

Built on Faith

St. Therese still 'showering us with roses' as parish celebrates 85th anniversary



Founding Father

The Rev. Charles T. Duffey was called to form a new East Side parish in 1924. He had been a priest for 14 years.

Still serving as the first pastor of Little Flower Church, Father Duffey died April 17, 1939. He was 54.

In the beginning, more than three-quarters of a century ago, there were no streets, sidewalks or sewers.

The land near 14th Street and Bosart Avenue was either grazing territory or under cultivation, with nearby homes densely clustered south of 10th Street.

But the nation's economy was soaring to unprecedented heights under President Calvin Coolidge. They called it the "Roaring '20s." The city of Indianapolis, led by Mayor Lew Shank, was feeling this incredible surge of wealth, too.

For some time, the East Side had been seen as prime territory for home development. Real estate agents hoped a new church and school would help sell slow-moving lots within platted subdivisions north of 10th Street. As Monsignor John J. Doyle would later recall, the Phoenix Investment Co., Security Trust Co. and Rosalia Realty went to Bishop Joseph Chartrand in 1921 with such a proposition: **They would turn land over to the Indianapolis diocese if Bishop Chartrand would agree to build a church and school.**

The bishop took title to the property for \$1 and pledged to build, but he did not act for a while. Nonetheless, word spread swiftly that a new Catholic parish was in the works. Three years later, in 1924, the bishop quietly informed Father Charles T. Duffey that he would found this rumored parish, the first in the world named after the beatified Carmelite nun Therese Martin of Lisieux, France, whose canonization was rapidly approaching.

Bishop Chartrand announced the formation of Little Flower Catholic Church on March 13, 1925. The new parish, he said, would be carved from territory belonging to St. Philip Neri, St. Francis de Sales and Our Lady of Lourdes. The bishop left to Father Duffey the negotiation of boundaries with pastors of these parishes.

Two months later, Therese of Lisieux was canonized.

Not long after Bishop Chartrand's public announcement, on the feast of the Annunciation, Father Duffey paid his first visit to the household of a potential parishioner, Sylvester Bitter of 622 N. Wallace St. As the priest spoke with Bitter and his neighbors, he was encouraged.

Parishioners held their first meeting April 5, 1925, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Campbell, 943 N. Bancroft St. More than a dozen showed up to help plan a Downtown bazaar that raised \$6,000 for the new parish and drew the city's political and social elite. The pioneering families debated whether enough money could be raised to erect both the church and school.

Soon after, they hired an architect to sketch plans.

Meanwhile, the parish had rented a storeroom in a vacant grocery at 10th Street and Bancroft Avenue owned by parishioner Harry Phillips. It was a narrow room with bare walls and rows of folding chairs separated by an aisle. There, Father Duffey celebrated Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.

The first two Masses were July 6, 1925, drawing more than 200 worshippers.

“We were wedged in,” recalled parishioner Rosemary Cleveland. “Those near the front were often asked to pass the collection basket.”

The same week Masses began, the city’s Board of Public Works held a hearing on whether to pave and improve Bosart Avenue. An objection had been lodged, but it was withdrawn after parishioner Lawrence Sexton argued in favor of the needed improvements.

“It was nothing but wilderness when we moved out here in 1922,” his wife, Mrs. Sexton, later recalled.

With support from the newly formed parish, the city adopted proposals to pave Bosart between 10th and 16th streets as well as to extend gas, water and sewer service to the area.

In the early days, about 75 families registered in the parish. But not everyone was pleased to see another Catholic parish on the East Side.

“The people in the house next to the grocery were, to put it mildly, anti-Catholic,” Mrs. Cleveland recalled. “Their young daughter often sat in the window facing the church and sang songs she thought would annoy us. Remember, this was 1925, and the KKK was going strong.”

Indeed, the Ku Klux Klan dominated Indiana’s political scene, controlling the Statehouse, including then-Gov. Ed Jackson. Former Grand Dragon D.C. Stephenson lived in Irvington, just southeast of the new parish. In the 1920s, the white-robed knights of the KKK, whose membership included Protestant ministers and local merchants, were more interested in making life difficult for Roman Catholics than in going after black city residents. The Klan irrationally suspected a papal plot to overthrow American democracy.

Undaunted by hatred and bigotry, Little Flower parishioners, who were mostly of Irish and German descent, went about assembling lay groups that would become the heart of their community.

The Men’s Club and Ladies’ Altar Society formed within days of each other in 1925 and hosted events such as in-home card parties, bingo nights and fish fries to raise money for church construction.



Phillips' building

The following February, Father Duffey began living in the makeshift church and celebrating Mass daily. A statue of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face arrived from Lisieux,

France. A priest friend of Father Duffey also helped acquire relics of the parish’s patron saint during a pilgrimage to her Carmelite convent in France. In addition,



Interior of the first church

the Vatican transferred particles removed from St. Therese’s bones to the new Indianapolis parish.

On Sept. 2, 1925, 15 bids for the new church and school were unsealed. The lowest price quoted was \$108,392 – or, roughly \$25,000 more than parishioners had wanted to spend. Adding insult, the low bid included neither plumbing nor wiring.

After some discussion, the parish let the contract and agreed to spend \$130,000 to build and furnish the church and school. On Sept. 30, 1925, ground was broken, but heavy rains slowed the clip of construction.

“Father and I used to walk past the big hole being dug for the church and he would say, ‘Joe, when this church is built, how are we ever going to fill it with people?’” recalled parishioner Joseph N. Huser.

In November 1926, Father Duffey moved from quarters in the old grocery to a new rectory on Wallace Street. Within weeks, electric streetlights sprouted along Bosart. By December, Bosart had been freshly paved and the combined church and school was the first building under construction, replacing a farmhouse. Even so, very few houses were visible.

The following April, Bishop Chartrand came out — on a “dismal and disagreeable” day, those present noted – to bless and lay the cornerstone. A history of the parish’s formation and the only known list of charter members were among items placed in a copper box that parishioners sealed within the cornerstone.

As it turned out, Father Duffey had no cause for alarm. Nearly 1,000 people assembled for a dedication Mass inside the new church Sept. 12, 1926. The crowd exceeded the seating capacity of what is now the school gymnasium by 200. There had been a final Mass in the grocery storeroom just hours before.



Construction begins

At the church dedication, Margaret (Royse) Lawley played her harp and the Siener Sisters Trio sang.

Within a week of the dedication, six sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis arrived from Oldenburg, Ind. School opened un-

der their direction two days later with 85 children. The sisters lived on the third floor and noise from parish meetings and dances often drifted up from the floors below.

Elizabeth (Farmer) Clemens was in third grade. At the time, she said, 10th Street was still a dirt road and students were given an hour and a half to walk home for lunch each day... even through the rain, sleet and snow. (The next year, Little Flower graduated its first 8th-grade class, totaling eight students.)

Catholics flocked to the area in great numbers, launching one

to St. Therese came to a close on Sept. 30, 1927, then her feast day, with 1,500 worshipers present. Excitement about her canonization, stoked by her inspirational "little way," moved people to pour into the East Side church from all over the city. Buses picked up many worshipers at Monument Circle and brought them to the church.

Nightly attendance averaged 700.

"There were people in the choir loft and on the stairway leading to the loft," Parishioner Alma Hofmann recalled. "The



Little Flower Church 1945 - 1962

of the bigger building booms the city had ever seen. At one time, 100 new homes were under construction, and 46 real estate firms and homebuilders were marketing new homes near Little Flower. Eventually, 10th Street and all of the north-south streets between 10th and 16th streets were paved. Streetlights dotted every corner. Telephone lines went up, and postal service began.

Parishioner Homer Phillips, who lived at 14th Street and DeQuincy Avenue, was among those who followed a footpath through an open field to the new church.

Father Duffey soon called on men of the parish to join a choir. The group's first test came in 1927 on Easter Sunday as Oliver R. Rasico led them, accompanied by an organist. (A women's choral society was not formed until February 1944, after many parish men had enlisted to fight in World War II.)

The parish's first public Novena

church hall was overflowing."

Father Duffey's sermons highlighted the meaning in St. Therese's brief life for ordinary Catholics. "The statue of St. Therese was carried in procession up and down the aisles with children strewing rose petals," Mrs. Cleveland said.



First graduating class in 1927

(Back row left to right) Joe Rice, Alice Prenatt, Father Duffey, Bernard Reilly, Robert Berlier. (Front left to right) Kathleen Cain, John Berlier, Kathryn Craig. Ruth Farmer, an eighth member of the class, was absent this day.

Parish population	
1925	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 460 people • 75 households
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,197 people • 972 households

These citywide novenas always ended with drama.

"One such closing I will always remember," Mrs. Hofmann said. "A basket of rose petals was concealed in the ceiling above the altar. Two strings were held by the servers. When father came to 'let fall a shower of roses,' the strings were to be pulled and the petals were to gently fall. But the dear boys had such strength the basket of petals went 'plop' on Father's head."

Regular Sunday novenas honoring the parish's patron saint also were well attended. And the novenas around her feast were a major draw for many years.

In the year all-city novenas began, Elmer A. Steffen, director of the diocesan choir at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, took the 12-member Little Flower men's vocal group under his wing to master Pietro A. Yon's "Missa Pastorale." They performed with a string trio at midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Broadcast by high-powered WFBM-AM radio, the collaboration drew rave reviews from more than 100 listeners along the East Coast and in Canada. For several more years, in the dawning days of commercial radio, the station would broadcast Little Flower's midnight Mass.

The parish staged its first two-week mission in May 1928, featuring special programs for men and women.

Back then, on the first Sunday of each month, the Men's Club occupied the first seven pews in church. "It was a sight to see them all genuflecting together before they knelt to receive communion," Mrs. Hofmann said. The women's group followed suit on the second Sunday of each month.

In late November 1929, the country's stock market took a startling plunge during an avalanche of panic selling. Weekly church contributions dwindled as the country experienced its worst financial catastrophe. Amid bank runs and closures, the federal government rationed such staples as meat, sugar, flour, shoe leather and gasoline. Many parishioners lost their jobs and life savings; some sold apples on street corners to support their families.

Father Duffey was forced to borrow money to cover Little Flower's interest payments on its \$100,000 construction loan, which became a crushing burden.

To help raise money and keep spirits up, parish women organized dessert bridge games, chicken dinners and pancake breakfasts, variety and hobby shows, raffles, penny suppers and cooking lessons.

"In December of each year, a chairlady was named for every month of the coming year. It was her job to select from the parish register a group of ladies to work with," Mrs. Hofmann said. "Every home was called on at least once a year. The challenge was to come up with new ideas, and the competition was great."

It was considered such an honor to be picked to organize a monthly event that Father Duffey would announce names of those selected from the pulpit once a year. Their phones would ring the next day with calls of congratulation.

Turning a \$50 profit on an event was considered a huge success. "It was surprising to me how the ladies could bake goodies in spite of rationing," Mrs. Hofmann marveled.

Parishioner Rose Priller, whose family moved into the Little Flower neighborhood in 1928 when she was 10, fondly recalled

the "penny suppers."

Little Flower was "a city in itself" during the Great Depression, Mrs. Priller said. Parishioners brought their own place settings, utensils and covered side dishes to these suppers, which were so named because of their modest cost. Those parishioners who still had jobs pitched in to supply meat. No organization like the St. Vincent de Paul Society yet existed to help those experiencing financial hardship.

Undaunted by the country's financial mess, Father Raymond Marchino, an associate pastor, joined with parishioner George Rolfsen to organize a boys' choir in 1930. They joined the men's choir to perform such works as Franz Schubert's "Mass in E flat major," which WFBM also aired. Both groups took pride in mastering new vocal pieces. During Holy Week in 1932, WKBF-AM radio broadcast a Little Flower choir of 45 boys and 15 men performing "Seven Last Words."

By 1933, the parish had increased in size to about 500 families, with 300 children enrolled in school. The school had expanded from four classrooms to seven. The parish debt was \$163,000. And a parish vocal group called The Melodeons toured the state.

In 1935, the Men's Club honored Father Duffey on the silver jubilee of his ordination by redecorating the church and buying him a new car. Four years later, on April 17, 1939, Father Duffey died, ending the parish's pioneer era.

"One thing that stays in my mind was the respect we had for priests," Mrs. Hofmann said. "If the priests were invited to a meeting or any kind of entertainment, everyone in the hall stood up when they entered. We always saw that they occupied front seats and special chairs."

That autumn, thousands of people filled Christian Park to watch an event signaling the rise of Little Flower's youth sports program, fueled by the parish's growth. On this cool fall afternoon, a Little Flower team coached by Father Richard Kavanagh took on St. Catherine for the first Catholic Youth Organization city football title.

Although Little Flower boasted the city's leading scorer, half-back Joseph Tuohy, the team lost 14-6. Little Flower remained an athletic power for many years.

As the country's economy picked up during the late 1930s, a second building boom began in the neighborhood. It lasted until the government began rationing construction materials during World War II.

Three months after the sudden death of Little Flower's founding pastor, in July 1939, Father Jerome Pfau arrived.



Father Jerome Pfau

Father Pfau began a capital campaign to expand the school that raised \$5,000 by the time he grew ill two-and-a-half years later. During his brief tenure, Father Pfau also served on the local Selective Service Board, which prepared for a U.S. military draft as fighting in Europe and the Pacific intensified.

Less than a month after Japa-

Little Flower offers hope to all

“What matters is not great works but great love for God”



On holiness ...

“Sometimes, when I read spiritual treatises, in which perfection is shown with a thousand obstacles in the way and a host of illusions round about it, my poor little mind soon grows weary.”

“I close the learned book, which leaves my head splitting and my heart parched, and I take the Holy Scriptures.”

“Then all seems luminous. A single word opens up infinite horizons to my soul, perfection seems easy; I see that it is enough to realize one’s nothingness, and give oneself wholly, like a child into the arms of the good God.”

“Leaving to great souls, great minds, the fine books I cannot understand, I rejoice to be little because ‘only children and those who are like them’ will be admitted to the heavenly banquet.”

— Taken from a letter Therese sent a missionary in China before her death

Therese Martin, who became known as “The Little Flower,” was the youngest child of watchmaker Louis Martin and his wife, seamstress Zelig Martin.

Only five of the Martins’ nine children survived to adulthood – and all joined religious orders.

Zelig Martin died when Therese was 4. Therese’s father and sisters spoiled and coddled her afterward, laying the foundation for tantrums when she did not get her way.

Therese prayed for an end to her outbursts so she might join her sisters in the nearby convent. Finally, she underwent a profound conversion one Christmas Eve.

“On that blessed night, the sweet infant Jesus, scarcely an hour old, filled the darkness of my soul with floods of light,” Therese would recall.

She followed two sisters into the contemplative Carmelite order at Lisieux, France, after seeking the pope’s intervention and finally receiving permission from a local bishop to join before turning 16.

Therese initially was considered no more distinguished than any other devoted nun, although her maturity surprised some. She took the name Sister Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.

Therese lived a life of humility, simplicity and childlike trust in God. By word and deed, she shared her “little way of spiritual childhood,” a path of trust and absolute self-surrender to God.

This course included smiling at the nuns she did not like and begging forgiveness when confronted about mischief she had not committed.

When Therese’s eldest sister, Pauline, was elected prioress, Therese agreed to remain a novice so the other nuns would not have to fear the Martin clan dominating life in the convent. This sacrifice meant Therese would never become a fully professed nun, and she would

have to continue to ask permission for her every action.

Today, it is said that Therese’s life and writings anticipated the Second Vatican Council by showing the path to holiness is open to all.

Therese eventually came to realize that what matters in Christian life is not great works – which were not possible for a cloistered nun – but great love for God.

Still, Therese aspired to sainthood.

“Unfortunately, when I have compared myself with the saints, I have always found that there is the same difference between the saints and me as there is between a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds and a humble grain of sand trodden underfoot by passersby,” Therese once said. “Instead of being discouraged, I told myself: God would not make me wish for something impossible.”

Despite Therese’s devotion to the Lord, winters in the cold, damp convent took a toll on her health. During Holy Week in 1896, she began vomiting blood from tuberculosis.

Her health worsened during the next 18 months.

By order of her religious superiors, Therese wrote down memories of her childhood and life in the convent.

While ill, Therese prayed to “spend my heaven doing good on earth.” She also promised she would send “a shower of roses” from heaven.

Without faith in God, Therese said, she would have taken her own life. Instead, she

was so outwardly cheerful that some speculated she was feigning illness.

Therese was 24 when she died.

Her eldest sister’s decision to publish her autobiography, “The Story of a Soul,” brought Therese to the world’s atten-



Therese at 3



Therese at 13

(Continued on next page)

tion. Her "little way" of trusting Jesus to make her holy and relying on small daily sacrifices instead of great deeds appealed to many.

As people read about her and sought her intercession, letters flooded the Lisieux convent. Most reported favors received through her prayers. This outpouring prompted Pope Pius XI to waive a rule against beginning the process of



Pictured standing: Therese's sisters Celine and Pauline; seated are Mother Marie de Gonzague, Marie, and Therese. Photograph taken in the Courtyard at Carmel Lisieux, early 1895.

canonization until 50 years after death.

Therese, the first modern-day saint to be photographed, was canonized in 1925.

In the intervening decades, some Catholics have turned away from St. Therese because they associate her with "over-sentimentalized piety." But for many she remains a beacon of hope.

In 1987, her Carmelite order built a national shrine to her south of Chicago. Ten years later, days after the 100th anniversary of her death, Pope John Paul II declared St. Therese a Doctor of the Universal Church, citing the effect of her spirituality on the lives of many.

"Shining brightly among the little ones to whom the secrets of the kingdom were revealed in a most special way is Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face," the pope wrote. "In the writings of Therese of Lisieux we do not find a scholarly presentation of the things of God, but we can discern an enlightened witness of faith."

SOURCES: National Shrine of St. Therese, Monastery of St. Therese, "Lives of Saints," Catholic Online, and Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face

"The Little Flower"



Born Therese Martin: January 2, 1873
 Joined Carmel at Lisieux: April 9, 1888
 Died: September 30, 1897
 Canonized by Pope Pius XI: May 17, 1925
 Proclaimed Doctor of the Universal Church: October 19, 1997
 Feast Day: October 1

"I want to spend My Heaven doing good on earth."



The Indianapolis Star, November 5, 1999

nese bombing of Pearl Harbor destroyed much of the U.S. naval fleet in December 1941, Father John C. Riedinger was named Little Flower's pastor.

He was the first pastor to request to be addressed informally, and so became "Father John."



Father Duffey stands before the new church and school

Mrs. Priller remembers him as a grandfatherly figure who joined the priesthood later in life than most men.

Father John quickly initiated a "burn-the-mortgage" campaign that succeeded in wiping out the parish's \$126,000 debt in time for its 20th anniversary in 1945. He also purchased a school bus that expanded the school's ability to enroll students by traveling 40 miles a day.

The parish contributed mightily to the war effort in the years after Father John's arrival. Women sewed bandages for the Red Cross and kept USO cookie jars filled as a thoughtful gesture. Men made beds and straightened up USO dormitories. A scrap drive collected 57,440 pounds of metal for recycling. The parish also raffled war bonds to help defeat the Nazis in Europe and the Japanese military in the Pacific.



1932-First Championship Team

More than 300 parish men and women went off to serve the nation. The Revs. Malo Topmiller, Paul Maloney and Morand Widolff, all former parishioners, served as military chaplains.

In July 1944, the U.S. Army named a Chicago hospital after Lt. Ruth M. Gardiner of Little Flower. She had graduated in 1928 with the school's second eighth-grade class. At 29, Gardiner was the first Army flight nurse to die in the war. She was killed 10 miles northwest of Naknek, Alaska, while trying to evacuate wounded soldiers.

A complete list of those who served in World War II is kept in the Little Flower parish archive.

At home, the parish dedicated a shrine to St. Therese on Sept. 22, 1944, along the south grounds of the campus. A copper box beneath this outdoor statute contains a strand of her hair.

In 1945, World War II ended.

That year, Father John set fire to the paid-off church mortgage in the auditorium during a celebration that included parish children performing a pantomime rendition of the parish history.

The event also featured a buffet dinner and dancing to the music of Carl Kiefer's Orchestra.

By then, the parish had grown to 2,700 members, with 512 children in school. Little Flower became known as "the little melting pot" because of an influx of Lithuanian, Polish and Latvian refugees to the area after World War II.

The formation of Holy Spirit and St. Andrew on the city's East Side in 1946 established new boundaries for Little Flower parish.

As the post-war housing boom eliminated vacant land that had existed in the vicinity of Little Flower, Father John fostered a construction drive of his own. Under him, the parish added classrooms to the school, built a convent and rectory and sacrificed financially to create a permanent church "worthy to be called the dwelling place of God," as Father John described.

During some of these years, from 1950 to 1953, the country was entangled in the Korean War, a conflict in Southeast Asia much smaller than the war that had ended several years earlier.

Overseas, Monsignor Cornelius Griffin, a parishioner who had celebrated his first Mass at Little Flower in 1951, distinguished himself by aiding wounded soldiers under enemy fire. He was awarded the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. Griffin retired as commander of the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps in 1965. He died in May 1993 in San Diego.

No historical documents exist in the parish archive documenting which parishioners served in Korea or in the Vietnam War fought from 1964 to 1975.

During the Korean War, parishioners raised money to help the archdiocese build Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School within Little Flower's boundaries. The school at 5000 Nowland Ave. accepted its first freshman class in September 1953.

Parishioners also were instrumental in financing construction of Community Hospital at 16th Street and Ritter Avenue. Through payroll deductions, door-to-door fundraising, gifts and other means, the hospital opened in 1956. It has grown into one of the largest nonprofit organizations in the Indianapolis area, with more than \$500 million in annual revenue.



Several years later, Father John persevered in his church drive, dedicating the new church in 1962 after gaining final approval to build it from Archbishop Paul C. Schulte.

Father John designed everything from the granite altars – replicated from Leonardo da Vinci's famous fresco, "The Last Supper" – to the beautiful stained glass windows.

One of the new church's most distinguishing features was the "Rose Window," donated by Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Cook, who organized the festive dedication of the new church.

Father John was Little Flower’s longest-serving pastor, leading the parish for 24 years. As Father John’s health failed, the Revs. Robert Borchertmeyer and Edwin Soergel, both then associate pastors, assumed larger roles in the oversight of church affairs.

When Father John retired in 1966, Father Raymond T. Bosler, pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Church on the city’s North Side, was named the fourth pastor of Little Flower. Father Bosler was a syndicated columnist and founding editor of *The Criterion*, the weekly newspaper of the Indianapolis archdiocese.

The next year, he was granted the title monsignor.

This was a time of great change for the church. The Second Vatican Council, which became a symbol of the church’s openness to changes in modern society, had just concluded. The council, which Pope John XXIII had convened in 1962, had met every fall for four years, and Bosler had been among the priests who went to Rome to participate.

“When Msgr. Bosler became our pastor, it opened a new world for all of us,” recalled parishioner Betty Murphy. “He had just returned from Vatican II. There were so many wonderful changes. Women could help at Mass and have a voice in the Church.”

The Vatican Council’s agenda had included discussions on modern media, relations between Christians and Jews, religious freedom, the role of church laity, liturgical worship, relations be-



Father Griffin’s first Mass, 1951



The Revs. Borchertmeyer, Riedinger and Soergel

tween Christians and non-Christians, and the role and education of priests and bishops. The council had issued 16 documents, one of which had promoted active participation in the Mass and had served as a first step in replacing Latin with native languages such as English. Other documents had sought common ground with Orthodox and Protestant Christians and had emphasized the servant nature of Catholic priests and bishops.

One of the most visible changes was the 180-degree switch in the position of the altar. Before Vatican II, priests faced away from the congregation. After Vatican II, priests turned toward worshipers and engaged them in the transsubstantiation of ordinary bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Msgr. Bosler formed the first Board of Education and Parish Council, whose presidents included Drs. John Nohl and Emmett Pierce, Robert Atkinson, Lloyd Neely and Joseph White. The monsignor also organized the first group of lay Eucharistic ministers – some of whom offered Communion at Community Hospital – and he initiated the Sunday evening Mass.



Men’s choir at church dedication

About this time, the baptismal room was converted to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. A

new main altar was established in the current position at the center of the church’s cruciform in 1974. At the same time, the choir descended from the loft in the back of church to seating behind the altar and facing the congregation.

Msgr. Bosler fostered Bible studies and ecumenical programs, joining the televised “Focus on Faith” as a weekly panelist. He also encouraged formation of the Adventurous Group to bring older parishioners together for fun and fellowship.

During the parish’s 50th anniversary in 1975, Archbishop George J. Biskup contacted Msgr. Bosler to wish the parish many more good years.



Msgr. Raymond T. Bosler

On June 24, 1975, Msgr. Bosler flew to Rome with 95 Little Flower parishioners and relatives to watch Pope Paul VI ordain Robert Gilday and James Farrell, childhood friends from the parish. The ceremony took place outside St. Peter’s Basilica.

The Revs. Gilday and Farrell were among 359 priests who received Holy Orders that day. Both men followed a long tradition of returning to Little Flower Church after ordination to celebrate their first Masses.

The same year, Indiana Secretary of State Larry A. Conrad organized a Mass at Little Flower to honor the memories of President John F. Kennedy and his slain brother, Robert F. Kennedy.

Two years later, feeling the effects of open-heart surgery, Msgr. Bosler stepped down. He died in April 1994.

In 1977, Father Frederick Schmitt, who had been an associate pastor at Little Flower in 1960, returned as pastor. He later said he found the parish pretty much as he had left it, but “with a few



Father Fred Schmitt

more wrinkles.” To balance out the parish’s emphasis on youth sports, he hired Little Flower’s first youth minister.

When St. Francis de Sales closed in 1983, Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara called on Little Flower and other nearby parishes to welcome its former parishioners.

Two years later, in 1985, Father Borchertmeyer returned to Little Flower from Bloomington, this time to serve as pastor.

Known as “Father Bob,” he filled the ecumenical void caused by Msgr. Bosler’s ill health by appearing for 14 years on “Focus on Faith.”

He was an incredibly popular priest whose personal warmth brought out the best in parishioners. He delivered thought-provoking sermons that related church teaching on topics such as social justice to contemporary happenings, including the push for welfare reform in the early 1990s.

The most memorable image of Father Bob may be that of him holding out newly baptized infants as he strolled the church aisles during Mass, introducing each child by name to parishioners. Amazingly, the infants were awake and alert, yet they never cried.

Father Bob oversaw a church renovation in 1989 and renovation of the Social Hall in 1991. He began raising money for a school renovation in 1995 but did not live to see its completion.

The church renovation involved removing and replacing thousands of bricks on the facade, replacing the roof, installing new sidewalks and halting a termite infestation in the ceiling.

Father Bob also had sought permission from Archbishop O’Meara to renovate Little Flower’s Blessed Sacrament Chapel in hope of offering round-the-clock adoration of the Holy Eucharist. The worship program would be modeled after St. Michael’s perpetual adoration chapel, Father Bob stated in a letter to the archbishop in October 1991.

“We wish to promote perpetual adoration as a call to people to return to the practice of private prayer, to strengthen our faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist reserved, and to encourage all again to return to prayer of reparation for sins,” he wrote.

Father Bob told the archbishop there were many signs the parish was ready. These included daily Mass attendance and the common practice of parishioners visiting the church at times when it was left unlocked. Father Bob said worshipers included prayer groups and those who explored the mysteries of the Rosary after Masses.

He noted that one parish couple had been driving to St. Michael’s each week. “They are eager to begin the practice here on the East Side, as are others who have heard that perpetual adoration is being considered,” Father Bob wrote.

Archbishop O’Meara granted his approval, and the chapel opened in November 1993. Adorers came from surrounding parishes, but most were from Little Flower.

Father Bob’s death in December 1995 profoundly affected the parish. He was killed in a traffic accident while returning from an Advent penance service at St. Thomas in Fortville. His SUV was broadsided by another car as it passed through an intersection where a stop sign had been removed.

Father Bob was killed instantly. He was 63.

His body lay in state in the church before his funeral Mass, with parishioners standing watch around the clock for five days. For many, Father Bob personified the parish. Tears flowed freely during his funeral Mass, which drew dozens of priests from far corners of the archdiocese and more than 1,000 mourners. As six inches of snow fell on the city, he was buried in the Priests’ Circle at Calvary Cemetery.

But Father Bob lived on in the minds of his flock.

“I carry in my pocket every day a small rock that was given to me by Father Bob,” Parishioner Gary Schluttenhofer would recall years later. “He gave one to everyone and told us that God is always our rock, and he will always be there when we need him.

“Many times I reach in my pocket for keys or money or something else and I feel this rock, and it reminds me that God is with me every minute of every day, and it gives me strength.”

Benedictine monk Kilian Kerwin took over as interim pastor. Upon being warmly welcomed, he abandoned plans to become pastor of a church in Bloomington with no school and no debt.

Several parishioners wrote Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein to urge that Father Kilian be reassigned to Little Flower. By August 1996, Father Kilian formally was installed as the parish’s seventh pastor.

It was a difficult time, however.

A month after Father Bob’s death, which received widespread news coverage, Father Kilian told *The Criterion*: “Many of us are still dealing with the emotions of letting go and accepting his death.”

Father Kilian had to begin delivering painful truths about financial problems that few in the parish had known existed. To bring expenditures in line with Sunday collections, he eliminated parish staff positions, taking on greater responsibility himself. This often included answering the phones.

After a while, Father Kilian was the only priest in a parish that had grown accustomed to having two or three. To compensate, he consolidated weekend and Holy Day Mass schedules.

“Someone once called and asked, ‘Father, what time is midnight Mass?’” he said one Sunday with characteristic wit. “That suggested to me that midnight Mass didn’t have to be at midnight.”

From then on, Christmas Eve Mass was celebrated at 10 p.m.

In 1997, Little Flower was still trying to regroup and did not stage its annual festival. In part, this was because the school renovation was underway, limiting use of the parking lot. But an attempt to hold it during the fall failed when no one came forward to organize it.

One day that fall, Archabbot Lambert Reilly from St. Meinrad appeared at weekend Masses to say Father Kilian would not

return for personal reasons.

Through all of the ups and downs after Father Bob's death, Little Flower's pastoral associate at the time, David J. Burkhard, and music director Teresa Eckrich provided the parish with stability and leadership. Burkhard, who had joined the pastoral staff in 1986 as religious education director, kept parishioners focused on the religious mission of the parish. Eckrich continued to enhance the liturgical celebrations and contribute as the primary pastoral support person for the Worship Committee. She had been music director since 1979.

Meanwhile, the archdiocese began the search for a new pastor.

Within 24 hours of remarking to another priest that he would be interested in serving Little Flower, Father Vincent P. Lampert became the parish's eighth pastor in January 1998. His priest friend had put in a call to the archdiocese to tell their superiors of Father Vince's interest.

"There was a spirit of hope missing when I arrived," Father Vince recalled. "People weren't really sure what our future direction was."

Some parishioners told him they were glad he had come to Little Flower, but they also wondered aloud why anyone would come. "Some in the parish were too hard on themselves," Father Vince recalled.

Father Vince knew the parish was going through hard times. But the opportunity to work in a parish similar to Holy Trinity in the West Side neighborhood of Haughville, where he had grown up, appealed to him. As Father Vince saw it, Little Flower had the same sense of community and strong ownership of the parish he had experienced during his boyhood. Both parishes also seemed to revolve around neighborhood churches and elementary schools, something else Father Vince had found appealing.

He had been pastor of Mary, Queen of Peace, in Danville, Ind., which did not have a school. Younger families had traveled many miles to attend Masses there.

Little Flower was two-and-a-half times larger than his former parish, with a more diverse population, but Father Vince, then 36, seemed to have the energy to keep up. Who could have doubted this after watching him maneuver about the church during homilies, handing out such "props" as rotten fruit or candy to bring clarity to the meaning of Gospel readings?

He was a hands-on pastor, who often could be found carrying out trash, shoveling snow and painting school rooms and student desks on stifling summer afternoons. In a letter to Fa-



Perpetual Adoration Chapel



Father Robert Borchertmeyer

ther Vince in 1998, Carly Buchwald, then an eighth-grader, thanked him for choosing Little Flower.

"You give wonderful sermons and I think it's neat how you walk around during them," she wrote. "The kids like it, and it gets them involved. I also think it's really neat how you come to lunch with us. It shows us that you're interested in what we are doing."

The archdiocesan capital campaign, launched in 1998 as Father Vince arrived, offered all Little Flower parishioners an opportunity to evaluate what the church meant to them. Letters arrived in Father Vince's mailbox by the dozen, and many struck optimistic chords. Mrs. Hofmann was among those who wholeheartedly endorsed the Legacy of Hope capital campaign.

"Our little saint has seen our parish go through some hardships," she wrote Father Vince in November 1998, "but she always comes through."

There were other changes, too. A new leadership team was installed in the school. Theresa Slipher was the principal and Kevin Gawrys was the assistant principal.

In late September, the 75th anniversary celebration began with the Novena to St. Therese, which concluded October 1, her feast day. It drew about 150 people each night. The weekend of her feast, hundreds of adults and children attended a pitch-in dinner and Music Fest in the Social Hall.

Father Vince believed there was still a strong sense of pride among parishioners in having the first church in the world named after Therese of Lisieux. "There's a very strong devotion to her," he said.

More than 90 parishioners signed up for a bus trip to Terre Haute to visit a collection of St. Therese's relics on Nov. 4, 1999, as they passed through Indiana. The parish also received a blessing on its 75th Anniversary from Pope John Paul II, which Father Vince brought back from a pilgrimage to Italy in May 1998. The document was kept on display in the church.

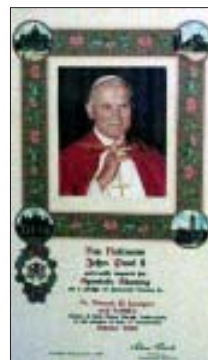
The number of parishioners who pursued religious vocations also was a sign of something special, Father Vince said.

The list of priests from Little Flower includes Father Dave Sullivan, who was inspired to become a Maryknoll missionary by several associate pastors at Little Flower. He served in the Philippines for more than 30 years, returning to Little Flower during his infrequent vacations or recuperations. There is also Father Michael Barton, who ministers in the Sudan, where he founded a school in 1993 to educate children uprooted by civil war.

More recently, the parish witnessed the ordinations of Fathers Darvin Winters Jr. and Joseph Moriarty.

In all, more than two dozen priests have come from the parish. Little Flower also has produced more than two dozen sisters and brothers.

Over the years, lay members of the parish have contributed much as well. They include Tommy Jordan, the first CYO executive director; Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter William Anderson; City-County Councilwoman Mary Moriarty Adams; former Indianapolis Police Chief Robert Reilly; Eli Lilly research chemist Hugh Sullivan; and



Papal blessing



Father Joseph Moriarty

First Mass
of
Thanksgiving
Father Joseph Moriarty
June 6, 1993



Priests from Little Flower

- Michael Barton
- Bede Cisco
- James Farrell
- Michael Farrell
- John Finis
- Charles Fisher
- William Fisher
- Robert Gilday
- Cornelius Griffin
- Patrick Hoffman
- Robert Howard
- Thomas Jordan
- Edward Kirch
- Gerald Kirkhoff
- Paul Maloney
- Philip Maxwell
- Joseph Moriarty
- Kevin Morris
- Patrick Murphy
- Donald Schmidlin
- Paul Shikany
- David Sullivan
- Malo Topmiller
- Francis Tuohy
- William Turner
- Andrew Weidekamp
- Morand Widolff
- Darvin Winters Jr.

Sisters from Little Flower

- Brigid Barton
- Teresa Marie Boersig
- Sue Bradshaw
- Dolorita Carper
- Eulalia Carper
- Jean Marie Cleveland
- Jeanne Dailey
- Joanne Dewald
- Francine Ewing
- M. Johnette Finis
- M. Kathleen Finis
- Melanie Fleming
- Dorothy Green
- Barbara Hileman
- Dorothy Howard
- David Lund
- Francis Xavier Mazur
- Mary O'Brien
- Dorothy Raney
- Catherine Raters
- Mary Schmidlin
- Sharon Lou Sheridan
- Roseann Taylor
- Monica Withem

Brothers from Little Flower

- John Buchman
- John Lavelle

Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving

• Reverend Darvin Edwin Winters, Jr. •



Saint Therese of the Little Flower
Roman Catholic Church
— Indianapolis, Indiana • June 6, 1999 —

“I can see myself in that role.”

— *Father Darvin Winters*

In the Indianapolis archdiocese, Little Flower Church has been a rich source of men and women taking on religious vocations.

More than two dozen men from the parish have joined the priesthood.

The number of Little Flower women who have made their final vows is nearly as lengthy. Most became sisters of St. Francis, sisters of Providence or Benedictine nuns. But at least two, Teresa Marie Boersig and Joanne Dewald, followed in the footsteps of St. Therese and joined the Carmelites.

Little Flower’s priestly tradition began in 1934 with the Revs. Morand Widolff and Robert Howard, parishioners who had gone off to the seminary and came back to St. Therese to say their first Masses.

Most recently, the tradition continued with the ordination of the Rev. Darvin E. Winters Jr. on June 5, 1999. Father Darvin received Holy Orders in a liturgy Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein presided over at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral.

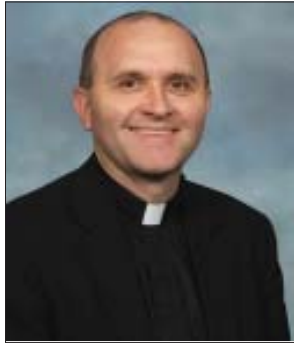
The following day, the 26-year-old priest returned to St. Therese to celebrate his first Mass.

“I was a server at Little Flower as a kid,” Father Darvin told *The Criterion* “I remember looking at priests and thinking, I can see myself in that role.”

“Father Fred Schmitt, the pastor, always seemed happy with what he was doing. All the priests seemed happy. That planted the seed.”

John Corriden, a former Chicago Cubs and Brooklyn Dodgers coach.

To emphasize the parish's bright future, Father Vince worked hard to be visible at parish events. He oversaw the sprucing up of the Parish Center and Rectory, preservation of the church's stained glass, and a parking lot resurfacing. Father Vince also helped restore the festival and lead the Debt Free drive.



Father Vince Lampert

"Those are just small ways of letting people know we're still here, and we're going to be here for years to come," Father Vince said at the time. "Now that the physical plant's been addressed, I would like to focus on the 'spiritual plant.'"

In 2003, however, Archbishop Buechlein called upon Father Vince to administer a fast-growing parish in Johnson County, SS. Francis and Clare. At that time, Father Robert Gilday returned to the parish of his boyhood, this time as Father Bob and pastor. He found longtime parishioner Tom Costello leading the parish staff and Mr. Gawrys administering the school as principal.

As a result of changing demographics and a rapid transition toward the neighborhood as a good place for young families to buy starter homes, Father Bob took over a church and school much smaller than he had grown up in, down from their peaks of more than 5,000 parishioners and 967 students.

"One thing that makes Little Flower stand out from other parishes is that we remain a neighborhood parish," Father Bob said. "Some people still walk to church. Children play on the playground after school and during the summer."

Meanwhile, Little Flower has become more of an intentional parish, a place of worship that people who live farther away seek out because they enjoy the people, the music and the liturgies.

Although the music liturgies are no longer broadcast live, Little Flower's musical tradition thrives. The adult, youth and children's choirs recorded musical CDs in 2006 and 2008. Proceeds from the sale of "Through the Rose Window" and "Christmas Through the Rose Window" benefited the Tuition Assistance Fund, which began to be strained as families suffered in a poor economy. A 12-song, Christmas release was scheduled for late 2010.



Miss Teresa Eckrich

In addition, Little Flower has continued to promote widespread participation in school musicals, such as the 2010 production of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, and the school's multi-media arts program. Both programs, led respectively by Miss Teresa Eckrich and Mrs. Kathy Laham, are considered strong features of the school that enjoy support from the entire parish.

Overall, Little Flower parishioners' commitment and respect for tradition has remained strong. "Parishioners are very loyal



and very generous to Little Flower, and generations of families continue to live here and belong here," Father Bob said.



Beauty and the Beast

Faculty, students and parents also agree that

Little Flower has special qualities, even as the movement of young Catholic families from the neighborhood and the cost of Catholic education have reduced school enrollment to fewer than 200 students. Nonetheless, Little Flower's school remains financially sound. And in 2009, the state of Indiana honored the school for making "Exemplary Progress," the highest possible level of achievement under Public Law 221, which established Indiana's comprehensive accountability system for K-12 education. The Indiana Department of Education places schools into one of five categories based upon student pass rates on ISTEP+ assessments for pupils in grades 3 through 8 taking English, mathematics, science and social studies.

The same year Little Flower recorded this important achievement, the archdiocese also chose the school to participate in a four-year program facilitated by Connecticut-based Catholic School Management Inc., a consulting firm which specializes in helping schools with communications, fundraising and operations.

Under Mr. Gawrys' leadership, each school year has had a theme. During 2003-04, his first year as principal, he challenged students to read 10,000 books, promising if the goal were met, he would camp out on the roof of the school and read C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a seven-volume series of children's fantasy books.

Children read everything from *Good Night Moon* to chapter books such as E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* and J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels. Before he knew it, Mr. Gawrys was atop the roof during one of the coldest, snowiest days of the school year, waving to parents between interviews with local media as they picked up their children in the parking lot below.

"The students did something that has possibly never been done in the history of schooling," he quipped after delivering on his promise: "They prayed school would *not* be canceled because of snow."

This tradition of emphasizing an annual theme continues, with the school in 2010 adopting the theme "From Just Us to

Father of the modern parish

Pastor leads Little Flower out of Depression debt and into new church



Father John Riedinger

On May 15, 1962, spectators lined the curbs along 13th Street and Bosart Avenue as a boom crane hoisted a 72-foot aluminum steeple and spire atop newly built Little Flower Church.

The Scecina Memorial High School band played. Newspaper and TV reporters were there, too, as a 21-gun salute sounded amid a carnival atmosphere.

It was perhaps the greatest moment in parish history – and the culmination of the Rev. John C. Riedinger's 24-year tenure as pastor of the East Side parish.

When he had arrived in March 1942, the parish was struggling to pay off a \$126,000 debt that had mounted after Sunday collections plummeted during the Great Depression.

The Roaring '20s economy that surrounded the parish's formation had long since stumbled.



The laying of the cornerstone

But Father John was determined to see the parish grow. Within four years, the debt had been eliminated. A solemn High Mass was sung, followed by a mortgage burning ceremony in January 1946.

But Father John, who had begun his working career in the construction trade, was just warming up.

Thirteen sisters of St. Francis who taught at the school lived in noisy quarters upstairs from the church. And the school was bursting with children.

In response to this space crunch, Father John began raising money to build a convent and replace the Wallace

Street rectory. The school's third-graders chipped in \$10 to get things going.

The convent, which featured 23 rooms and a chapel, was finished in 1947 at a cost of \$138,000. It later became the Parish Center. Three years later, during the parish's silver anniversary in 1950, the rectory was completed for \$78,000.

Once again, the debt was quickly paid down.

"If you happened to pass Little Flower during the construction of the different buildings," *The Indianapolis Star* noted, "you were likely to see Father John working with the rest of the crew."

No doubt such success fueled Father John's most ambitious and lasting effort: construction of a separate church on the Little Flower campus.

In 1955, Father John displayed a model of the proposed church he had designed and asked the 1,300 parishioners to donate at least \$3 a month for the project. The goal was to raise \$400,000 to build the Romanesque church, which would seat 1,000.

Women of the parish served Sunday smorgasbords to raise \$10,000 for the altar. They also held "Father John's Card Party" each year. School children sold roses, a symbol of St. Therese of the Child Jesus.



Church's structure takes shape

Within two years, illness had temporarily sidelined Father John. Father Bernard Gerdon temporarily took over. About this time, the school was expanded to 17 classrooms.

By 1961, after scrutinizing the parish's finances, Archbishop Paul C. Schulte reluctantly gave permission to break ground for the new church. It would seat 1,158 and cost about \$500,000.

Blueprints for the 167-foot by 112-foot cruciform church had been drawn from Father John's model.

In typical fashion, Father John rode the tractor that turned the first load of dirt. The Revs. Edwin Soergel and Robert Borchertmeyer, a priest who later would become Little Flower's pastor, were nearby. After Father John suffered a stroke in the fall of 1962 that seriously affected his vision and mobility, the pair took on more of the parish work.

Archbishop Schulte dedicated the new church July 8, 1962. In May 1966, the man *The Indianapolis Star* called "a living legend" retired because of poor health. Father John was named pastor emeritus. "I did the best I could and left the rest to God," he once recalled. Father John died July 13, 1971, leaving a lasting legacy on the city's East Side. He was 89.

Little Flower's Pastors

The Rev. Charles Duffey, 1925-1939
Founding pastor

The Rev. Jerome Pfau, 1939-1942

The Rev. John G. Riedinger, 1942-1966

Msgr. Raymond T. Bosler, 1966-1977

The Rev. Fred Schmitt, 1977-1985

The Rev. Robert Borchertmeyer, 1985-1995

The Rev. Kilian Kerwin, 1996-1997

The Rev. Vincent P. Lampert, 1998-2003

The Rev. Robert J. Gilday, 2003-Present



A boom crane positions the steeple



The new church with altar facing away from congregation and communion rail

Justice,” to help students explore and apply lessons from Catholic social teaching. Longtime fifth-grade teacher Helen Dalton said she and her middle-primary-grade peers want to help students develop an awareness of the Church’s call to social justice and to show greater compassion.



Mr. Gawrys on school roof

“I plan to use stories of children from around the world, in a variety of economic, cultural and political conditions, as well as literature and Scripture, including the Beatitudes,”

Ms. Dalton said. “These are meant to help them identify with others whose basic needs are the same but whose lives are very different. Hopefully, they will make this message of compassion and justice their own and put it into action.”

Teachers planned to host guest speakers on social justice topics such as hunger, child labor and the need for basic shelter. These speakers might come from Habitat for Humanity, a local food bank, Catholic Social Services and the Holy Family shelter to make students aware of social needs in their community.

By the time Little Flower students graduate, they have received a well-rounded education. They plan school Mass liturgies, participate in school musicals, take advantage of creative music and art programs, acquire computer skills, contribute to the betterment of their community through many hours of service, participate in science fairs, and travel to Washington, D.C., to study and explore the nation’s heritage, museums and seat of government. Catholic Youth Organization sports, sponsored by the Little Flower Athletic Association, also remain an integral part of the school’s mission, although in recent years some programs such as football have been combined with those of other East Side schools.

“Little Flower is a great place. It not only helped me prepare for high school, college and the real world,” said Lucas Robinson, a 1999 graduate who went on to become Scecina’s valedictorian in 2003, “it prepared me for every obstacle I might face.”

Parish involvement with school-age youth does not end with 8th grade graduation. Adults and previously confirmed college and high school students prepare high school students to receive the sacrament of Confirmation. In May 2009, for example, Archbishop Buechlein confirmed 19 parish students at Lucas Oil Stadium along with hundreds of others during a Jubilee Mass to celebrate the archdiocese’s 175th anniversary.

The parish serves other vital missions as well. Before Maryknoll’s Father Dave returned in September 2005 to the Philippines, he reflected on “the only parish I have ever known,” marveling at the steady flow of worshipers he would greet on their way to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, including former East Side residents who were returning to the parish.

“I think that has a great deal to do with our spirit here,” he said. “I really do. Sometimes we lose sight of what a great parish we have.”

(On July 25, 2010, the parish honored Father Dave at a reception after he had celebrated a Mass at Little Flower commemorating the 50th anniversary of his ordination. Today, he provides

pastoral care to Maryknoll priests and brothers in Maryknoll’s medical care facility.)

During his 2005 homily, Father Dave noted other outward signs of parish vitality: the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,



Confirmation at Lucas Oil Stadium

the Pastoral Council, the School Commission, the Parish Festival, the Ladies’ Club, the children’s liturgies, and the funeral luncheons.

Father Dave told parishioners that he especially enjoyed celebrating Mass in local nursing homes as part of the health ministry created in 2001 by Father Vince as a way of “giving back” to older parishioners. The program, now run by Peggy Clegg, who was hired as the new pastoral associate for health and senior ministries in November 2008, is unusual nationally. Most such programs are run by part-timers, volunteers or hospital personnel. The ministry has expanded to serve all ages through volunteers called Christopher Ministers, who bring the Eucharist to shut-ins and nursing home residents.

In addition, the Gabriel Project helps pregnant women having crises and distributes donations of baby supplies and clothing.

To better address parish needs, the Parish Pastoral Council in 2007 changed its governance structure to supplement the Finance Council with seven commissions: Athletics; Evangelization and Social Justice Ministry; Faith Formation and Spiritual Development; Liturgy; Parish Life; School; and Stewardship.

In late 2008, the Pastoral Council launched an organizational development process known as Appreciative Inquiry to complete a new strategic plan that would build upon the parish’s strengths. More than a dozen parishioners spent months interviewing 80 fellow parishioners to find out what makes the parish special. The planning process ended in late 2009. By the end of 2010, the Pastoral Council intends to publish a collection of stories that describe the hopes and dreams of parishioners who were interviewed. The consensus reached during Appreciative Inquiry was that Little Flower conveys a strong sense of community, one that younger parishioners find welcoming and older parishioners believe is spiritual.

“Little Flower as a parish has a lot of strengths that people often overlook,” said Bill Belles, immediate past chairman of the

(continued on page 11)

Parish history

1921: Property at 14th Street and Bosart Avenue conveyed to Indianapolis diocese.

1925: Carmelite nun Therese of Lisieux, France, canonized. First church named for her meets in former grocery storeroom at 10th Street and Bancroft Avenue. Parishioners Mary Anna Gearin and Mary Edna Lamb are first children baptized. Men's Club and Ladies' Altar Society form.

1926: Founding pastor Charles T. Duffey and Bishop Joseph Chartrand lay cornerstone for new church and school. Little Flower School opens with six sisters of St. Francis and 85 youngsters.

1927: First novena held to honor St. Therese of the Child Jesus draws an average of 700 each night from across the city, including about 1,500 on the final evening. Little Flower school graduates nine in first class. Mary Dangler and Andrew Porten are first couple married. First funeral held for Margaret Riordan. William Eddy is first to convert to Catholicism. Thirty-three children receive first Holy Communion. Morand Widolff is first parish boy to study for priesthood.

1929: Sunday contributions plunge after stock market crash. Parish debt skyrockets.

1930: Bishop Chartrand confirms 173 children and 37 adults during first such ceremony at Little Flower.

1934: The Revs. Morand Widolff and Robert Howard become first parishioners to return and say first Masses in Little Flower Church.

1939: Founding pastor Duffey dies at 54. Fr. Jerome Phau named as Little Flower's second pastor.

1942: Father John Riedinger becomes pastor; parish has \$126,000 debt.

1944: Shrine to St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face erected on church's south grounds. Interior of church redecorated.

Parish Pioneers

Herbert Baker
 William A. and Flora M. Bauman
 Dr. John Cain
 Mr. and Mrs. William Campbell
 Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Collier
 Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Concannon
 Raffo Conrad
 Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Costello
 Mr. and Mrs. David Crawford
 Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Dugan
 Mr. and Mrs. David Crawford
 Mr. and Mrs. C.F. Dangler
 John Farrell
 Donald Flanagan
 Elmer Fox
 Betty Gavaghan
 Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Gearin
 Mr. and Mrs. John Goory
 John Gorman
 Anthony Hessman
 Herman Huser
 Joseph Huser
 Mr. and Mrs. Frank Kirkhoff
 Dr. Walter Kocher
 Mr. and Mrs. Harry Lamb
 Mr. and Mrs. John Lamoreux
 Mr. and Mrs. Francis Lenahan
 Mr. and Mrs. James Lynch
 Cecil McConahay
 Charles McGill
 Mr. McGlyn
 F.A. Muelhbacher
 Thomas O'Connor
 Mr. and Mrs. Leo Ostheimer
 Mr. and Mrs. Harry Phillips
 Oliver R. Rasico
 Joseph Rice
 William Roth
 Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Sexton
 Joseph Thamann
 Charles and Mary Thamann
 John Ward

Surviving Parish Pioneers

Raymond H. Bauman
 Robert Dangler
 Alvina Wurz

1945: First church mortgage burned. Parish buys motion picture projector for entertainment.

1947: Convent completed.

1950: Rectory finished. Parish celebrates 25th Anniversary.

1957: Growing school enrollment prompts additions to school.

1961: Cornerstone laid for \$500,000 church at 13th Street and Bosart Avenue.

1962: New church dedicated. Former church becomes school gymnasium.

1966: Parish begins offering Sunday evening Mass.

1974: Altar moved to central location in church; choir descends from loft to sing in former sanctuary. William O'Neill becomes school's first lay principal.

1975: Parish celebrates Golden Anniversary. Pope Paul VI ordains parishioners James Farrell and Robert Gilday in historic Mass at St. Peter's Basilica.

1989: Church renovated.

1991: Social hall fixed up.

1993: Perpetual adoration chapel opens.

1995: Parish begins school renovation. Pastor Robert Borchertmeyer dies in traffic accident.

1996: Fr. Kilian Kerwin appointed pastor.

1998: The Rev. Vincent P. Lampert becomes pastor.

2000: Parish celebrates 75th Anniversary.

2003: The Rev. Robert Gilday is appointed pastor.

2006: Sanctuary renovation, new choir seating, new altar and new alter furnishings.

2007: Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein celebrates Mass to dedicate the altar.

2008: Exterior bricks on church restored with \$425,000 from Legacy of Hope.

2009: Bosart Street school entrance renovated to match original look. New windows installed for area behind the choir.

Pastoral Council. “At the time, we were kind of groping for a way of understanding what the needs of the parish were and pulling together a game plan. If people are going to leave the area, we can’t stop that, but we’d like for them to say, ‘I’d still like to go to Little Flower and make that my parish home.’”

The parish also has witnessed a whirl of restoration projects since 2005. With a \$30,000 grant from the nonprofit Indianapolis Center for Congregations, Little Flower renovated its sanctuary area during 2005-06. The size of the sanctuary was reduced, and it was rebuilt, elevated and equipped with a ramp allowing older parishioners to continue to serve in liturgical ministries. After the sanctuary renovation, which included new choir seating, contributions from private donors made possible the purchase of new custom altar furnishings from Weberding’s Carving Shop in Batesville, Ind., that replicated the appearance of Little Flower’s original high altar.

On Oct. 20, 2007, Archbishop Buechlein celebrated Mass at Little Flower to dedicate the intricately carved altar. In February 2009, the parish installed replicas of the stained glass windows that originally had been behind the original high altar.



Archbishop Buechlein blesses new altar

The windows, created by Der Glass Werks in Indianapolis using old photographs as a guide, depict the crucifixion of Jesus at Calvary.

In addition, by the spring of 2008, after a successful archdiocesan Legacy for Our Mission capital campaign, which had been launched in the fall of 2005, work began on a \$425,000 project to replace the church’s exterior brick masonry. The project’s completion was celebrated Oct. 4, 2008, as part of the annual appreciation dinner and celebration of the Feast of St. Therese.



Crumbling brick exterior

During the summer of 2009, the parish restored the Bosart Avenue school entrance and configured a small courtyard at the entrance using alumni contributions and proceeds from the sale of personalized brick pavers. This main entrance had been more heavily used when most students walked to school, and it had fallen into disrepair.

Parishioners have continued to support one another and to



Replicas of original stained glass

provide for the parish amid the most severe recession since the Great Depression. Home values have fallen. Household finances have been strained. Job losses have been widespread. The recession began in December 2007 and quickly spread throughout the developed world. Unemployment in Indiana reached 10.6 percent in June 2010, a level unseen since January 1983. The recession ended by late 2009, but national economists said recovery might not appear until 2011 or 2012.

Nonetheless, even amid the construction, repairs and decline in school enrollment, rigorous parish budgeting has kept the parish out of debt and the annual operating budget in the black. As the parish continues to evolve, Father Bob said, many challenges lie ahead: re-evangelizing Catholics, spreading Catholicism to the neighborhood and keeping the parish and school viable with fewer – and less affluent – parishioners.

“There are fewer Catholics and fewer children within our boundaries,” Father Bob said. “The religious practices of Catholics are also changing. A lower percentage of Catholics attend Mass weekly. The parish is less a center of religious and social life for Catholics.”

In May 2010, Little Flower, Our Lady of Lourdes and Holy Spirit elementary schools joined Sccecina Memorial High School to form the East Side Catholic School Partnership. The cooperative’s goal is to strengthen the schools individually and collectively by celebrating traditions while preparing for a difficult future.

“Catholic schools in the United States have a nearly 200-year history of developing service- and achievement-oriented youth,” said Msgr. Paul Koetter, Holy Spirit’s pastor. “The purpose of the partnership is to build upon this legacy for the future.”

Facing the possibility of a 22 percent decline in the number of priests by 2012, the archdiocese had unveiled plans in 2005 to eventually close and consolidate parishes. This plan proposed eventually having a single priest serve Little Flower and Our Lady of Lourdes.

“This certainly suggests that parishioners will play an even larger role in the leadership of Little Flower,” Father Bob said. “Parishioners will be challenged to have a greater sense of ownership of the parish and the life of the parish.”