



History of the Church of the Ascension, Chicago, Illinois  
1982-2019

## History of the Church of the Ascension, Chicago (1982-2019)

Since the 1984 publication of George C. Giles' History of the Church of the Ascension, much has remained the same. The Anglo-Catholic identity, worship and faith that so profoundly shaped the parish from late in the 19th century remain central. The parish continues to emphasize traditional sacred music, most notably by way of the professional choir that offers a different mass setting each Sunday at the 11:00 a.m. Solemn High Mass. The music, the emphasis on tradition and the Anglo-Catholic identity continue to draw both new members from nearby and visitors who make Ascension a destination for worship when in Chicago.

It's also true that plenty has changed—in the parish, in the neighborhood and, of course, in the wider church and culture. This brief supplement to aims to summarize a few notable themes and developments since the early-1980s publication of the parish history.

**To develop or not to develop.** Church of the Ascension owns the entire half-block facing LaSalle Drive between Elm and Maple Streets. What is now our parking lot at the south end of the block was acquired in the 1960s with the idea of further development of church facilities to serve the church's mission and ministries. Those plans never came to fruition after the 1969 death of the Rector who championed them, Fr. William Orick, and after the closure in the 1970s of the school that had been sustained by the Sisters of the Order of St. Anne. At least three times since the 1980s the parish Vestry (governing board) has seriously considered development of the south end of the property. Most recently, in 2018, a decision was made to forego any avenues of development until they could be considered in the context of a long-range plan for the parish's mission and facilities. That long-range plan remains unfinished.

*This architectural drawing from the 1980s shows a high rise in the location of the parking lot. An adjoining low rise building and some parking in the high rise ramp would have been designated for parish use.*



**Women at the altar and in the pulpit.** The General Convention of the Episcopal Church authorized the ordination of women as priests in 1976. As explained in the last chapter of the 1984 parish history, Ascension clergy and members actively resisted this significant change. Father Edwin Norris ultimately left the Episcopal Church following his 1993 retirement as Rector (and became a Deacon in the Orthodox Church of America). In following years, women, both laypersons and ordained, did begin to serve in other roles at the altar—first as acolytes, then Sub-deacon and eventually Deacon for the Solemn High Mass, and in more recent years as preachers. Vestry and parishioner conversations in 2018 revealed a surprisingly widespread sentiment that the time had come to welcome women to celebrate the mass. Many had positively experienced the ministries of women priests elsewhere. Mother Anna Broadbent,



Curate at St. James' Cathedral (shown here), was the first woman to preside at a weekday mass, in February, 2019. She and other women priests have since officiated at both weekday and Sunday masses. No women clergy have yet been called or hired to serve on the parish staff.

**The St. Anthony of Padua Food Pantry** was pioneered in the 1990s to more actively respond to needs in the neighborhood. While other nearby ‘soup kitchens’ provide hot meals, the primary mission of our food pantry is to provide a sack-full of non-perishable groceries to some of the many nearby low-income individuals and households. (We do also include a sack-lunch!) The pantry continues to serve about 150 guests on the first Saturday of each month. Non-parishioner volunteers are welcome to share in this outreach effort.



*Kuni Sakai, a parishioner pantry volunteer*



### **The Order and Convent of St. Anne.**

The Order of St. Anne was brought to Ascension in the early 20th century to partner in the mission and ministries of the parish. A parochial school that was a primary ministry of the sisters became increasingly difficult to sustain and was closed in the

1970s. The decline in women's religious orders generally has also been reflected in the Order of St. Anne, both here at Ascension and elsewhere. (A 2018 Chicago Sun Times article from which the above photo was taken is titled *Praying for a Sister: Near North nuns likely facing extinction without recruits.*) For now, the two remaining nuns, Mother Judith Marie, OSA, and Sister Barbara Louise, OSA, continue to have active ministries both in the parish and beyond.

**Clergy Leadership.** The last Rector to be included in the 1984 history of Ascension was Father Gregory Norris. As already described, he retired in 1993. Father Gary Fertig, previously an assisting priest at St. Thomas' Church, Fifth Avenue, New York, served as Rector from 1995-2012. He was known by many as a capable preacher and steward of the parish's Anglo-Catholic legacy. Father David Cobb was Installed as Rector on Ascension Day, 2014. Turmoil erupted soon after, when he dismissed the parish's legacy music staff and the parish administrator/treasurer. Following Fr. Cobb's resignation in the fall of 2015, Bishop Jeffrey Lee (Diocese of Chicago) appointed Fr. Patrick Raymond to serve as Priest-In-Charge. Fr. Raymond was called as Rector in 2017. With increased collaboration between Vestry and clergy, and with a renewed appreciation for Ascension's unique traditions and strengths, the parish has recently been regaining composure and positive momentum.

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*The Very Rev. Patrick Raymond, Rector*  
Dr. Benjamin Rivera, Choirmaster    David White, Organist  
Cynthia Perrizo, Senior Warden    Gary Alexander, Junior Warden