

We are 50!

Fifty Years is a lifetime,
or perhaps it is half a lifetime.
Compared to the oldest parish in America,
Fifty Years is young.
Compared to Infinity, Fifty Years is a spark,
or a breath, or a sprinkle of rain.
St. Thomas Becket Parish
has reached a golden mark!

We are 50!

Look around:
the altar, the pews, the hall,
the places that gather us in faith
to embrace His teachings.

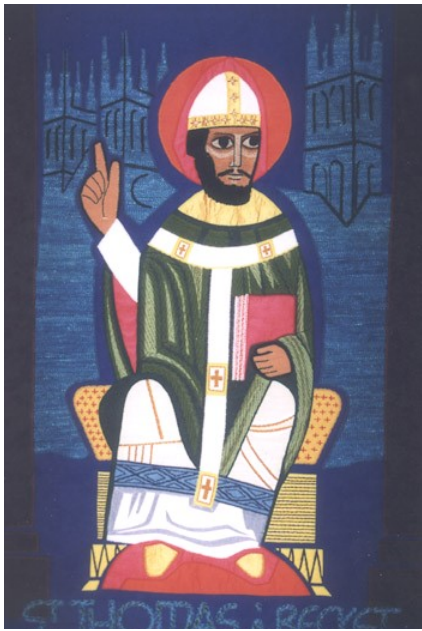
Look again:
the faces, the eyes, the hands,
the hearts, the souls, the voices,
the people that gather in faith
to live His teachings.

We are 50!

Our free will – akin to His will
brings us to this time and place.
Time to remember and cherish the past;
time to wonder at the work of our hands;
time to smile at the fun that we've had;
time to be grateful for God's given grace;
time to celebrate in this Holy space.

We are 50!

Some of us were here at the beginning.
Some of us arrived yesterday.
It matters not.
Are you one hundred years old?
Or one hour old?
Are you somewhere in between?
It matters not.
You are here. You are family. You are welcome.
You are loved.



OUR PATRON SAINT

Every parish and chapel in the world is named after a patron or protector. The name chosen among three given to the cardinal for a parish founded by Father Frank Wachowski in an area of Prospect Heights was St. Thomas a Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1162-1170) and a martyr for the church.

Thomas of Canterbury was certainly a controversial and unusual character of the middle ages. He was a talented man who became first archdeacon of the Cathedral of Canterbury, chancellor and friend of the King of England, deacon, priest and finally bishop of Canterbury and eventually a martyr and saint.

Thomas was born of a family of means in London, England on December 21, 1118. He was named Thomas because he was born on the feast day of St. Thomas the apostle. As a youth he received an excellent education as befitting his upbringing. He was educated in France, a sign that he would dedicate his life to the church though not necessarily as a priest. It was during this time that he took a vow of celibacy.

As many successful young men before him, Thomas caught the eye of a powerful patron, Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury. Thomas became a member of his household, was ordained a deacon and made archdeacon of the Cathedral of Canterbury.

King Stephen of England died and was succeeded to the throne by Henry II a 21-year-old young man. Theobald recommended Thomas to Henry for his chancellor. Henry offered the job to Thomas. Thomas accepted and with his drive and talent, he became the most important man in England save for the king. His influence over Henry was great and he became confidant and friend to the throne.

At the death of Theobald, it fell to the king to recommend to the chapter of Canterbury and to the Pope a new bishop. After much thought he suggested Thomas, his chancellor, who was still only a deacon. Thomas tried in vain to warn the king of the strife and trouble this could cause. The king overruled Thomas and so at age of 43 in 1162 Thomas was ordained a priest and eight days later consecrated archbishop of Canterbury.

As was his custom, Thomas took his office most seriously and became the head of the church of England and its greatest defender. Unfortunately, this brought him into contention with the interest of the state and of his friend Henry II. For eight years the two defended their concerns and causes and finally Thomas began to prevail.

This caused much grief to Henry who in a moment of weakness exclaimed before his knights, "Is there no one in my kingdom who can rid me of this low priest"? Four of the king's knights took the king's wish as a command and on December 29th, 1170 eight days after his 52nd birthday, Thomas was hacked to death in a room of the cathedral. Thus, Thomas ended his earthly sojourn a martyr for his faith and the defender of his flock.

From that time pilgrims have come to the sight of his death and by popular acclaim declared a saint. Miracles occurred immediately. A cult to the bishop was soon begun and Pope Alexander III officially canonized the bishop of 1173.

ST. THOMAS BECKET HISTORY

On May 15, 1968, Rev. Frank Wachowski was appointed by His Eminence Cardinal Cody to establish a new parish in what was then an unincorporated area of northwest Cook County known as Prospect Heights, Illinois.

Father Frank, as he was to become known to his new parishioners, was given responsibility for developing the boundaries of the parish and acquiring land for the eventual construction of a church. The boundaries of the parish had to be worked out with neighboring parishes already in existence – St. Alphonsus in Prospect Heights, St. Emily in Mt. Prospect and St. Catherine Laboure in Glenview. After much searching for land centrally located, available and affordable, Father Frank was able to acquire a little over five acres from a landscape nursery on Lee Street (later renamed Burning Bush when incorporated in Mt. Prospect). Finally, the parish could be organized and begin to function.

The first Sunday Masses were said on September 28, 1969 in the gymnasium of Maryville Academy. During the following week, arrangements were made with the local public school district to use the school directly across the street from the parish property. From October 5, 1969, and for more than nine years thereafter, this was to be the “church” for weekend and some Holy Day Masses. Folding chairs, a portable podium and a collapsible altar were stored in the garage of a parishioner who lived next to the school. Each week, the church would be set up on Saturday afternoon and taken down on Sunday afternoon. During the first month, 247 families were registered as members of the parish.

The first organization of the new parish was a CCD program of religious education for children. Classes were held in the homes of volunteer teachers, who were mostly parents, except for Sunday morning classes in the school for pre-schoolers, first and second graders. Teachers and children were enrolled, and classes were begun by the end of November.

In December, Cardinal Cody approved the name of St. Thomas Becket. While this was the second choice of the parishioners, the Cardinal felt that there were too many parishes with names similar to the first choice, Church of the Holy Spirit. Now that we were born and named, a committee was formed to have a Christening party. Arrangements were made to have a dinner dance in the hall of St. Catherine Laboure parish center on March 7, 1970. Learning that Father Frank was completing 25 years in the priesthood, the committee decided to include this occasion in the celebration. The party was a huge success with a capacity attendance and became an annual event for the next six years.

During the first two years, Father Frank resided with the priests at Maryville. In the spring of 1970, a home about six blocks north of the parish property was purchased to serve as a residence and parish center. In May, the ladies of the parish held a house-warming shower to provide cooking utensils and linens.

The first CCD class to receive their First Holy Communion was at Mass on May 23, 1970 for 97 children. On August 1, 1970, an outdoor Mass was said by Father Frank on the parish property. This was followed by a family picnic in the adjacent park.

During the first two years, weekday Masses were said in the home of parishioners in the evenings as often as possible. In September of 1971, the garage of the parish center was converted into a chapel. From then on, the chapel was used for daily Masses, baptisms, weddings, Holy Hours and confessions.

A club for senior parishioners, later named New Horizons, was formed in October of 1971. Round Robin groups were organized in January of 1972. The purpose of these groups was to raise funds for the parish while enjoying social activities such as playing cards, sewing, crafts, etc. Very successful garage sales were handled by the Round Robin groups for several years.

In May of 1972 following his ordination at St. Mary's Seminary, Mundelein, Rev. Robert F. Tonelli was assigned to the parish as the first assistant to Father Frank. Father Bob quickly became involved in forming activities and organizations for the younger parish members. A youth group for high schoolers was formed in April of 1973. This group eventually chose the name Active Christian Teens (ACT). These teenagers have conducted car washes, paper drives and doughnut sales besides their social and religious activities.

Men of the parish were invited to become charter members of a new council of the Knights of Columbus in May of 1973. The Mt. Prospect Council was eventually formed and has provided the parish with their services on many occasions, particularly at ceremonial functions.

During the summer of 1973, a softball league for the girls was organized with four teams participating. The league continued for several years for the enjoyment of the young women.

Plans for the new church, meeting hall and rectory were announced in November of 1975. A pledge drive was inaugurated in February of 1976 and was concluded in April of that year with pledges totaling more than \$434,515 payable within three years. A parish cook book was compiled and published in January of 1977, containing many favorite recipes submitted by parishioners.

Father Bob was transferred to Holy Trinity Church at the Medical Center on the near south side of Chicago in May of 1977. The following month, Rev. Thomas E. Sreniawski was assigned to the parish following his ordination at St. Mary's Seminary, Mundelein.

The long-awaited day of ground breaking ceremonies was held on June 26, 1977. Later that year, the corner stone of the church was put in place on October 23, with Rev. John McEnroe, Urban Vicar, officiating. Father Tom was transferred in May of 1978 to Our Lady of the Mount parish, Cicero. Rev. James F. Ouletta was transferred to the parish as Associate Pastor in June of 1978. Father Jim was previously at St. Catherine Laboure and was ordained at St. Mary's Seminary, Mundelein in 1960.

The Men's Club was organized and held its first general meeting on November 13, 1978.

While construction was not yet complete, the new church was used for Sunday Masses for the first time on December 23, 1978. The joy of Christmas was enhanced by the occasion.

It wasn't until September of 1979 that construction of the new building was completed for full use and occupancy. Meanwhile, Father Frank became seriously ill, requiring major surgery and intensive treatment. On March 9, 1980, ceremonies for dedication of the church were officiated by Cardinal Cody. Unfortunately, Father Frank's health continued to deteriorate and he was called to his eternal reward on September 1, 1980. Mass of the Resurrection was concelebrated by more than twenty priests on September 4, 1980 with the final blessing given by Cardinal Cody.

Shortly before Father Frank's death, Fr. Jim was appointed Administrator of the parish and on November 15, 1980 after a ten week mourning period a new pastor was named. Fr. Ralph Mollan, ordained in 1943, came to us from St. John De LaSalle parish where he had been pastor for thirteen years.

Fr. Ralph Mollan was pastor from 1980 – 1989. After the initial excitement of establishing a new parish and building a new church by Fr. Frank, it was Fr. Ralph Mollan's job to begin forming this new community and its identity. We should keep in mind that Fr. Frank had been the driving force behind St. Thomas Becket and was the face of the parish. With his death, there was uncertainty and a loss of direction. Fr. Mollan had a difficult job since everyone would compare him to Fr. Frank.

He began getting parishioners involved and giving them a voice by forming the PPC (Parish Pastoral Council). He would attend Men's and Women's Club meetings and settled the parish into a rhythm. The parish grew, and there were joyful celebrations and tearful goodbyes. After his retirement, he continued to live for a period of time in the rectory as pastor emeritus. He moved to the Bishop Timothy Lyne Retirement Home in Lemont, Illinois and died there on April 14, 2009.

Fr. John Roller succeeded him and was pastor from 1989 – 2004. He was considered a great homilist, and told many anecdotes and we came to know his family and the impact his former pastors had on his own life. In addition, he was considered by some to be a gifted musician. He never has a lesson, but played the piano "by ear". Many times he would play the piano as a meditation after communion. When he did that after the 9/11 attacks, many found that to be a great comfort.

Meanwhile, the once "new" church and other parish buildings were getting old and maintenance and upkeep were critical. There was also the debt incurred from the construction of the buildings. Fr. Roller invited key parishioners to the newly formed Finance and Maintenance committees. With the help of the Finance Committee, the parish debt was eliminated and a savings program was begun.

Guided by the Bishops' Committee on Liturgy document titled "Environment and Art in Catholic Worship (11/02/1997) and the Becket 2000 Capital Campaign, the church was remodeled into an "antiphonal" configuration. Construction began on May 27, 1997.

During construction, Sunday Mass was celebrated in the parish hall, which was set up to resemble the new configuration which would soon be in the church, itself. It was crowded but gave a spirit of renewal to the parish. The First Mass celebrated in the newly configured church was, in fact, the Mass of Rededication of our place of worship on October 11, 1997 by the Most Rev. Gerald Kicanas.

During those times, Mt. Prospect was becoming more diverse and multicultural. The Archdiocese wanted to attend to the needs of the new members and began having local parishes celebrate Mass to serve the different culture and language needs of the growing population. Some members of the Polish community approached Fr. Roller, inquiring and requesting whether St. Thomas Becket might be able to host weekly Masses in the Polish language. Father brought this to the PPC which unanimously welcomed the idea. The first Polish Mass was celebrated on December 1, 1996, with a couple of hundred in that first Polish congregation. However, as time went on, the number present would be pushing the 1,000 mark!

This was the start of the revitalization of our parish. While other parishes witnessed a decline in Mass attendance, with the addition of the Polish Masses, our Mass attendance grew. By the time of his retirement, there were almost as many Polish speaking parishioners as English speaking ones. The new pastor would have to be able to address the needs of both communities and strive to make of them one parish family.

Fr. John Roller retired to St. Emily parish in 2004, and still celebrates Mass here at St. Thomas Becket as well as at St. Emily and St. Paul Chong HaSang Korean Mission in Des Plaines.

An Associate Pastor of St. Monica, Rev. Edward Panek was our pastor from 2004 – 2015. He was born on the Southside of Chicago to Polish speaking parents and was bilingual. He was intelligent, driven, lots of energy and vision. He arrived with his dog, Beavis and began serving the parish.

Most of the young/new families were Polish and Fr. Ed had meetings and social events with them. It was not unusual for Fr. Ed to be playing volleyball on the church grounds with these young adults/families. His competitive nature was apparent to anyone who played against him.

Soon, Polish Mass attendance was larger than the English community. Fr. Ed had the difficult task of balancing the needs of both groups. In Poland, there are many priests in a parish, here there was one. It was new to the members to serve as lectors, Eucharistic ministers, sacristans, catechists and ushers.

In 2009, St. Thomas Becket celebrated its 40th anniversary. With Fr. Ed's guidance, an ambitious celebration was planned. A garden and statue of St. Thomas Becket was planned and commissioned. The dedication of the statue was on May 30, 2009 and Cardinal Francis George attended.

We called 2009, the year of Jubilee. There were multiple celebrations including a Founders dinner, a 40th anniversary dance at Old Orchard and a 40th anniversary closing ceremony with Bishop Rassas.

In the following years, the English and Polish community continued to make connections and the parish grew. Fr. Ed was the head of our Deanery from 2011 – 2019. When his time with St. Thomas Becket was finished in 2015, he was named pastor of St. Raymond De Penafort parish in Mount Prospect.

An Associate Pastor of St. James in Arlington Heights, Rev. Krzysztof (Chris) Kulig became our Associate Pastor in 2012 and was named the pastor in 2015. Fr. Chris was born in Poland and came to the United States as a seminarian. An energetic, joyful and caring man who bridges the two communities and is respected by both.

In 2016, the Archdiocese of Chicago brought the "To Teach Who Christ Is" (TWCI) capital campaign to St. Thomas Becket. We were given a goal of \$615,000 to raise over 5 years, \$369,000 would stay in the parish. With Archdiocesan approval, most of the funds would be for renovating our church back to its original design. This increases seating in the church by about 200 people.

The renovation began on May 13, 2019. During the construction, the parish hall was again used for Mass. After 11 weeks of hard work, the first Mass was celebrated in the beautiful new space at 9am on Friday, August 2, 2019. The carpet was replaced by tile, ceiling was painted, the previous pews and chairs were replaced by new pews, electrical work was done for future upgrades, new sound system and marble altar, ambo and tabernacle stand were installed. All previous pews, chairs, altar, ambo and tabernacle stand were donated to chapels in much need of these items.

On September 7, 2019 at the 4:30pm Mass, Cardinal Blase Cupich and Bishop Alberto Rojas are scheduled to celebrate with us the 50th anniversary of the first Sunday Masses said in the gymnasium of Maryville Academy. On October 12, 2019 a Gala Dinner is planned to commemorate this special event in the history of our parish.

In closing, we are grateful to those who have set the foundation for this parish and look forward to new growth and faith in the future.

1969



2019

St. Thomas Becket Parish Major Events Timeline

Rev. Frank E. Wachowski Founding Pastor 1968 – 1980

May 15, 1968 Cardinal Cody appoints Rev. Wachowski to establish a new parish
December 1968 St. Thomas Becket approved as name of the new parish
September 28, 1969 First Sunday Mass in Maryville Academy gymnasium
October 5, 1969 Sunday Masses begin at Indian Grove school (continue for 9 years)
May 23, 1970 First Holy Communion Mass (97 children)
August 1, 1970 Outdoor Mass on parish property, picnic in park afterwards
October 23, 1977 The Cornerstone is laid in new church
November 13, 1978 First Meeting of the Men's Club
December 23, 1978 Sunday Masses at new church – work not completed
September 1979 Work completed on the new church
March 9, 1980 Dedication of the new church

Rev. Ralph Mollan Pastor 1980 – 1989

Circa 1987 The Parish Book of Prayer appears in the back of the church

Rev. John Roller Pastor 1989 – 2004

Circa 1990 Brass Sanctuary Items purchased (tabernacle, ciboria and candlesticks)
Circa 1995 Maintenance Committee recommends capital improvements including a new roof and HVAC units. It begins the discussion of church needs and renovation
September 8, 1996 Archdiocese of Chicago approves "Circle" Renovation of worship space
December 1, 1996 First Polish Mass celebrated (standing room only)
May 27, 1997 "Circle" Renovation of worship space begun
June 1997 Rodgers organ donated by Marian Bradle (in memory of Don Bradle)
June 27, 1997 Old pews donated to Fargo, ND diocese (3 churches helped)
October 11, 1997 Dedication of New Church with Bishop Gerald Kicanas
October 12, 1997 Dedication Concert for our new Rodgers Organ by Mr. William Stein
October 17, 1997 New Ceiling Tiles (donated by USG) installed in parish hall

Rev. Edward Panek Pastor 2004 – 2015

September 20-21, 2008 Taste of Becket
May 30, 2009 Dedication of St. Thomas Becket statue – Cardinal George attended
September 12, 2009 40th anniversary dance at Old Orchard Country Club
September 20, 2009 40th anniversary closing ceremony – Bishop Rassas attended

Rev. Krzysztof Kulig Pastor 2015— present

August 11, 2016 Orientation meeting of "To Teach Who Christ is" (TWCI) capital campaign
September 2016 First TWCI meeting with whole parish. Announcement of intention to renovate church back to it's original configuration
May 13, 2019 Renovation of church begins
September 7, 2019 Dedication of new church and 50th anniversary celebration
October 12, 2019 50th Anniversary Gala Dinner at Manzo's Banquets

HONORING THE PAST - BUILDING THE FUTURE



PARISH STATISTICS

Number of registered families in 1969	247
Number of registered families in 2019	720
Average weekend Mass attendance	1465

Baptisms: first on September 30, 1969	2979
First Communions: first on May 23, 1970	2057
Confirmations: first on November 5, 1970	1654
Marriages: first on April 11, 1970	768



GROUNDBREAKING - JUNE 26, 1977





MOVING FORWARD BRICK BY BRICK...







WALL BY WALL...



CORNER STONE - OCTOBER 23, 1977

