

## **THE LEGACY OF THE DOMINICAN ORDER TO ST ANTONINUS CHURCH**

On January 24, 1875, prompted by the Holy Spirit, Bishop Michael Corrigan of the then episcopal City of Newark, asked Dominican Father Stephen Byrne to establish a community of the Order in the city. When the Master General's permission came from Rome in March 1875, Father Byrne at once selected a location for a new parish on the outskirts of Newark known as the "West End". There he rented a three-story frame building that stood on Bank Street between South Eighth and South Ninth streets. He lived on the floor and turned the first floor into a church.

**On Pentecost Sunday, May 16th, 1875, in the presence of 75 people, St. Antoninus Church was born** when Father Byrne said the first Mass. He preached on the coming of the Holy Spirit. Thus, 147 years ago, St. Antoninus church received the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Father Byrne then purchased a large plot of land that extended from South Eighth to South Ninth streets on South Orange Avenue. He turned the wooden barn that was on the land into a little chapel and named it St. Antoninus after the great Dominican Archbishop of Florence. On Sunday, July 18, 1875, Bishop Corrigan dedicated this little church to the Lord, and preached a eulogy on its patron saint.

Soon, from St. Antoninus church, missionary priests began to travel far and wide in their work of saving souls. The church became a house of prayer and devotion. Catholics came from all over Newark to hear sermons and to attend parish missions. The parish had about a hundred families and was one of the smallest and most scattered congregations in Newark.

By early 1900, the parish was beginning to outgrow the little church. Father Thomas Louis Power, who was the Prior at that time felt the need for a new church and a new rectory as well. The house in which the

Fathers resided had become wholly unfit to live in, and Father Thomas decided to first build a new rectory. The cornerstone was laid on Sunday, September 24, 1905, and the rectory was formally opened on August 25, 1906.

The ground for a new church was finally broken in April, 1911, during Father Heffernan's priorship. The grandiose plan called for an immense building in the French-Gothic style. The exorbitant cost thwarted the full plan. Father Heffernan and the Provincial Council decided to erect only the basement at first, and to cover it with a temporary roof. The Right Reverend John J. O'Connor, bishop of Newark laid the cornerstone for this "basement" church two days after the feast of St. Antoninus on Sunday, May 12, 1912. And, five months later, on Rosary Sunday, October 6, 1912, Bishop O'Connor dedicated the lower church to the Lord.

Saint Antoninus Church became known as a church remarkable for its devotions, and its holy hour became a model for others to follow. Father Heffernan embellished the lower church 'till it became an exquisitely beautiful house of prayer.

The fruition of the plan to build the full or the "upper" French-Gothic style church took place in 1940. Archbishop Walsh dedicated the parish on September 21, 1940. About 1,500 parishioners witnessed the ceremony.

St. Antoninus experienced some of the best Dominican years from 1940 onward until about 1960. The times were marked with strong spiritual and temporal activities. In 1942, Father A.B. Davidson, pastor and prior, conducted novenas, prayers for peace, parish socials, musical shows and victory gardens. St. Antoninus even provided housing for war veterans. During Father Vincent Raetz's pastorate and priorship from 1948 to 1957, spiritual activities continued to flourish. Attendance increased so much that latecomers to the 12 noon Mass had to attend a 12:15 Mass in the lower church! Saint Antoninus had outgrown its early title as "The

Little Parish on the Hill”.

When Father W.B. Sullivan became the pastor and prior in 1958, he built a new convent for the Sisters of Charity who taught at the adjoining school. In 1967, Father John Kearney served as pastor, and in 1973, Father Thomas Ertle was elected the last Dominican pastor and prior of Saint Antoninus.

From 1960 to 1975, parish families began to move out of Newark to suburbs and other New Jersey towns. In 1967, St. Antoninus, like other parishes in Newark, suffered greatly from the racial riots. After ninety years of teaching, the Sisters of Charity had insufficient money and enrollment to continue the school. In April 1975, the Dominicans were reassigned from St. Antoninus exactly after exactly 100 years of service.

Three months after the Dominicans were reassigned to another location, in June 1975 , Fr. Jim Ferry was given the permission by the Newark Archdiocese to take over the dwindling community at St Antoninus Church and start the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as we know it today.

The rest is history (according to the movement of the Holy Spirit!)

**Come to this Mass celebrating the feast of St Antoninus : 12 Noon, Tuesday, May 10.**