

Chapter Three

A Broken Wagon Wheel

This is a history of St. Alphonsus Parish based mainly on the research and writing of parishioner Kathy Pheiffer in 1978, when the parish was celebrating its sesquicentennial. Tidbits from other sources have been added.

Imagine a flat tire changing the course of history.

Before motorized vehicles had tires, horse-drawn wagons used wooden wheels.

AAA was not available to call in 1828, when a group of German-speaking French immigrants were traveling from Sandusky, then known as Portland, to settle in Cincinnati.

A wheel on one of their wagons broke, apparently beyond repair, while traveling through a swampy area on an old Indian road near the current State Route 61.

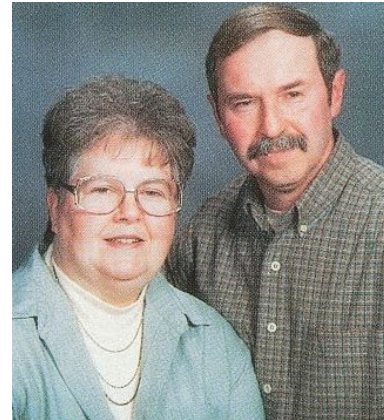
At the time there were very few Catholics in the region. The closest priest was stationed in Canton.

"It was almost divine providence that they ended up there because there were no Catholic churches around here, not even in Norwalk," said Mary Carabin, a local historian, and a descendant of the original St. Alphonsus settlers.

About 20 determined souls heading toward a new life in Cincinnati decided to settle in this wilderness rather than traveling on. The exact number of immigrants who were in the small bedraggled-looking wagon train is not known for sure. It is certain the following were with the group. Joseph Carabin, 51; his wife, Katherine Bauer Carabin, 45; their children, Peter, 23; Augustus, 21; Elizabeth, 19; Isadore, 14; Joseph, 9; Lewis, 7; Carolyn, 6; and Francis, 4; Clement Baumgartener, 29; Peter Bauer, 54 (brother of Katherine Bauer Carabin); his wife, Veronica, 44; their children, Angeline, 19; Mary, 17; Peter, 12; Catherine, 10; Antone, 8; Jean Baptiste, 2; and a female relative, Francesca Bauer, 42, who was an aunt of Peter Bauer.¹ A couple more people apparently joined the travelling party in Buffalo.

The Carabin family was from Lutzelbough, France, and the Bauer family were from Phalzburg, France.² Both were German speaking towns in Alsace Lorraine.

The first families had made the monumental decision to leave their homeland for various reasons. Dreams of low land prices (\$5 an acre), faith in American democracy and a chance to make a new life were all factors in the decision to leave their war-torn country. Many families had lost their husbands and sons fighting in the Napoleonic wars of the early 1800's.



Kathy and Jim Pheiffer



Mary Carabin

¹ National Archives Microfilm Library, Publication 237, Roll 12, Passenger List of Henry IV, October 2, 1828

² Research of Mary Carabin

PARISH BEGINNINGS

The immigrants crossed the Atlantic by ship with wagons loaded with their meager belongings and some grain from their homeland.

They docked at Berth 427 in New York, October 2, 1828. There were 578 persons aboard the ship. They had embarked from Havre, France, the same port John Neumann ventured from eight years later.

At the time, a normal voyage from Europe to New York took about 35 days, all of them anxious days for the immigrants. They probably left Europe after summer harvesting. Having sold their cash grain, they embarked on their tremendous journey to a new home in a strange land.

Upon their arrival in America, they undoubtedly bought oxen and then traveled the river and Erie Canal system to Lake Erie and Portland. From there they were heading to Cincinnati and Bishop Edward Fenwick, whom they had contacted from Europe.

Just south of Norwalk they developed wagon trouble in a swampy area. It was here in a heavily wooded, apparently fertile land, that these German speaking immigrants started a new life.

On November 7, 1828, perhaps a couple of weeks after their arrival, Joseph Carabin purchased land from Timothy Baker.³ Obviously, they left no grass grow under their feet once they arrived in America.

PARISH ROOTS

In the small band were two people to whom St. Alphonsus owes its parish roots. One was Peter Carabin, son of Joseph, who had been studying for the priesthood. Cincinnati Bishop Edward Fenwick wanted to ordain him and send him into the Indian Missions. The other was Francesca Bauer, the "hermitess", an exiled French nun.

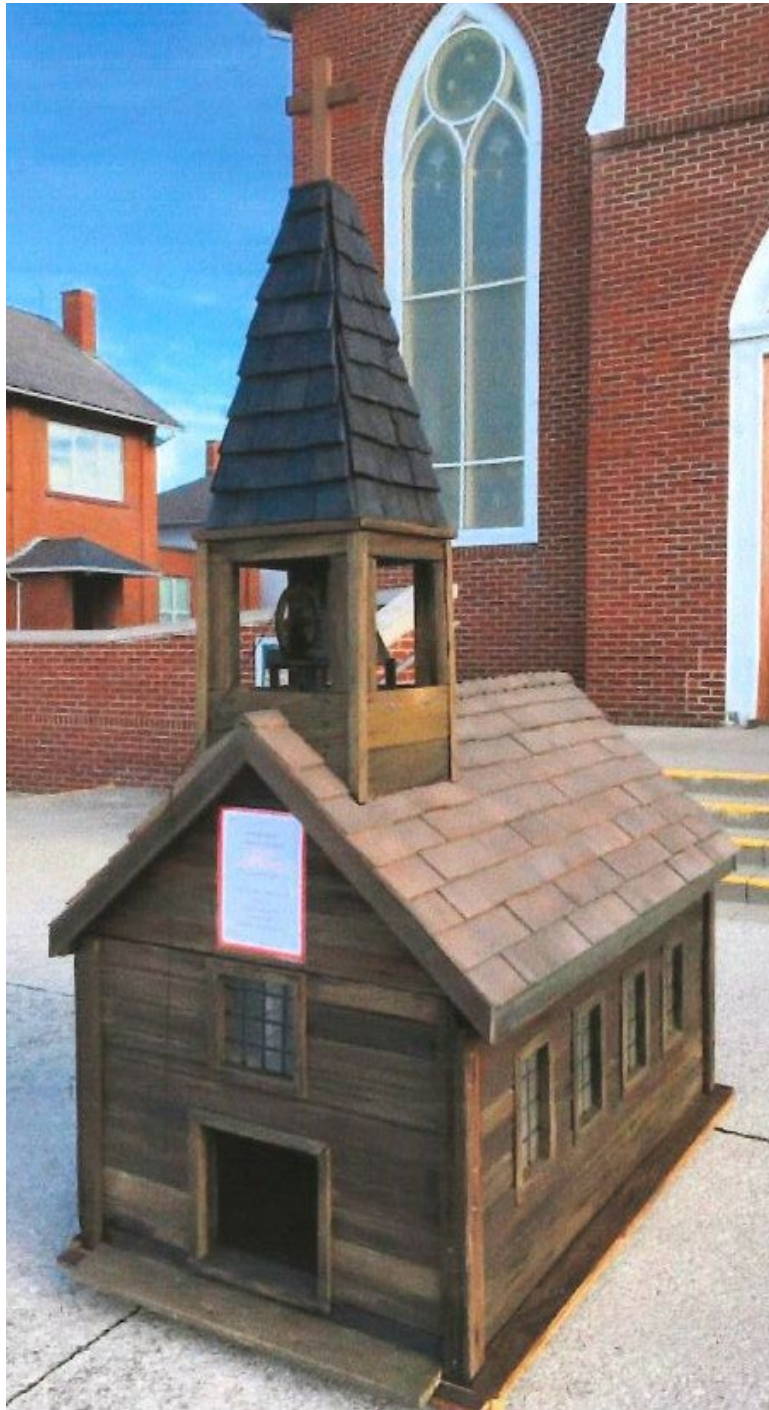
In the early days of the settlement, Fr. John Henni traveled from Canton to attend to the immigrants' spiritual needs. Sister Francesca also helped with teaching and spiritual guidance. She built for herself a hut in the woods to lead a life of undisturbed prayer. This earned her the name "Waldschwester" or Sister of the Woods. Little did she realize that her planned life of solitude would take such a change.

In 1829, Bishop Fenwick visited the settlement to ask young Carabin, who was 23 and a subdeacon, to join him in Cincinnati. The Bishop knew that Peter Carabin had good morals, conduct and average talents with a great capacity to work. Peter Carabin did go to Cincinnati, was ordained, and eventually became very proficient in the tongues of various tribes of North American Indians, which earned him travels into the uppermost regions of the United States.

FIRST CHURCH

By this time, the "hermitess" was convinced that if they built a church, there would be a priest in residence. With the Bishop's permission a church was built. Under her supervision, and many times, her help, the church was erected. Sister Francesca was known to often wield an ax and work right next to the men in the woods.

³ Huron County Probate/Deed records



Model of original church, initially dedicated to St. Michael, the Archangel.

The land for the first church was donated to Bishop Fenwick on May 20, 1830, by John G. Taylor, Peter and Verona Bowers (Bauer) and Anthony Haffel and wife, Cecill Carabin Hoeffel. There was a total of ten acres donated; eight was in Peru Township and two in Bronson Township, just north and east of the present parish campus.

The total monetary outlay was about \$100 for nails, hinges, glass, and other items. Parishioners donated their skills to build the church.

The church faced west, opening with double doors and four windows graced each side. The frame structure measured 32 feet by 40 feet. On the east end there was a wooden cross and at the west end there was a small belfry holding a bell donated by Fr. Henni, who only sporadically stayed in Peru. The inside of the church was furnished with an altar made of rough boards and pews of round logs, hewn flat on the upper surface, lined the outside and center of the building⁴.

Bishop Fenwick left instructions for Sunday ceremonies for when a priest was unavailable to say Mass. These services included the singing of hymns in German and/or Latin, the recitation of the Rosary and the reading of the Gospel and other prayers. Sr. Francesca taught catechism to the children.

⁴ Rupert's History, Rev. F. Rupert, History of St. Peter's and St. Paul's Church, Norwalk, Ohio, also containing early History of St. Alphonsus and St. Mary's, 1899.

ST. MICHAEL, THE ARCHANGEL

Bishop Fenwick visited again in the summer of 1830. He gave First Communion and confirmed six children. The bishop was impressed by the growth of the population, encouraged the finishing of the church building and promised a priest would visit more often.⁵

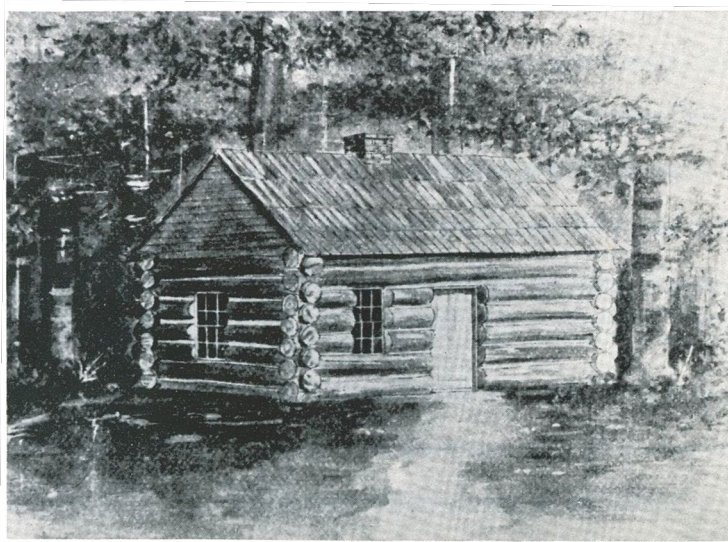
In fall 1830, the church was blessed by Fr. Henni and called St. Michael's.⁷ This fact is upheld by an entry into Huron County marriage records held at the courthouse in Norwalk.

In the next three years, the number of immigrants increased and included some names still familiar in the area. Among them were the Burger, Hohler, Schnurr, Greenfelder, Hammerschmid, Behrman (Barman), Grimmer, Smith, Schaefer, Hettel, Schreiner, Zimmer, and Schmitt families.

The predominately German speaking community stayed fairly isolated, depending on their own. It is interesting to note an item in a local newspaper. "It is expected, The Rev. M'Ouinn will preach in English at the Roman Catholic Church in Bronson on Sunday next in the forenoon." Apparently when English was used, it was news.

In 1832, the dreaded cholera swept Ohio and claimed many lives, according to parish death records.

Among the lives claimed was that of Bishop Fenwick of Cincinnati. Bishop John Baptist Purcell succeeded him.



Artist depiction of 1835 school. It opened in September for 26 pupils and quickly grew to 50 or 60 pupils.

FIRST SCHOOL

In 1833, the first school at St. Alphonsus was built by the farmers. It was made of round logs and opened in September to ten students and Sister Frances presiding.

The following year, the first school was turned into a barn and classes were moved to the pastor's residence until a better school could be built.

FRANCESCA BAUER

In 1833, Bishop J. B. Purcell visited St. Alphonsus and finding the great devotion and dedication of the people, decided the parish was large

enough to support a pastor. He in turn sent the Redemptorist Order to take charge. Because there was no house for the priest, the "hermitess" offered her hut until she could fire the people into erecting a suitable abode for him.

⁵ History of St. Alphonsus Church, Rev. Leon Lentsch, 1897.

Francesca Bauer's zeal for her faith and her desire to have a parish at the settlement was unmatched. She stirred the people into action many times and at one time she owned a total of 112 acres of land.⁶ Her actions and motivations were not always appreciated, nevertheless. Her "meddling" was probably one of the most important factors in the building of St. Alphonsus Parish. She must have been "quite a woman."

FIRST RECTORY

The first rectory was erected on the east side of the wagon road but was abandoned in 1834 because of inadequacy. In Fr. Rupert's history the abode was described as such: "The brothers sleep in the garret on the floor, which consists of single planks laid side by side over the beams. One had to step carefully from one board to the other. If Brother Aloysius should happen to fall out of bed some night, he would pursue his career to the lower story, though not, thank God, to the lower regions."

In May 1833, Reverend Francis Xavier Tschenhens came with \$200 to finish the priest's house and furnish the church. Upon his arrival, he gave a formal two-week mission which was reportedly quite a success. Fr. Tschenhens was given permission to establish a Redemptorist foundation (monastery) at St. Alphonsus or elsewhere in Ohio.⁷

At about the same time another pastoral residence was started by the settlers. Visiting priests stayed with local families during the construction. It was located at the southeast corner of the church so that a passageway between the house and sacristy offered privacy from passers-by and safety from the weather as the priests came to and from the church. The residence was reportedly quite a mansion for the times, so the settlers obviously spent many hours building what they thought was a fine pastor's residence.⁸

In a January 13, 1834 letter to the Bishop Purcell, Fr. Tschenhens says "that Peru numbers fifty Catholic families, and that from fifteen to sixty miles away there are a number of small congregations varying from ten to sixty families; Germans, Irish and French Canadians, with the Germans predominating." He proposed that two priests be stationed at Peru; one to attend the home parish, and the other to give missions in the surrounding country.⁹

The first entry on written record of the parish was made by Fr. Tschenhens on June 1, 1834, when he baptized Frank Anthony, son of Anthony and Margaret Haemann.

⁶ Huron County Probate/Deed records

⁷ Redemptorists Centenaries, by John F. Byne, C. SS. R., 1932

⁸ Rupert's History, Rev. F. Rupert, History of St. Peter's and St. Paul's Church, Norwalk, Ohio, also containing early History of St. Alphonsus and St. Mary's 1899

⁹ Ibid, Redemptorists Centenaries

CHURCH DEDICATION

In July 1834, the church at Peru was re-dedicated by Bishop Purcell in honor then-Blessed Alphonsus Ligouri. This may have been the first church in the whole world dedicated to St. Alphonsus since it occurred nearly five years before his canonization on May 26, 1839. St. Alphonsus Ligouri was the founder of the Redemptorists.

Fr. Tschenhens began to feel that he could establish a Redemptorist community there, but his hope was not realized. He had bought 81 acres of land from W.J. Vrendenbough in late 1833 in Peru Township. The land was located next to the present cemetery and went south across Settlement Road. It was supposed to be used for the monastery but was eventually sold in small parcels in the late 1830's.



Stained glass window of St. Alphonsus Liquori, high above the current church's sanctuary.

On the feast of the Most Holy Redeemer, July 17, 1835, Frs. Saenderl and F.X. Haetscher paid Fr. Tschenhens a visit and Solemn High Mass was sung for the first time in the little church.

FATHER PROST AND PERU

After the arrival in the United States in 1835 of Fr. Joseph Prost, an Austrian, and Fr. Peter Czakert, a Bohemian, the later was sent to Peru to join Fr. Tschenhens. In October, Fr. Prost arrived at Peru to find them living in dire poverty. Fr. Tschenhens was away on missions trying to obtain the means of support, which supposedly his parishioners failed adequately to supply. Fr. Prost pointed out their duty to support their pastor and threatened to withdraw him if they refused to do so; but his words fell on deaf ears. They believed that subsidies had been sent from Vienna to the American Redemptorist community and that Fr. Prost was not being completely honest with them. They told him so in plain words.

Neighboring non-parishioners overtly attempted to sabotage the development of the parish, according to Fr. Leon Lentsch's 1897 history of the parish:

The Americans of this locality were with few exceptions not friendly toward the Catholic faith. During the first years of Tschenhens' pastorate, it happened a number of times that "Yankees" would enter the church during divine services and by their rude and rowdy-like conduct try to provoke the worshipers to a fight. At times they would (try to

provoke) by loud talking, laughing -- or they climbed upon the boards laid on the rafters. One fellow even struck down the candles on the altar. Still, the Catholics did not at first (acknowledge) the insolence, but once they felt themselves strong and numerous enough to give these insolent Yankees a sound thrashing, they did so. After that, the Yankees bothered them no more.



Paulette Geiger's sketch of what the original buildings of St. Alphonsus Parish may have looked like as seen from the wagon road (current Route 61) looking west. From left to right you would have seen the first school which had been turned into a barn, then the combined rectory and church and then the second schoolhouse.

In about 1837, Fr. Prost returned with \$900 and ultimately finished the work started earlier. The church was doubled in length with a hewn log addition at the west end. It contained a choir gallery, new benches, and a new bell steeple which Fr. Prost furnished with two bells. The pastoral residence was enlarged so as to accommodate four or five priests and two brothers. He appointed Brother Aloysius Schuh, schoolmaster, without salary. He left nothing undone to promote the welfare of his flock.¹⁰

The parishioners contributed \$400 to the improvements made. The people praised their pastor but contributed very little to his support. According to a letter of Fr. Tschenhens, they were still obsessed with the idea that he had plenty of money; they reportedly refused even the pay for fodder for one of the two horses he had to keep.¹¹

But this must be entered in the settlers' defense:

¹⁰ Redemptorists Centenaries, by John F. Byne, C. SS. R., 1932

¹¹ Ibid

In those days money was scarce in Peru. The people, though they possessed large tracts of land, had no income. Dense forests covered the land, and the work of clearing for cultivation was slow and laborious. They were all beginners and were struggling hard to clear enough to raise crops to support their families. There was no sale for timber, and all had to be burned on the spot where it had been grown. There was no transportation, and therefore only a poor market from produce. Flour might be \$40 a barrel in Green Bay, but there was no means of taking it there, not even a wagon road. The only market was at Milan and their wheat usually averaged, in those days, no more than 25 or 30 cents per bushel, and that only in trade, such as coffee, sugar, calico, home-spun and farm implements. Many settlers having large farms did not handle three dollars in money during an entire year, and hence could pay but little toward church and school, when the demands were to be met with cash. It was also one of the worst periods of American history, when for several years there was a money panic over all the western country lasting from 1836 to 1840.

However, the farmers were quite liberal in furnishing the pastor with produce and horse feed, excepting in the spring of the year when there was a general dearth in these commodities as well as of money.¹²

On Low Sunday, April 7, 1839, Fr. Prost announced to the congregation at Peru that he was to leave them and Fr. Tschenhens would stay until the Bishop could provide another priest. Fr. Tschenhens remained until January 1840 when he, too, was ordered to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to join Fr. Prost.²¹

FATHER FREYGANG CAME

The parish was without a pastor for about 10 months before Rev. Joseph Freygang, the first secular priest came. During this period the parish was served by priests of neighboring churches. Sent by the Bishop, Fr. Freygang soon proved to be a maverick who became involved in controversy and was ultimately excommunicated for his activities on June 21, 1841.

Earlier, in about 1836, a dispute had arisen between Norwalk "town people" and the "settlement". The residents of Norwalk contending they were more at the center of activity and therefore needed a priest and parish of their own. After Fr. Freygang was in Peru only one week, he went to town to start up a parish against the direct order of the Bishop. Back in Peru, Fr. Freygang openly attacked the St. Alphonsus parishioners, who complained of his unpriestly manner to priests in Canton and Tiffin and to Bishop Purcell in Cincinnati.

On St. Joseph's Day, Fr. Freygang's name day, March 19, 1841, the "town people" came to salute him with guns which developed into a bloody skirmish with the angry settlers. The townsmen took the priest back to town with them. Luckily, no one was seriously injured during the scuffle.

The "procession" into Norwalk was quite a sight with Fr. Freygang seated on a wagon with his belongings, the men forming a guard around the wagon with guns, and the women following all the way to Norwalk reciting the Rosary. St. Alphonsus was again without a pastor.

¹² Rupert's History, Rev. F. Rupert, History of St. Peter's and St. Paul's Church, Norwalk, Ohio, also containing early History of St. Alphonsus and St. Mary's 1899

In about May 1841, Bishop Purcell went to Pittsburgh to ask Fr. Prost to return Fr. Tschenhens to St. Alphonsus. The bishop felt Tschenhens was the only man able to rectify the schism. The priest arrived back in Peru in mid-June.

"His return was hailed with joy by the people of the settlement, but little could be accomplished with the rebels," Fr. Lentsch wrote in his 1897 history of the parish.

RE-ENACTMENT

As part of the parish's celebration of its 1978 sesquicentennial, a sort-of re-enactment of Freygang's kidnapping was performed. This time the country folk of St. Alphonsus went to the city and brought current Pastor Norbert Howe out to Peru.



Mike Hohler and Paul Spriggs kidnap Fr Norbert Howe Oct. 1, 1977, re-enacting the 1841 events of Fr. Freygang. St. Alphonsus turned the tables on the 'town folk'. Ten tractors and wagons filled with St. Alphonsus and St. Mary's members went to Norwalk to kidnap Fr. Howe. Almost 300 people took part in the festivities. After returning to St. Alphonsus, a Mass was said in the school hall and 10 cent refreshment night followed with a sing-along led by Harry and Vern Gordon, Norwalk.

On the following pages are separate historical accounts of the Freygang events, both appearing in the Norwalk Reflector 25 years apart. Henry Tinman's article was written in 1975, A.H. Williams' in 1950.

Just Like Old Times

Story Of A Rebel Priest



By HENRY TIMMAN

March 19 is St. Joseph's Day, one of the several Holy Days of the Catholic Church. This year's observance marked the 134th anniversary of an incident which split the Catholic faith in Huron County for a long time. In the Autumn of 1840, Father Joseph E. Freigang arrived as resident pastor of St. Alphonsus Catholic Church at Peru. This parish also served the Catholics living in Norwalk.

Rev. Freigang was a ripe scholar, able to speak English, German and French. In his native Europe he had been a professor in a religious community. He immediately began agitating for a church building in Norwalk, and one was commenced on the site of the Shrine on West Main Street. This church was eventually completed, but stood only partially finished from June of 1841 until some time in 1842.

Rev. Freigang lived in the rectory at Peru, where the church and other buildings were then located on Route 61 a short distance north of the Settlement Road. He was rapidly alienating the Peru residents by holding Mass in Norwalk in a building which stood on the site of the Grant Store on East Main Street. The Bishop (Rt. Rev. Purcell) had forbidden these Masses, but services continued along with work on the new church.

Came the Feast Day of St. Joseph - March 19, 1841 - and the townspeople determined to salute their priest on his Patron's Day at Peru. A number of men marched out to the "Settlement" with their shotguns to fire salutes. Volley after volley was fired until the Peru people were thoroughly excited. A free fight was indulged in, and a small amount of blood was shed. Soon a wagon appeared and Rev. Freigang and his luggage were loaded in it. The men marched alongside the wagon on its return trip to Norwalk, and the women followed in procession.

This was the condition until Bishop Purcell arrived in June to try to settle the matter. He preached a sermon at Peru calling for unity of action. At the same time he excommunicated Rev. Freigang for obstinate disobedience to his Bishop, the preaching of heretical doctrines, and unclerical deportment. He also interdicted St. Peters, the struggling little parish forming against his orders in the village of Norwalk.

After this Mass by Bishop Purcell, the two factions again fought and shed some blood. In the general confusion, the Town People captured the banner from the processional cross, and returned home with it. Bishop Purcell had already planned to preach at the courthouse in Norwalk that evening. The building was jammed with people to hear the Bishop explain his actions with Rev. Freigang. Sullen silence greeted his remarks, which were followed by Father Howard, speaking on the "True Church." This sermon aroused the animosity of non-Catholics, and at least one of them threatened the priest with violence.

About the same time the Bishop came to Huron County, Rev. Freigang (or Freygang) was indicted by the grand jury for assault and battery. He, along with Blassus Myres, Joseph Myres and Mathew Kelble were alleged to have assaulted one Mygarius Ott at Peru on March 19, and to have imprisoned him for two hours afterward. The case was dismissed by the Prosecutor John Whitbeck.

At the same term of court, the priest was indicted for libel on the complaint of Maria Hettel, for which he paid a fine of \$100 and costs. He had alleged that Maria was of loose character, and also had charged that she was hired by his enemies to speak bad things before the Bishop. He identified those enemies as Charles Ruemele, Martin Sattig, Phillipp Barman, Marc Mayer, Michael Meier, John Lang, Michael Ballwig, Vincent Metz and Joseph Schelb. These men were members of St. Alphonsus Parish.

In July of 1841, several legal notices appeared in the newspapers, signed by 45 parishioners loyal to Rev. Freigang and denouncing the actions of the Bishop. These were followed by sworn statements that Elizabeth Kraus had been asked to testify against Rev. Freigang "about kissing and such things." Another notice said that two scandalous girls from Peru had been refused Communion, and were then hired to testify to the Bishop against the Priest, "and we think they are bad enough to do so."

The series of legal notices concluded with a "Declaration of Some Members of the Roman Catholic Church of St. Alphonzo." In this sworn statement, several members protested that they did not authorize their names on the prior announcements protesting the Bishop's actions. They vowed to live and die in the Communion of the Catholic Church and in obedience to the authorities. They also promised to immediately return to their duties at the Church of St. Alphonzo under the direction of the new pastor, Rev. F.X. Tshenenss. This notice was followed by one warning persons that Rev. Freigang was no longer in authority to say Mass, or administer any other sacraments.

In the autumn of 1841, Joseph E. Freigang was hired to teach German at the Norwalk Academy, which position he held for one year. He was last heard from in 1855 in St. Louis, Mo. He was reported then in a state of neglect and destitution. His story is one more chapter in the untold history of the Firelands.

That it must not be taken for granted that the new church (St. Peter's) was organized without opposition. St. Alphonsus Church in those days was a sort of monastery where there were eight or nine priests all bitterly opposed to starting the new church to take from them a large part of their membership. It was not until the early years of the 1840's that St. Peter's had a regular pastor. Bishop Fenwick, then the only Catholic bishop in Ohio, was located in Cincinnati. He had made a couple of visits to Norwalk while the controversy between the two churches was in progress, but was unable to clear up the situation. By 1841 the new organization had run out of funds and work was delayed for a year. In the meantime, a pastor, the Rev. Father Freygang with all his belongings drove into Norwalk, the men of St. Peter's surrounded his wagon and each with a gun, acted as an escort to prevent the men from the "Settlement" from doing him harm. Father Freygang made his home with the Sattigs who lived on the river north of town. Father Freygang's first name was Joseph and on the feast of St. Joseph, which occurred on March 19, 1841, all of the communicants from Norwalk and Milan formed a procession and marched out to St. Alphonsus to give him a rousing ovation. Each man carried a shotgun and on arrival at Peru a surprise volley was fired over the pastoral residence. Naturally the priests and members of St. Alphonsus were fully aroused and angry. A free-for-all fight was soon in progress. That ruckus was the start of a series of similar affairs and always resulted in a lot of broken noses and other disfigurements. Clubs and stones were freely used and several shots were fired with little bodily harm, however.

After the first "salute" was fired a committee of Norwalkians entered the parochial house and made an address to Father Freygang asking him to become their pastor and to explain the shooting and to offer him congratulations. Father Freygang celebrated mass after which the St. Peter's contingent obtained a team and wagon, loaded the Father into it and still surrounded by his body guard, drove back to Norwalk where the Father was immediately made the pastor of the new church. At that particular time Father Freygang was the only priest in residence in Peru. His coming to the Norwalk church left St. Alphonsus church temporarily without a pastor. In the interim, till a new priest was sent to Peru, all of the Settlement members were required to come down to Norwalk to perform their church duties. In the meantime the people of the Settlement were not idle. They appealed to the bishop in Cincinnati and to neighboring priests to come to the rescue. Father Freygang was said to have been suspended, but the people of Norwalk generally liked him, which gave him the feeling of security

DID YOU KNOW?

by
J. H. WILLIAMS

That one summer day in 1842 Bishop Fenwick came up from Cincinnati and went direct to St. Alphonsus Church where a large crowd was awaiting him. The crowd was made up of people from the Settlement and from Norwalk, Milan and Monroeville. The Bishop preached on the need for unity between the opposing congregations. He thereupon excommunicated Father Freygang and removed the consecration element from the burial ground in the rear of St. Peter's Church. After the Mass the two factions indulged in heated argument which ended in bloodshed and many blows. Women shrieked and confusion generally reigned. The people from the Norwalk church captured the processional Cross and a couple of banners and then marched back to Norwalk with the Cross uplifted and banners flying. The Bishop came down to Norwalk, but would not hold any services in St. Peter's. He went to the Court House, where in the evening he preached to a large crowd, the majority of which was made up of Protestants. In the course of his remarks he referred to the episodes of the morning. He told the Catholic contingent to break all connection with Father Freygang and to unite in making one strong parish in Peru. Then came the great event when another priest who had accompanied the Bishop, preached a scathing sermon against all non-Catholics. The Protestant part of the congregation became incensed and several attempted to do violence to the priest. James Mulholland, a Norwalk man well-known to me in my boyhood days, became so angry that he had to be removed from the Court House. The Bishop's name was Purcell.

Norwalk Catholics were amazed and greatly displeased at the action of the Bishop in excommunicating Father Freygang, yet they immediately discarded him, abandoned the completion of the Norwalk church and again began their trek to Peru for the services at St. Alphonsus. The Bishop continued to be severely criticized by the Norwalk contingent, but the faith of the fathers prevailed, and he was obeyed. The strange thing about the affair was that Father Freygang was almost immediately engaged to teach German in the old Norwalk Seminary then under the management of the Baptist Church. Later Freygang went to Sandusky and still later to St. Louis where he probably died sometime about 1860. Another tomorrow.

That not all of the people who were engaged in the St. Alphonsus Church trouble were Germans. All were well known and fine men and women, most of them had come to this part of the country to work on the railroad, the Cleveland, Norwalk and Toledo road in the early 1850's. They were evenly divided between the Germans and Irish. In the membership were the McCordles, the Sattigs, the Freys, the Hettles, the Langs, Saladines, Hermans, Venuses, Pelkers, Wonderleys, Dufners, Cooks, Hiltz, Humble, Troendle, Amend, Blatz, Greenfelder, Beverick, Brady, Adelman, Donnelly and Sullivan families. The animosity between the two churches continued unabated. Finally Bishop Purcell offered to accept St. Peter's, providing the church property was deeded in his name. Unfortunately the original deed from Isaac Underhill had been lost and no one had thought it necessary to have it recorded. Matters became complicated but after a couple of years were straightened out and a deed given to the successor of Bishop Purcell who had died. The Cleveland Diocese had been established with a new Bishop who came to Norwalk, provided a resident pastor and St. Peter's took on new life. That was in 1846. The church building was re-consecrated, the cemetery in the rear blessed, although many Catholics had been buried there without the rites of the church during the time preceding the arrival of the new priest. The first burial there was that of the body of Joseph Hettle in the summer of 1841. The new era which was about to dawn for St. Peter's was short lived. The priests at St. Alphonsus' (and there were several of them) continued to war on the Norwalk people. In 1851 a priest by the name of Evrard came to Norwalk. He announced that he would see that justice was done to the Norwalk church. Sometime in the early 1850's another priest by the name of Poncell took charge of St. Peter's. Father Poncell, though French, spoke good English. He wanted to conduct some of the services in English because at that time there was an influx of Irish into Norwalk and they spoke English. In the end Father Poncell, in order to take care of those people, began the agitation for another church where English would prevail. He bought a lot down on Milan Street and with the help of many Protestants who admired him for his fearlessness in caring for those stricken with the cholera during that year of 1854, the Protestant population of Norwalk responded valiantly and St. Mary's Church, a fine brick building, together with a priest's house (still standing and occupied, not by the priest, however), was the outcome of Father Poncell's efforts.

About a week after the return of Tschenhens, Bishop Purcell returned to Peru to hold Confirmation. The next day, he preached on the courthouse steps in Norwalk and executed Freygang's excommunication. Freygang went on to become a schoolteacher and saloon operator, including one on Hester Street in Norwalk.

JOHN N. NEUMANN

In 1841, the parish was again served by the Redemptorists, one of whom was John Nepomucene Neumann, a Redemptorist novice. As written earlier, St. Alphonsus was the only Catholic Church in the

area and while the resident pastor was out attending missions, the assistants served the needs at the parish proper. It was in this capacity that John Neumann served Peru. His signature appears three times in early parish records of 1841. On October 2, he baptized Francis, son of John Bayer and Marie Cook of Monroeville; October 17, he baptized David, son of David M. Groghan and Margaret King of Thompson; and on November 14, he baptized Anthony, son of Nicolaus Bayer and Angelica Hefel of Norwalk.²²

He served the spiritual needs of the Huron County immigrants for parts of five months. He eventually became the fourth Bishop of Philadelphia in 1851. He was declared heroic of virtue in 1921; Blessed in 1963 and was canonized St. John Nepomucene Neumann June 19, 1977.

John N. Neumann was the first American Bishop to make the 40 hours devotion a regular diocesan institution.

The townspeople finally got their wish as Bishop Purcell in 1842 blessed the official establishment



BLESSED JOHN NEUMANN, FOURTH BISHOP OF PHILADELPHIA
Beatified — October 13, 1963

of St. Peter's Church on West Main Street -- the location of the current Sorrowful Mother Shrine. When the final Redemptorist priest left Peru in August 1843, St. Alphonsus was a mission of St. Peter's for about five months.

SANGUINIST FATHERS SERVE

In January 1844, Rev. Francis X. Brunner, representing the Fathers of the Most Precious Blood Order, arrived with a band of seminarians and priests. "The Sanguinist Fathers encountered none of the hardships of their predecessors at Peru. They found there a well-organized parish of more than 100 families, having a large church, school and pastoral residence with all the necessary appurtenances; also, a well-equipped barn and best of all there was no debt."

Fr. Brunner wrote home to Switzerland describing their arrival at Peru; "We thought we saw the shepherds of Bethlehem, who as they hastened to the crib, told the good tidings to one another." The parishioners competed with one another to supply the needs of the newcomers. One pioneer housewife reportedly hurried home for bread and milk, while others furnished meat, butter, and vegetables; still others brought furniture. The "hermitess" supervised the cleaning of the church that soon held the entire settlement for Mass in honor of Our Lady.

SISTERS OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

It was during this time that Francesca Bauer had no rest until measures were taken to bring the Sisters of the Precious Blood here from Loewenburg, Switzerland. Their perpetual adoration to the Blessed Sacrament appealed to her and she in turn made all her possessions available to them when they arrived in America.

It was in 1845 that St. Alphonsus made its first contribution to the vocation of sisterhood. Among those who welcomed the Precious Blood Fathers was a Mr. Matthias Grimmer, who later became an intimate friend of Fr. Brunner's. Mary Ann Grimmer, his 14-year-old daughter, a very virtuous child sought to and became a Sister of the Most Precious Blood.

Sister Christina, as she later became, related this story almost jokingly to Sisters after she had been in the convent. She was in the habit of slipping out of the house before other members of her family were up, when she lived at home to be able to be the first to greet our Lord in Church or hear Mass. Her father, feeling that this might have disastrous effects on her health removed her shoes from her bedside after she had fallen asleep one night. On awakening and finding her shoes mysteriously missing she slipped out in her bare feet and made her way to church. Never again was she hindered by her devout father.

Sister Christina later became Director of Studies, Mistress of Novices and a leader in the educational field.

FATHER PETER CARABIN RETURNS

Father Peter Carabin came back to serve as Pastor of his home parish in 1847 after he had served for a number of years in Wisconsin. He was in ill health and had retired to his parents' home to recuperate. Bishop Amedius Rappe of the Cleveland Diocese welcomed the recuperating Indian missionary as pastor because of the great need for priests. The exact nature of Fr. Carabin's illness is not known but it was known as "Maumee Fever" during the canal days. At the time of his death, Fr. Carabin was paralyzed

with the exception of his hands. In his final years he made a new English translation of the Book of Job and a poetic version in German of the Psalms. This book is now displayed in the John Neumann Prayer Center.

It was during the time when he was serving at St. Alphonsus that he solicited subscriptions for a new church. The four acres of land that the present church was built on was bought from John Spitznogle on May 23, 1849.

The stone for the church was a native Bedford sandstone taken from a quarry which was located along the river on the Peter Bauer farm adjacent to the land of Joseph Carabin, east of the current State Route 61 across from Settlement Road. The new church was constructed on the north side of Settlement Road where it still stands today. According to parish financial records, \$4,726 was collected from parishioners during the stay of Fr. Carabin.

The Rt. Reverend Bishop Rappe consecrated the church on January 18, 1852.

BRICK PARSONAGE

A brick parsonage was built by Fr. Charles Evrard just east of the church between 1850 and 1853. Some of the money for the construction of this house was realized from the sale of the ten acres of land originally bought by Fr. Tschenhens for the intended monastery of the Redemptorists and the 10 acres donated in 1830 for the first church. The eighteen acres in Peru Township were sold on March 28, 1851 for \$487 and the two acres in Bronson Township were sold November 23, 1853 for \$201. The ten acres had been purchased by Fr. Tschenhens on December 19, 1833 from Peter Bowers (Bauer).

The original cemetery was located in the two acres on Bronson. There was a stipulation in an old deed that the families of those buried there were to keep the burial ground fenced and the weeds cut. Also, the road extending into this property was to be kept open for general use. This road extended along the entire original ten acres.

THREE BELLS FROM NEW YORK

The bells of St. Alphonsus were purchased in 1873. Peter and Margaret Hohler donated \$1000 that paid for the big bell. According to the parish financial record, the total cost for all three was \$1,737. The parish collected subscriptions for the bells totaling \$1,614 and the remaining \$123 was paid by Father Evrard.

They were made at the Meneely Bell Foundry at West Troy, New York. There is a Latin inscription on each bell. On the largest was written, "In honor of God under the title of St. Peter", the next smaller bell's inscription read, "In honor of God under the title of the Blessed Virgin Mary", and the smallest read, "In honor of God under the title of St. Alphonsus." The weight of the bells was 1,763, 928 and 558 pounds respectively. They were rung as chimes on special occasions such as High Mass or weddings. For everyday occasions only one bell was rung.¹³

They were blessed on December 24, 1873 by Reverend Charles Evrard. In 1952, the largest bell was broken and removed. The other two bells still call parishioners to services. If the wind and atmosphere

¹³ Norwalk Reflector, December 17, 1873

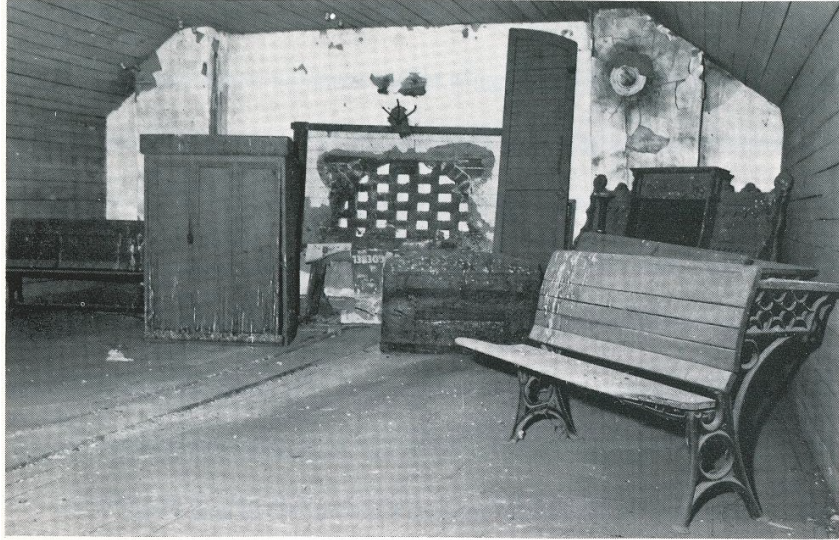
are just right the bells' clear chimes can be heard for miles around -- just a gentle reminder to area residents of our ever-present God.

BRICK SCHOOL

The brick school next to the church was built during the pastorate of Rev. Michael Dechant in 1878. It was constructed so the attic could serve as a dormitory for the children who lived too far to travel to and from school. Also in the school was the sister's residence, kitchen, dining room, chapel, hall (used for

bazaars), classrooms and living quarters for the lay teacher. The total cost was \$2,909. The Sisters of Notre Dame from Cleveland staffed the school from then until 1885.

Between the years of about 1890 and the 1920's there was a "west school" that parish children attended. This was to enable them to learn English because the parish school was a German School.



A picture of the school attic from the 1970s. Old desks, a teacher's podium and an old trunk take the place of the beds that once occupied this dormitory room that parish children occupied during the school week.

Norwalk Reflector

St. Alphonsus' 'West School'

has interesting past

HENRY

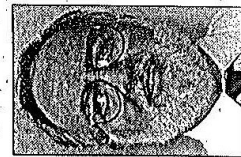
TIMMAN

Just Like Old Times

The Catholic parish of St. Alphonsus Liguori celebrated its centesquingennial last year and is now working on its second 175 years of good work. Several

obscure items of its history were discussed last year, one of them being the "West School."

In 1880 a half acre was deeded to Bishop Gilmour for a school in the west part of the



TIMMAN

parish. The location is the east side of Peru Center Road just south of Peru West Section Line Road.

One source says this school was built for the convenience of the Catholic children in that area, while another source says that English was taught here, while only German was taught in the school located next to the church on Settlement Road.

Whatever the reason, I'm sure it was convenient for the families in that area to have a school closer, so the children didn't have to walk so far on the mud roads of that era.

This was a wooden building with the traditional bell to summon students. When the school was finally abandoned (about 1920, I'm told) the bell ended up with Charles Frederick, Norwalk's

master metal worker. His family returned the bell to St. Alphonsus Liguori parish several years ago and it can still be seen there.

It's interesting to note that this West School was within sight of the public school at Peru Center which is still used as the township hall. The fact that parents paid to send their children to a parochial school within sight of the public school shows their dedication to parochial schools.

A similar plan existed for several years at St. Sebastian's Catholic parish in Sherman Township. A parochial school was operated at the corner of Dogtown and Thomas Roads about 2 miles from the church and the main school.

The main parish school now used as

the parish social hall on Settlement Road was built in 1878 and continued a tradition started in 1833, when a school opened with just 10 students. St. Francesca Bauer taught this pioneer Catholic school in a log house. It was a sad day when the parish had to close the school in 1969.

Another distinction enjoyed by St. Alphonsus Liguori parish is that the first Forty Hours Devotion in the United States is supposed to have been held there.

The first resident priests were of the Holy Redeemer Order, usually called Redemptorists, and the records of that Order show that early in the year 1839 "during carnival time in 1839 Fr. Prost and Fr. Tschemmens held the first Forty Hours at Norwalk."

REMEMBER: My "Just Like Old Times" books are on sale at Colonial Flowers at 7 W. Main St. in Uptown Norwalk. These preserve my earlier columns in permanent book form.

Henry Timman, an authority on Firelands history, resides in rural Norwalk.

FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 2004

Since Norwalk did not have a Catholic Church in 1839 and since these two men were serving at St. Alphonsus Liguori, we have to presume that this special devotional service took place there — perhaps just before Ash Wednesday. At this distant time I'll not speculate further, but will only present the facts as presented to me.



Circling the top of the bell is a frieze, repeated three times, each depicting six nude figures similar to those on ancient Grecian urns. They appear to be concentrating on a globe and a scroll of writing, perhaps indicative of education. Below the frieze is a decorative band, and a floral design is centered lower on the bell.

JACK SCHAFFER and St. Alphonsus bell (C-T photo by Gene Krebs)

Historic bronze bell restored to parish

Elyria Chronicle-Telegram, 1978

After years of wandering and neglect, a huge bronze bell cast in 1844 has been restored to St. Alphonsus Church on Rt. 61 near Peru in Huron County.

Next Sunday, when the 180-family parish celebrates the 150th anniversary of the church with a special mass, the bell will be hanging near an interior stairway leading to a chapel where historical parish mementoes are kept.

The little parish has a proud historical claim to fame, for in 1841, from July through November, its pastor was John Nepomucene Neumann, who was canonized in June of 1977, the first American male saint.

He was sent to St. Alphonsus as a "go between" for the Irish and German parishioners because German was his principal language.

The saint eventually became the fourth Bishop of the Philadelphia Diocese, being affectionately called the "little bishop" because of his short stature—only five feet two inches.

St. Alphonsus is the oldest Roman Catholic parish in the Diocese of Toledo, I'm told. The original frame church was begun in the fall of 1831, being completed in 1834. Four years later an addition doubling its length was built of logs, the inexpensive building material being chosen because the parish planned to build a stone church in the future. In 1850 this stone church was constructed, using stone from a nearby quarry.

MYSTERY surrounds the big bell, says Jack Schaffer, owner of the Litchfield Elevator, who cleaned it up and repainted the frame at his place of business before trucking it to the church. Schaffer, who lives in the Peru area, is an active member of St. Alphonsus, serving on committees and formerly on the parish council.

According to church records, he says, in 1834 someone donated money to purchase a church bell. But unless there was a 10-year delay in acquisition, perhaps because further money was necessary for the purchase, this bell could not have been hung in the church. It was cast in 1844 by C. W. Coffin, Buckeye Bell Foundry, Cincinnati, Ohio, according to inscriptions on the sides.

Both the bell and frame are ornamental with decorations. On top of the cast-iron frame is a female figure holding an arrangement of flowers over her head, and the base is ornamented.

Circling the top of the bell is a frieze, repeated three times, each depicting six nude figures similar to those

on ancient Grecian urns. They appear to be concentrating on a globe and a scroll of writing, perhaps indicative of education. Below the frieze is a decorative band, and a floral design is centered lower on the bell.

WHETHER OR NOT the bell ever hung in the church, it is definitely known that it hung in a church-affiliated school in the west end of the parish district. The school was built about 1885, and someone scrawled this year date on the bell in yellow paint. Again, mystery...was the bell taken out of the church and hung in the school, or was it acquired from some other source?

The church sold the school property in the 1920s, and the bell may have been removed at that time, says Schaffer. For a while it sat in the church basement. Nobody wanted it, the parish priest once even offering it to anyone who would lug it away.

Finally the bell came into possession of a man, not a member of the parish, who stored it in a corn crib for years where it acquired a thick layer of dirt and the frame rusted.

RENEWED INTEREST in the church's history finally led to request for the bell's return to St. Alphonsus which happened recently following the death of the owner.

After the frame was sandblasted to remove rust, Schaffer trucked it over to the elevator. There he painted the frame black and cleaned the bell, mostly with vinegar water.

Since the frame weighs 180 pounds and the bell 310 pounds, hauling it Litchfield and back to the church was not a light task, although the frame can be taken apart for easier handling.

The bell rings with a rich mellow tone. It will be rung at the church on special occasions.

St. Alphonsus has other bells hanging in the belfry, but parishioners are happy to "welcome home" the bell which on summoned parish children to school. Back in 1872 or '73, a huge bell weighing 1,000 pounds cracked and broke during a Christmas Eve ceremony, Schaffer reports.

A history buff, he says Peru was once a stopover for farmers hauling grain horse-wagons from southern areas Huron County to Milan, where it was shipped by barge down the canal to Lake Erie and reloaded into larger vessels.

At one time Milan was the second largest grain-exporting port in the world, second only to Odessa in Russia.



EARLY RISERS

An interesting excerpt was found in the Huron County Chronicle, October 1, 1878. It reads, "The German Catholics of Peru observed the 40 Hours Adoration obligation last week. During that time, they were almost constantly in church. The bell called the worshippers to the sanctuary two mornings at half past four o'clock. Don't the boys all want to join that denomination?" The zeal for their faith that this small



1886 picture of the parish grounds, which appear to be high and dry. Note the buggy step in the foreground.

community displayed was undoubtedly difficult for most non-Catholics to understand even though they had been here for forty years.

CHURCH RENOVATION

In 1890, the church was completely renovated. A new sanctuary and a new roof and ceiling were provided, carrying the Gothic design throughout the church. Sacristies were built, extending the north end of the church. It was then that the original Bedford stone was covered with plaster. The Smola Brothers from Fremont were the contractors for the work on the church. The total cost of the remodeling and renovation was \$10,124. Subscriptions and collections paid by parishioners totaled \$5,562. A "fair" in the church before the pews were put in realized \$1,821 for their efforts.



ST. ALPHONSUS CHURCH
PERU, OHIO.,
1888

A member of St. Alphonsus parish entered this informative article in the Norwalk Experiment Newspaper in May 1890:

St. Alphon's Church will be rebuilt. Work for repairing the St. Alphon's Catholic Church at the German Settlement has begun. The contract was let to a Fremont architect. The north wall will be torn down and an addition of twenty feet in length will be added; the roof of the old church will be entirely removed, and the entire structure will then be built five feet higher, and a new roof will take its place.

"The stones were drawn from the Bronson quarries. The walls and roof are to be completed by October 1, 1890, whereupon the interior will be refitted and repainted. The old windows will be removed, and new ones will take their place and it will be provided every convenience. This has been a long-needed improvement and when completed it will be one of the handsomest and most beautiful churches in the country and an ornament of the German community.

Excerpts from a newspaper section devoted to the settlement in 1897 describe the church as follows:

"The church is a beautiful building of sandstone. The tower reaching towards heaven is topped by a golden cross, can be seen for many miles in all directions and bells invite people to prayers on Sunday."

"The inside is very practical. The organ is discovered at the entrance while the altar and sacristies fill the back part of the church. The Chancellery (pulpit) is built on the left side and can be reached by a winding staircase. Many stained-glass windows throw subdued magic light on the inside. There are very few congregations with much larger numbers who can point to a more beautiful house of God."

GRAND PICNIC

A grand picnic was held July 28, 1897. According to a councilman minute book, "A grand picnic was held on our parish grounds. It was a red-letter day for the Settlement since not a parish member was missing. Again, on August 2, St. Alphonsus Day was celebrated with Solemn High Mass with five priests. About 250 people received Holy Communion."

In December 1897, Rev. Leon Lentsch cleared the parish of a \$200 debt incurred from the 1890 church renovation. Pastor's note in minute book, "Deo Gratias".



During Rev. Lentsch's stay, a pipe organ was installed in the church choir loft. It was purchased from the Episcopal Church on Main Street, Norwalk.

In the summer of 1973, two organs were dismantled. (It is unknown when the other organ was installed.) Parishioners Donald and Elva Bauer donated a new electronic organ in that year. Donald Bauer is a direct descendant of Peter Bauer, one of the original parishioners from Alsace Lorraine, France.



While Kay Hirt plays the new 1970s organ, Marianne Schaffer directs the choir: Pat Schaffer, Sue Hohler, Ann Spriggs, Betty Sabo, Corris Raftery, Mike Sabo, Wilma Hammersmith and Jack Schaffer

FRAME RECTORY



Fr. Thomas Maria Kolb, who forced the parish into debt for a new rectory and gave away the parish's original chalice

During the pastorate of Fr. Thomas Maria Kolb, the brick parsonage was torn down and replaced with a frame house that is still standing. It was Kolb's feeling at the time that the brick house was unhealthy. It was damp and because of the nearness of the swamps across the road, he felt, prone to disease. There are still some bricks from the brick house in the present basement. Fr. Kolb took up residence in the home at the southwest corner of State Route 61 and Settlement Road during the construction. The cost of the new parsonage was \$4,074; \$3,000 of which was borrowed from the bank.

CONVENT

For a time, school operations had been consolidated at the West school on Peru West Section Line Road. In 1919, the parish decided to re-open the school on the parish grounds. No teaching sisters were available from the nearby diocese, so Fr. Aust contacted the Servants of the Most Holy Heart of Mary, Kankakee, Illinois.

The superior came to view the premises and agreed to send Sisters for three years if a convent was built.

One was built, to her specifications, by two contractors from the parish, Otto and Charles Schaffer. It was ready for occupancy by the fall term of 1919.

Historic Chalice Missing

The original chalice used at Peru St. Alphonsus Church is missing. To make matters worse, the chalice was still in use in 1841 and was almost certainly used by St. John Neumann.

According to an October 11, 1963, article in the Catholic Chronicle, the chalice was at that time in possession of Fr. Lawrence Ernst, a native of Norwalk serving in Toledo as coordinator of diocesan lay councils.

The priest had received the chalice from his grandmother, Margaret Fisher, who had received it April 19, 1927, from Fr. John Johnston who was serving at Lorain St. Mary Parish.

"As an act of gratitude to Mrs. Fisher for having erected a shrine in the mission hallowed by the labors of Venerable John Nepomucene Neumann, fourth Bishop of Philadelphia, I hereby bequeath the chalice used by the distinguished ecclesiastic when stationed at Peru, Ohio," Fr. Johnston wrote in a note accompanying the chalice.

Further information on the mentioned shrine is unavailable.

Fr. Johnson had obtained the chalice in 1905 from Fr. Thomas Kolb, then pastor at St. Alphonsus.

"It nearly breaks my heart to part with the chalice because Bishop Neumann was my dear mother's confessor, and I, as a little baby, received his special blessing," Fr. Kolb wrote in 1905.

Kolb further told Johnston the chalice was the first used at St. Alphonsus and was brought to Peru by the Redemptorists in 1832.

"I believe I could take an oath that it is a chalice once used by the holy bishop," the Chronicle quoted Kolb as saying.

The article did not say what motivated Fr. Kolb to give away a holy piece of parish history.

Ernst was later made monsignor and retired to Ann Arbor, Mich. In June 1977, he brought the chalice back to Peru for use during a diocesan Mass concelebrated by Bishop John Donovan to mark Neumann's canonization.

Ernst has since died, but the chalice's whereabouts are unknown.

The sisters stayed as agreed, three years, and in 1922 the Sisters of Notre Dame returned for the twenty years.

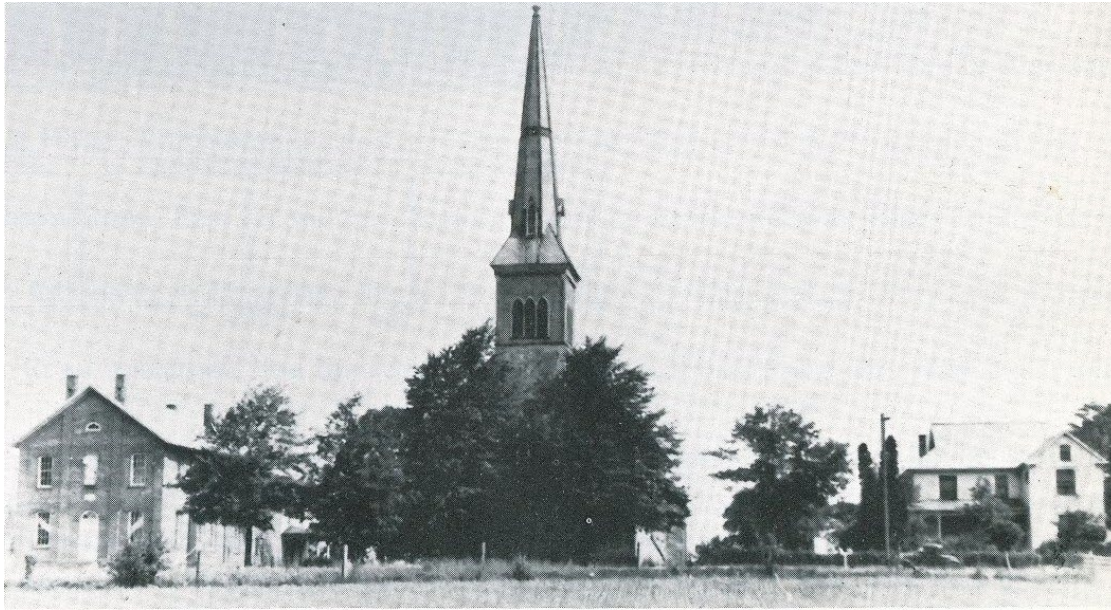
In 1942, Fr. Lambillotte, changed orders to the Franciscans of Tiffin and they remained until the school closed in 1969.

TOLEDO DIOCESE

In 1922, Huron County was placed in the Toledo Diocese. Until then it had been in the Cleveland Diocese after its origination in 1849.

Father Alexander Hasenburg was here at the time. A well-liked pastor, he planted a vineyard in back of the church and supplied many a parishioner with free wine and hospitality. Fr. Hasenburg chose not to remove himself from St. Alphonsus in the diocese change and was therefore under the direction of the

Toledo Diocese. He stayed until his death on March 19, 1930. He is buried in the St. Alphonsus Cemetery.



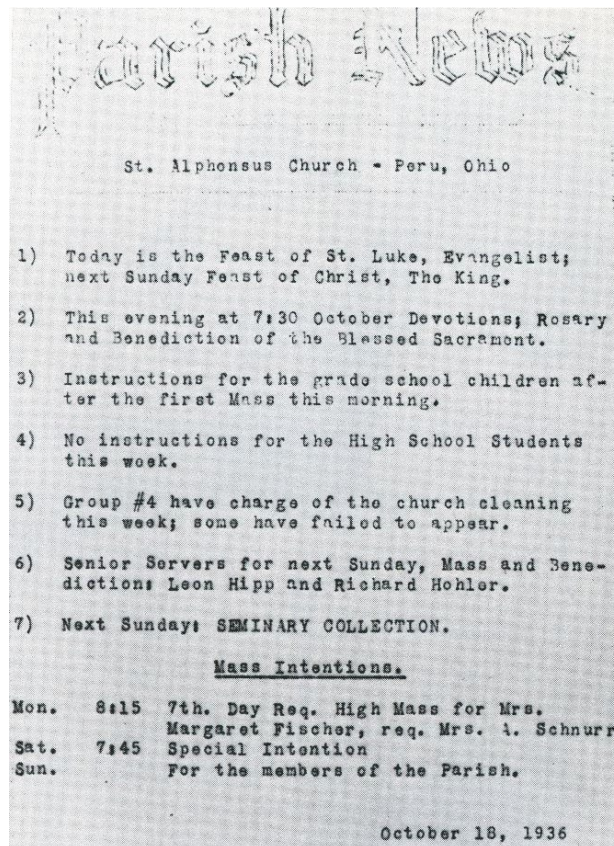
The front of the parish as it looked during the pastorate of Fr. Hasenburg.

BAKE SALES

During the pastorate of Fr. J.B. Fralick, monthly bake sales were initiated by the Confraternity of Christian Mothers. They were held at Kohlmeyer Hardware Store in Norwalk. The baking skills of the women of parish were soon appreciated by "city folk" and the money earned was a great help to pay the parish debt. After Fr. Marcellus Lambillotte came, the bake sales continued and became very competitive with each committee trying to outdo the previous in sales.

PARISH NEWS

Fr. Lambillotte was assigned as pastor in April 1935. He served until June 1953. During these 18 years, Fr. Lambillotte completed many projects for the betterment and growth the parish. He did an outstanding job of preserving facts that are becoming history by initiating the "parish news".



A page from the first parish bulletin.

The first Sunday bulletin was published October 18, 1936 and carried this quote from Fr. Lambillotte, "We trust that you will save the parish news . . . for its historical value in the progress of your church." St. Alphonsus Parish will forever be indebted to Fr. Lambillotte for the information he has saved, and also for the humor he inflected into these bulletins. These bulletins were all saved, and he had them bound into book form.

Original copies of the bulletins have been donated to and are available for examination on microfilm Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library and Museum in Fremont.

In a bulletin close to the first publication, we find this. "In 1936, we built and paid for complete well system, school toilets, replaced pipes in church and convent, built new kitchen, started installations of new lighting fixtures in church and enjoyed the use of new vestments."



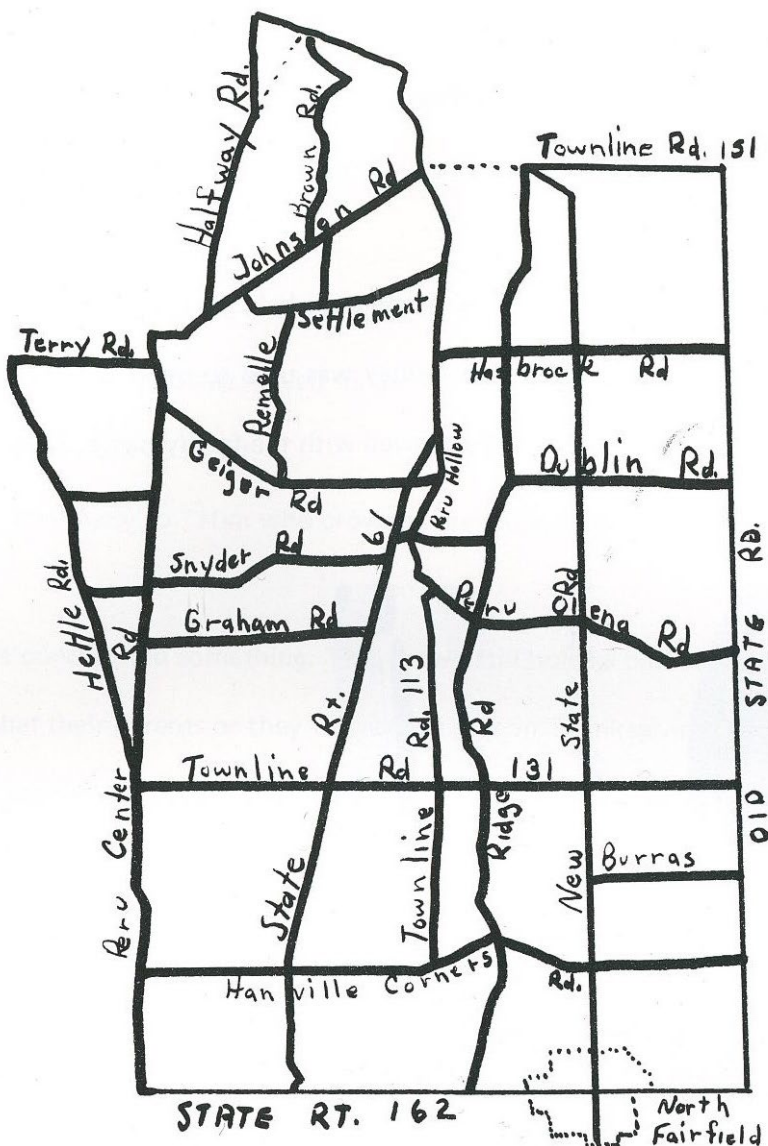
The interior of St. Alphonsus as it appeared in the early 1940's. The same pews, though refurbished, remain.

BIRTHDAY CLUB

In 1940, Fr. Lambillotte inaugurated a "birthday club". The donations coming from it were to shoulder the expenses of church renovations that were started on May 26 of that year. Each parishioner was asked to give a birthday gift to the church on his/her birthday in thanks for his past year of life. A total of \$1111 was received towards the estimated renovation cost of \$1375.

The church had new fresco altars put in. Low masses were held each week because of the inconvenience.

In 1942, new pews were also installed. Bake sale money was used to defer the expenses. Also, for a \$25 family offering, a new pew would carry a metal name plate engraved with the family name. These brass plates are still intact.



Parish boundaries as drawn in 1938. These remained intact until the 1980s, when geographical restrictions for parish membership were relaxed.

WORLD WAR II

In November of the same year, the faith of St. Alphonsus parish was again demonstrated. The sisters formed the school children in a Communion brigade. These groups of children were to receive communion on designated days for the parish boys serving in World War II. Also, a novena to the Sacred Heart was begun and lasted the duration of the war, and the parish was very faithful to this.

During the war, Fr. Lambillotte wrote regular letters to the service men. These letters were mimeographed and sent to each parish boy. By making himself the center of communications, he kept all the boys informed of each other's whereabouts, what they were doing and of the parish goings-ons.

Father did this again for the many young men in the Korean conflict of 1950 to 1953.

In 1943, a letter from the Rt. Reverend Chancellor read, "am returning to you this cancelled, time-worn note which has been in the possession of Huron County Banking Company since 1930, let me congratulate your parishioners for managing to clear the debt of the parish." The parish was free of debt once again.

GOLDEN CROWN

In 1949, the loyal parishioners donated gold jewelry and precious stones to have a golden crown made in thanksgiving for the safety of all 42 men who had served in the war. It was an offering for all the blessings received by the faithfulness to the novena of the Sacred Heart.

The "golden crown" was made to "Him who crowned our work with success and now deserves manifestation of our gratitude."

All 88 parish families contributed something. This crown still holds a place of honor, and many parishioners still can point out the jewels that their families gave in thanksgiving. Incidentally, very many young men also served in the Korean conflict of 1950-1953. Only one, Edwin Barman, son of Mrs. Theresa and Edward Barman, lost his life at the front.

BELLS AGAIN

Automation came to St. Alphonsus in 1952 when the two remaining church bells were electrified. They rang the Angelus the first time, automatically, February 13. Fr. Lambillotte in a letter to service men in Korea said, "for weddings we ring both bells simultaneously at no extra charge. Tips are accepted ... for the servers, of course".

During the same month, the men started work on the church basement. A fire wall was placed between the furnace room and the rest of the basement with the hopes of having a club room with a kitchen in it.

SCHOOL REMODELING

On August 31, 1952, the Bishop visited St. Alphonsus and made a tour of the buildings and grounds. On September 3, he directed Fr. Lambillotte to proceed with the school remodeling plan.

The estimated cost was \$53,350 with approximately \$35,000 in the parish treasury. School was held in the church basement until the remodeling was completed. The school was reopened February 2, 1953.

In the spring of 1953 Fr. Lambillotte was moved from St. Alphonsus and Rev. Leo P. Williams replaced him.

CHURCH RENOVATION

Again in 1958, the church was renovated. The main and side altars were given the more modern lines. The two stained glass windows on either side of the main altar were sealed off at this time to shut off the cold air.

The side altars and contemporary carved statues were placed along with the new high altar in the newly decorated church of shades of green with gold leaf trim. New stations of the cross were installed.

Soon after Vatican II, it became the custom to have an altar facing the people, so in keeping with the decree in 1966 a new altar and sanctuary furniture including two lecterns were purchased and installed on the gold carpeting.

SCHOOL CLOSED

In 1969, St. Alphonsus school was closed. Mother Euphrasia, Superior of the Sisters of St. Francis, wrote to Fr. Williams that the nuns would not be sent the next year because of a shortage of vocations. This was a very sad day in recent history.



Students boarding Monroeville Public School busses to be transported home.

After the close of the school, some parents sent their children to St. Mary's Elementary School in Norwalk. At this time, the CCD program was put in full swing with at least 75 students in grades one through eight who were attending the public school. At first classes were held at St. Alphonsus, but in 1971 they were moved to St. Mary's, Norwalk. After an unsuccessful three years of combining St. Alphonsus and St. Mary's CCD classes, a decision was made to bring St. Alphonsus "back home". In 1974, the classes were returned to St. Alphonsus.

The high school CCD, after being included in St. Mary's unsuccessfully, and held at St. Alphonsus with little success, were then combined in an area program that included, Wakeman St. Mary's, Milan St. Anthony's, and Norwalk St. Paul's and St. Mary's, some of the same parishes served by St. Alphonsus in the 1830's and 1840's.



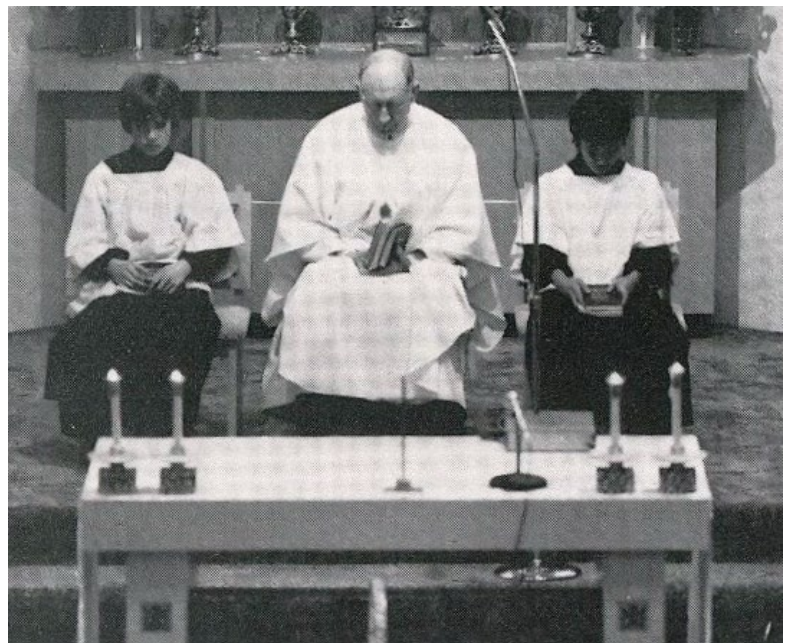
In a picture from the mid-1970s, Catherine Raftery conducts an activity with preschoolers John Peterson, Dani Pheiffer, Sherri Hammersmith, Keely Raftery, Shane Steffani, David Schindley and Lori Wise.

RENOVATIONS

The plastered native stone church was "bricked over" in 1970. New brass doors were installed at this time and the building received a new roof.

In 1973, after much discussion at parish meetings it was finally decided to install a modern kitchen in the parish hall. The women of the parish, with great joy, cleaned and filled the cupboards with dishes. The new facilities have been appreciated very much by everyone as it is in almost constant use for many activities such as anniversaries, meetings, graduations, and youth activities including our first summer festival, initially dubbed an "Ox Roast" in 1975 after a 20-year lapse.

The festival was held annually for about 10 years. Historically, festivals, bazaars, and feather parties were a popular parish tradition.



Fr. Shenk prays after communion. One elder parishioner remarked, "Fr. Shenk will make sure the Mass takes an hour, even if he has to stand there and twiddle his thumbs."

In 1972, the St. Alphonsus Day celebrations were reinstituted under the direction of new pastor Fr. Bernard Shenk. These were attended August 1st every year by a large percentage of parishioners, young and old and consisted of a 6 pm Mass, followed by a potluck supper and a dance.

On the day after Christmas in 1975, some 35 men of the parish began a renovation program that stretched from the insulation of the church ceiling (even though they were once told it could not be done) through the beautification of the inside of the house of God, to the restoration of the basement to its natural beauty. This program is still in progress. It touched almost every building and square foot of the parish landscape.

The newly created eleven-member parish council with the solid backing of Fr. Shenk saw this program through to satisfaction. The Winterick Co. of Solon, Ohio was awarded the performance of the redecoration of the church. The total billing was \$33,943. Their work began in February 1976. The plaster was repaired and painted from ceiling to floor. Benches were repaired and finished; a new lectern and statue of the holy family were designed and made; the altars and communion railings were re-cut to fit the needs of the designer.

New carpet was laid in June 1976, and Wasiniak Construction removed the brick from the outside of the two sanctuary stained glass windows. They had been bricked over in 1958 because it was felt they let in too much cold air.

Again, for the first time in nearly 20 years the Lord gave the parish the early summer sun through the colorful stained-glass windows to help make the 125-year-old building a serene place in which to worship.

The people of the parish cooperated very faithfully through the newly instituted ox roast festivals to raise money and parish spirit. Many workdays effectively saved the parish an estimated \$15,000 and helped build strong parish unity. Consider an insulation bid for \$3,800 which was performed for \$800 with the help of the men of the parish who crawled over the vaulted ceiling, like squirrels, with staplers.



How many St. Alphonsus parishioners does it take to change a flat tire? Coaching Kenny Stang on the task are Rich Raftery, Dick Gates, Mike Sabo, Mike Smith, Dan Sabo, Mike Raftery, and Tom Raftery after a Sunday Mass in about 1977.

BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

On June 29, 1975, the kick-off of the Diocesan celebration of America's bicentennial occurred at St. Alphonsus. More than 1,000 people from across the Toledo diocese congregated for a liturgy centered around the theme "Liberty and Justice for All." Bishop John A. Donovan was principal concelebrant at the Mass that included a military procession of past servicemen of the parish forming the color guard.

Priests attended the festivities from many of the 24 missions that St. Alphonsus priests served almost 150 years earlier.

"What more appropriate setting could we find for opening the Diocesan observance of the American Revolution Bicentennial than Peru?," said Rev. Thom was Redding, diocesan Bicentennial coordinator. "The history of the Catholic Church in Northwest Ohio began here in 1828."

Refreshments were served in the school hall for the thirsty visitors who braved temperatures in the 90's to view the Mass held outdoors at the north end of the cemetery. The stone altar in the cemetery was used for the ceremony. A historical display was also in evidence for all to view. It covered 150 years of St. Alphonsus parish history.

Again, on June 26, 1977, St. Alphonsus hosted a Diocesan Celebration for the canonization of John Nepomucene Neumann, C.S.S. R., first male saint for the United States. He served nearly five* months of his lifetime of service to Christ at St. Alphonsus in the year 1841. Over 800 persons participated in the Mass, which was again held outdoors. Bishop Donovan was principal celebrant. Fr. Edward Dunne, a Redemptorist, presented the homily and conducted a Tridium for three days prior to the celebration. Although temperatures were lower, and a gentle breeze was blowing the day was one of beauty. Refreshments were once again offered, giving friendship to the visitors and fellow parishioners.

ANOTHER PASTOR LEAVES

At the end of June 1977, St. Alphonsus lost another pastor, Fr. Bertrand Shenk. Fr. Shenk can be credited for many things during his five-year stay, especially the groundwork for the sesquicentennial festivities. Fr. Shenk, a student of history, aroused interest in many people enabling this historical account to be finished. The Sesquicentennial celebration progressed through the leadership of the new pastor, Fr. J. Norbert Howe.

One hundred and fifty years of parish life is difficult to put down in words and photos. So many people have given so much of their lives and talents to make the parish survive and grow. It is really impossible to do justice to all.

The parish has seen so many adversities that one wonders why it still stands, but the faith has made the parish whole. Consider the faith of the parishioners who did all major building projects during the first 100 years without any revenues in hand. The people believed the Lord would provide for tomorrow when it came, and He did.

Obviously, St. Alphonsus is witness to the eternal truth, that unless the Lord builds the house, it shall not long endure. With the same trust in God, our strength is assured for another 150 years.

- above is the conclusion of Kathy Pheiffer 1978 parish history. The following pages chronicle a myriad of events and accomplishments that give reason to believe the parish will indeed endure another 150 years.

*Although long believed that Father Neumann served for five months, The Autobiography of St. John Neumann, C.S.S.R. c1977 claims he served from September 16th to mid-November 1841.

Late in the sesquicentennial year, a stainless-steel time capsule was sealed behind the marble stone at the southeast corner of the church. It is to be opened in 2028 -- the parish's bicentennial year.

In the early 1980s, the parish hall was tripled in size.

Fr. Norbert Howe remained pastor until 1983 when Fr. Ray Fisher was transferred here. Fr. Herb Willman presided in 1987 and 1988 until Fr. Michael Schilling arrived.

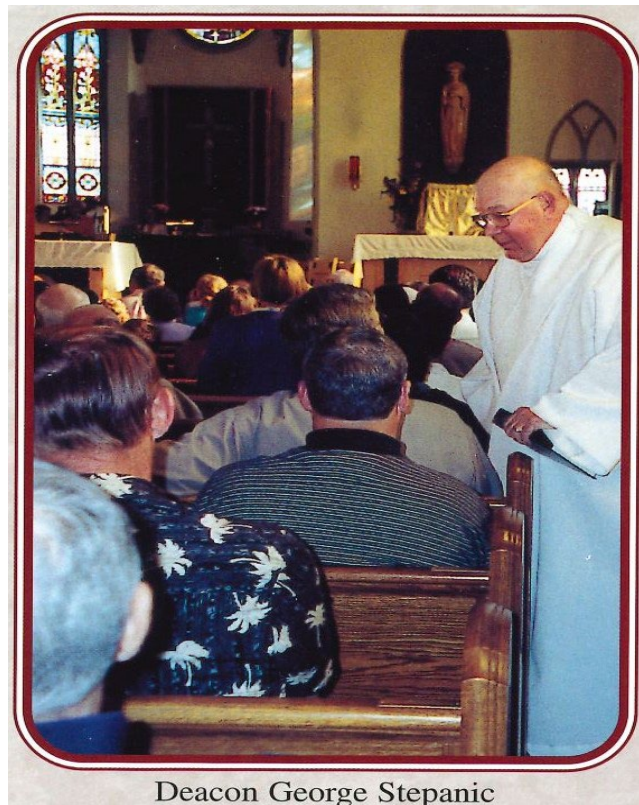


Bishop Daniel Thomas, Parish Manager Catherine Raftery, Fr. Ron Schock

"The people of St Alphonsus are wonderful to work with and for," said Schilling, who was at St. Alphonsus and St. Mary through 1994. "May times I acted as a 'sacramental chaplain' for the people -- knowing that the day-to-day routine of the parish was being handled effectively by others."

In 1989, after more than 15 years of being an integral volunteer, Catherine Raftery was appointed parish manager. Catherine is involved in almost everything, including CCD, liturgy preparations, training and scheduling Mass servers, scheduling facility usage, ministry to the sick and ensuring maintenance of buildings and grounds.

In 1990, Deacon George Stepanic and his wife Judy moved to the parish. He ministered in the parish until his death in 2013.



Deacon George Stepanic



Ann Spriggs and Pat Schaffer prepare the sanctuary for the celebration marking the 150th anniversary of St. John Neumann ministering at St. Alphonsus. Painted by a Fort Wayne, Ind., artist specially for the parish, the image of Neumann was hung in 1940, high above the church sanctuary as part of the local Faithfull's efforts to boost his canonization. A novena was also said that year to support the process toward sainthood. The painting remained above the sanctuary until the 1976 church renovation.

A successful celebration in 1991 of the 150th anniversary of St. John Neumann's work at St. Alphonsus, inspired the return of the annual parish festival in July 1992. The festival remained an annual event until the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Saturday, September 21, 1991 St. Alphonsus Peru 4:30 P.M.

WELCOME TO A CELEBRATION OF A SAINT AMONG US

Celebrant: Reverend Michael Schelling, Pastor

*Special Liturgy to celebrate St. John Nepomucene Neumann's stay at
St. Alphonsus and surrounding parishes July to November 1841*

Entrance Song: GOD OF OUR FATHERS (Used with permission)

1. God of our fathers, whose almighty hand. Leads forth in beauty all the starry band
Of Shining worlds, in splendor through the skies. Our grateful songs before thy throne arise.
2. Thy Love divine hath led us in the past. In this free land by thee our lot is cast;
Be thou our ruler, guardian, guide and stay. Thy word our law, thy paths our chosen way.
3. From wars alarms, from deadly pestilence. Be thy strong arm our ever sure defense;
Thy true religion in our hearts increase. Thy bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.
4. Refresh thy people on their toilsome way. Lead us from night to never ending day;
Fill all our lives with love and grace divine, And glory, laud, and praise be ever thine.

GLORIA: By Sister Mary Lou Buyer - Please Sing Along

1st reading: Ezekiel 34: 11-16

Song of Response: #35 in Glory & Praise- LIKE A SHEPHERD

2nd Reading: I Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

Gospel: Luke 24: 13-35

Offertory Song: SAINT IN OUR MIDST by Marianne Schaffer (a parishoner)

(Words and music found in back of Glory & Praise Song Book in your pew)

Refrain: St. John Neumann was a man of God, who came into our midst.

A holy man he came to serve the Lord, Almighty God he praised.

1. One hundred fifty years ago, John Neumann walked our land.

This humble man in priestly garb, gave service to the Lord.

A patient, loving man was he, who never searced for fame;

He only sought to serve the Lord, Almightyl God he praised.(Refain)



SAINT IN OUR MIDST (continued)

2. He came to teach the word of God to German immigrants.

He traveled over country miles to bring God close to them.

His travels took him many miles through lonely wilderness;

His clothes were worn, his food was scarce, John's trust in God was great. (Refrain)

3. John Neumann was a man of God, who came into our lives;

He walked our land in search of souls, a shepherd for His flock.

A patient , loving man was he, who never searched for fame;

He only sought to serve the Lord, Almighty God, he praised. (Refrain)

4. Today we honor this great man who came into our midst.

He ranks among the saints above; his blessings we beseech.

We gather here to honor him; to thank him and to praise;

this humble man who served the Lord, Almighty God, he praised. (Refrain)

Closing Song: HOLY GOD WE PRAISE THY NAME (used with permission)

1. Holy God we praise thy name; Lord of all , we bow before thee;

All on earth thy rule acclaim, All in heaven above adore thee;

Infinite, thy vast domain, Everlasting is thy reign; (Repeat last line)

2. Hark! the loud celestial hymn. Angel choirs above are raising;

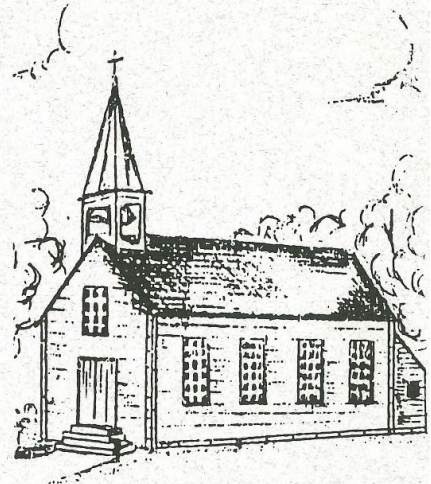
Cherubim and Seraphim, in unceasing chorus praising;

Fill the heavens with sweet accord: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord. (Repeat last line)

3. Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, Three we name thee;

While in essence only One, Undivided God we claim thee;

And adoring bend the knee, While we own the mystery. (Repeat last line)



ALLELUIA! We have been Greatly Blessed!

In addition to the erection of the Neumann Prayer Center, in 1996 a wheelchair ramp was added to the front of church and the building's stained-glass windows were repaired. Also, a baseball field was erected on newly donated land. The field was named after Fr. Arnold Schaffer.

In 1998 and 1999, the church was renovated. Part of the original entrance was uncovered, revealing hand hewn stone holy water fountains. Also, Mike and Linda Hohler donated a barn that was moved to parish grounds and converted to a picnic shelter and Mary's Grotto, behind the Neumann Prayer Center, was erected.

St. Alphonsus was chosen to host the initiation of the Firelands Area pastoral plan held on August 22, 1999, in the picnic pavilion. The plan encourages the cooperation of area parishes -- St. Alphonsus, Norwalk St. Mary's, Norwalk St. Paul's, Monroeville St. Joseph's, Milan St. Anthony, Wakeman St. Mary, New London Our Lady of Lourdes, Willard St. Francis and Plymouth St. Joseph. More than 500 attended the Promulgation Celebration, officiated by Bishop Bob Hoffman.

The ceremony featured choir members from most of the parishes under direction of St. Alphonsus Choir Director, Denise Reilly.

St. Alphonsus festival



Spreading mulch, Jack Schaffer of Hasbrock Road works on the new St. Alphonsus rosary garden and grotto. The parish's annual festival will be held Sunday at the church grounds on Settlement Road. **Story and photos, Page 3**

**The 2000 parish festival is promoted
in the Monroeville Spectator**

GROTTO DEDICATED TO MARY

PICNIC SHELTER

FIREPLACE and SOUND SYSTEM

NEW RESTROOM FACILITIES

SIDING ON PARISH CENTER

LANDSCAPING

All of the above have been or are expected to be completed at St. Alphonsus in 1999.

We are indebted to the many who have made these possible with their time, talent, and treasurers. We regret any omissions. Please help us express our gratitude to the following:

GROTTO: Bob and Jean Stovicek – stone artists; Mike & Linda Hohler - hand hewn stone; Wensink Farms- landscaping bolders; Dick Zimmerman – consultant; Pricilla Tremmel, George and Judy Stepanic - promoters

PICNIC SHELTER: Mike & Linda Hohler, Gert Hettle, Wensink Farms – barn donors; Jim Herner- architect; John Ott, Chase Heyman enterprise Hill farms, Ernie Midkiff, Larry and Scott Reilly, Jim Hohler, Paul Ott, - loading and moving; John A. Schaffer, excavating; Dave Martin – porch supports; Dick Gates, Glenn Brooks, John Wilson, Ben Stang, Ben Martin, Steve Hohler and Fred Scheid– carpenters; Charlie Fisher – equipment, supplies and consultant; Jim, John, Mike and Dave Wasiniak, Eric Adelman, Bill Herner, Rich Pfeiffer, and Marvin Smith – masonry; Jim Schaffer electrical; Don Bauer – fill dirt and aggregate; Howard Sutton – timber wall ; Lake Erie Construction - treated timbers for wall; Will, Bob, and Justin Gordon – roof; Paul Bernier, Robyn Schaffer, and John Garcia – helpers; John Hanlon & Ray Riley – cleaning and preserving;

FIREPLACE -by Richard Zimmerman; Ray Riley and Gene Wise – helpers;

SOUND SYSTEM IN PRAYER CENTER AND OUTSIDE– installation by Jim Reichert;

RESTROOM FACILITIES AND SIDING FOR PARISH CENTER – Bernard Schaffer, Tom Raftery, Kevin Schaffer, Gene Wise, and Glenn Brooks;

LANDSCAPING: John and Carolyn Lambert, Ed Prack – nursery stock; Marvin Smith - digging and moving; Howard Sutton – setting. [45 Trees and shrubs were placed this year]

We are also indebted to an anonymous donor who made so much of the above possible.

Additional donations for Mary's Grotto are being accepted.

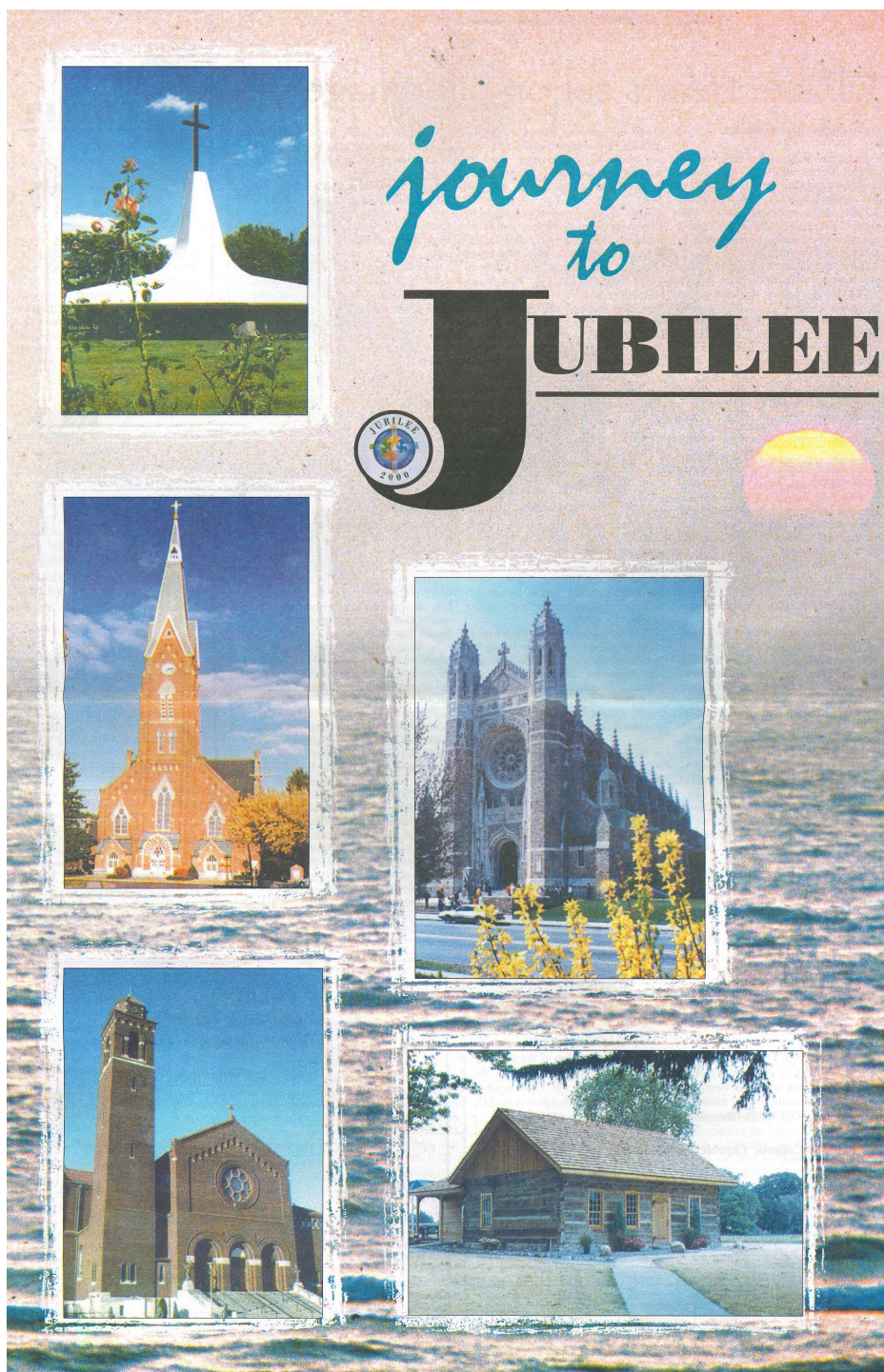
God bless all of you and your families. St. Alphonsus and its many visitors seeking peace and prayer are indebted to you!



Project coordinator



Ben Stang works on the picnic shelter, which is the frame of a barn donated by parishioners Mike and Linda Hohler. Portions of the shelter came from a barn owned by another parishioner, Gertrude Hettle.



A SPECIAL SECTION OF THE CATHOLIC CHRONICLE • MARCH 19, 1999

Pope John Paul II declared the year 2000 a Jubilee year, meaning people who made prayerful pilgrimages received a special dispensation. Pilgrimage sites in the Toledo Diocese were the St. John Neumann Prayer Center at St. Alphonsus, Rosary Cathedral in Toledo, Our Lady of Consolation Shrine in Carey, Sorrowful Mother Shrine south of Bellevue, and Historical Church of St. John the Baptist in Glandorf.

New oak entrance doors, built and installed by Chris Barman and Barman Construction, were placed on the church in 2002.

In 2003, a restaurant-style kitchen was added to the parish hall, allowing for larger celebrations.

Some 44 parishioners and friends of St. Alphonsus made a pilgrimage to New York Harbor to mark the 175th anniversary of the first St. Alphonsus parishioners arriving in the New World.

After more than 30 years of St. Alphonsus being a sister parish of Norwalk St. Mary's, the Toledo Diocese shuffled the deck in 2004. St. Alphonsus is now twinned with Monroeville St. Joseph's. When first announced, there was skepticism about it. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, the saying goes. But the partnership ended up working well.

Fr. Ken Lill became pastor of St. Alphonsus and St. Joseph at the time of the new parish arrangement and stayed until 2009. Fr. Bill Pifher was pastor from 2009 through 2015, followed by Fr. Ron Schock, an Attica native, who stayed until 2021.

Historical Marker Placed at St. Alphonsus

In October 2001, an Ohio Historical Marker entitled "Early Catholic Missionary Settlement" was placed at St. Alphonsus to commemorate establishment in America of the religious men and women belonging to the Precious Blood order.

The marker memorializes the beginnings of the Precious Blood Priests, Brothers and Sisters in America. In January 1844 at the invitation of Bishop John Purcell of Cincinnati priests and brothers of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, led by Father Francis de Sales Brunner of Switzerland, settled at Peru.

The Redemptorists order of priest had recently left the fledging parish.

The missionaries brought urgently needed spiritual support and education to German-speaking immigrants in a large portion of northern Ohio. The Peru mission extended to Cleveland, Akron, Medina, Shelby, Fremont, Tiffin and New Riegel.

In July 1844, the Sisters of the Precious Blood came from Switzerland to begin their ministry in this early Catholic Settlement.

Over the next 12 years, nine major settlements were established throughout Seneca, Mercer, Putnum and Auglaize counties in Western Ohio. Since then, Precious Blood communities expanded throughout the United States, South America and in Guatemala.



St. Alphonsus Parish Festival, July 14, 2002. Photographer was Robert Wensink; pilot was Doug Galloway.



Father Norbert Howe, who pastored St. Alphonsus from 1977 to 1983, returns often for parish events.



A wagon shelter, complete with a restored wagon, was added to the parish grounds in about 2005.

The wagon was originally manufactured by local resident Lawrence Fisher, the predecessor of General Motors Body by Fisher.



A life-sized carving of St. John Neumann, outside of the Prayer Center.



Long-time Choir Director Denise Reilly presides on a Sunday morning in about 2013.

Shrine of St. Francis at St. Alphonsus

recollection of Jack Schaffer

Early in the 21st Century, Ruth Wensink, a good friend, wanted a wood carved statue of St. Francis of Assisi. I knew someone who could do that for her. Ruth was very happy with the Statue of the Saint for her garden.

Before she passed, she gifted the carved statue and funds to build the shrine to St. Francis on the grounds at St. Alphonsus.

At first, I envisioned a small placement like Mary's Grotto near the Prayer Center.

With guidance from our Pastor, Fr. Bill Pifher, we decided to build a version of the Portiuncula, a small church in Italy where it is said St. Francis had a spiritual awakening.

Pat and I had visited Assisi and were impressed with the Chapel that St. Francis naturally loved so much.

With the volunteer help from over a dozen skilled hands, we built the shrine beginning in the winter of 2013.

The sandstone masonry phase began at 6 am on June 21, 2013. We worked long days virtually every Saturday until it was completed in early February 2014.

The only reason the “Miracle” of the shrine was completed so well in such a short time is a parishioner/mason whose name is Edward Barman. Ed laid virtually every stone. I was his “grunt” and I had faithful help from several others including our three retired “Wise Men” -- Jim Herner, Richard Zimmerman, and Bob Stovicek. Those men were very accomplished builders over a lifetime, and they helped us build a shrine worthy to be named after St. Francis.

The shrine was dedicated on October 4, 2014, the feast of the Patron of Assisi.



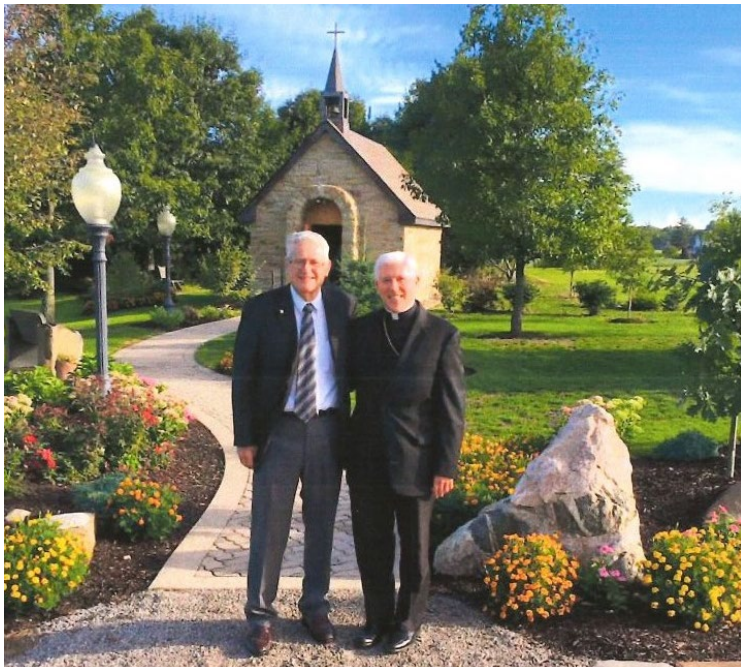
Volunteers erect the roof on the St. Francis Shrine at St Alphonsus.



Ed Barman, an accomplished mason, shared his talents in the construction of the St. Francis Shrine.



Bishop Daniel Thomas prays in the shrine.



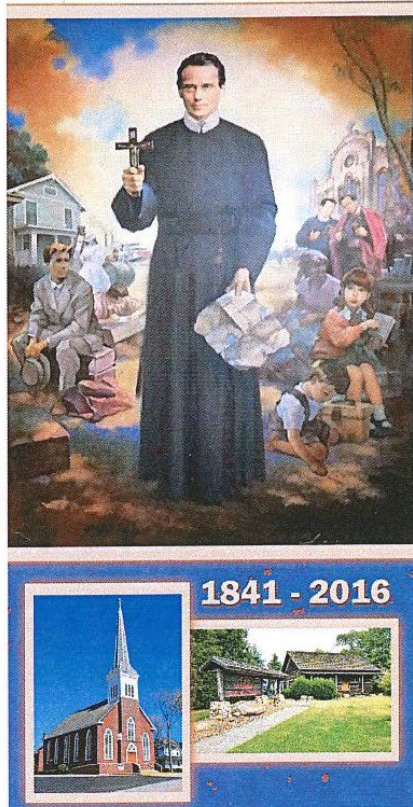
Jack Schaffer poses with Bishop Thomas.



In appreciation
for your contribution
to the
St. Francis Shrine
At St. Alphonsus



CELEBRATING



175 YEARS

SINCE

ST. JOHN NEUMANN'S
RESIDENCY AT ST. ALPHONSUS PARISH

Sunday, August 21, 2016 | 9:30 A.M. Mass

WELCOME TO ST. ALPHONSUS PERU

Celebrant The Most Reverend Bishop Daniel E. Thomas

Concelebrants Rev. Ronald Schock
Rev. Norbert Howe
Rev. James Szobonya, Redemptorist Priest

Deacon Deacon Michael Wasiniak

Master of Ceremonies
Dan Demski

Altar Servers Karli & Catherine Schnellinger,
Braden Lloyd, Ryan Sowders,
Nate Silcox

Welcome Sawyer Schafer

Greeters Linda and Chuck Furey

Lectors Susan Moore, Larry Hanneman

Musicians Denise Reilly, Director

Keyboard Sue Lesch, Sue Fritz

Flute Jodi Chaffee

Guitar Jack Schaffer

Presentation of Gifts Tom and Mary Carabin
Tom and Marlene Eastman

Extra Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
Ruthann Foltz, Kara Schafer,
Paige Schafer, Tom Smith

Ushers Tom Brown, Gregg Moore,
Dennis Perry, Don Schaffer

PRAYER
TO ST. JOHN NEUMANN



Missionary in America
Favorite of children
Father to the poor and lowly
Parish builder
With special devotion to the Blessed Virgin
Most devoted to the passion of Jesus
Most austere in penance
Pioneer of parochial schools
Patient in suffering and strong faith
Shepherd of souls
Help for sick and diseased
Patron of Forty Hours
Hope of incurable diseased
Humble, hardworking priest,
serving needy souls with joy,

PRAY FOR US!



The Sanctuary is decorated for Thanksgiving.



First Communion Mass in 2013



Before and after pictures of interior renovations completed in 2019.



A million-dollar renovation in 2020 changed the face of the 170-year old church. In addition to an inviting vestibule, the church has restrooms for the first time.

On the Go

WITH BISHOP THOMAS



**St. Alphonsus Peru
blessing of new
narthex and confessional**

Bishop Daniel E. Thomas blesses a stained-glass window which is part of the new narthex at St. Alphonsus Parish in Peru. The Bishop joined Rev. Ron Schock and the parishioners of St. Alphonsus Feb. 14 for the celebration.



Layout from the Diocesan magazine Graceful Living marking the February 14, 2021, blessing of the expanded church.



