

History of St. Thomas Becket



Northern Dakota County experienced a phenomenal increase in population in the 1980s. In response to that growth and the overcrowding experienced at surrounding parishes, the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis announced the formation of a new parish, the Church of St. Thomas Becket, on October 12, 1989. Fr. Thomas M. Kommers, then pastor of St. Timothy's in Blaine, was appointed founding pastor.

At the time of the announcement, more than 18 months of discussion and planning had already gone into making the new parish a reality. A permanent site for the church had been purchased on South Robert Trail between Diffley and Cliff roads. And parish geographic boundaries had been set: Yankee Doodle Road on the north, Lexington Avenue on the west, 120th Street on the south and Minnesota Highway 55 on the East.

Shortly after the announcement, a number of Catholics living within the parish boundaries called Fr. Tom to offer their help. A quick search was made of the eastern Eagan area for a temporary worship space. A building with potential was found at the corner of Lexington Avenue and Lone Oak Road. Known as the "old post office" to long-time Eagan residents, it had been, coincidentally, the beginning site for St. John Neumann, the first Catholic Church in Eagan. A three-year lease was signed and after substantial cleanup and repair, the new temporary parish center opened.

Following the suggestion of the Archdiocese, arrangements were made to purchase a house for the pastor rather than build a rectory on the permanent site. Fr. Tom moved into this residence, which is located in the Stonebridge subdivision, in November 1989 .

There were difficulties in getting the Lone Oak site ready. Extremely cold weather hampered repairs and permits came slower than expected. The first Mass, originally scheduled for the Feast of Epiphany, January 7, 1990, had to be delayed. Instead, interested individuals were invited to a meeting to get acquainted with Fr. Tom, learn more about the new parish, and sign up for several task forces needed to get our parish underway. Some 80 people gathered that night for the first meeting of our community. Coffee and refreshments were served, a pattern that continues to this day.

With help from a large number of parishioners, we worked diligently during the month of January to prepare the parish center for our first Masses. On Sunday, February 4, 1990, we celebrated mass with songs and prayers of thanksgiving to God for the new community. Both Masses were filled to capacity. Hospitality was provided by Fr. Tom's family and friends.

Since the beginning, the Catholic Community of St. Thomas Becket has been known for its commitment to warmly welcome new members with love and understanding. Wearing name tags and sharing coffee and refreshments after each Mass are now hallmarks of our weekend worship. But our focus is outward as well, with a deep commitment to establish a parish that will make a difference in northern Dakota County, the metro area, and beyond.

The parish has grown steadily over the years, from 75 to 80 households at the outset to some 600 households by September of 1994 to over 1,200 today. By 1992, the Sunday Masses were bursting and the need for building effort became apparent. In June 1992, on the Feast of Pentecost, the planning process for construction of our new home got underway. Parishioners were invited "To Build Church - Spiritual and Physical," and 60 members came forward to offer their time and skills through service on the overall coordinating group called the Project Management Team and several other building task forces.

The parish community overwhelmingly showed its support by responding to the Building Fund Drive in a manner which greatly exceeded expectations. Over 75 percent of parish households pledged without a home visit or phone call. And an additional 8 percent pledged following contact by phone. Others who were unable to pledge at the time due to unemployment, medical expenses or their situations indicated a willingness to pledge once their finances improved and many followed through on that commitment.

The site where the new church building was to be built was claimed and blessed in October, 1991. A year later, the community celebrated a Groundbreaking Festival which included a procession and prayer led by Bishop Lawrence Welsh, and an actual turning of the soil by every family in attendance.

In October, 1993, we prayed within the unfinished walls of our new building. On April 3, 1994, Holy Saturday, we celebrated our first Mass in our new church sanctuary at the Easter Vigil. Formal Rites of Dedication were celebrated on June 5, 1994 with Archbishop John R. Roach presiding.

From the outset, St. Thomas Becket has been a participatory community. In addition to monetary support, thousands of hours are donated by parishioners - young and mature alike - to various ministries, task forces, programs and committees. Our entire membership contributes to the success of this parish.

Add our community-building events such as the Annual Parish Picnic, Community Camp, wine and hors d'oeuvres parties, potluck suppers, painted rocks that mark membership, and hospitality after the Mass, and the result is a genuine feeling of togetherness, of community. This spirit, along with continued growth and reliance on each other, are the driving forces that will propel the Catholic Community of St. Thomas Becket into the next century.