

FROM THE PASTOR'S PRINTER

Congratulations and Prayers

Congratulations to Sr. Mary Peter Ruschke (nee Jessica), daughter of Jeff and Cathy, on her first profession of vows as a Sister of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration. Our prayers are with you in your commitment to serve of the Lord and his Church!

A Sporadic Series on the History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati as We Celebrate 200 Years Part II-a

Established in 1821 under the leadership of Bishop Fenwick, the fledgling Catholic Church of Cincinnati was strongly taking root. Upon Bishop Fenwick's death in 1832, Father John Baptist Purcell was ordained a bishop in 1833 to succeed Fenwick and he would shepherd the diocese until 1880.

These decades would be a time of great growth in numbers and development, even as the diocese shrunk in geographic size as new dioceses were established from its vast territory. The number of Catholics grew steadily and substantially throughout the diocese as immigrants from Europe, many from Germany, Ireland, and Italy, immigrated to the United States. In the northern part of the diocese, German and Irish immigrants settled to build the canals and then farm the lands. In Dayton and Cincinnati, immigrants made their homes and established businesses and farms which helped these areas to prosper.

Catholicism, always suspect in the minds of predominately Protestant citizenry, was seen as an even greater threat to the American way of life because of the influx of these Catholic foreigners. Not only was Catholicism growing, but the influx of other cultures threatened the Anglo culture which, at least in the eyes of born citizens, would be contaminated by the boorish ways of poor peasants from foreign lands. (As the French say, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Of course, they say it in French.) Such movements as the Know Nothings, a secret anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant society, persecuted and harassed the Catholics, especially in the 1840-50s. In fact, Purcell and the apostolic delegate from Rome were attacked in Purcell's coach as they rode through the streets of Cincinnati. If anyone was up to the intellectual challenge of facing such hatred head-on, it was Bishop Purcell. He would regularly speak and debate with non-Catholic personalities of the city and gained a solid reputation as a wise and successful presenter of the faith to people who often had great misconceptions and prejudices about Catholicism.

During this time, parishes grew exponentially. When Bishop Fenwick died, there were 16 parishes in Ohio, and within dozen years, there were 70. By the 1880s there were 500 parishes in Ohio. Such growth was a blessing for our state, but also presented great challenges. Clergy and religious were needed to serve people of diverse nationalities and language—people who often were poor and uneducated. Dominicans, and Jesuits, and the Sisters of Mercy, as well as diocesan priests, were already in the diocese during Fenwick's time, but their numbers could not begin to meet the need. Purcell recruited religious orders to come to Ohio and minister, so that the Catholic faith could flourish in a new land. Sisters of Charity (an American order from the start, Sisters of Notre Dame, Ursulines of Brown County, Sisters of the Precious Blood, Franciscan Sisters of various orders, and Little Sisters of the Poor were among the women who came to teach, run hospitals and nursing homes, and care for the poor of any race or denomination. Franciscans, Precious Blood fathers and brothers, and other orders of priests and brothers added to those who were already in the diocese. Foreigners entered Mount St. Mary's Seminary to prepare for ordination, (One of them being my great, great, great uncle) also foreign diocesan priests came to serve as well. Great sacrifices were made by these men and women, since the financial security of these missionaries was not secure. Hunger and sickness and rigorous work were no strangers to them.

While a debt of gratitude is owed to the clergy and religious, it would be a mistake to think that the lay members of the church simply received from them. Lay participation in the life of the Church was often the impetus to bring a parish into existence. Catholics would gather to pray together, and often, when they had enough people that they thought they could begin a parish, they asked the bishop to formally establish it. Often without a resident priest, they oversaw the good order of the parish, lead prayers, taught the faith to their children, and kept the faith of their ancestors alive.