

## 1969-1980: The Rev. Hilarion V. Cann



Father Cann continued the implementing of Vatican II mandates. He encouraged parishioners to participate in liturgical ministries. He fostered a tithe fund for charitable purposes. When the school closed in 1970, he created the pastoral associate position which includes faith formation for adults and children .

Father Cann, in his first pastorate assignment, dealt with early transfer of Fr. McDonald to a new assignment, built a new church and implemented Vatican II mandates. He also wrestled with moral issues regarding the Vietnam War, polarizing effects of the community textbook crisis and those concerning closing of our parish grade school.

### School Closing

Declining enrollment and financial difficulties ultimately caused closing of Blessed Sacrament Grade School in 1970. For a while, Bill McDermott and Joe Fallon, another Carbidier, drove two Bluebird school buses for transporting parish children to other Catholic grade schools.

The school closing did not alter the need for a Jack-of all trades to keep the school heated. Jimmy Providenti did that and many other tasks, unseen. Jimmy died in 1991.

### Second Vatican Council and the New Church

Father Cann implemented the changes mandated by Vatican II. He established the first elected pastoral council and drafted parishioners to become lectors(readers); eucharistic ministers (both men and women permitted), and altar servers (girls and boys). At the altar, Father Cann now faced the congregation. English replaced Latin. Liturgical music now related to the scripture readings and moved from traditional to contemporary and sometimes folk style.

Building the new church - gathering space, worship space, chapel, reconciliation room, sacristy, a kitchen/supply room - all tied into the other structures and was handicapped-accessible. This became Father Cann's most visible and loving accomplishment. His concept was that the people are the church and the building a place to worship. The interior featured earth tones and the people brought color to the celebration of the Eucharist.

The planning began in 1975 and many meetings were held to discover the wishes of the members. The majority favored building something new. The church hired Clint Bryant as architect and Willy Malarchet, a liturgical consultant, to apply Vatican II guidelines and help the parish plan a personalized worship area and conduct information sessions that created understanding and consensus.

The ambo, altar, pews, baptistry, and windows, stations of the cross, carpeted blocks forming the altar area, celebrant's chairs, and statue of the Virgin and child were designed especially for the building. Families could purchase and donate many furnishings as memorial gifts, such as the Gifts Book and table in the gathering space. The Parish Women's Organization donated a new Allen organ. Worship II hymnals were purchased about the same time.

Schoolrooms were remodeled for religious instruction. Offices and restrooms were updated. Parishioners contributed 2,500 hours to help cut costs. Jimmy Providenti and Clarence Ore volunteered their labor every day.

Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, assisted by Father Cann, dedicated the new worship space on April 14, 1978. Finally, we were out of the gym. Gene Warden acted as liaison with his brother's construction company to handle and solve daily problems.

### Staffing, Organizations and Movements

The St. Christopher, St. Marie Goretti and St. Gerard Women's Guilds formed to join St. Anne's Guild. They created social activities, sold religious articles, tended the nursery and other responsibilities. The parish council and other new ministries absorbed many of these responsibilities except those of St. Anne's Guild.

Father Cann hired Monica Anderson as his first pastoral associate and the director of religious education. Monica was a nun, later released from her vows and freed to work at Blessed Sacrament parish.

The Holy Name Society was disbanded and eventually replaced by the St. Dismas Men's Club. They continue to provide delicious Sunday morning pancake breakfasts and use the donations for many helpful tasks around our buildings.

Beginning in 1971 and continuing for many years, a total 67 parishioners attended Cursillo Weekends. Following this experience, they met in small groups in their homes to share prayer, study of scripture and other religious authors, and bringing Christ to their environments. Parishioners participated in other movements: Teens Encounter Christ (TEC); the Charismatic Movement, Christ Renews His Parish and, at Blessed Sacrament, small group meetings in homes. TEC remains alive. Many of these people became more active in parish ministries.

Father Griffin encouraged the parish to be more involved with the larger community. A tangible example became the vision of two parishioners, Mary Virginia DeRoo and Mickey Hooper, to provide a hot meal at noon to the homebound of the community. They took this idea to the Community Services committee who suggested that they involve other churches in the area. Eventually their vision became the Meals on Wheels program that is still going strong.

### Tithe Fund

To reach out to the larger community, the parish started the Tithe Fund, administered by the Pastoral Council to support charitable works. At first 5 percent was taken from the regular collection for this fund, later to 7.5 percent. During Father Jody's pastorate, a standing committee chaired by Joan Garten developed guidelines for distributing the fund and raised giving to a biblical "first fruits" level of 10 percent.F  
arewell

Father Cann transferred to Bridgeport All Saints parish in 1980. He served 12 years.