



1867

to

1992



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With hectic suburban living schedules, modern conveniences like electricity and indoor plumbing and a large parish of almost five thousand families, it might be difficult to relate to our early predecessors of the first St. Michael Parish.

The Civil War of the early 1860's had just ended, yet turmoil, both political and economic, was prevalent in much of Europe. The tiny, German speaking country of Luxembourg was no exception to this unrest. Torn by the strife in their homeland between the feuding factions of Germany and France, many courageous Luxembourgers set sail for America with a hope for a better, more democratic life. Several of those Luxembourg families settled in the western edges of Orland known as Goodings Grove near 153rd and Bell Road in Homer Township.

America was an agrarian nation. These hardy, hard working farmer families of early St. Michael's did well in their newly adopted surroundings. Their need to congregate and celebrate their Catholic faith was a concern that was addressed by these neighboring farmers in 1866. Their determination led to the construction of our first church, a tiny 20 by 30 foot wooden structure on land donated by Mathias Wagner at what is now 159th and Will- Cook Road, the location of the current St. Michael Cemetery. (Our late mayor and parishioner, Fred Owens, was interred here after his untimely death last May.).

On the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, September 29, 1867, the first Mass was said. Our evolution had begun.

A few years later a more suitable church that boasted a bell tower and steeple was built on Will-Cook Road at 151st Street. (The bell from that church is part of the three bell system of our current church's bell tower.) This beautiful frame, country church was built on land donated by John Jungles, a family name that is still very much a part of St. Michael's today.



A few "old timer" St. Michael Parishioners can still recall the old church at 151st and Will-Cook Rd. From the late 1860's until 1924 this was our parish church. Notice hitching posts in front and side of fence.)

To relate to the hardships, yet simple life joys of these settlers might not be easy for us modern age Americans. Perhaps a visit to the Hostert cabin on West Avenue might help in the understanding of this earlier way of life. The original log cabin was located on the Hostert farm just west of 143rd and Wolf Roads just south and across 143rd from where the Centennial School is today. The Hostert family has long been a name associated with our parish. Their generosity and involvement in parish life is well known among the old timers of St. Mike's.

Life on the farm was certainly difficult. Fields to plow (horse and plow, no machinery), chickens and livestock to feed, crops to harvest, and rigorous daily chores to meet, all combined for a hard, yet simple, close knit family life. It was a life close to nature, one of God's greatest reflections.

Mass at St. Michael's wasn't a weekly, Sunday occurrence. Usually once a month a Benedictine priest from Chicago's north side would make the horseback trek to say Mass at the old St. Mike's. (It took a bit more time to get here than our less than an hour Stevenson Expressway drive). He would be housed at a parishioner's home for a few days before heading back to Chicago.

Besides celebrating Mass and receiving the Eucharist, early parishioners would spend much time after Mass socializing and exchanging stories of births, deaths and marriages while youths played nearby or teens romantically eyed one another from a distance. (Our current narthex provides an area to do much of those same things today).

The early 1870's also saw the erection of the first St. Michael School. It was a two story frame structure with a school room on the first floor and a room that housed the lay teacher on the 2nd floor. As many as 30 students attended at a time.



The sculpture of the Holy Family in our current church reflects the commitment of our parish of the continuing belief of the importance of family.

This school's intermittent existence lasted up until about 1916. (Our current school opened in September, 1949).

Benedictine priests from Chicago were not the only priests to serve our early missionary type parish. Priests from Lockport, along with the Benedictines, served the parish's needs into the early 20th century.

To acquire a spiritual feeling for those early people of St. Michael, take a leisurely stroll through the cemetery at 159th and Will-Cook Roads. Names like Wagner, Jungles, Hostert, Lucas, Bremmer, Wies, Weiler, Gerlock, Cox, Homerding, Welter indicate a time that is no more. The words "Geb" for born and "Ges" for died express the German language usage of their day.

Because of the railroad coming through nearby Orland Park in 1879, the future of isolated Goodings Grove was destined for a slow route to extinction.

Jesuits took over the duties of the earlier Benedictines in serving the parishioners from 1905 until 1926. St. Ignatius on Roosevelt Road provided us with these early 20th century priests. Some of our older, current members can still recall some of these priests with last names of Preuss, Calhoun, Daley or Zurlinden, all with the S.J. initials following their names.

It is not clear whether it was Father Calhoun or Father Daley who made the decision to move the parish into Orland Park, but on Palm Sunday in 1923, Mass was celebrated in the town hall of Orland Park. Father Daley purchased high land west of town used as a pasture with a creek crossing it. (Hence, Highland Ave. The creek is encased in corrugated culverts and is still there under the parking lot). Ground was broken on May 15, 1924, on our current site on Highland for a new, white frame church. The congregation gathered in the new church for the first time on August 10, 1924.

The old church in Goodings Grove had been scarred by over 50 years of weather and wear. A unique, simple agrarian way of life had ended. A new, small country village way of life was beginning.

An immediate acceptance of a Catholic parish in the town of Orland Park was not an overwhelming success story. The predominantly Protestant town often rendered a cold shoulder to these Catholic intruders. There was even an incident with a burning cross across the street from the new church. History is silent as to whether the KKK or an individual was the culprit.

In the summer of 1926, Cardinal Mundelien named Father William Gorey as the first resident pastor at St. Michael's where he served for the next ten years. After briefly living in small quarters above the sacristy of the church, Father Gorey and his brother constructed a frame rectory behind the church. This building was eventually rented to parishioners once the current red brick rectory was built.



Prior to our current church, the first church on Highland Avenue was home to many of our current parishioners from 1924 until 1969.

Along with the arrival of St. Michael Catholic Church to the village of Orland Park, the 1920's saw electricity as well as Prohibition come to this decade. The stock market crash of 1929 ushered in the decade of the Great Depression, followed by the trauma of World War II in the early to mid-40's. Father Rooney replaced Father Gorey as pastor in June of 1936 and served until the end of 1944. Economic growth, as well as population growth, in Orland was very stagnant during this period. Although St. Michael's boasted of having three active societies (Altar and Rosary, Holy Name and Ladies Sewing Circle), little or no building growth took place in the parish due to the tightness of money. Father Rooney is best remembered as the pastor who led his parishioners through World War II, holding novenas and special prayer services for St. Michael servicemen serving overseas.

Father Kilbride took the helm as pastor in December of 1944. Under his directorship the long anticipated dream of a Catholic elementary school became a reality. He obtained the services of the Dominican Sisters of Kentucky along with several dedicated lay teachers and opened the eight classroom red brick, two story school on September 14, 1949. Not long after its opening it became apparent that the popular new school was already too small, and classes went on a double shift. Sister Helen Marie served as first principal until 1955.

In 1952, Father Kilbride was transferred and was replaced by Father Frank Coyle. Post War building and suburban growth was on the march in the Palos-Orland area as it was across the

country. Crowded Masses on Sunday along with the overcrowded school created a problem for the new pastor. He seemed to be the right man at the right time for the challenge. His first move was in 1954 when he extended the frame church, utilizing the property immediately to the east, which necessitated bulldozing the original frame rectory. The extension to the church provided an additional 100 seats or total capacity of approximately 250 people.

Then, in 1955, construction of the St. Michael gymnasium was completed. This structure temporarily solved several problems of overcrowding. Its many functions included, first and foremost, a gymnasium for St. Michael school children. In addition, it was used as a roller rink on Saturdays, early in the day for school age children and in the evening for adults. Meetings were held here a few evenings each month for Altar and Rosary Society, Holy Name Society and the Home- School Organization. Folding chairs had to be set in place after school hours and removed immediately following the meetings.



St. Michael School and auditorium (gym) have served the educational; religious, social and athletic needs of the parish since 1949.

To alleviate the overcrowding of the later Masses in the little church on weekends, the gym was converted into a church in order to accommodate the large crowds. A small stage was rolled in, the portable altar was placed on top, and approximately 600 folding chairs were set in place. Of course, all church equipment was removed Sunday evening, and the gym was ready for the school children on Monday morning.

New Year's Eve parties in the gym were most memorable. The committee decorated the gym and set up the banquet tables and chairs. The gaiety had to end in time to take down the banquet

tables and rearrange the chairs for the morning Masses. The altar was rolled in, vestments were set out, and the gym was ready for Mass.



Father Frank Coyle had a vision of St. Mike's future and continued the building program started by Father Kilbride.

Father Coyle's knack or art of persuasion helped obtain not only building growth during his reign, but also the services of an assistant. Father Stanley Rudcki, fresh out of the seminary, arrived as the first assistant in July, 1953. (Current parishioners, Lucille Schutte and Virginia Walsh were able to bring Father Rudcki back this past March to conduct the 125th Anniversary concert with members of the Chicago Lyric Opera Symphony and the St. Cecilia Choral Group. This was his gift because of his long term love of his first assignment at St. Mike's and his friendship over the years with these two women).

A rectory that was considered too large by parishioners of Father Gorey's time suddenly became too small, and an addition was built in 1957. Father Coyle's building legend was only beginning. 1960-61 saw the building of a new twelve classroom addition to the overcrowded school. This new addition also included a library, a teacher's room and an administration office. During this school year, eleven Dominican nuns comprised the faculty. By 1967, twelve nuns and thirteen lay people made up the teaching staff.

Because of the building debt of the school, the long awaited new permanent church was delayed. After nearly six years of waiting, persistence and patience paid off. Ground was broken in April 1968. The first Mass was offered by Father Coyle for the June 1969 eighth grade graduates and

their parents. The dedication Mass was held on September 29, 1969, with Cardinal Cody in attendance, 102 years after the first Mass of our parish.

Father Coyle's organizational and promotional skills are widely known. He was an excellent fund raiser, a man who rewarded his dedicated volunteer workers with gala dinner celebrations and parties, a man who put St. Michael and Orland Park on the map. His retirement in the spring of 1974 and subsequent death late that same year ended an era of growth and construction unparalleled in any other previous time in our parish.

Monsignor Gorman (now Bishop Gorman) was his very capable replacement. Shortly after his arrival, the opening of a major shopping mall, Orland Square, impacted the population boom of both Orland Park and St. Michael Parish and School. Housing construction and census numbers exploded all over the Orland area in the late 70's and all through the 80's. Parish Mass schedules increased but were still overcrowded. Parishioners were involved in a rapidly changing society, a society that had been questioning established values of earlier times and presented new, multiple and diverse needs to the new pastor, his associates and religious staff members.



Monsignor Gorman (at Lectern) is introduced (as new pastor in the new church) by retiring pastor Father Coyle (seated).



Former pastor and now Bishop Gorman distributed the holy Eucharist next to Cardinal Bernardin at 125th Anniversary celebration Mass.

In Monsignor Gorman, once again St. Michael was blessed with the right man for the challenge. Through his leadership a task force was formed to devise a style of parish governance. In recognition of the fact that all people of God are gifted and called to ministry, our parish structure encourages, facilitates and coordinates and supports ministry in the areas of Worship, Service, Education, Youth and Parish Life. A variety of ministries flourish at St. Michael's - whether it's planning programs and religious ceremonies for baptisms or funerals, or Quest families meeting in their homes with teens, or religious education instruction for public school children, or group discussion meetings with engaged couples or Christ Renews His Parish, Women's Theology or hospital and nursing home visitors, or so many other parish services, the needs of parishioners are being met, and God's work is hopefully being accomplished. Our parish structure with our Parish Ministry Commission and five ministry teams composed of both parishioners and staff has become a model for parishes in our archdiocese and throughout the country. St. Michael's Parish owes much to Monsignor Gorman and the task force that worked so hard throughout 1974 and 1975.

He also complemented this parish ministry concept with the physical building needs to meet this spiritual effort. The restructuring and refurbishing of the church helped the overcrowded situation. The narthex created a climate controlled environment for socializing prior to and after religious ceremonies or social gatherings. The commons and chapel have served overflow Mass situations along with other religious and social needs while the ARC serves as an excellent small meeting room and religious library. The new library and lower commons serve the needs of the school children during the academic year.

Bishop Gorman is best remembered as a pastor who seemed to make personal time for everyone. He would greet an 80 year old or an 8 year old by name. He took on the tough challenges and needs of his flock with unwavering dedication and determination to see them to their ends. His

many visits back to Orland are always warmly welcomed by his former parishioners.

Former St. Mike's associate pastor Father Edward McLaughlin, who had served as pastor at St. Maurice Parish on Chicago's near southwest side, became our sixth resident pastor after Monsignor's transfer to an administrative post in the Chancery Office of the Archdiocese in 1986.

Father McLaughlin has continued the programs of the Parish Ministry Commission. His Irish wit, his ability to gather needed volunteers, his warm smile and humble manner and his caring attitude for people all seem to indicate that St. Michael Catholic Church of Orland Park has once again been blessed with the type of leadership necessary to give us that "hope for the future".

History oftentimes seems to be a mere compilation of dates, names and facts. The history of St. Michael Parish is really the story of people, religious, clergy and laity, who have laughed, danced and loved in social situations or who have cried in happiness at weddings or baptisms or in sadness at wakes and funerals. It is the history of people serving God and other people of their family and parish.

There are stories that are still alive in the minds of current parishioners who would tell a tale of Father Gorey or Kilbride. There are more stories about Father Coyle's insistence on punctuality for Sunday Mass or, God forbid, leaving Mass early. There are tender stories about Monsignor Gorman often showing up at the doorstep of a parishioner who had suffered a loss, a practice that Father McLaughlin also tries to incorporate as part of his personal touch.

There are stories of the gala July 4th picnic, dinner and dancing of the 1930's, 40's and even into the 50's and 60's by people who worked and participated in those events. There are stories of the recent past of Summerfest comedy skits or Christ Renews His Parish retreat experiences.

All of these are stories of a Christian people living a life of current history at St. Michael of Orland Park. All of us have the opportunity to become a part of the "hope in our future," by our involvement in ministering to God and our fellow parishioners.

If those early Luxembourg farm families of the 19th century could return for a brief visit to the St. Michael's of the 1990's, they would hopefully be proud of what they had started and what it has evolved into as a parish and as a people.