very active in the parish today, was established, the annual fund drives of the diocese were faithfully supported, the Altar and Rosary Society for the women of the parish was active, and the parish devotions of May Crowning and Forty Hours were held. Toward the end of then Monsignor **Estadt**’s tenure, the demographics of the parish began to change. Saint Thomas had been on the fringes of Columbus, but the growth of the suburbs pushed the city east and north making Saint Thomas part of the center-city. Many parishioners moved to these developing suburbs and the residents who moved into the parish boundaries were generally not Catholic. Parishioners of the past continued to come to Saint Thomas to some extent, but many naturally became active in the new parishes being established in their respective neighborhoods. A new ethnic group, African Americans, entered wholeheartedly into the parish life and brought a new richness to the fabric of the parish life.

Father Carmen J. Arcuri served first as administrator and then briefly as pastor during Father **Estadt**’s final year.

Monsignor Michael L. Donovan was pastor from 1976 to 1981, his first pastorate, leaving to become pastor of Christ the King Parish. Monsignor Donovan completely renovated the sanctuary of Saint Thomas Church in keeping with the changes to the liturgy required by the Second Vatican Council.

Father Charles Theodore Thomas was pastor from 1981 to 1982, his first pastorate, leaving to become pastor of Saint Timothy Parish. His pastorate only lasted for 18 months. Father Thomas started the youth group and brought the parish together socially.

Father Charles E. Cotton was pastor from 1982 to 1986, his first p  English
become pastor at Saint Elizabeth in Columbus. He started the parish council, oversaw the renovation of aging buildings, and served as a part time chaplain to Saint Anthony Hospital (now Ohio State University Hospital East). Father Cotton left Saint Thomas to become the full time chaplain of Mount Carmel Medical Center.

Father James A. Klima was the tenth pastor of Saint Thomas from 1986 to 1992, his first pastorate, until he was made pastor of Saint Mary in Marion. He undertook the updating of the parish census and began the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults at Saint Thomas. Father Klima renewed efforts at building community life in the parish which included the revival of parish picnics and the publication of both a historical directory and a pictorial directory.

Father Ronald J. Atwood became pastor of Saint Thomas in 1992, his first pastorate, and was pastor for two full six-year terms, before becoming pastor of Saint Francis of Assisi Church. Father stressed the right and responsibility of each baptized person to enter into ministry in the parish. Liturgical celebrations were planned by a committee and many parishioners were commissioned in the roles of lector, Eucharistic minister, server, usher/greeter, etc. It was during this period that Saint Thomas became a member congregation of Building Responsibility Equality and Dignity (B.R.E.A.D.), an interfaith advocacy group for social justice. Also, through the efforts of the Social Concerns Committee, outreach to the neighborhood continued in the Thanksgiving dinner held annually at the Eastside Community Center headquarters. In addition, a parish quilt that hangs in the back of the church was made from the fabric contributed from any family that wanted to share a piece of its family history for the effort. The colors, shapes, and textures of this artifact reflect the diversity that is so attractive to so many worshippers who visit the parish.

Father Denis Sebuggwawo Kigozi, became pastor of Saint Thomas in 2003, his first pastorate. His reverence and kindness draw many to the parish. Since the parish has recently been enriched by a new Hispanic immigrant population, Father Kigozi has established a bilingual Mass every other Sunday. He has led efforts to encourage participation by these new members as liturgical ministers, and to promote such programs as English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and scripture study in both English and Spanish.

Thanks Bob and all contributors!

View the PowerPoint presentation given by Bob Burke for St. Thomas' 100 anniversary

celebration.

