

## 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary

### DID YOU KNOW

- That the first Mass in Milford was celebrated on the second Sunday of October, 1863, on the upper floor of Morrison's General Store at the corner of Commerce and Main Street.
- That Fr. Lucien Wicart, Fr. Joseph Strauss and Fr. Frederick Baumgartner travelled from St. Vincent in Pontiac to the Milford community as often as possible to offer the sacraments for the Irish, German and French Catholic families that had settled here.
- That the first church, a small white frame building was erected at the top of Summit Street where the cemetery now stands. The hill was henceforth called "Catholic Hill."
- That Fr. Wicart, the first priest to serve Mass in Milford, who came from St. Vincent in Pontiac as often as he could from 1863 to 1890, also carried a melodeon, a small pump organ, in his buggy or sleigh to encourage the formation of a choir.
- That soon after the first church was built in 1870, the adjacent property was purchased for the cemetery on what was once called "Church Hill." This is the site of the present cemetery on Summit Street.
- In January of 1890, the first pastor, James Hally was appointed. He was a quiet, pious, gentle man and greatly loved by the parishioners, whom he served for five years. The mission priests from Pontiac had served the area wonderfully for seventeen years, but the people of Milford were proud to finally have their own parish in 1890.
- That the stone church in downtown Milford was built from natural fieldstone taken from neighboring farms and was dedicated by Bishop Foley on July 7, 1907. This was St. Mary's second church and served the parish until 1967.
- That the pastor at the time, Fr. Thomas Halley, organized the Milford Dramatic Club which entertained the Milford public with dramatic

mysteries and thrillers. They raised over \$3,000 toward the building of the Church.

- That when the church was dedicated a little over forty families belonged to the parish.
- On the day of the dedication thirty children were confirmed from St. Mary's and some of the surrounding parishes.
- That St. Joseph parish in South Lyon was first founded as a mission of St. Mary's parish in 1911. It remained so until 1965.
- That Fr. John Dowdle replaced Fr. Tom Hally in 1911 and made a dynamic impact on the people of St. Mary through his fiery-tongued sermons and civic minded involvement in the community. That he started the first Blood Bank in Milford during World War I.
- That Fr. Christopher Dolan succeeded Fr. Dowdle in 1923 and finished the construction of the new field stone rectory facing Commerce Rd. in 1929 just before the start of the depression.
- That in 1923, Fr. Christopher Dolan succeeded the very patriotic and charismatic orator, Fr. Dowdle.
- That Fr. Dolan built the new field stone rectory next to the church in 1929, just ahead of the Stock Market Crash.
- That Fr. Dolan's charity and compassion was of great comfort and inspiration to the people of St. Mary during the Great Depression.
- That Fr. Dolan taught the catechism and presided over the first communion of a member of our parish, Fran Rabideau, one of the 7 McFarlane children.
- That in 1938, Fr. Dominic Foley was appointed pastor, and under his direction a number of physical improvements were made to St. Mary's.
- The \$25,000 debt on the rectory was paid. The stone walls of the church were repainted. The steps leading to the church were re-built to allow greater access. The vaulted ceiling was removed and the Sanctuary was re-structured.
- That Fr. Foley also re-activated the Ladies' Altar Society and organized a Men's Club.

- That Fr. Foley secured the weekend service of Fr. Joseph Rybinski from Orchard Lake Seminary in 1942. He would serve the parish with great humility and faith for thirty-three years.
- That in 1949, four sisters of the Franciscan Sisters of Atonement came to St. Mary's Parish to teach catechism here and in the surrounding parishes. They moved into the newly remodeled former Rectory.
- The sisters also had a knack for knowing the needs of parishioners that were dealing with great difficulties and would suddenly appear on a doorstep with a chicken casserole a loaf of bread and a smile. The whole village of Milford quickly learned that if anyone was in trouble, these sisters were there to help and to offer advice.
- They were also good fund raisers and soon their Sunday Carnivals raised enough proceeds to buy a bus to transport children in the area to St. Patrick's School in Brighton.
- That in 1952, Fr. Richard Haney became pastor. A quiet and orderly priest, he was a financial genius, who completed the remodeling of the church and paid off the debt.
- That under his leadership, he promoted a new community spirit and prepared the parishioners to take greater responsibility for Church affairs.
- That Fr. Lawrence Edwards became pastor in 1959. He convinced parishioners to look into real estate for the growing parish. Rental properties were acquired around the Church with the hope of building a school someday. Property on West Commerce was also purchased.
- That St. Mary had grown to 450 households in 1965 and that the parish was outgrowing the stone church in town. Previous pastors had considered an expansion of the church, but this was deemed impossible.
- That a new pastor, Fr. Elmer Mahoney, was named during that year. Under his leadership, ten acres of the Boyle farm on Commerce and Burns Roads was purchased and previous considerations to build a school were abandoned.
- That the parish decided to build a Church-Hall facility similar to the prototype buildings that were being built throughout the Archdiocese. Ground breaking for this building took place on April 17, 1966.

- That on January 7, 1967, Archbishop John Dearden dedicated the new St. Mary parish building on the new site at Commerce and Burns Rds. The pastor, Fr. Mahoney, and the weekend associate, Fr. Milewski assisted at the Mass. Fr. Raymond Maiberger of St. Boniface Church preached the sermon.
- That the new building seated 500 people in the Church proper with an additional 200 people that could be seated in the Social Hall, adjacent to the Church. The building was approximately 116 feet by 109 feet. Our present day offices and classrooms to the west of the offices occupy this space currently. The cost of the building including furnishings was \$258,000. Site work and parking cost an additional \$56,000. The rectory and parish office was completed at the same time at the cost of \$47,500.
- That as the parish took possession of the new building (the current office space and religious education rooms), it continued to thrive during the initial reforms of the Vatican Council II.
- That in the early 70's, the sisters who had been responsible for Christian formation left the parish.
- That Fr. Mahoney had to leave the parish, because of poor health in January of 1972. Fr. Robert Humitz, who would later become pastor of St. Patrick in Union Lake, was named the temporary administrator until a new pastor was appointed.
- That even though the prototype Church was dedicated in January of 1967, there was not a paved parking lot and there were many days after the winter thaw, when parishioners could not park, due to the wet ground. They, therefore, had to resort to using the old stone church on some Sundays.
- That the parking lot was finally finished on September 9, 1967.
- That the old stone church continued to be used for Religious Formation and for social activities.
- That, not long after the people of St. Mary began worshipping at the new site at Burns and Commerce Rds., Archbishop Dearden announced an Archdiocesan Synod called "Seeking Progress Together" to discuss implementation of the Vatican Council changes.

- That the people of St. Mary's enthusiastically entered into the Synod process and formed discussion groups which would make recommendations to the Archbishop about all aspects of parish life.
- That it was a challenge to get used to some of the changes in the Liturgy proposed by Vatican Council II and that they led to some tensions in the parish.
- That the first St. Mary Parish Council was installed in February of 1970 and the formation of the first Commissions soon followed.
- That the first item of business for this Council was to decide what to do with the properties which the parish owned in town. After investigating their combined worth and the feasibility of combining all ministries at the new site, the Council decided to sell the stone church, rectory, convent and other properties.
- That on April 2, 1972, Fr. Francis Zielinski was appointed the eleventh pastor of St. Mary, bringing with him a love and gift for liturgy and adult formation.
- That in 1972, there were 838 registered families and there was further growth anticipated. The pastor, Fr. Zielinski, the parish staff and the Parish Council quickly became aware that the current building could not house the growing congregation and all of the parish activities.
- At the end of that year a planning commission was formed to review future plans for the parish and to do a demographic survey of the 50 acres of parish boundaries. In 1973, the commission found that about 1,200 Catholic families resided within the parish boundaries. Future population growth was also predicted.
- The commission determined that a new church needed to be built and the current church would become a hall and office space to support parish activities.
- That as the new site at Commerce and Burns was being used for worship, the old stone church in town was still being used for catechesis, parish gatherings and youth activities. There is even a picture from that time of teens playing volleyball in the old church space.

- That as the church, the convent and rectory in town were sold, parish activities had to be held in the new facility or postponed. Even the religious education department had to share space with the church sacristy.
- That the planning commission, formed in 1972, took all of this into account, as well demographic projections that the Catholic population would grow, when they finally proposed that a new church building should be planned.
- That the planning commission formed in 1972 determined that a new church needed to be erected for the growing parish.
- That the proposed church would seat 700 people and was planned in a crescent style. A large narthex would connect to the original building, which would then house a social hall, eight meeting rooms, a library and religious formation offices.
- In August of 1975, Fr. Zielinski blessed the ground of the new permanent church at the Ground Breaking Ceremony, and George Niepoth, the Parish Council President, turned the first shovel of dirt, followed by representatives of all the parish organizations.
- That while the planning commission was working on the proposal for the new church in 1972, the Franciscan Sisters of Atonement who had taught religious education and provided pastoral ministry in the parish since 1949 were called by their congregation to minister in other places. This occasioned the need for a director of religious education and led to the formation of parishioners as catechists.
- These catechists taught children in their own schools after regular school hours. The Junior High and High School students were taught in parishioners homes.
- While much of the parish energies were devoted to preparing the new building and religious formation of the youth, the new commissions were very involved in their work and there were many fund raising activities including millionaire parties, flea markets, art auctions and a parish recipe book.
- That while the parish bid their farewell to the Sisters of Atonement in May of 1972, a new ministry was introduced at St. Mary, as Archie Noon was

ordained to the diaconate on July 15, 1972. Archie was among the first ordained permanent deacons in the Archdiocese.

- That Archie along with his wife, Margaret, and their six children were members of the parish long before his assignment to St. Mary's as a deacon.
- That Archie would serve the parish for almost thirty years until his retirement. He would go on to help in the formation of the Divine Mercy Community in Davisburg.
- That as the parish watched the construction of the new church two sad events occurred. Fr. Joe Rybinski, who had assisted various pastors at St. Mary's for thirty-three years, had to bid the parish farewell for health reasons in November of 1975. Although his primary responsibilities were to Orchard Lake St. Mary's, he was a great friend to the people of the parish. Two months later, Fr. Dominic Foley, who had served the parish from 1938-1952, passed away and was buried from St. Mary's.
- In 1976, St. Mary's gained the services of Sister Catherine Broughton, IHM, who coordinated faith formation for junior high and high school students, and Sr. Celeste Shoppy, IHM, who directed the expanding Christian Service activities.
- That on July 31, 1976, the present church was dedicated by Cardinal John Dearden. The following November, reconstruction of the prototype building was completed and all activities were now held at the one site.
- That during this time, Fr. Zielinski promoted adult formation with bulletin articles on faith, scripture, prayer and liturgy. The adult education program was expanded, and those that wanted to attend classes in theology at Orchard Lake Seminary were subsidized by the parish.
- That participation in liturgical ministries was encouraged as more people were trained as lectors and Eucharistic Ministers. Parishioners presented the gifts at the altar, and in 1976 girls were permitted to act as altar servers.
- That the Church that we are presently in for worship was dedicated by Cardinal Dearden on July 31, 1976. In November of that same year, the

prototype building was renovated to provide offices, classrooms and a parish hall.

- That the parish continued to grow in size and participation. The Parish Activities Group was especially involved in gathering parishioners for social activities like the "Red Garter Night," the Ox Roast and the square dance at Schultheis Lazy J Ranch.
- That lay involvement during Sunday Masses increased as parishioners brought up the gifts of bread and wine, more were trained as Lectors and Eucharistic Ministers, and the first girls were permitted to serve at the altar with boys in 1976.
- That as the Milford/Highland/Union Lake area continued to grow in population in the 1970's, there was a need for a new parish in the area.
- That in July of 1977, the Archdiocese started a mass station at Spring Mills School in Highland.
- That in May of 1978, Fr. John Howard was named the first pastor of this new parish, as they took the name Church of the Holy Spirit in December of that year. The parish boundaries were carved out of sections of St. Mary's, St. Patrick in Union Lake and St. Rita in Holly.
- That on June 24th of 1979, Bishop Joseph Imesch formally installed Fr. William D. Sinatra as the twelfth pastor of St. Mary's. Fr. Sinatra brought his skills as an organizer, community builder and gardener to the growing parish.
- That in 1979 the parish profile showed a demographic of forty percent of the parish under 18 and fifty five percent under 30. It was a young, vibrant, enthusiastic and generous community.
- That under Fr. Bill the pastoral team and parish council took on more responsibility in directing parish activities.
- That soon after Fr. Bill Sinatra arrived as the new pastor, a Knights of Columbus Chapter was formed in the Milford/Highland area? It was named after Bishop Fulton Sheen.
- That the parish hosted deacon interns under Fr. Bill Sinatra as they prepared for the priesthood?

- That in 1981, Sr. Ruth McDonald, IHM, was hired as the new Religious Education Director? She brought her great skills in teaching and background in religious life to help in the faith development of the children of St. Mary's.
- That on August 5, 1981, St. Mary's celebrated the burning of the mortgage and became debt free. Thus, the loan on the church and parish center were paid off quickly by today's standards.
- That in August of 1983, Sr. Donna Hart, IHM, came to St. Mary's as a pastoral minister advocating for everyone to "really commit to ministry" in the parish.
- That this commitment was evidenced by parishioners signing annual commitments to various ministries in the community. During this time, The Giving Tree, Thanksgiving Food Baskets, Funeral Luncheons, Coffee Socials and Stephen Ministry were all established in the parish.
- That our wonderful participation in Word and Song can be traced back to the early 1980's when parish leadership and the Worship Commission vigorously promoted "full and active participation in the Liturgy."
- That the annual parish fair was moved to August to correspond with the parish feast day of August 5th, the Dedication of St. Mary Maggiore in Rome.
- That the Christian Initiation of Adults was warmly welcomed by the parish community and that the parish family as a whole recognized and prayed for children as they were preparing for the sacraments.
- That the bell tower was erected in 1983 and dedicated in October of that year.
- That the bells in the tower came from St. Leo's Church on Grand River in Detroit and were dedicated for that parish in 1910 by Most Reverend John S. Foley, Bishop of Detroit. An inscription with his name and that of the pastor, Rev. Mathew Meathe appears on one of the bells.
- That there is an inscription on the other side of that same bell with the inscription "St. Mary, Our Lady of the Snows, Rev. William D. Sinatra, Pastor. Blessed by Most Reverend Edmond C. Szoka, Archbishop of Detroit."

- That soon after Fr. Bill arrived in the parish that he took a great interest in the history of St. Mary. Under his guidance, a history committee was activated in 1981.
- That throughout the decade leading up to the centennial celebration of St. Mary's, Fr. Bill and the committee shared historical facts and points of interest with the parish.
- That Fr. Bill would never see the fruition of this work as an overseer of the centennial, as he received a new assignment in July of 1989 at St. Mary's in Royal Oak.
- That Fr. Ron Anderson became the thirteenth pastor of St. Mary's on July 1, 1989. He along with Fr. Dominic Foley would serve the parish for the most years, fourteen.
- He immediately led the community into a year-long celebration marking 100 years as a parish. The parish entitled it "100 Years – A Journey in Faith."
- As Fr. Anderson helped foster the planning and celebration of 100 years, he also acquainted himself with the people of the parish and its traditions. The parish welcomed this tall, lean priest and his low-key manner.
- That Archie and Margaret Noon were designated as chairpersons of the Centennial Committee as the parish prepared to celebrate 100 years as a parish.
- That Pat Foley, Kay Meagher and Robin Behrend wrote a history of the parish with the title of the Centennial Celebration "100 Years: A Journey in Faith." It was illustrated by Sandra Keller.
- That parishioners were treated to an ice cream social for the whole family and the parishioners delighted in "Moments in History" presented at Sunday Masses during the year.