

History of Our Lady of Peace Parish, Columbus, Ohio

By: J. Michael Finn

As the city of Columbus expanded following World War II, the need for more Catholic parishes became more evident. New housing developments were being added in north Columbus between East North Broadway and Worthington. Columbus Bishop Michael J. Ready responded to this growth by creating new parishes.

On January 17, 1946 Bishop Michael J. Ready decreed the establishment of a new parish in Columbus to be placed under the patronage of Our Lady of Peace. On February 1, 1946 Bishop Ready officially announced the creation of three new parishes in Columbus: Christ the King on the south side of Columbus; and Our Lady of Peace and St. Michael on the north side.

Father George Herbert Foley was named as the founding pastor of Our Lady of Peace Parish. Prior to his appointment Father Foley had been pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Sugar Grove, Ohio.

The original geographical boundaries of the new parish were: Glenmont Ave on the south; the New York Central Railroad on the east; the Olentangy River on the west; and either Kanawha Ave. or Chase Ave. on the north.

Father Foley celebrated the first Sunday Mass in the new parish on February 3, 1946 at 9:30 AM. It was held in the A. A. Shroyer Funeral Home (later Weir Arend Funeral Home) 4221 N. High Street. Weekday Masses were held in Father Foley's apartment at 4217 N. High Street. Reportedly, Masses were also held at the Beechwold Theater on N. High Street.

Early Beginnings

The new parish needed land, so Father Foley conducted a search for available property in the Clintonville area. On June 12, 1946 Bishop Ready purchased property located at the corner of N. High Street and E. Dominion Blvd. The 3.5 acre site included a large lot, with 300 ft. facing High Street. The address was also reported as 4476 North High Street.

The property was purchased from Benjamin F. and Emma Patterson. It included a 10 room house located at 22 East Dominion Blvd. which was planned for use as a rectory. The realtor was the C. R. O'Neil Company Realtors, who represented both parties in negotiations. John D. O'Connor of the Connor and Nestor law firm represented the Diocese. Once the property was secured, the parish set in motion the construction of a temporary church and school.

Barracks Church and School

The end of World War II in 1945 had left the US Army with a considerable amount of surplus materials. The Diocese contacted the Marion Engineer Depot in Marion, Ohio to inquire if any surplus buildings were available. The depot was a major supply and logistics site of the U.S. Army Engineers. It was determined that surplus army barracks might be the type of buildings needed. Our Lady of Peace acquired several types of these buildings.

It appears that the church may have been the earliest barracks structure built on the property. This was built in 1946 on the far northwest corner of the property (about where the present driveway from High Street is located). It was a typical narrow military barracks

structure. The interior of the temporary church was furnished with pews and kneelers made by German prisoners of war in Marion. The Marion Engineer Depot was used as a prisoner-of-war camp throughout the war (the prisoners were paid eighty cents a day for their labor).

It is unknown exactly when the first Mass was offered in the barracks church. The Masses for Easter 1946 were still celebrated at the Shroyer Funeral Home. A July 1946 date for the first Mass in the barracks church would seem likely.

The earliest mention in the newspaper of a service at "Our Lady of Peace Church" was a wedding and a funeral held in October 1946, but it is likely Masses were held there prior to that. This simple wood frame barracks church would serve as the parish church until 1953.

For the Our Lady of Peace School a double width army barracks was used. This contained classrooms, as well as, a recreation hall. The city issued a building permit in May 1947 for the construction of a school and a recreation hall on the new property. The first school year at Our Lady of Peace began in August 1947.

The first principal of Our Lady of Peace School was Dominican Sister Lucille Stewart, O.P. Prior to coming to Our Lady of Peace, Sister Lucille served at a variety of Diocesan schools. She also had served the Dominican Congregation at the St. Mary of the Springs Motherhouse as Assistant Procurator from 1936 until 1937.

Permanent School Building

On May 1, 1951 the parish acquired the property located at 60 E. Dominion Blvd. It was used briefly as the parish rectory; however, it was soon converted for use as the parish convent. The Dominican Sisters moved into the convent on August 22, 1951. The first Mass in the chapel of Our Lady of Peace convent was celebrated October 6, 1951 by Bishop Michael Ready, who blessed the chapel and the building. The Bishop spoke, comparing the chapel to the small beginnings of all great things, and asking the protection of the Blessed Mother for the Sisters stationed there. Hymns were sung during the Mass by pupils of the seventh and eighth grades at Our Lady of Peace.

The purchase of the convent property was necessary due to the planned construction of a permanent Our Lady of Peace School. On June 24, 1951 Bishop Michael Ready laid the cornerstone for the new Our Lady of Peace School, replacing the military barracks school.

Bishop Michael Ready dedicated the new Our Lady of Peace School building on Sunday, April 27, 1952 following the 9:30 AM Mass. The ceremonies were the result of more than six years of effort on the part of Father Foley, Sister Lucille Stewart and the parishioners.

The new building included six classrooms, four of which were being used. The school was of one-story brick construction, and faced East Dominion Boulevard. Ramsey and Croce were the architects. The basement provided a cafeteria, a meeting room, kitchen, and storage rooms. Four Dominican Sisters were in charge of the school. At the time, there were 153 students enrolled in eight grades.

First Our Lady of Peace Church

Having established a permanent school and convent, the parish, under the leadership of Father Foley, moved to begin planning for a more permanent church. The parish continued to raise funds for a permanent church through collections and other activities; however, due to a

lack of funds they planned for a two step plan of construction that they hoped and prayed would lead them to a permanent church.

The plan called for a new gymnasium to be added to the school building. This would be used as the parish church until sufficient funds were collected to construct a permanent church. The church/gym would also allow the elimination of the barracks church. Once the permanent church was built, the church/gym would be converted to a gym and turned over to the school.

In the spring of 1953 construction began on the new church/gym, which was connected to the rear of the new school building. The new building cost \$80,000 and would seat 500. A large white cross was placed over the main entrance.

On Sunday, December 20, 1953, Bishop Michael Ready celebrated a Pontifical High Mass in the new church of Our Lady of Peace. The Bishop blessed the new building, which was followed by the Mass. Msgr. Harold O'Donnell, assistant chancellor of the diocese, and Msgr. Gilbert Schmenk, professor at the Pontifical College Josephinum, were deacon and sub deacon, respectively. The St. Charles Seminary choir, under the direction of Father Thomas Gallen, sang, and seminarians from St. Charles served as minor ministers. As planned, the new church replaced the army barracks that had been used as the parish church.

The parish continued to use the new church for several years while continuing to accumulate the funds necessary to build the permanent church that had been Father Foley's dream. The church also provided a convenient place for parish meetings and other events.

Sad News Before a Permanent Church Arrives

After expending much effort on behalf of the Our Lady of Peace Parish and parishioners, Father George H. Foley died at Mt. Carmel Hospital on February 2, 1965 at the age of 59. His obituary noted that his death came "following a long illness." It is not clear from available sources what this illness was or how long Father Foley may have suffered with it.

Father Foley's funeral was held at Our Lady of Peace Church on Saturday, February 6, 1965 where a Solemn Pontifical High Mass was celebrated by Columbus Auxiliary Bishop Edward G. Hettinger. Father Foley was buried in St. Joseph Cemetery, Columbus, Ohio.

On June 3, 1965, Monsignor Frank T. Riehl was appointed the second pastor of Our Lady of Peace, replacing Father Foley. Msgr. Riehl had served as pastor at Holy Trinity Church in Jackson, Ohio and at St. Ladislav Church in Columbus. At St. Ladislav he built the present St. Ladislav Church (1958) and the former school (1950).

Following his appointment to Our Lady of Peace, Msgr. Riehl began working on the two step plan to replace the existing church/gym with a more permanent structure. On November 9, 1965 the proposed design for a new Our Lady of Peace Church building was announced. Bids were to be released in early 1966.

Modern in design, the brick church would seat 618. The architect selected for the project was Ernest E. Gaal of Columbus. Monsignor Riehl noted that his goal was to have it completed by Christmas 1966; however, construction on the new church was not begun until early in 1967.

The cornerstone of the new church was laid and blessed on Tuesday, March 19, 1967 by Auxiliary Bishop Edward G. Hettinger. The newspapers of the time noted that the interior of the modernistic church would be in compliance with "new liturgical regulations" promoted by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

In August 1967 the unique bell tower of Our Lady of Peace was installed. The tower consisted of four bells, graduated in size and topped with a cross. The bells were purchased

through the Verdin Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. They were cast in Holland and blessed by Auxiliary Bishop Edward G. Hettinger. The bell tower rises 78 feet above the skylight of the church. As the skylight is 32 feet above the sanctuary, the bell tower's tip rises 110 feet over the sanctuary.

Another feature of the new church was that it included attached parish offices and a rectory for the pastor and assistants priests. The basement of the new church also allowed for meeting rooms for parish committees and other organizations.

On Sunday, December 10, 1967 at 10:00 AM the new Our Lady of Peace Church was officially dedicated by Columbus Bishop John J. Carberry giving the parish its first permanent church. Following the dedication ceremony the first Mass in the new church was celebrated by Bishop Carberry at 10:45 AM. Assisting at the Mass was the pastor Monsignor Frank T. Riehl; Rev. Leonard Fick; Rev. Edward McFarland; and, Rev. Frank Fortkamp. Rev. Donald Maroon served as Master of Ceremony and Rev. Richard Bober provided the homily. Other participants in the Mass included Monsignor John P. Byrne; Rev. Richard Crosser; and Rev. Michael Donovan.

Newest Property Acquisitions

For many years, the parish had used the field north of its property as an athletic field since it had been vacated by DeSantis Florists. The property had originally contained a green house and garden. The DeSantis family had allowed the parish to use it. In the early 1990s it was announced by the owners of the field of their intent to commercially develop the property for apartments. This would have left the parish without an athletic field. On October 27, 1994 the pastor, Msgr. Kenneth Grimes was able to negotiate a sale of the property to the parish. It is now known as DeSantis Field and continues to serve the youth of the parish.

In 2011 the parish decided to purchase separate property for use as a rectory and to utilize the attached rectory as more accessible meeting rooms for parish organizations. On August 1, 2011, the pastor, Father Kevin Kavanaugh purchased the home at 27 E. Dominion Blvd. directly across the street from the church for use as the parish rectory.

Our Lady of Peace Biography

Father George H. Foley

The Founding Pastor of Our Lady of Peace was Father George Herbert Foley. Father Foley was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts on July 22, 1905, the son of George H. and Agnes Dowling Foley. He attended Boston College High School; Boston College; St. John's Seminary in Boston; and Mt. St. Mary's Seminary in Emmetsburg, Maryland. He was ordained to the priesthood on April 13, 1932 in St. Joseph Cathedral by Bishop James J. Hartley.

His first parish assignment was as assistant pastor at St. Joseph's Cathedral where he served from 1932 until 1942. He was then appointed pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Sugar Grove, Ohio where he served from 1942 until 1946.

While assigned at Sugar Grove he served as chaplain of the Boys Industrial School in Lancaster, Ohio. There, he served the religious needs of incarcerated youth. He also served as Chaplain to the Columbus Police and Fire Departments from 1932 until 1951. *Columbus*

Dispatch columnist Johnny Jones wrote of his service to the fire service, “When a big fire raged, there in the thick of it was this familiar figure. ‘Hello, Father, here again’ is the way you hear the firefighters greet the man whose white collar, symbolic of his office, stands out amid the darkness of smoke and water. He is not above lending a hand if needed.”

Father Foley’s father, who died in 1928, was a retired Boston police officer, which is likely what drew him to service with the safety forces. Father Foley was appointed Founding Pastor of Our Lady of Peace Parish on February 1, 1946.

A few days after his appointment as founding pastor, *Columbus Dispatch* columnist Johnny Jones also wrote this regarding Father Foley, “It is good news to hear that Father Foley is again assigned to Columbus and the community will be better for his work which is far beyond what he is just supposed to do. To recount how he works, where he works and the results he obtains would be only to embarrass him and for myself to be probably bawled out a bit. And you can add that we gain one of the finest story tellers I have ever known.”

Father Foley worked diligently, serving the needs of the new parish for 19 years. He built the first barracks church and established Our Lady of Peace elementary school. Before his death he worked to lay the groundwork for further development of the parish church and school.

Father George Foley died at Mt. Carmel Hospital on February 2, 1965 at the age of 59 following a long illness. He was survived by his sister, Agnes Foley of Columbus and his brother Joseph G. Foley of Miami, Florida. His funeral was held at Our Lady of Peace Church on Saturday, February 6, 1965 where a Solemn Pontifical High Mass was celebrated by Columbus Auxiliary Bishop Edward G. Hettinger. He was buried in St. Joseph Cemetery, Columbus, Ohio. Requiescat in Pace.

When the present Our Lady of Peace Church was built in 1967 the first and largest bell on top of the church bears the inscription, “In Memory of the Reverend George H. Foley, Founding Pastor 1946-1965.”

Sister Lucille Stewart, O.P.

The first principal of Our Lady of Peace School was Dominican Sister Lucille Stewart, O.P. She was born in Toledo, Ohio, on December 24, 1906, to Harold and Cecelia (Walters) Stewart. She entered the Novitiate of the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs in Columbus in 1924 and in 1926 she made her Profession of Vows. Sister Lucille received a B.S. from St. Mary of the Springs College (now Ohio Dominican University).

Prior to coming to Our Lady of Peace, Sister Lucille served at St. Mary, Lancaster; St. Francis, Columbus; St. Francis, Newark; St. Thomas, Columbus; St. Mary of the Springs Academy; and Blessed Sacrament, Newark. She also served the Dominican Congregation at the Motherhouse as Assistant Procurator from 1936 until 1937.

Sister served as the first principal at Our Lady of Peace School from 1947 until 1954. After leaving Our Lady of Peace in 1954 Sister served at Sacred Heart, Coshocton; St. Thomas, Zanesville; St. James the Less, Columbus; and Holy Trinity, Somerset. Sister also ministered in the Dioceses of Steubenville, Ohio and Santa Fe, New Mexico. She ministered to the elderly and sick in St. Mary Parish, Lancaster before coming to Mohun Health Care Center in 1993.

Sister Lucille Stewart, O.P. died Thursday, June 14, 2007, at the age of 100, at Mohun Health Care Center. Her funeral liturgy was held on Tuesday, June 19 at the Motherhouse Chapel followed by burial in St. Joseph’s Cemetery. Requiescat in Pace.

Monsignor Frank T. Riehl

Monsignor Frank T. Riehl, the second pastor of Our Lady of Peace Church was born in 1907 in Zanesville, Ohio. He was the son of Theodore and Elizabeth Riehl. In Zanesville he attended St. Nicholas elementary and high schools. He attended college at St. Charles Seminary in Columbus, Ohio where he received an A.B. degree, graduating in 1931. The same year he was assigned for theological studies to the University of Innsbruck, Austria by Columbus Bishop James J. Hartley. He was ordained April 7, 1935, in the chapel of the Collegium Canisianum, a Jesuit seminary in Innsbruck, Austria, by Archbishop Sigismund Waitz of Salzburg.

After returning to the United States Father Riehl was assigned as assistant pastor of Holy Family Parish in Columbus, from 1935 until 1938. On June 18, 1938 he was appointed pastor of Holy Trinity church, Jackson, Ohio where he served until 1947.

In February 1947 Father Riehl was assigned as Administrator of Columbus St. Ladislav Parish and was later appointed as pastor on June 25, 1948. Father Riehl built the present St. Ladislav Church (1958) and the former school (1950).

Father Riehl was appointed a Papal Chamberlain by Pope John XXIII, receiving the robes of office from Bishop Clarence G. Issenmann on March 25, 1963 and conferring the title of Very Reverend Monsignor. He served at St. Ladislav until 1965.

On June 3, 1965, Monsignor Frank T. Riehl was appointed the 2nd pastor of Our Lady of Peace, replacing Father George H. Foley. Monsignor Riehl was responsible for the construction of the present Our Lady of Peace Church (1967).

He retired from Our Lady of Peace in 1970, and took up residence at St. Nicholas Church in Zanesville. In February 1973 he was admitted to Good Samaritan Medical Center for treatment of a heart ailment. Monsignor Frank T. Riehl died on March 6, 1978 at the age of 71. His funeral Mass was celebrated at St. Nicholas Church in Zanesville on March 9, 1978. He was buried at Mt. Olive Cemetery in Zanesville. Requiescat in Pace.

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