

A History of Assumption Parish

May 4th, 1854—

“I cordially approve and recommend to all Catholics the zealous efforts of our brethren at Mt. Pleasant to build a church...The church is to be dedicated to Almighty God under the title of “The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”

With these words, the Reverend John Purcell, Archbishop of Cincinnati, authorized the solicitation of funds for the construction of a church in the northern reaches of Hamilton County, in the community known as Mount Pleasant.

This small settlement had been a mid-route stop on the road from Cincinnati to Hamilton providing travelers with food, libation, livery and smithing services. In 1817, Samuel Hill and tavern owner John LaBoiteaux laid out the plan of a town to an approximate one mile square. It is believed that the name came from the pleasant, forested setting and its elevation of 860 feet. In 1884 the U.S. Post Office requested the name be changed because there were two Mount Pleasants in Ohio. As the story goes, the community had been a refuge from the cholera epidemics that ravaged Cincinnati in 1832, 1847 and 1848. In recognition of this inexplicable feat, it was decided that Mount Pleasant be renamed Mount Healthy.

The first Assumption church was built on a tract of land designated Lot 32, east of the Hamilton Pike. Its construction is credited to landowner, Joseph Hechinger, who was responsible in gaining the support of the local residents for the project. The small frame structure was dedicated on August 5, 1855.

Prior to its founding, Catholics in this area traveled to St. Francis of Assisi and St. John the Baptist parishes in Cincinnati; and St. James parish in White Oak; which had been founded eleven years earlier. Although the church in Mount Pleasant was officially sanctioned by the Archbishop as The Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it was also known as *Heilige Maria Himmelfahrts Kirche*, in keeping with the predominant German heritage of its members.

Pastoral duties for the first six years came under the jurisdiction of the priests at St. James. For two years the Franciscans attended to the spiritual needs of the parish as part of their mission to minister to the German enclaves of the Cincinnati area. From

1862 to 1865 four different priests regularly visited Assumption.

In 1858 a two and a half story frame building was constructed north of the church to serve as the parish school. Following the prevalent custom of the period, male lay teachers performed the educational duties. In 1865 the school building was converted to a parsonage which became the home of the first resident pastor, Rev. George Nordmeyer. He was succeeded shortly thereafter by Rev. Herman Johanning. The arrival of Father Johanning marked the close of the pioneering years and ushered in a new era of community and pastoral identity.

The life and culture of Assumption is closely associated with seven major resident pastors. Father Johanning was the first in this line. On April 22, 1869 he was instructed by Archbishop Purcell to call on active parishioners to assist in the planning and building of a new church. Work progressed rapidly as benefactors provided clay and a kiln site (the northwest corner of Joseph Street and Compton's Road) for the manufacture of bricks. The corner stone was laid in June of the same year. Funding difficulties and related construction delays slowed the project but on November 20, 1870 the church, minus its steeple, was finally dedicated by the Archbishop. Not long after its completion, a frame structure was built in back of the church. This served as the parish school and, as was common in other areas of Cincinnati, lessons were taught in German.

For the next ten years Father Johanning worked tirelessly to reduce the indebtedness of the parish. There is little record of the personal side of this pastor other than his willingness to often sacrifice his wages to lessen the fiscal encumbrance on his people. Assigned to Harrison, Ohio, he left the parish on May 1, 1881 expressing disappointment at not being able to remove the debt for his successor. His efforts secured the foundation for a small but growing community of Catholics, and created a place of worship that was a physical and spiritual landmark for nearly ninety years.

The new pastor was the recently ordained, Rev. Bernard Roesener. Undaunted by the prospect of growing debt, he devoted his first eleven years to the cancellation of the economic burden shouldered by the sixty to seventy families. Records indicate his success in this endeavor was achieved on January 1, 1892 when the parish treasury finally recorded a small but long-awaited surplus. Inspired by this accomplishment, Father Roesener began a campaign to match the interior of the church with its exterior

splendor. New alters were constructed replacing the original, temporary installations. The addition of new statues, Stations of the Cross, wall frescoes, and magnificent stained glass windows helped to create a truly inspirational setting.

Once again buoyed by his success, Father Roesener turned his attention to the mission of Catholic education. The Congregation of Divine Providence assumed the responsibility of running the parish school with the arrival of three Sisters in 1894. He actively petitioned for the planning and eventual construction of a new school building. Completed in 1908, it also served as a residence for the Sisters. Many parishioners tried to discourage the pastor from building such a large structure for only 85 children. Events would prove his decision to be prudent as full capacity was reached within a few years. Certainly recognized as one of the great building pastors, Father Roesener's last accomplishment was the construction of a new rectory. It was completed in 1917 on the site of the original school/rectory of 1858. An interesting note in this regard is that the old frame building was not demolished but moved north on Joseph St. where it still exists today as a private residence.

Failing in health and beset by the worries of administering to his people, Father Roesener retired in February 1921. He died suddenly on June 24, 1924. The Pontifical Requiem Mass was celebrated at Assumption by Archbishop Henry Moeller, a classmate and life-long friend. As pastor for forty years, Father Roesener served longer than any other in that post. Along with physical manifestations in bricks and mortar, he brought stability and unity to the parish—important assets to the Catholic community of Mt. Healthy during the early decades of the new century.

Rev. Francis Sieve came to Assumption in March 1921. The first of the major pastors whose presence and personality can still be remembered by members of the parish, he was a priest of stern countenance and possessed an authoritarian disposition that was not uncommon in the clergy leadership of this era.

Almost immediately he set his sights on the growing number of school children and its related pressure on the existing school building. In spite of his personal determination to alleviate the situation, the basic issue of classroom space would challenge the educational mission of the parish for forty more years.

The Sisters withdrew from their residence in the school allowing for the

construction of additional classrooms. Even with this new space, the instructional arrangement required two grades in each room with one teacher for both grades. As for the Sisters, a house near the corner of Hill Ave. and Joseph St. was purchased and allocated for their use. The sacrifices they would endure in living conditions would not be adequately relieved for many more years.

Father Sieve managed to purchase additional land to increase the size of St. Mary's Cemetery and a strip of property along Elizabeth Street that encompassed three residences. Two of the lots would eventually become the site of an auditorium/club house. The evolution of this rather uninspiring facility began when one house was razed and a simple addition added to the other. The third residence which was located at the corner of Hill and Elizabeth was the home of the Bushman family who performed warden and custodial duties for many years including the ringing of the Angelus bell.

On September 8, 1929 Assumption celebrated its Diamond Jubilee (75 years) with a Solemn High Mass attended by Archbishop John McNicholas. The sermon on this occasion was preached by Father Edward Summe, a son of the parish who had said his first Mass in the church in 1922. Because of increased attendance, a third Sunday Mass was inaugurated in 1930. This addition marked the beginning of a long association with the Franciscan Fathers living and teaching at St. Francis Seminary on Mill Road north of Mt. Healthy.

Father Sieve had the unenviable task of managing the parish through two of the most difficult periods in the nation's history. The double impact of the Great Depression and the Second World War caused the postponement of his most cherished desire—the building of a new school.

It was rare that a community the size of Mt. Healthy would lose so many, and it was doubly remarkable that they were all sons of the parish: Alvin Fischvogt, Edwin Garlich, Walter Haar, Joseph Kessler, Arthur Straub in World War II; and William Rapien in the Korean War.

Shortly after the war Father Sieve arranged for the refurbishing of the statues, stations and wall frescoes in the church. But his health had been in decline since the mid-forties and ultimately the vision he championed was left to others to fulfill. He died suddenly on August 3, 1947. He was the first pastor to be buried in the church cemetery

and is remembered, not so much for physical contributions like his predecessors, but as a true “Father” of the parish.

For the next ten years three pastors served the community. The first, Rev. Robert Tensing, worked an interim tenure of about two months paving the way for Rev. William O’Connor. Although Father O’Connor’s stay lasted only one year, much was accomplished. This was due in part to his genial nature which seemed to generate enthusiastic support among the parishioners. As a veteran chaplain of both World Wars he was well suited to address the problems and adjustments of a post-war society. Already, growth in attendance caused the scheduling of a fourth Sunday Mass. Rev. Robert Hungling, a member of the faculty at Purcell High School, arrived in March 1948 to assist the pastor. Father Hungling was the first of twenty-eight assistant priests to be assigned to the parish—his most significant and endearing contributions were to come later.

With the consent of Archbishop McNicholas, surveys and plans dealing with the utilization of church property including the location of a new school were developed. It was also during this time that an active group of parishioners, eager to institute athletic activities for the children, renovated the so-called “club house”. They tore down a portion of the attached house and enlarged the old addition along Elizabeth Street. Over the years it would serve many uses and many organizations, and could be considered the first parish center. In 1948, it was used for dinner seating during the summer festival. Father O’Connor’s successful management of this particular event is still regarded by some as a unique and memorable occurrence unmatched not only at Assumption but in the entire Mt. Healthy community. He was transferred to St. Catherine’s in Westwood in September 1948 and was succeeded by Rev. Edward Depenbrock.

Soon after Father Depenbrock’s arrival, the Archbishop authorized the purchase of a four unit apartment building on the corner of Hill and Joseph Streets as a residence for the Sisters. They essentially moved across the street occupying the newly purchased facility on November 28, 1948. Their former residence was quickly converted to accommodate two needed classrooms. In addition to the Sister’s house, the Archbishop also authorized the construction of the long-awaited school. On Pentecost Sunday, June 5, 1949 ground was broken marking the first major construction by the parish in more

than thirty years. The corner stone was laid in November and the formal dedication, officiated by Auxiliary Bishop George Rehring, took place on May 28, 1950. In the fall of the same year, the new school opened its doors to what seemed to be an ever increasing student population.

September 26, 1954, the feast of the American Martyrs was set by Archbishop Karl Alter as the date Assumption would celebrate its Centennial Jubilee—100 years of the Catholic community in Mt. Healthy. Soon after, it became increasingly evident that the church could no longer efficiently serve the needs of a parish family that was expanding rapidly with the regional growth in the suburbs. Added to this were advancing concerns about the safety of the structure itself. Questions raised about the load capacity of the choir loft, the stability of the steeple, and basic fire safety, hastened the planning effort for a new structure. Under the guidance of Father Depenbrock it was determined that a temporary church would be constructed, it would be attached to the existing school, and it would contain classrooms. The temporary church was to be converted to an auditorium facility when a new, more appropriate structure could be built.

Due to health related complications Father Depenbrock resigned on October 10, 1956. Rev. Francis Franer, the first full time assistant at Assumption, was designated parish administrator until a new pastor could be appointed. Father Depenbrock's tenure is remembered as an important transitional period where long-standing problems were addressed and the plans for future growth were initiated. After a long illness he passed away at Good Samaritan Hospital on January 4, 1960.

On January 15, 1957, Rev. Francis Heider arrived to take over as pastor. Father Franer returned to his duties as assistant—a post he held until receiving a new assignment in 1959. A ground breaking ceremony for a building called the “church/hall” took place in February 1957. In the fall of the same year, school opened with eight additional classrooms in the lower level of the new building. While the first, second and third grade occupants tended to their studies, construction on the church proper continued overhead. The dedication took place on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1957, with Archbishop Alter as the celebrant.

The era of Father Heider is probably the most colorful in the history of the parish. He was big and gregarious with a winning smile and a booming laugh. The church was

new, and the school, under the firm and able guidance of Sister Mary Concepta (Burlando), had twenty classrooms running at capacity. For a few years it was a time of reassuring consistency.

The first major project initiated by Father Heider was the construction of the convent for the Sisters. Following a successful funding campaign, the ground breaking ceremony occurred in the spring of 1961, on land previously purchased by Father Depenbrock. The thirteen Sisters who had been living in the cramped quarters of the apartment building moved into the convent in February 1962. For the first time in 69 years of faithful service the Sisters of Divine Providence were finally able to attend Mass in their own chapel.

In September 1964 special permission was received to raze the 1908 structure and build another school. Demolition took place in 1965 and after a year of split scheduling and other sacrifices by teachers and students, the new building was ready for use in the 1966 school year. This marked the completion of a facilities infrastructure that would remain virtually unchanged for almost thirty years. At some point in time the concept of a new, permanent church apparently faded as a priority. This may have been due to other building and maintenance demands and a general acceptance by the parish of the adequacy of the temporary “church/hall”.

It was also during this time that the geographic size of the Assumption community stabilized to its current expanse. In the early years, parish membership claimed residents east to west from Finneytown to Groesbeck, and south to north from the Monfort Heights/College Hill area into the farming regions above Mt. Healthy. Within each new parish former Assumption families were instrumental in assisting the growth and development of fledgling communities. The following parishes and founding dates help to illustrate the closure of the Assumption boundary: St. John’s Dry Ridge, 1860; St. Clare, College Hill, 1908; St. Margaret Mary, North College Hill, 1920; Church of the Little Flower, Mount Airy, 1926; Our Lady of the Rosary, Greenhills, 1938; St. Vivian, Finneytown, 1943; St. Ann’s, Groesbeck, 1953; Corpus Christi, New Burlington, 1958. The last addition to have a direct impact on Assumption occurred in 1961 with the founding of St. Bartholomew parish on Winton Road.

The pastoral tenure of Father Heider could be viewed as a series of shared

adventures. Whether it was a hunting trip to Canada, a pilgrimage to the shrines of Europe, or tales of Reynard the fox, there was something unique and memorable about his ministry. This was evident in liturgical activities as well, from the impressive ceremonies closing Forty Hours Devotion to May Crowning and Rogation Day processions. A flourishing legacy from this period that can still be heard today is exemplified in the service of Eugene Englert, who, as a young composer and energetic organist, was hired by the pastor in 1959.

Father Heider freely expressed his joy in wearing the gold vestments on holydays, and was the last pastor to regularly don the biretta as a symbol of his office. In May 1964 he celebrated his fortieth year as a priest (his actual ordination date was June 14, 1924) In honor of this event the city council of Mt. Healthy proclaimed “Father Heider Day”. In some respects this marked the high point of his pastoral service as an era of transformation loomed on the horizon.

In 1962 Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council. By 1964 substantial changes in liturgy promulgated by Vatican II and John’s successor, Pope Paul VI, began to be implemented into the life of the Church. The dictates of Vatican II had an effect on the Catholic community that transcended mere manifestations of a non-Latin liturgy, turning the altar around, and Saturday Masses of obligation. The effect was profoundly noticeable on Father Heider. Every pastor before him, regardless of financial problems or management crisis, had been secure in a practice of worship that had stood firm for 400 years. His struggle with change was therefore unique and to witness his personal adjustment to the transition was at times, sad.

The school was also experiencing a transition. Sister Concepta retired in 1968 and the responsibility of principal was passed on to Sister Marion (Osterhage), She was already well established in the school as a powerful leader and teacher, and guided the educational mission for two years before being assigned to St. John’s Dry Ridge. In 1970 Sister Ruth (Nadicksbernd), previously known to many as Sister Mary Ann, became principal. A dynamic administrator, she lead the school in an era of stark transition with strength and wisdom. In terms of teachers, the lay contingent grew steadily while the number of religious faculty was in decline. The one-time crushing enrollment situation also peaked and began to slowly subside.

The strain of adjustment, advancing age and declining health made Father's last years difficult. He died on May 18, 1971 while still serving the parish. His resting place is in St. Mary's cemetery next to Father Sieve. A tribute to Father Heider is the universal fondness by which he is remembered by his parishioners.

Rev. Robert Hungling, Assumption's first assistant priest in 1948, returned in 1971 as the new pastor. One of the first items achieved in his tenure was the reinstatement of the Parish Festival. Backed by scores of dedicated parishioners, Father Hungling's first of many successful festivals took place in June 1973. Accordingly, he did not hesitate to approve other fund raising opportunities, one of which was the weekly Bingo, first licensed in 1978.

By the mid-seventies Father was in a position to authorize a substantial renovation project for the rectory. A two-story addition was constructed on the north side, over the pen area where Father Heider had kept his "hounds of heaven". The front porch was also enclosed providing two office spaces. Assumption had been consistently staffed with two assistant priests since 1963 and the renovation was a welcome change for the three inhabitants.

In 1979 Sister Ruth was reassigned but the tradition of strong and effective leadership in the principal's office continued with the appointment of Sister Rosella (Summe). The school itself continued to experience a decline in enrollment. A transition in parish demographics was certainly part of reason, but it is also believed that the institution of more realistic and higher tuition costs contributed to the slide. There were benefits that could not be discounted. Class size became more manageable and the conversion of unused classrooms into instructional support and administrative areas increased efficiency.

On December 28, 1978 a disastrous occurrence of profound impact shattered the calm of the post-Christmas holidays. A fire of suspicious origin started near the Nativity scene in front of the Blessed Virgin's altar. It spread rapidly through the natural decorative greenery and onto the wooden roof beams. By the time it was brought under control destruction was massive with the main altar and sacristy area a total loss. The entire Mt. Healthy community acted with compassion and support. School District officials permitted the high school gym to be used as a temporary place of worship and

other kindnesses were extended.

Reconstruction began immediately as dictated by the demand for smoke and water damaged classrooms to be made available for the continuation of school. In planning for rebuilding the church, it was decided to reorient the interior so the altar would become an approachable focus of liturgical activity. It was moved from the south end to the middle of the east wall and the pews configured to surround it. Perhaps the most pleasant addition was the installation of stained glass windows. They helped create an environment not experienced by parishioners in over twenty years.

On the feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1979, in the 125th year of the parish, Archbishop Joseph Bernadin rededicated the church. The calamity of the fire and the eventual recovery became a milestone of a different sort. It allowed the parish to make a more visible transition to the modern mode of worship, it represented a new, unifying identity, and it ended any lingering notions about the temporary status of the 1957 structure.

Father Hungling's most memorable achievement was his work on the recovery of the church. After its rededication he continued as pastor for eight more years. They were years of relative stability as he applied his organizational and managerial talents to the basic task of running the parish. During this time there was one addition to the school's educational array. A self-supporting Kindergarten program was established largely due to the action and dedication of the younger families in the parish.

Following an archdiocesan policy of withdrawing from administration at the age of 70, and for additional health related reasons, he retired in 1987. Father Hungling passed away in 1995.

Rev. Francis Lammeier, arrived in August 1987. He maintained the basic operation of the parish established by Father Hungling but would face new challenges as the community moved into the last decade of the century.

In 1988, following the departure of Sister Rosella, Father Lammeier hired Mr. William Walborn to replace her as principal. Mr. Walborn was the first lay person to hold that position since the arrival of the Sisters in 1894.

In 1992 key members of the parish, in concert with Father Lammeier, initiated a needs assessment study under the banner of "Assumption 2000". Every organization,

ministry, and allied association participated in developing a substantive planning document. Out of this came the decision to begin solicitation for a parish center building that would house a gym, stage area and meeting rooms. With the success of the funding campaign, authorization was received begin construction.

In the midst of this activity there occurred a somewhat sobering event. After one hundred years of commitment and service to the parish, the Congregation of Divine Providence terminated its presence at Assumption. Residency in the convent had dwindled to one or two, and connection to the educational mission of the school had ceased. Disconsolate as this was, an opportunity suited to the mission of “Assumption 2000” was recognized. A decision was made to relocate the rectory and its administrative spaces in a renovated convent building. This occurred in the spring of 1994. And not long after the annual parish festival, crews moved in to demolish the rectory built by Father Roesener in 1917.

Father Lammeier worked to make Assumption more self-sufficient, shaped by its lay constituents, and more desirable for pastoral successors to choose. This had become an essential strategy as all parishes faced the major challenge of the era—a critical shortage of priests. In 1994 this situation was felt by all when the number of weekend Masses was reduced for the first time in the church’s history.

The Parish Center, dedicated in the spring of 1995, was built on the sites of the rectory and the old church and attached to the 1949 school, the oldest building remaining within the parish campus. The stained glass window of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin originally installed in the 1917 rectory overlooks the ancient alley-way that separated the Hechinger lots of 1854 and the property that became the site of the school.

In his final years as pastor, Father Lammeier struggled with bouts of ill-health and was further challenged by ministering to the parish without the consistent support of an assistant. He retired in 1999 but can still be seen at many parish functions.

Memory Clips

The flood of personal memories is difficult to include in an “official” history. The following words and phrases are provided to jog the memories of those who can travel back; and to give those who can’t, snippets of Assumption lore. Many were taken from a collection compiled on the occasion of the 20 year reunion of the 8th. grade class of 1965. School life is a primary topic—eight years left quite an impression on developing minds.

- Air raid drills
- Arthis–thesis
- Art on Friday afternoon: drawing the cornucopia
- Baltimore Catechism, blue and green versions
- Band director, Mr. Schneider, and his heavy hand
- Bike racks filled with bikes
- Black letter sweaters
- Blessed John Martin Moye
- Boy Scout paper drives
- Cartridge fountain pens
- Chapel veils or paper towels
- Checkmarks:
 - Exercises Self-Control
 - Accepts Correction Well
 - Is Considerate of Others
 - Works to Maximum Ability
- Cleaning erasers after school
- Cooties
- CYO Inaugural Ball at Stardust Hall
- Deer burgers in the cafeteria after a successful hunting trip
- 8th grade concert at Grace E. Hunt school
- 8th. grade students substituting for teachers in the lower grades

- Father Franer dressed up as Zorro
- Father Heider broadcasting over “Station A”
- “Father Jim Says” in the weekly Messenger
- Father Wintermeyer, “The visible head of the Church”
- 5¢ candy machine in the hallway—the no-candy Lenten selection
- Gregorian Chant, “punctums” and other strange words
- Genuflecting at the sound of a clap
- Harry Bushman cleaning up “accidents”
- Health lights
- Holy cards with gilt edges, printed in Italy
- Jerry Adams’ theatrical performances
- J.M.J.
- Lasso tricks: the one man wild west show
- Lunch in the cafeteria: 25¢, milk:3¢ for those who carried
- Main Theater: the annual trip to see a movie epic
- Marching in the Holy Name Parade
- Marching in the Memorial Day Parade with Father Heider
- Mass every day at 8:00am
- May Crowning
- Mrs. Wolf, the librarian
- Motivational signs: “Time is passing. Are you?”
- Navy blue jumper and white blouse uniforms
- Painting the store windows in Mt. Healthy for Halloween
- Patrol boys: badge, belt and paddle
- Pitch pipes
- Praying for the conversion of Russia
- Recess: bean-bag, come-across, gang catchers, red rover; and torn pants, skinned knees and broken glasses
- Rich’s Pony Keg after a sports practice or after serving a wedding
- School colors: blue and gold
- School picnic at Stricker’s Grove

- Selling seed packets and getting religious prizes
- Servers going on sick calls with the priests
- Sister Charles Louise, the Singing Supervisor
- Sister Julietta's wisdom: "Empty barrels make the most noise."
- Space shots on TV in the classroom
- St. Joseph Daily Missal
- Thanksgiving day football games: Assumption vs. St. Margaret Mary
- Tick-Tacking the nuns house
- Treasure Chest and Chuck White
- Waiting across the street from the convent to carry the Sisters' books
- Wearing taps on shoes and greenie stick'em caps
- Wooden Rosary beads and their distinctive clicking sound
- "Wraps" were hung in the cloakroom
- Writing the Mass for Mr. Englert
- Writing the times tables for Tony Gustin
- Babe Schiering and Charlie Theiring
- John Mullen Computer Camp
- Rick Reis and the Talent Show
- "...your Bishop Daniel, my Bishop John."

And many, many more...