

St. Thomas More Parish
1966 ^{25th} 1991
Anniversary



DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
250 WALDEMERE AVENUE
BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT 06604

OFFICE OF
THE BISHOP

September 7, 1966

Reverend Edward J. Howley
St. Joseph's Rectory
85 South Main Street
South Norwalk, Connecticut

Dear Father Howley:

Observing the relevant prescription of Canon Law and granting the dispensation referred to in Canon 459#3, 3^o, I hereby appoint you Pastor of the new St. Thomas More Parish, Darien, Connecticut, erected by separate document to take effect Thursday September 15, 1966. Your appointment as first pastor also becomes effective Thursday September 15, 1966 when you will assume full responsibility for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the parish.

You are directed to take canonical possession in accordance with Statute 47 §2 of the Diocesan Synod, namely, by presenting this letter of appointment in the parish rectory at a mutually agreeable time to the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Martin F. Doran, Vicar Forane of the Stamford Deanery.

You are hereby authorized as of Thursday September 15, 1966 to open and administer bank accounts in the name of St. Thomas More Parish and to make withdrawals from the same.

Begging God's blessing upon you and the faithful newly assigned to you, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Walter W. Curtis

Most Rev. Walter W. Curtis, S.T.D.
Bishop of Bridgeport



Office of the Bishop
238 Jewett Avenue
Bridgeport, Connecticut 06606

September 1991

Dear friends in Christ:

"There are different gifts but the same Spirit; there are different ministries but the same Lord; there are different works but the same God Who will accomplish all of them in everyone. To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

These words of the Apostle Paul provide a valuable insight into the anniversary we mark today. Saint Thomas More Parish has throughout its twenty-five year history clearly demonstrated that the Lord does indeed shower a variety of gifts upon the members of His Church and that these gifts bind us all together as a single People.

The gifts of Saint Thomas More Parish are many and well-known. You were the first in the Diocese of Bridgeport to have a Parish Advisory Council after the Second Vatican Council; and you are leaders in evangelization, in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and in "outreach" to parishes and institutions of the Diocese which serve those most in need.

Thus, it gives me great pleasure to join you in your celebration today. Gathered around the altar for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we thank the Lord for Saint Thomas More Parish, for the lay women, lay men, religious, and clergy who have made it a vital community of Faith, and in a special way for its dedicated Pastor, Reverend Edward J. Howley.

May your Patron Saint, the noble and courageous Thomas More, keep you ever in his care; and may you continue to be a gifted People who freely share yourselves and your gifts with others.

Very truly yours in Christ,

Edward M. Egan

The Most Reverend Edward M. Egan
Bishop of Bridgeport



Saint Thomas More

The parish's patron saint, Thomas More was a learned English lawyer and judge who rose to be Lord Chancellor of England under his close friend King Henry VIII. Born in 1478 and educated at Oxford University, he became a member of Parliament at the age of 26 and Speaker of Parliament 19 years later. After being knighted, he was named High Steward of Oxford and a year later of Cambridge University as well. Thomas was married and had three daughters, one son and a foster daughter.

At the age of 41, he succeeded Cardinal Wolsey as Chancellor of the Realm. He was the first commoner who was not an ecclesiastic and the first layman not a noble to hold that office. When Thomas refused to take the Oath of Supremacy which acknowledged King Henry VIII as Supreme Head of the English Church, he was convicted of treason and beheaded on July 6, 1535. The prayer book he used during his imprisonment in the Tower of London, with his notes in the margins, is now owned by Yale University. He died, as he proclaimed on the scaffold, "...the king's good servant, but God's first."

Renowned for his deep religious convictions and his fidelity to the Catholic Faith which brought him martyrdom, Thomas was canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1935. He is regarded as model and patron for lawyers and jurists.

The great Dutch humanist Erasmus, who was More's friend, wrote of him: "More is a man of an angel's wit and singular learning...a man of gentleness, lowliness and affability...a man of marvelous mirth and pasttimes, and sometimes of as sad gravity. A man for all seasons."



TRUSTEES



John J. Holland

(No Photo)

Jonathan O'Herron

Dear Parishioners

Twenty five years have passed. It is time to give thanks, time to reflect.

First, we give thanks to God who has inspired and strengthened us. In difficult days and in good days, our faith has brought us through.

Thanks are due also to the hundreds of people who have given their time, talent, treasure, and prayers to the success of St. Thomas More Parish. From its inception, this has been a community parish. Many have always been involved.

The concept that united us all was the idea that through our combined efforts God would be made present in our lives, giving all of us hope, strength and joy. Our desire to strengthen God's presence in our midst has been the catalyst and the glue.

With faith in our hearts, we were able to do very well. St. Thomas More is a fine parish with fine parishioners.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Edward J. Howley

History of St. Thomas More Parish

In 1966, 21 years after World War II, the population of Darien had almost doubled. Saint John's Church, the first Catholic Church built in Darien, could no longer provide for spiritual needs of all of the town's parishioners. A decision had to be made; either build a new and larger Saint John's or create a second Catholic Church in Darien. Bishop Curtis was advised by both the clergy and the laity, with some favoring a new and larger Saint John's Church, others a new parish. The Bishop made the final decision and the new church would be called Saint Thomas More. The choice of Saint Thomas More's name was appropriate; vision, direction, and fortitude, the strength of Thomas More, would be required by the fledgeling parish. Bishop Curtis chose Father Edward J. Howley as Saint Thomas More's first pastor.

The new parish included a rectory, a school and a convent, on fifteen acres of land. They had been purchased years earlier by Saint John's Church in anticipation of future expansion. When Saint Thomas More was approved, no new construction was planned for the parish. The school would serve as church, administrative area and school. Masses would be celebrated in the school hall.

The school continued to function until 1972, when it closed because of the withdrawal of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Though the school hall continued to function as the weekend Church, it became clear to all that this arrangement could not continue. The folding chairs used for the Church had to be removed and then rearranged for all non-spiritual activities, such as sporting events and meetings. Quiet prayer and meditation became increasingly difficult. The school hall would never become a church.

STAMFORD ADVOCATE, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1966.

St. Thomas More Parish Is Established In Darien

The Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis, Bishop of Bridgeport, today announced the establishment of St. Thomas More Parish in Darien. The new parish will be a division of St. John's Parish and will encompass all of the territory of Darien north of the New York-New Haven and Hartford railroad tracks. St. John's parish henceforth will embrace the territory of Darien Township south of the railroad tracks.

The new parish comes into being Thursday, September 15.

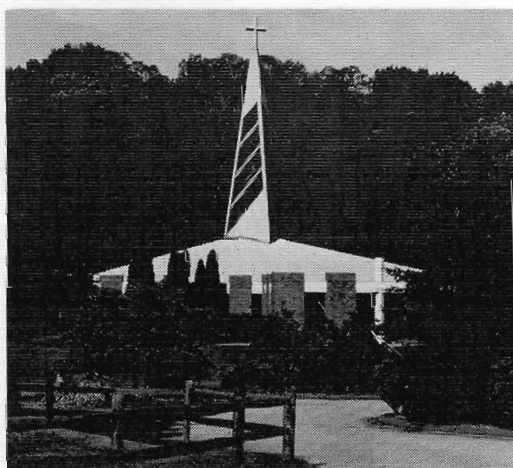
With the creation of the new parish, Bishop Curtis also named the pastor of St. Thomas More Parish, as well as three other pastors. All pastoral appointments will be effective Sept. 15. The Rev. Edward J. Howley, administrator of St. Joseph Church, South Norwalk, will become the first pastor of St. Thomas More, Darien.



1st Council Chairman	Vicar General	Pastor	Chairman Building Committee	Chairman Building Fund	Chairman Parish Council
Admiral J. Edmund Moran	MSGR. John J. Toomey	Rev. Edward J. Howley	Philip F. Sparton	Jackson E. Spears	Charles E. Hoffman

In 1971 the Parish Council, with the support of the parishioners, raised over \$600,000 in a campaign for a new Church. The new Saint Thomas More Church, dedicated on October 27, 1973, was a remarkable architectural achievement. The design of the church is modern, yet retains the simplicity of the Carthusian Monastery so loved and admired by Thomas More. The Altar is visible to all. There are no posts or columns so the Eucharistic banquet may be viewed by all the faithful. The stained glass windows each tell a story. The windows on the left tell of the promise of the old testament, the windows on the right proclaim the Good News of the new testament. In the center and above the altar, we see the Trinity, bearing the words "I Am" and the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

In the past twenty five years, Saint Thomas More has achieved an honored position in meeting the needs of the people of Darien. Many of its programs have become models for the community. The Happiness Pre-School program is fully licensed and accredited by the State of Connecticut. The Religious Education program has become an outstanding example of Catholic Religious Education, employing advanced teaching methods of instruction and experience. The Youth Group of Saint Thomas More each year travel to Appalachia to build houses for the desperately poor. The Outreach Program is dedicated to helping the poor with the necessities of life: food, clothing and financial help. The Stephen Ministry has been developed to counsel those who are experiencing difficulties that may arise from family, job, or health problems, "People caring for people." Exploring Catholicism is an adult program of spiritual exploration and education, designed for those who want a deeper understanding of their religion and faith. The Children's Mass is special. Parents, it would seem, bring their children within weeks of their birth. Children participate with action, song and prayer. They know that this is their Mass, they belong and they are loved. The adults attending the children's Mass experience the miracle of life, the children learn they are the future.



AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PASTOR



Q: *Well, Father Ed, it's been 25 years. How do you feel?*

A: Fine. We've made a lot of progress.

Q: *What were you doing before you came to St. Thomas More? Were you surprised about coming here to start a new parish?*

A: I was the Administrator at St. Joseph's in South Norwalk and very happy with my work. There is great faith there. In those days the diocese did not consult with a priest about where they sent you. Not a very good idea, really. One day the Bishop came down to see me and told me "I'm sending you to establish a new parish in Darien." I was not really surprised. Prior to St. Joseph's, I supervised the building of St. Mary's School in Bethel. I literally just had the key to the new school in my hand and the very next day, I was told that I was being sent to South Norwalk. In a way, when I was sent to Darien, it was the same pattern.

Q: *Was St. Thomas More supposed to be a clone of St. John's?*

A: No, no, it wasn't done that way. The Church gives a lot of authority to a pastor. By Canon Law, the pastor sets the tone, the style of a parish.

Q: *How would you characterize your vision of St. Thomas More at that time?*

A: I tried to convince the people that they should dream along with me . . . about the type of parish we should have. The first sermon I gave produced somewhat of a sensation. I said something quite simple: "I've been sent here to create a new parish. It will not be mine . . . it's going to be our parish. If we build a church, we'll do it together, or we won't do it at all." My vision of the new parish was a place where people would find strength from their faith in God, and having this parish, their church, as a symbol of God's presence among them would give them strength, hope and courage.

Q: *As we go through the history of St. Thomas More, we see the touch of Fr. Howley. Do you agree?*

A: I guess so. At St. Mary's in Bethel, I was the Youth Leader. The pastor told me: "You have the kids." That was my mission . . . particularly the high school kids. At my first meeting, they all came. I used to debate with them all the time. Great fun. Then, I moved on to administration. Whenever there was a need for change, for doing something, I tried to involve the parishoners. I found in all the parishes in which I was stationed and especially here in Darien . . . that there are many good ideas and they should be encouraged. There is a lot of talent in our parish.

Q: *What was your greatest challenge here?*

A: The fact that many people did not see the need for a second parish. There was a genuine affection for their former parish . . . and well deserved.

I told them that it really wasn't necessary to change parishes. If they really wanted to stay in St. John's or any other parish, they should go where they could pray best.

Q: *What was the geographic boundary?*

A: The railroad; and it still is. Subsequently, people began to choose their parishes. It makes sense, many came from Stamford and New Canaan.

Q: *Then, why did they come here? Was it the distance?*

A: No, I don't think so. Many came because they liked the idea of a new parish. Something attracted them. There was a core of about 350 people. When the time came to build a church . . . we first celebrated Mass in the school auditorium . . . about three years later, this group had been working closely with me. The church could have been built sooner, but I wanted the church to be owned by the people, as many as possible. An idea is really worthwhile if large numbers participate.

Q: *The ten o'clock Children's Mass here is unique. What influence do you think it has had on the parish?*

A: It's been significant. It started as a high school Mass at 5:00 pm on Sunday for the Youth Group, the teenagers, no adults. After Mass, for 50 cents, they had cokes and could make sandwiches. It was a dialogue Mass just as it is today with the children. They enjoyed it and soon you couldn't keep others out. Parents started coming with all their children. Then it changed and the focus was on junior high. As it was no longer for teenagers, the high school kids tended to drop away. Then it was for 7-12 year olds for many years. As it grew bigger, I couldn't have all of the kids up at the altar with me. But this was community action . . . not private prayer.



But you shouldn't think only of the Children's Mass. We provided many styles of worship. Religious Education was very important in building the parish. We devoted resources and put it high on our priority list. We have built a fine program. We limit the class size to 12 and make the schedule convenient for parents. The Youth Group has always been active. We actually went to Appalachia 20 years ago. I took 45 kids to Pennsylvania by bus.

Having been trained as an educator, I was really on an education kick. I realized there was no one right way. So, we had different style Masses for different types of people...and put music into just about all our liturgies.

Q: *Father, what would you say was the highlight of the past 25 years.*

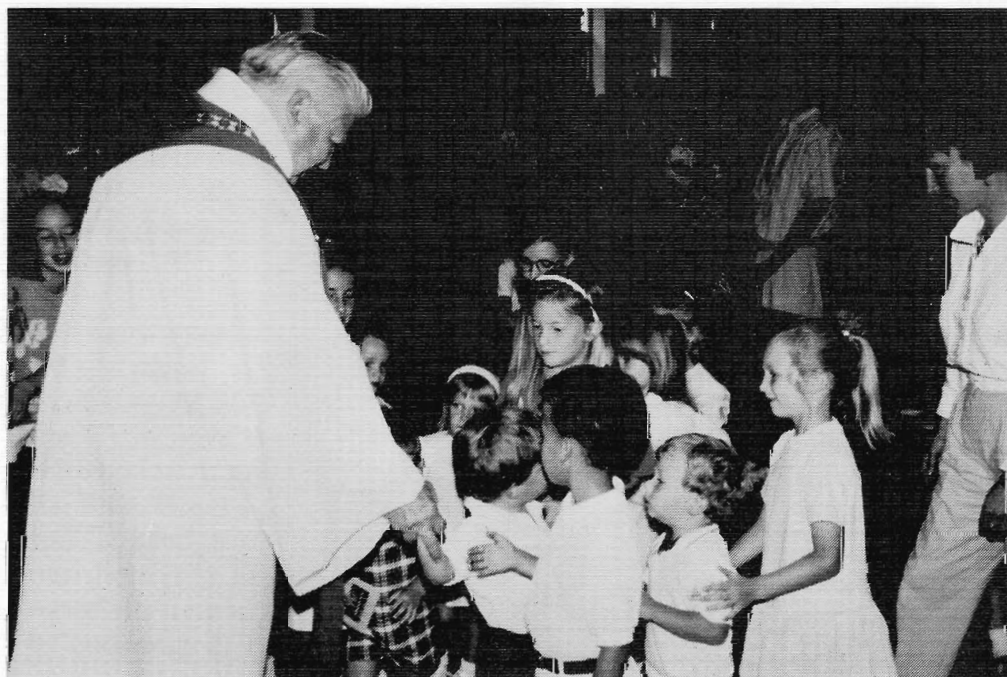
A: Personally I would have to say the integrity of the people. Their willingness to respond to a truly religious ideal. This was most powerful... the response of the parishoners that they need God. We had common goals and worked together to see how we could get the job done. We were generally able to reach a consensus.

Q: *Any regrets? Would you do anything differently?*

A: We learn by experience. If we did it again, we would do it more easily and hopefully better. But no, no regrets. We lived up to the dream.

Q: *What is the biggest challenge today?*

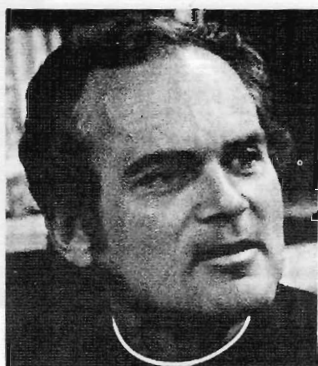
A: Today? We're at a different stage. I feel we must find ways to reach out to more people. This is a pressing problem, not only at St. Thomas More but in the entire Church, to touch those who don't have God in their lives... or who have been turned off for some reason. I see this as an ongoing challenge in my ministry as pastor.



THOSE WHO SERVED...



Fr. Gerald Sigler



Fr. Robert McBride



Fr. William Donovan



Fr. Robert Post



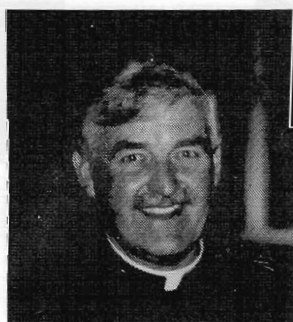
Fr. Thomas Thorne



Fr. Joseph Cavoto



Fr. Francis Virgulak



Fr. Patrick Mooney



Fr. Stephen Fronckewicz

Fr. Sagala Fr. Ruben Lopez
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PARISH STAFF...



Barbara Donalds, *Choir Director*



Dorothy Killoran, *Director, Nursery School*



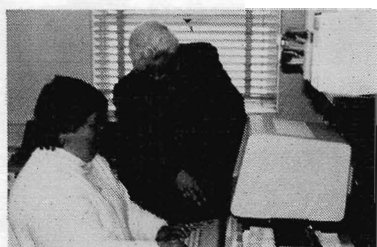
Lillian Toll, *Stephen Ministry*



Peggy Byrne, *RCIA*



Zita O'Brian, *Director, Religious Education*



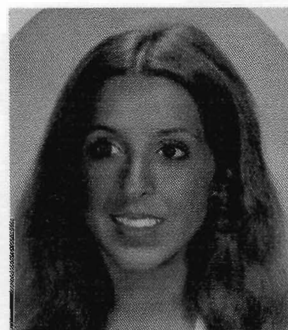
Sr. Madeline & Patricia McCandless, *Secretary*



Sr. Madeline McAdam, *Pastoral Assistant*



Galen Tate and Marion Gordon, *Organist & Cantor*



Marion Macchio, *Cantor*

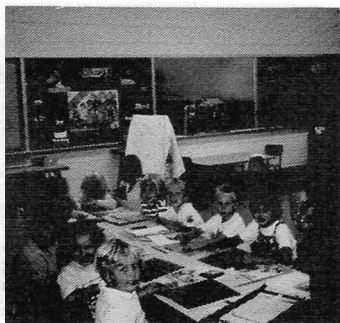


Jean Cass, *Office Manager* and Barbara Luby, *Youth Ministry*



Angelo Cappelli, *Organist*

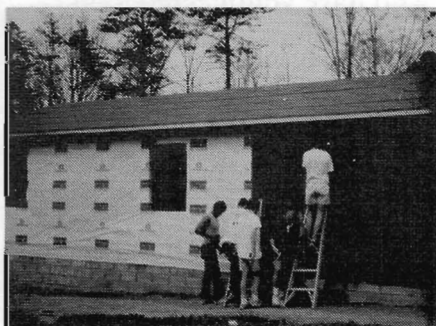
PARISH PROGRAMS...



Religious Education



Welcoming Marine Cpl. Randy Donis recently returning from the Gulf



Outreach in Appalachia



RCIA



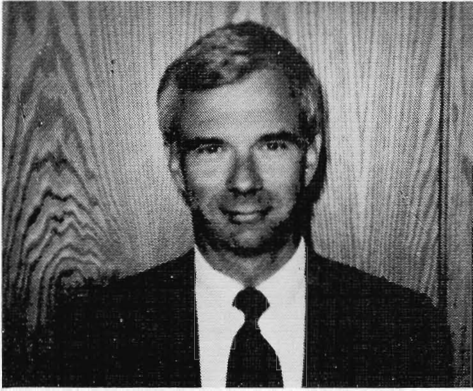
Stephen Ministry



Exploring Catholicism



Happiness School



Kevin McEnery
Chairman, Parish Council

Parish Council

Core to the success of St. Thomas More is the active participation of the laity complementing the efforts of the clergy and professional staff. Our original 500 families, many of whom are still active in the Parish and to whom we clearly owe a debt of gratitude, have grown to over 1700 families. But simple growth does not define achievement or success.

As we gather to commemorate and celebrate the first 25 years of St. Thomas More, we can look with pride to our strong religious educational process, with over 700 students and 70 instructors, parishioners who have volunteered their time to introduce our children to the teachings of the Church. We have formed an RCIA group to initiate adults as new members of the Church, assisted by their Parish sponsors and lay ministers. We are proud of our energetic Exploring Catholicism group, and our successful Happiness School daycare activities. Our Stephen Ministers, consisting of trained lay people, are available to help individuals work through those stressful events that can significantly impact one's life.

The laity is also well represented by the Parish Council, consisting of 22 members who meet monthly with Father Howley to discuss and provide counsel regarding current issues facing the Parish.

The Parish "outreaches" to assist the Community in various forms, including the annual construction of a house for a destitute family in Appalachia. This is funded by donations from the Parish, with the bulk of the actual construction done by our teenage members who donate their Spring recess for this effort. St. Thomas More also actively supports the education of needy inner-city students within Fairfield County through scholarships. Our Outreach Program provides financial assistance for various disadvantaged groups in the surrounding communities, such as the elderly and the homeless.

So as we reflect upon the beginnings and growth of our Parish over the past 25 years, from the first Mass held in the school gym to the completion of the Church, we should consider its accomplishments (both internally and within the Community) and rededicate ourselves to expand these to enable St. Thomas More to continue to develop its potential. In so doing we would allow the Parish members at the 50th Anniversary to feel the same sense of pride that we possess today.

1966 **25th** 1991
St. Thomas More Parish
Darien, CT