

# The History of the Parish of St Dominic

What began in October 1945 with a small group gathering to worship in the basement of Lomond School has blossomed into a community of over 1,400 families growing in their faith through prayer, education and outreach.

The spirit of those families who founded St. Dominic Parish over 64 years ago has never wavered. It was passed on through generations of people who followed in their footsteps on this faith journey. Their dedication to our church and their vision for our future have enabled St. Dominic to touch the lives of hundreds of children, adults and elderly in our community. We have travelled together in faith and have been strengthened by each other and the wonderful blessings that have highlighted the seasons of our past. Together, we continue to build on this foundation for the next generation of the Church of St. Dominic.

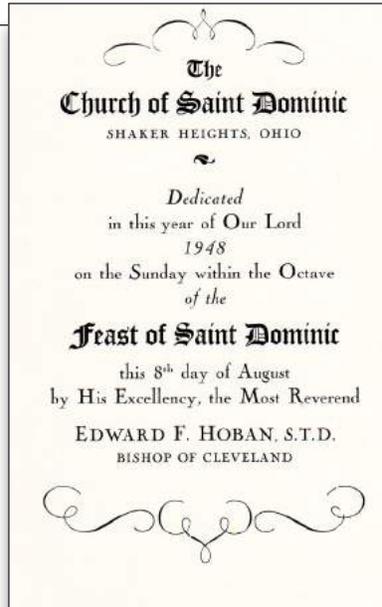
*The origin of the following colorful historical account was the program for the dedication of the church dated August 8, 1948.*

It was on October 11, 1945 (the Feast of the Maternity of the Blessed Mother) that St. Dominic's came into existence. On that day His Excellency Bishop Hoban announced the formation of a new Catholic parish in Shaker Heights, Ohio. Previous to this no parish existed in the city; several parishes located outside the municipality had administered the territory of Shaker Heights.

The new parish was named for a Spanish Saint, Dominic Guzman, the famous founder of the Dominican Order. The new St. Dominic's was formed of former St. Cecilia territory, and comprised approximately one-half of the suburb of Shaker Heights. Its western boundary was Lee Road; the southern, Scottsdale Boulevard; the northern, Parkland Drive to Almar Drive; and the eastern boundary was left undetermined. These boundaries located the new parish on the southeastern perimeter of Greater Cleveland; its total territory was comparatively small, slightly over one square mile.

As the "Founding Father" – the Pastor and Organizer Bishop Hoban named the Reverend Edmund F. Ahern, who until that time had been Pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Lorain. Father Ahern, who was ordained in 1915, had been successively assistant at St. Thomas' and St. James' Parishes, then Chaplain at St. John's Hospital, and finally Pastor of St. Mary's in Lorain and Dean of the Lorain Deanery when he was assigned the task of organizing the new St. Dominic's.

And so, with the parish officially established, the territorial

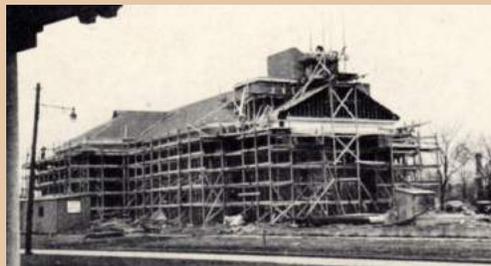


lines set and the Pastor appointed, the new parish was functioning – on paper at least. The hard task was ahead of transferring it from paper to reality.

The first step was to call a meeting of the parishioners with their Pastor. The first meetings presented a picture of optimism mixed with confusion. A possible site for the future Church was located at Kinsman and Palmerston Roads. At those first meetings, held in the basement of St. Cecilia's Church, the fitness of this site was discussed; sizable pledges were made by parishioners; a Guild of the women was organized to help Fr. Ahern in his initial efforts.

On November 18 through the kindness of the Shaker School Board, the first Masses in the new territory were said by Fr. Ahern in the Auditorium of Lomond School – in that auditorium which was to become, in the course of events, so familiar to the people of St. Dominic's. The ladies of the Guild furnished the altar for the first Masses; and from that first Sunday an organization of ushers, under the leadership of William Bergen, Jr., began its essential work.

The parish was not quite two months old when the first party was held. Friday, December 7, was the date chosen by the ladies of the Guild for their first Benefit Party. Held at the East Side Turner's Hall, it netted a return of one thousand three hundred and thirty-three dollars, and was the first of a number of tremendously successful parties held for the parish by the Ladies Guild.



The scene, after two months, was bright with hope for the future – but with startling suddenness it changed to blackness bordering on despair. Father Ahern, who had been working at full speed for two months, was suddenly stricken ill. The proposed site was meeting with objections from every side. At Christmas of 1945 – the first Christmas for the Parish – the congregation was in truth “a flock without a shepherd.” It was necessary for the priests from St. Cecilia’s (the mother parish) to hold the Christmas services. The outlook was depression: doubts were being expressed concerning the future of St. Dominic’s . . . many were wondering if the whole project might not collapse . . . if the new parish might not die a premature death . . .



## 1946

Towards the end of the first month of the new year, new hope and new life came to the faltering parish. On January 25th Father Ahern resigned, and the Bishop appointed a new Pastor – the Rev. Roy G. Bourgeois, who was ordained in 1925, had served as assistant pastor of St. Joseph’s Church in Canton and was the Pastor of St. Peter’s Church in Akron before being transferred to St. Dominic’s.

Father Bourgeois, in order to be close to his parishioners, immediately took up residence at St. Cecilia’s Rectory. He had hardly assumed his duties when a second piece of good news was made public – a deadlock over the site had been broken; a parcel of land at the intersection of South Moreland Boulevard and Norwood Road, slightly over three acres in extent, had been located for the future Church buildings. This was one of the most desirable sites in all of Shaker Heights, admirably located at an important intersection on the Rapid Transit line.

The only difficulty concerning this site was a zoning technicality: a school would eventually be built; how could the school be built along Winslow Road, which was zoned for residential buildings? The entire question, pro and con, was discussed at public hearing before the Council of Shaker Heights on March 18. A petition to rezone the Winslow side was presented in competent fashion by Attorney James Butler, Attorney Roy Scott, and County Commissioner John F. Curry. By vote of 5 to 2 the petition for rezoning was approved by the councilmen.

To chart the course of action through this and other problems, Fr. Bourgeois enlisted the help of an “Executive Committee,” composed of the following men: James Butler, Roy Scott, Samuel Ruddock, John Curry, William Kirby, and Michael Kelley (Site and Building Committee); and John Flaherty, William Avery, William Bergen Jr., Robert Martin, Edward Satalia, and Ralph Sweeney (Finance Committee). Meeting with the Pastor at various homes,

these men applied their combined experience and intelligence toward the solution of each problem as it arose.

Easter of 1946 was a very joyful feast for the congregation, in strong contrast to the previous Christmas. The auditorium of Lomond School was resplendent with a new portable altar (built by Ralph Sweeney), banked with lilies and ferns. Pastor and people rejoiced at the thought that, with the help of God and Our Mother of Perpetual Help, their problems were slowly being solved.

June of 1946 was an all-important month for the parish. A down payment was made on the site, so that it was

definitely “reserved” for the church. Shortly thereafter, in spite of discouraging real estate conditions, a house was purchased for use as a Rectory and at long last it became possible for Fr. Bourgeois to live in his parish. This house, a single home at 3269 Lansmere Road, was furnished in record time by Frank Vyhna, so that it was ready for occupancy in the month of June. Then on June 10 the Bishop named as assistant to the parish – the Rev. John F. Whealon. Father Whealon had been ordained the previous year. He served as assistant at St. Peter’s in Akron for three months and studied for nine months in Canada before coming to St. Dominic’s.

Throughout that first summer Fr. Bourgeois studied Colonial Architecture and met regularly with William Koehl, the architect, in order to make the plans for a Church which would be a credit to the Parish and to the community. On July 27th the Pastor erected a sign on the property, proclaiming to all and sundry that the location was the “future home of St. Dominic’s.” In the fall of that year, on Sunday, October 27, a moving and memorable parochial event took place. On that Sunday the first Holy Communion of the parish was held. Beautiful floral and sanctuary decorations adorned the altar in Lomond Auditorium as nine girls and five boys received Holy Communion for the first time from the hands of their Pastor, Fr. Bourgeois.

And so it was that the important year 1946 drew to a close. No shadow of doubt about the future of the parish dimmed the joy of this Christmas. The parishioners could look back upon a year of steady progress, and hopes were bright for the new year.

During 1946 the men of the parish banded to form the Holy Name Club. Under the leadership of Roy Scott the Holy Name became a strong right hand to Fr. Bourgeois in his labors for the parish. The men organized a Smoker on July 17; they had an “Athletic Night” on November 6 in this fashion throughout 1946 and in succeeding years the Holy Name Club performed numberless tasks for the welfare of St. Dominic’s.

During the year the Guild continued its invaluable activity, sponsoring three highly successful parties: a card party in June at the Higbee Lounge, a Garden Party in August at the home of Mrs. Alfred Ward, and an Anniversary Party in December at Turner's Hall. At this last party Father Bourgeois was surprised with a birthday cake, on top of which burned a single candle, in celebration of the first birthday of the parish!

## 1947

The opening months of 1947 were the "calm before the storm." At that precise period in our country's history, two years after VJ Day, the wartime building controls were still very much in effect. The shortage of building materials (steel in particular), coupled with a great impetus in postwar building plans, caused a serious threat of inflation to the nation's economy. To offset this threatened inflation the Government Civilian Production Administration (C.P.A.) had jurisdiction over all building permits. Only necessary building was permitted; before any building project could commence it was necessary to secure a C.P.A. permit.

The time from January to June of 1947 was spent in completing the architectural plans and building drawings for the proposed Church, in letting our bids for the project, and in marshaling the requisite papers, arguments, and support to obtain the all-important C.P.A. permit.

On Sunday, May 11, a slate of names was presented to the parishioners as candidates for councilmen. The former councilmen (John F. Curry, John Flaherty, William Kirby Samuel Ruddock, Roy Scott and Ralph Sweeney) had been serving in that capacity temporarily; the first permanent councilmen, put in office by democratic election, were William F. Avery, James A. Butler, William H. Kirby, Ralph G. Sweeney, Edward G. Resch and Samuel J. Ruddock.

Saturday, May 31, was another "red-letter" day in the history of the infant Parish. On that day the Government Board (now called the Office of Housing Expediter) granted permission for the construction of a Church at the intersection of South Moreland Boulevard and Norwood Road. As the bids from contractors had been received and the contractor chosen (The Henry F. Hebing Co. of Cleveland), the one remaining formality was to select a day for the ground-breaking ceremony so that the building might commence.

The day chosen was Tuesday, June 3. By telephone and

word-of-mouth the news was quickly passed around the parish that this was to be the day. Late that afternoon a sizable crowd gathered at the site. Included in the throng were several priests from neighboring parishes, the Mayor of Shaker Heights, the heads of Church societies, the Architect, the Contractor, and many well-wishers. Representing the Bishop as officiating dignitary was the Pastor of St. Cecilia's, Rt. Rev. Msgr. John Ruffing (who had been made a Monsignor just a few weeks previously).

As the setting sun illuminated the scene Monsignor Ruffing dug the silver-plated shovel into the ground and lifted out the first shovelful of dirt from the site of the future Church. He was followed by the Pastor and the Assistant, visiting priests, heads of societies, councilmen, and all parishioners willing to wield the shovel. When all were finished a minor excavation had been made in the ground! After this ground-breaking, by way of celebration, an "open house" was held in Lomond Auditorium.

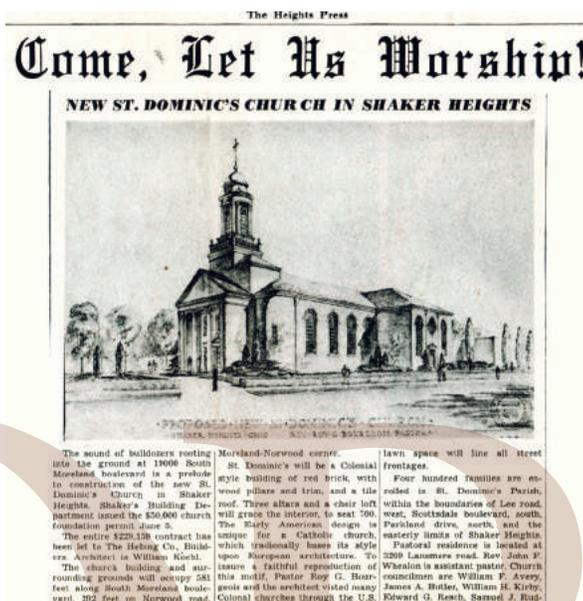
On June 12 activity on the location began in earnest. The contractor, Mr. Henry Hebing, moved in a bulldozer to level off the site. Thereafter many of the parishioners, in going to and from work on the Rapid Transit, became "sidewalk superintendents" as they watched the steady progress. As the summer went on, an excavation was made for the foundations, wooden forms were built, concrete was poured, the subterranean work was completed and finally the bricklayers began their work on the walls.

By Sunday, October 26 work had progressed to such an extent that it was possible to lay the cornerstone. This ceremony was carried out with all due solemnity. Bishop Hoban had appointed the Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese, the R. Rev. Floyd L. Begin to lay the cornerstone.

The afternoon of October 26 was bright and sunny as several hundred parishioners and guests filled the body of the unfinished edifice. In their presence Bishop Begin blessed and sealed the cornerstone and then blessed the half-completed walls in the rich and meaningful ceremony.

The closing months of 1947 were ideal for building and bricklaying, so that the structure seemed almost to grow up from the ground. By the early part of December the walls were nearly completed and the steel roof-beams were set in place.

At the end of the year all but a very small part of the roof was covered, so that Christmas of 1947 – the third and last Christmas in the Lomond School Auditorium – was a day of great rejoicing for St. Dominic's.



1947 was important in the history of the young parish not only because of this beginning of construction, but also because St. Dominic's began functioning as a true parish. Catechism instructions, with the help of the Sisters from St. Cecilia's, were continued throughout the school year; a convert class and servers class were conducted; a parish census was completed; the second First Holy Communion was held in Lomond School Auditorium on Sunday, November 9; a Men's Choir was formed to supplement the Sodality Choir; High Masses were sung on Sundays and during the week.

To the Holy Name and the Guild there was added another Parish Society, the High School Club, which sponsored two dances and a number of activities. The Holy Name Club joined hands with the Guild in presenting a Spring Dance for the parish on April 18 at the Cleveland Club. The Holy Name had a Communion Breakfast, a Baseball Night for the parish, a Golf Tournament, and a Smoker. The Guild, besides collaborating with the Holy Name Club for the Spring Dance, sponsored an "open house" at Lomond Auditorium after the cornerstone ceremony, had a Second Annual Garden Party, a Benefit Bridge at Higbee Lounge, and the Third Anniversary Party (again held at the Turner's Hall).

## 1948

The seven months which have elapsed this year have been seven months of intensified parish activity. As of January 1 the parish had grown from 400 to 450 families; a new Building Fund Drive was in progress: the parishioners were manifesting their enthusiasm and support by steadily-increasing Sunday collections, by their contributions to separate funds for the Sanctuary and for the Stations of the Cross.

On Tuesday, March 2 the first Mass was sung in the Meeting Room at the Church Site, adjacent to and behind the unfinished Church. This Meeting Room thereafter replaced the Rectory Chapel as the place for daily Mass.

A Senior CYO was organized in the early months of 1948 and began a series of significantly successful parties. The Guild, among other activities, sponsored a "Surprise Party" on April 1 at the Higbee Lounge. This party not only made a city-wide reputation for the Guild but also netted over three thousand dollars for the Sanctuary Fund. Not to be outdone, the Holy Name Club put on a Jamboree party on June 18, raffled an automobile, and also made over three thousand dollars. This sum was used to buy the tabernacle and the chandeliers for the Church.

And so the past has met the present; the brief history of St. Dominic's has come to its end. There is a deeper story which has not been written – the story of the many prayers offered up to God, of blessings brought to men, of Masses, Confessions and Communion, of Baptisms, Marriages and deaths, of souls helped in their journey toward eternity. That story is known only to God and cannot be described in these pages.

This much, however, is certain: the imposing new Saint

Dominic's Church, with its Colonial tower and pillared porch, is a monument to the hard work and the sacrifices of the members of Saint Dominic's Parish. It is impossible to list all of those who have played a part in the history and to whom a special word of thanks is due. Mention can be made of the Pastor and priests of St. Cecilia's Church, the ladies of The Guild and the men of the Holy Name Club, the past and present councilmen and all those who served on committees during the early days of the parish, the ushers and the altar boys, the housekeeper and the sacristan, the catechism teachers, the members of the Sodality Choir and the Men's Choir, the Shaker School system. In a word, to all who contributed, in great measure or small, in material resources or prayers, to the building up of the parish, credit and thanks are due. May the beautiful Saint Dominic's Church stand for many years as a living monument to their great faith, to their goodness and their sacrifices!

## 1950

The parish school opened its doors in 1950. By the mid-fifties, the faith community expressed itself in many ways. Various organizations for adults and children came into being. These included the Arch Fraternity of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the Sodality of Our Lady, a League of Preparation (to pray the Fatima prayer), High and Grade School Confraternities, the Legion of Mary, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Brownies, Girl Scouts, and the "Schola Cantorum" Boys' Choir.

In 1955 Father Bourgeois passed away and the Reverend Arthur L. Gallagher became Pastor. Between 1957 and 1959, a new addition to the school was built which included a new parish hall, gymnasium, cafeteria, and meeting rooms.

## 1960

By 1960, 920 families belonged to the parish. In 1965, the winds of Vatican II and change blew through the parish. A new altar appeared. The priest faced the congregation during Mass. Mass was said in the vernacular. The laity became deeply involved in the liturgy, with the creation of Lectors to proclaim the Word of God, and Lay Extra-Ordinary Ministers of the Eucharist to help distribute Communion.

## 1970

Father Gallagher, by 1971, had been ill for some time. He retired as Pastor, but did not leave the parish until his death. In 1971, the Reverend John F. Neary was named Pastor. He was joined by the Reverend James P. Costello in 1973. In 1975, Father Costello was named Co-Pastor along with Father Neary. Father Costello was transferred in 1983 to Holy Family Parish in Parma, where he was named Pastor. In 1985, Father Neary decided, after many active years as Pastor, to retire for health reasons. The Reverend Martin J. Amos became Pastor. By this time the parish had grown to include over 1,000 families.

## 1985

Fr. Amos would shepherd the parish for the next 15 years, as he continued to institute the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Fr. Amos, a former seminary professor, helped introduce Christ Renews His Parish at St. Dominic, a weekend spiritual retreat for the parishioners. The fruits of this retreat were found in increased adult education classes, as well as countless social outreach opportunities for parishioners. The parish became involved in Habitat for Humanity, and was proud to be the first Catholic parish to build a home through this program. Fr. Amos also began the St. Vincent DePaul Society at the parish, a social outreach program which served the needs of all those within the parish boundaries.

The parish installed a Carillon Bell system in the church steeple. The interior of the church was also renovated, as the communion rail was removed, and the confessionals were renovated. Rooms for parents with small children were built in the rear of the church, and would also be used for bridal parties before wedding masses. New windows were purchased for the entire school complex as well as the rectory. The church building was also air-conditioned. It was time of much needed renovation for an aging complex!

## 2000

Fr. Amos was a well-loved pastor, whose compassion for his parishioners as well as attentiveness to the church buildings brought about a grace-filled time in the life of the parish. His pastoral leadership was recognized far beyond the parish, and in the year 2000, Pope John Paul II called him to become an auxiliary bishop in the Diocese of Cleveland. This was a great honor for both Fr. Amos and the parish, and the community warmly and gratefully bid farewell as he went on to serve the larger Church.

Fr. Thomas Fanta became the pastor of St. Dominic at Bishop Amos's departure. The parish continues to grow under his leadership, and now numbers almost 1,400 families.

## 2001

In 2001, a series of meetings were held with the parishioners to help shape the future of the community. These meetings focused on parish life, education and facilities. A parish census was conducted, and each household in the parish boundaries received a personal visit. At the conclusion of the census and the vision meetings, a Vision Statement was



written by the parish and the community continued to flourish.

The first phase of the new vision for the community focused on liturgical celebrations, social outreach, communications and social activities. The second phase focused on adult education and the strengthening of the parish day school and PSR program. The final phase addressed the facilities and physical repairs needed throughout the complex.

The Capital and Endowment Campaign *Jesus Christ: Yesterday, Today and Forever* began in 2002, and in 10 weeks, almost 3.5 million dollars was raised by the parish community. The church roof was replaced, a new lobby to the community center was built, an elevator was installed, and bathrooms throughout the school were updated. The school library, computer lab, and science

rooms were also completely renovated. In addition, a parish endowment of more than a million dollars was started in the parish. Permanent signage was added to the front of the church and school, and the Marian Grotto at Norwood and Lynnfield was beautifully restored as a community prayer garden. The community's generosity was amazing!

The vision statement had a strong focus on social outreach, and a new initiative **Project Serve** was started to inspire parishioners to share their gifts with the poor on the local level, as well as the national and global levels. A partnership with Santo Domingo Church in El Salvador was established, and parishioners began mission trips there 4 times a year. The parish also established numerous partnerships with social service agencies throughout the city, and hundreds of parishioners of all ages continue to share their talents with those in need.

The parish looks forward to its 75th anniversary in the year 2020. We continue to try to build a community of welcome, where the gifts and talents of each parish member are recognized and respected.

The mission statement of the parish is:  
*A Eucharistic Family Living the Mission of Christ.*

You are invited to share in this mission, and join in creating a true family united in God's love.