

# FROM THE PASTOR'S PRINTER

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

It has been a while since we've looked at the history of the archdiocese. We left the diocese in the 1800's with Bishop Purcell shepherding a diocese dwindling in area as new dioceses were carved from it, while the numbers of Catholics greatly increased. In the mid-1800's our diocese constituted roughly the southern part of Ohio once the dioceses of Cleveland and Columbus were established, and the diocese of Cincinnati was named an archdiocese 1850, which made Purcell an archbishop. (An archbishop oversees a group of dioceses but does not rule the other dioceses.) We have looked at the challenges of an immigrant Church facing nativism and mild persecution, yet establishing itself as not simply a religious sect, but a valuable institution and citizenry for the local area and the nation.

In the 1850's especially, the issue of slavery in the US was boiling over. Archbishop Purcell himself was against slavery and considered it a blessing that Ohio was a free state. Yet, the city of Cincinnati had strong economic ties to the South because of Ohio River trade, and certain people did not want to upset that apple (or cotton) cart. Also, there was fear among lower income immigrants – among them, Irish Catholics – that freed slaves would take their jobs. In the face of anti-black protests, Purcell had publicly spoken out against them in speeches and in the Catholic Telegraph. When the Emancipation Proclamation, decreed by President Lincoln in 1863, freed slaves in Confederate states, Purcell called for all slaves, even those in Union states, to be freed. This prophetic act cost him a lot of support. Purcell was supportive of the works of various persons and religious orders to educate blacks who lived in Cincinnati both before and after the Civil War. Following the war, black parishes and schools were founded in the Archdiocese and evangelizing movements took place to bring blacks into the Catholic faith.

Regardless of the various sentiments of the Catholic population, once the Civil War started, like most Ohioans, Catholics responded generously to the call to preserve the Union. Purcell made it clear that people had a duty to do so. Besides Catholic men enlisting in the military and lay persons joining causes to assist in the war effort, priests served as chaplains as did religious women of nursing orders, especially the sisters of Mercy, Charity, and the Poor of St. Francis from the Archdiocese tended wounded soldiers in their hospitals and in battlefield

hospitals, at no small cost to themselves. They moved sick children and women into the convents, reserving the hospitals for soldiers, and a number of battlefield sisters died of disease, to which they had become susceptible because of their dedication and exhaustive ministry.

Following the war, the archdiocese saw an increase in the number of native-born priests and religious. Archbishop Purcell was a strong believer that the clergy should be educated in their own country and the seminary flourished under this leadership and trained not only priests for our diocese, but for other dioceses as well.

From the fledgling seminary-college-preparatory school of the 1830's (known as the Athenaeum of Ohio) evolved Mount St. Mary Seminary, who in its lifetime has moved from Cincinnati, to St. Martin, Ohio, to Price Hill, to Mt. Washington, to Norwood, to Mt. Washington—it could have served as a training school for nomads—St. Xavier College (Xavier University) and St. Xavier High School. In Dayton, the Marianist order established a preparatory school for boys, which by the 1860's had evolved into St. Mary's College (now the University of Dayton). Along with these schools, parish grade schools flourished in the archdiocese. Religious orders of women and the Brothers of the Poor of St. Francis established orphanages and schools to care for children who would have fallen between the cracks of society, and a number of orders operated boarding or day schools of their own through high school. From grade school through college, the Catholic schools worked to preserve the Catholic faith and identity of their students as well as give them the tools and a sense of pride as Catholic American citizens.

Not to be overlooked was the ministry of health care, whether in hospitals, clinics, or care for the elderly by the Catholics of the archdiocese, usually through communities of religious sisters. These institutions had as their first mission the care of those who were left out of other institutions, though not at all limited to them. In their charters, they intended to care for anyone, regardless of race, color, or creed. A number of these places received financial support from non-Catholic leaders, who, though often puzzled by the Catholic faith, saw in the care and stewardship of these sisters a blessing not available elsewhere.

All of this occurred under the care of Archbishop Purcell.