

## 100 YEARS OF SAINT EDWARD PARISH FAMILY

In 1916, Youngstown was still part of the Diocese of Cleveland. On July 27, 1916, the Youngstown Vindicator announced that Bishop John P Farrelly, Bishop of Cleveland, had purchased 2 3/4 acres of property on Youngstown's north side for a new parish. The north side had been growing rapidly and expanding further away from downtown and St. Columba Church. The lot included 454 feet of frontage on Tod Lane, planned for a church, and 280 feet fronting Ohio Avenue, planned for a school. The cost of the land was \$26,000 (2017 equivalent is \$609,000).

Shortly thereafter, **Father Maurice Griffin**, assistant to Father Edward Mears, pastor of St. Columba parish, was appointed pastor of the new parish. Father Griffin quickly appointed a Parish Council and plans were made to build the school first. Charles F. Owsley was selected as the architect and Moore-Lamb Construction was chosen to build the new school, at a cost of roughly \$100,000 (equivalent to \$2,344,000 in 2017).

In accordance with Canon Law, on April 23, 1917, Father Griffin and all of the priests of the city gathered to bless the ground and raise the American flag on the site. Father Edward Mears then turned the first spadeful of earth. The new school was named St. Edward, in honor of St. Edward the Confessor (1003 - 1066), King of England.

Initial plans were to construct the school fronting Ohio Avenue, with a central auditorium to be used temporarily as the church, and with classrooms occupying the perimeter of the building. Longer-range plans were to build the permanent church structure on the same property at the corner of Tod Lane and Ohio Avenue. Economic and other conditions in the ensuing years dismantled that plan.

General contractor, Joseph Moore, soon began construction. The cornerstone was laid on July 8, 1917, with Bishop Farrelly officiating, with thirty five clergy and thousands of citizens in attendance. A parchment placed inside the cornerstone was signed by the bishop, the pastor, priests of the diocese, parish council members, and the general contractor. It states :

" I, the Ordinary of the Diocese of Cleveland, under Benedict XV, Sovereign Pontiff, now gloriously reigning, Woodrow Wilson, being President of the United States of America, James M.Cox, Governor of Ohio, and Carroll Thornton holding supreme authority in the city of Youngstown, this eighth day of July, in the year of our Lord, 1917, place the cornerstone of the new school named in honor of St. Edward. "

The new St. Edward School was considered to be a very modern school, early Romanesque in architectural style, comprised of a single story housing eight classrooms surrounding a central auditorium. It was built of brick and reinforced concrete and offered Grades 1 through 8.

St. Edward School opened its doors to students for the first time on September 4, 1917. four school rooms were used for the initial enrollment of 154 students, but a fifth room was opened only 3 weeks later to accommodate the rapid enrollment increase in the primary grades. Most of the students had come from McKinley and St.Columba Schools, but also from 16 other local schools. The school was staffed by Sisters of the Holy Humility of Mary from Villa Maria, Pennsylvania. The first principal was Sr. Regina Miller.

The first Mass was celebrated in the new St. Edward Church on November 1, 1917. Then, in the fall of 1918, Spanish Influenza reached epidemic proportions in Youngstown and the Chamber of Commerce designated St.Edward Church as an emergency hospital.

Within the first two years, nearly \$100,000 had been contributed to the St. Edward Church Building program. A new brick rectory was built on Tod Lane (still in use today) to replace the wooden structure at the corner of Ohio and Benita Avenues. A new convent was also built for the Sisters who staffed the school.

In 1924, St. Edward School organized the first Parent-Teacher Organization in the diocese, opened the school library, and initiated study groups for students and parents. Eventually renamed St. Edward Parents and Students(S.T.E.P.S.), this group remained active in fundraising and supporting the school for all its years of existence.

Fr. Griffin was transferred to Cleveland in 1933. **Father John F. Maloney**, pastor of St.Patrick Parish in Elubbard, Ohio, was named the new pastor. St. Edward Parish had grown to 900 families by then and the Great Depression was exacting its toll. Citing poor health, Fr. Maloney resigned as pastor after one year.

**Father William Nash**, serving at Immaculate Conception Parish in Willoughby, Ohio, was appointed the new pastor of St. Edward in 1934. Men of the parish organized the Mission Club in 1938 and held an annual charity clambake to raise funds for needy parishes. (The proceeds would many years later be donated instead to the parish.)

The annual clambake is still a major fundraiser to this day. A devoted advocate of education, Fr. Nash added a ninth grade to the school in 1939. At that time, there was no tuition at St. Edward School, thus saving parents a year of tuition at Ursuline High School or an additional year of Catholic education for those going on to Rayen High School. On May 15, 1943, Pope Pius XII established the Diocese of Youngstown, with Bishop James A. McFadden of Cleveland as its first bishop. Then, in 1945, the Bernard Family purchased the old Yale School, on the corner of Ohio and Redondo Avenues, and donated it to the parish to use as a junior high school. Nine years later, in 1954, a new school was built on the same site with funds from the generous parishioners. Within this same decade, parishioners presented Fr. Nash with \$50,000 in honor of his fiftieth anniversary as a priest. He used this to build Edwardian Hall, a four room building behind the original school on Benita Avenue. Initially used for first grade, the building has met a variety of needs, including a preschool, and now serves the work of Beatitude House. In 1961, Pope John XXIII elevated Fr. Nash to the rank of Protonotary Apostolic, the highest level of monsignor. Msgr. Nash remained the pastor until his death in 1965.

**Monsignor John J. Lettau** had been in residence at St. Edward Parish since 1951, while serving as secretary to Bishop Emmet M. Walsh . He was subsequently appointed vice chancellor and vicar general of the diocese. At St. Edward, he said Masses, taught ninth grade Religion classes, and attended to various parish needs while also fulfilling all his diocesan responsibilities. Upon Msgr. Nash's death in 1965, Msgr. Lettau was appointed administrator and then pastor. At that time, the parish boundary was Gypsy Lane on the north. Residents c' Liberty Township were part of St. Rose Parish in Girard. Consultations between Bishop Malone Msgr. Lettau, Msgr. Kelly, pastor of St. Rose, and Fr. Roach, pastor of St. Vincent DePaul Parish in Vienna led to an agreement to extend the boundaries of St. Edward Parish north to Tibbetts-Wick Road, thereby tripling the size of the parish. Enrollment in St. Edward School skyrocketed to almost 1,000 students in nine grades, with three classrooms per grade. In the later sixties, the number of sisters teaching in the school declined gradually as they entered other fields of service and there were fewer young women entering the convent. More lay teachers staffed the school and the first lay principal in the diocese, John Rozzo, was appointed principal of St. Edward School in 1969.

Parish Sunday collections had always funded the school, but costs were steadily rising. In addition, increasing numbers of students' parents were not parishioners, and therefore not contributing to the collections. Tuition

became a necessity to operate the school by 1970, as it had in other parish schools in the diocese. School enrollment continued to gradually decline.

The mid-seventies brought more changes: in 1974, a kindergarten was added, in 1975, the ninth grade was discontinued, with enrollment declining to 630, and in 1976, the Convent was razed. By 1980, enrollment in St. Edward School had dropped to 450 students.

Significant changes in the eighties impacted both the school and the parish. There were fewer priests to meet the needs of the parishes. Families continued to move out of the parish and had fewer children to attend the school. The aging parish buildings required more and more maintenance and improvement. The cost of maintaining a school continued to rise.

Msgr. Lettau retired in 1990 after 25 years as the beloved pastor of St. Edward Parish.

The new pastor, **Father Frank M. Lehnerd**, was a son of the parish. He had been baptized here in 1932, graduated from St. Edward School in 1947, and said his first Mass here after his ordination in 1958. After serving as an assistant pastor in Canton, he joined the faculty of Cardinal Mooney High school, serving as dean of boys and then assistant principal for six years. He went on to Central Catholic High School in Canton as assistant principal and was named principal of John F. Kennedy High School in Warren, Ohio, in 1967. Additionally, Fr. Lehnerd's pastorates included St. Mary's, Mineral Ridge (1972-1985), St. Catherine's, Lake Milton (1985- 1987), and St. Stephen of Hungary (1987-1990). In 1976, Fr. Lehnerd was appointed Director of Catholic Charities and Vicar for Social Concerns for the Diocese of Youngstown, holding these positions until his appointment as pastor of St. Edward Parish in 1990.

As its 75th anniversary approached, St. Edward Parish faced the reality of deteriorating buildings that required more significant improvements. Fr. Lehnerd and leaders in the parish organized the Immediate Action Program (I.A.P), a major fundraising campaign to update the church, school, and rectory. As they had done for its entire history, parishioners responded ever so generously, raising \$750,000 to fund the renovations. In the church, a new marble altar was installed, walls were refinished, new pews added, and the Ohio Avenue entrance was closed off with arched windows and a new baptistry. The building would now be dedicated solely to the church and parish meeting rooms. The junior high building received three new classrooms and two new computer rooms.

It would house all nine grades of St. Edward School (K through 8th) in September of 1992.

An era was about to end. Father Lehnerd announced in February of 2003 that St. Edward School would close at the end of the academic year. After eighty-six years of providing an outstanding Catholic education to thousands of students, enrollment had dropped to an all-time low. On Thursday, June 5, 2003, thirty-nine eighth-graders became the final graduating class. Wallace J. Dunne, former principal of the school from 1972 to 1989, addressed the crowd at the baccalaureate Mass, noting his sadness at the closing but also the many contributions of St. Edward graduates to the community. In late Fall of 2004, Father Lehnerd notified the parishioners of his impending retirement from his pastorate after devotedly serving the parish for fourteen years.

**Very Rev. Monsignor Robert J. Siffrin** became Administrator of St. Edward Parish in January of 2005. Originally from Massillon, Ohio, he attended St. Gregory College Seminary and St. Mary Seminary in Cincinnati, earning both his Bachelor Of Arts in Liberal Arts and his Master of Arts in Sacred Scripture Studies in 1975. He also tutored and worked at St. Rita School for the Deaf in Cincinnati. He was ordained by Bishop James W. Malone in Youngstown on June 23, 1979.

Monsignor's assignments have included Ursuline High School in Youngstown and associate principal at John F. Kennedy High School in Warren. He was appointed Director of Planning for the Diocese of Youngstown in 1987 and then Chancellor/Vicar for Clergy. In 1996, Bishop Thomas J. Tobin then appointed him Vicar General/Moderator of the Curia, the highest ranking official in the diocese under the Bishop. Still retaining that position today, Monsignor works closely with the Bishop, coordinating and overseeing all the offices and ministries of the Diocese of Youngstown. Pope John Paul II named him Prelate of Honor in 2004.

Bishop Tobin was reassigned to the Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island in June, 2005. Monsignor Siffrin was elected as Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Youngstown, serving until Most Reverend George V. Murry, S.J. was appointed the fifth Bishop of Youngstown by Pope Benedict XVI in early 2007. In addition to his diocesan and parish responsibilities, Monsignor is active in a wide range of Church and civic organizations, including Knights of Columbus, Beatitude House, Chaplain for the Youngstown Police Department, A.C.T.I.O.N. (President), Rotary Club, Youngstown Symphony, and others.

After a full century, St. Edward Parish Family remains an active and visible testament to Faith and community on the ever-changing landscape of Youngstown's north side. Many families have been parish members for three or more generations. Since the first Baptism of infant Rosemary O'Neill on November 25, 1917, some 7,000 individuals have been baptized and received their First Eucharist here. The first marriage was performed on October 2, 1917 for Robert Hoellin and Sara Sturgeon. There have been nearly 3,000 marriages since. According to records, St. Edward School provided a Catholic education to over 43,000 young people. Under the leadership of Monsignor Siffrin, St. Edward Parish offers a wide array of ministries, committees, and organizations to serve the people of God. Permanent Deacon James Smith and Pastoral Associate Sister Therese Ann Rich, OSU, coordinate the many opportunities for parishioners to share and enrich their Faith. Programs include the following:

**CATECHETICAL MINISTRIES** : Lifelong Faith Formation, Faith Formation for Children, Sacramental Preparation , R.C.I.A. (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults), and Faith-sharing Group.

**LITURGICAL MINISTRIES** : Cantor, Lector, Eucharistic Minister, Sunday Choir, Youth &

Adult Altar Servers, Greeter, Usher, and Environment/Art

**PASTORAL CARE MINISTRIES** : Eucharistic Minister to Homebound/Hospital/Nursing H Ministry of Consolation, Catholics Returning Home, Prayer Chain, Health Ministry, and St. Edward Food Pantry

**LEADERSHIP MINISTRIES** : Parish Council: Christian Services, Christian Education, Administration and Finance, Spiritual Life and Worship,

Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Building and Grounds,

Parish Activities, and Nominations

St. Edward Parish has always been richly blessed by the generosity of its parishioners giving their "Time, Talent, and Treasure" in abundance. This legacy continues today, both within the parish and in outreach to the community. Donations to Catholic Charities, the parish Fund, and various missionary charity collections are consistently high. The St. Edward Pantry distributes groceries to the area needy with funding from parishioners. Beatitude A.C.T.I.O.N., and St. Vincent de Paul are also among the recipients of both funding and volunteer workers. An annual Giving Tree provides Christmas gifts donated by parish 200 children each year.

In every sense, St. Edward Parish is indeed a Family, inspired by Faith and Hope, and working together for the future and ever grateful for the legacy of those who came before.