

“Our parish buildings, our fine school, the spirit of faith and sacrifice of our parishioners, all these are attributable, under God, to the untiring and unstinting efforts of the good people of our parish and their exemplary Catholic lives.”

- Fr. Bernard P. DeCrane

St. Barnabas Parish Family has much to be proud of as we celebrate our first 50 years. From a modest gathering of 70 families to initiate building a parish, our family has grown to more than 3500 families today.

We are indebted to Fr. DeCrane and those early parishioners, whose vision and hard work have built a lasting Christian community, not only in the physical plant but also in the daily witness of Christ throughout Northfield Center, Northfield Village, Sagamore Hills, and the surrounding areas. Their sacrifices are the cornerstone of the parish family we enjoy today.

It is difficult to imagine the eagerness with which his new parishioners greeted Fr. DeCrane in June of 1956. However, for those who recalled loading into Mrs. Grady’s Model T to ride to St. Mary’s in Bedford to learn the Catechism, or learned their lessons gathered in Ann Burgenson’s home on 82, the news of a parish in this country town was somewhat of a small miracle.

In the pages that follow, you are invited to join us on this sentimental journey as we recall these past 50 years of faith and friendship.

St. Barnabas officially became a parish on June 11, 1956. Archbishop Hoban appointed Fr. Bernard DeCrane the first pastor.

At the time, Fr. DeCrane was pastor in name only, being the custodian of roughly 18 acres of undeveloped diocesan property. The land was covered with towering weeds and vines; there were no usable buildings.

Whatever fears beset the new pastor as he visualized the tremendous task ahead were quickly dispelled. Two days later, June 13, 1956, Fr. DeCrane met with about 70 families at the home of Ed and Mary Mikolay on Beechwood Dr. in Northfield Center. As they exchanged ideas, Fr. DeCrane knew that this parish would become a reality.

Fr. DeCrane would recall later that their spirit of cooperation and self-sacrifice was unprecedented. Father liked to say that he was rich in one commodity – dedicated parishioners.

After a thorough study of the area, it was decided that a temporary church with a seating capacity of 600 would be built. From the beginning it was determined that this church would eventually be converted into classrooms when a larger, permanent church was needed. (The original church is now home to the PSR office, school library, computer room, art room, and New Youth Vision Room.)

A school with a minimum of eight classrooms would be needed, as well as a convent to house the sisters who would staff the school.

In addition, it was determined that the church must have a full basement that someday could become the social center of parish life. The church basement is now the school cafeteria.

The entire community seemed to rise to challenge of a new parish being born. At the regular meeting of the Northfield School Board on June 11, 1956, the school board, along with Superintendent Lee M. "Pat" Patton, agreed unanimously to allow St. Barnabas to use school facilities for Sunday Mass until a church could be built. Mass would be celebrated at Northfield High School, now Nordonia Hills Middle School, on Leonard Avenue.

The appointments were crude in that high school auditorium. The heat was oppressive. Still, Fr. DeCrane mused, "there was no greater air of excitement and devotion in a cathedral in Rome as there was in Northfield High School on June 24, 1956." On that memorable day, St. Barnabas Parish celebrated its first Mass.

With a site secured for Sunday worship, the next challenge was to find a place suitable for daily Mass. The men of the parish rose to the challenge with the slogan: "The difficult we do easily; the impossible takes a little longer." In virtually no time a two-car garage on the grounds was raised on concrete blocks. The interior was redecorated and a wooden

cross was nailed to the front door. And so, St. Barnabas parish had a chapel for the daily sacrifice of the Mass.

From the beginning, Fr. DeCrane entrusted the spiritual affairs of St. Barnabas to the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary. One of Fr. DeCrane's first acts as pastor was to find a suitable place to enthrone the Blessed Mother so that she could watch over and guide the parish in the construction of a new home for her Son. A stone chimney on the grounds, the only visible ruins of a log cabin built in the early 19th century, provided the ideal site.

The historical significance of the chimney as a suitable place to honor Mary was the last thought in Fr. DeCrane's mind when he got his first glimpse of the chimney, obscured by overgrown weeds. Making a mental note that first day he tramped through the property, which at that time resembled the jungles of New Guinea where he had served as a chaplain during World War II, the new pastor determined: "That is the first thing to go."

However, as the weeks passed and building plans began to take form, Fr. DeCrane found his mind returning again and again to the chimney. Maybe it shouldn't go, he thought. Then he started thinking in terms of converting it into a shrine.

Early in July the chimney was converted into Our Lady of Fatima shrine. During the benediction that day the entire parish knelt for the

recitation of the Memorare. It was here that the entire building program was placed under Mary's protection.

Fr. DeCrane's decision to use the chimney as the focal point of the shrine was reinforced when Mrs. Gladys Quayle brought the story of the chimney to him. Mrs. Quayle had been located and brought to the rectory by Steve and Mary Alice Povec.

According to Mrs. Quayle, the chimney was part of a log cabin that was built in 1824 by some of the first white settlers to come to the wilderness that was to become Northfield. Mrs. Quayle noted that "whenever the circuit rider preacher rode through here on horseback for his periodic visits, religious services were held in that cabin. The stones in that fireplace and chimney are in your structure of Our Lady of Fatima Shrine."

The house was enlarged in 1882 and converted into a gracious home. When this home burned to the ground in 1920, only the original chimney remained.

Mrs. Quayle heartily approved of the shrine. "I feel that you have complimented my ancestors, for truly the land has been restored to religious purposes as my grandparents had wished."

Not long after the dedication of Our Lady of Fatima Shrine, the parish had scheduled its first outdoor bazaar. With Steve Belak as chairman, this festival would raise the seed money to start construction.

As the committee members worked feverishly to prepare the grounds for parking cars and readying the booths they were fighting a losing battle over one thing they could not control – the weather.

A hard rain began to blow and wash away all their efforts. Twenty hours before the opening of the parish festival the rains had converted the grounds into a quagmire. Strong winds had whipped down the tents.

“I think we’d better pray,” said Fr. DeCrane as he gathered the workers together in front of Our Lady’s shrine. With the faith that moves mountains they knelt in the rain and mud for the recitation of the rosary. Before the last decade was completed the rains stopped and the sky cleared. St. Barnabas Parish was blessed with an ideal weekend, one of the finest of the summer.

One of the volunteers, Roy Steele, was not Catholic at the time. He was so deeply moved by the experience that he converted to Catholicism because of it.

The festival was a major success. Through the heroic efforts of everyone in the parish on August 24th, 25th, and 26th, the committee reached its goal of raising \$10,000! With that, the parishioners knew that their dream of a church in Northfield would become a reality.

On October 7, 1956, the first shovel of earth was turned. Ed Mikolay was the contractor. From that day on, without interruption, Mikolay’s paid construction crews labored every day. At times Mr. Mikolay paid his workers from his own pocket when construction expenses

exceeded estimates. Volunteer workers from the parish took up the task at night and worked far into every night

The basement of the new church was completed in time for celebration of midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, 1956. Just two and a half months after the groundbreaking, the impossible was done and the first Mass was held in the new church building.

The lattice work steel supports were still open at the ceiling when the workers went home at 11:00 that night, and a perfectionist could see many things not yet done. However, Fr. DeCrane would recall later: "To the sophisticated, perhaps, it was as humble as the cave in Bethlehem. But to our loyal parishioners it was as beautiful as the Sistine Chapel in Rome."

St. Barnabas Church was completed by May, 1957. Never before in the history of the Cleveland Catholic Diocese had a newly-found church been completed in less than a year from its creation.

It may have appeared as a miracle to some, but for the 295 families comprising St. Barnabas Parish, the performance simply made a truth of that expression: "The difficult we do easily; the impossible takes just a little longer."

With this tremendous milestone reached, an eight-classroom school was adopted as the next parish project. The goal was to have the school completed by September, in time for the fall session.

Miraculously, that deadline was met as well. The first students entered St. Barnabas School on September 7, 1957. If one cared to notice, the school was missing a few items, such as windows and doors. Those would come later. The essential ingredients were there – teachers, students, desks, blackboards and books.

The small school was built with expansion in mind. The one-story structure was built with stairwells and a foundation capable of adding another story. By March 1, 1960, eight more classrooms were built atop the original. By 1966 we had so many demands on our school that a new wing was called for, making three classrooms of each grade.

Because of the new church and facilities, both the parish and Northfield were seemingly growing too fast. On June 6, 1963 Twinsburg was taken from the parish to form the new parish of Saints Cosmas & Damian.

The overwhelming number of families moving into the community in the 1960s was Catholic. Our parish growing pains continued without interruption. Even with the formation of Saints Cosmas and Damian, and the added wing to St. Barnabas School, the parish was strained. Therefore, Our Lady of Guadalupe was established in 1967, taking an additional 500 families from St. Barnabas.

Fr. DeCrane retired on October 18, 1976. Fr. Edward Bedell was assigned to succeed him as pastor.

The number of parish families had climbed to over 2,000, and numerous weekend Masses had to be celebrated in the church and cafeteria to service the needs of all the parishioners. At 10:30 and noon each Sunday, some families worshipped at Mass in the church while others participated in the guitar Mass below.

It was clear that the time had come to replace the “temporary” church with a larger worship space. On August 17, 1980, ground was broken for the new church.

The Eucharist was the heart of Fr. Bedell’s priesthood. Father could not preach a homily without at least a passing reference to the Eucharist. His daily routine always included time before the Blessed Sacrament. It was natural then that Fr. Bedell would want to build a new church to meet the needs of the larger congregation and at the same time incorporate the reforms of Vatican II.

If the sanctuary appears stark, it was Fr. Bedell’s deliberate plan. Nothing, he said, should take your attention from the sacrifice of the Mass. There was no large crucifix hanging above, for the altar should be the focal point of one’s devotion at Mass. The statues of the Holy Family were placed near the rear of the church.

The tabernacle was housed in a separate chapel where He could be adored throughout the day and night outside of Mass.

The new church, which seats over 1,000 people, was completed in 1981.

Fr. Bedell loved the outdoors. He was an avid hunter and fisherman. In October of 1988, Fr. Bedell went to Canada to close up the family cabin for the winter. In a tragic boating accident, he along with one other of the party was drowned. His dedication to the Eucharist as well as his smile and sometimes-mischievous personality were missed by many. Also missed was Crackers, his beloved dog who had occasionally wandered into church for daily Mass.

In 1989 Fr. Joseph Konen was appointed as the new pastor at this difficult time in the life of the parish. Fr. Konen would invest much energy working through the confusion and hurts of this time by emphasizing spiritual development.

Faith was at the heart of conversion and parish life. If St. Barnabas were to continue to be characterized by a community spirit, the large, impersonal congregation needed to be broken down into “family” units of faith sharing. The G.I.F.T. program was born as a new way of being parish. Fr. Konen worked hard to create small groups that would gather in the homes twice monthly to share and grow in their faith.

Fr. Konen ultimately resigned his pastorate and discerned God’s will in the secular world.

On April 19, 1993, Fr. Charles Diedrick was appointed as the fourth pastor of St. Barnabas. Fr. Charlie inherited a growing parish. As in the 1960s, massive development was going on in the area. Overnight fallow fields were being turned into neighborhoods looking at a potential growth

of 2,000 to 4,000 additional households coming into the community near the turn of the millennium.

Like the pastors before him, Fr. Charlie rose to the challenge of adapting the parish to the changing times. Larger parish facilities were needed to service the influx of people. Nine new classrooms were needed, for a total of three classrooms for each grade K-8, and a new multipurpose hall.

The result is an adequate number of classrooms, a parish center, gathering space, and Bedell Commons, at a cost of over \$3 million. With continued sacrifice by parishioners, St. Barnabas Parish Family once again proves that “the difficult we do easily, the impossible takes a little longer.”