

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

Historical Narrative researched and written by Lawrence Seidemann Jr., Mary Seidemann and Larry Seidemann III for Texas Historical Commission THC Subject Marker application. Denton County. 1994

IMMACULATE
CONCEPTION
CATHOLIC CHURCH

COPY

HISTORY

In 1890, Denton was a small community of only a few stores. The Catholic population was small. On July 15 1890, Pope Leo XIII in his brief "*Romani Pontificis*" wrote: We hereby divide and dismember the Diocese of Galveston to form a new Diocese that shall bear the name of Dallas. This diocese included the small community of Denton. The Reverend Thomas Brennan was consecrated Bishop of Dallas. A visiting priest Father P. M. Donohoe¹ was assigned to visit the outlying Catholic communities that included Denton. With the large territory that he had to cover, and on horseback, it was most probable that he only visited Denton once or twice.

The first church services were held in a two-story barn-like structure in 1890-1892. The Mass was celebrated in the second story of the structure and the local farmers were permitted to store their equipment on the first floor. Father F. X. Meilinger was the mission priest, and he also had mission parishes in Sanger, Celina, Pilot Point and Whitesboro.

During the 1890-1894 time period, several things began to happen in Denton. The Catholic community was growing; in July 1892, a foundation was laid for the building of a church house just south of the Alliance Mill near the "Y"². This is now Dallas Drive and Eagle intersection. After reconsideration, it was decided to move it to what is now Second and Bolivar streets. This delayed the construction about a year. In 1893-1894, a new parish was built. The foundation was built with hand hewn logs. Since Father Meilinger was handy with tools it is believed that he did part of the carpenter work. There was a scarcity of paper in those days, consequently, most of the church records were written on the walls or slates and have been lost or destroyed. This information was handed down from word of mouth from one generation to another. In 1895, Father John Lenert was sent from Chicago to help with the mission churches in Denton County.

This church was in use until 1956 when it was torn down and the new air-conditioned Immaculate Conception Church was built on the corner of Second and Elm for a cost of \$89,000. This was during the tenure of Father Henry McGill. Father McGill also purchased property on Bolivar Street that served for a time as the rectory and was later used as a meeting hall until the parish center was built. The parish center was started in 1960 and completed in 1966 under the leadership of Father Joseph Thomas³.

Another important milestone in Denton was the planning and building of the present courthouse in 1894-1897. The courthouse now houses the Commissioners Court, the Historical Commission and the Denton County Historical Museum. (Source Denton County Historical Commission). Water for household use was a problem during 1890, however, by 1894 most houses had running water. Before people had running water they had shallow wells or cisterns. Mosquitoes and wiggly worms grew by the hundreds in the water. The water was unsafe; therefore, malaria, chills and fever ran rampant.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF TEXAS

Galveston was the main seat of the Catholic Church in Texas. The first bishops who governed the territories were French Vincentians. Bishop Jean Marie Odin, C.M. came from Lyon, France. He was the first bishop of the diocese of Galveston (1837-1861). This included all the land in Texas. Before this, the Texas Diocese was part of New Mexico and Colorado and was under the bishop of Monterey, Mexico. Bishop Claude Marie Dubuis was the second bishop (1862-1881). The territory of this jurisdiction stretched as far as Dallas; he sent missionary priest to East Texas to minister to the scattered Catholics. As early as 1850 Father Joseph Martiniere visited Collin county and it is possible that he visited Denton, however, no record indicates that he came as far west as Denton county.⁴

The oldest parish in the Diocese of Dallas was St. Paul Parish in Collin county. This parish was later moved to Wylie and renamed St. Anthony. It was built in 1856. In 1871, Father Theo A. Buffard built St. Joseph's Church in Clarksville, Texas. It was attended by Catholics as far away as Little Rock, Arkansas. Other churches built during Bishop Dubuis' reign was St. Patrick parish in Denison (1873), Immaculate Conception Church in Jefferson, Texas (1867) and Sacred Heart in Dallas (1873), which was located at Bryan and Ervay streets.

Bishop Nicholas Callagher (1882-1918)

The third Bishop of Galveston recommended that a new diocese be formed with Dallas as the center. Bishop Callagher submitted his proposal to the Bishops of the Province of New Orleans in 1889. It was sent to Pope Leo III and on July 15, 1890, the Diocese of Dallas was formed which included Denton county.

Denton had a population of 2,558 in 1890. The public school was started in 1884, the students used slates; however, the State did not furnish text books. During the 1890, the Normal College, later to be called North Texas State University [NTSU], was started. College of Industrial Arts [CIA], now known as Texas State Women University [TSWU] was established in 1901. Bishop Thomas Brennan was appointed the first Bishop of the Dallas Diocese in 1890⁵.

Bishop Thomas Brennan, First Bishop of the Dallas Diocese -- 1890

Thomas Francis Brennan was born October 10, 1855, at Bally Cullen, Tipperary County, Ireland. His parents were James Brennan and Margaret Dunne Brennan. His father died when he was eight years old, and he and his mother (along with his four brothers) emigrated to the United States in 1868 and settled in Erie, Pennsylvania.

In 1873, he entered St. Bonaventure College at Alleghany, New York, to study for the priesthood. He was ordained for the Diocese of Erie on July 4, 1880. He spoke several languages including French, German, Italian, and Latin, as well as English. When he was 35 years old he was appointed Bishop-elect of the newly formed Diocese of Dallas. There were 30 priests by the end of 'his term of office' in August 1891. He established 25 churches with resident pastors, 25 without, and 74 missions. He died March 21, 1916, in Rome.

Edward Joseph Dunne, 2nd Bishop of the Dallas Diocese -- 1893

Edward Joseph Dunne was born April 23, 1848, in Tipperary County, Ireland. His parents were Richard Dunne and Judith Cooke Dunne. He moved to the United States in 1849 and lived in Chicago, until he became the second Bishop of Dallas, on October 22, 1893. He died August 6, 1910.

Bishop Dunne started building the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Dallas in April 1894. He dedicated it in October 1902. Bishop Dunne was also instrumental in starting St. Paul's Hospital in Dallas in 1896 as well as St. Anthony's Hospital in Amarillo in 1900. St. Paul's Hospital was staffed by the *Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul*. They came from Emmetsburg, Maryland. St. Anthony's was run by the *Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word*. They came from San Antonio. The cost a day per bed was \$1.00.

Bishop Dunne developed several educational institutions in the Diocese. Mainly Holy Trinity College (1907), later, it was moved and renamed the University of Dallas.

There were only 22 priests in the Diocese in 1893 and 28 churches. When he died in 1907 there were 90 churches. In the short time that he was Bishop of the Diocese, the Catholic population grew from 23,000 to 62,000 population.

Joseph Patrick Lynch, 3rd Bishop of the Dallas Diocese -- 1911

Joseph Patrick Lynch was born at St. Joseph, Michigan, on November 16, 1872. He was consecrated in Sacred Heart Cathedral, Dallas. He was the first American-born Bishop. In his First Synod of the Diocese, he divided the Diocese into five deaneries: East Texas, Dallas, Fort Worth (which included Denton), Amarillo, and El Paso. Under "On Catholic Faith"⁶ priests were instructed to preach no less than five and no more than fifteen minutes. Salaries were set to be no less than \$600 and not more than \$900 per year.

Assistant Pastors received about \$250 plus room and board. In 1934, the Second Synod was held with 62 diocesan priests attending one of which was Raymond Vernimont of Denton. Pastors' salaries were set at \$1000 per year. Assistant Pastors received \$360 a year. Sisters teaching in Parochial schools were to be given room and board and a salary of \$25 a month.

Bishop Lynch founded Laneri College and Our Lady of Victory college in Fort Worth. He built 112 new churches and 115 structures, such as schools, hospitals, and rectories. He died August 19, 1954.

Bishop Augustine Dangelmayr was the second priest of the Diocese of Dallas to be named bishop. He served as Auxiliary to Bishop Lynch and as Auxiliary to Bishop Gorman for a few years. He was a native of Muenster, Texas.

Thomas Kiley Gorman, 4th Bishop of the Dallas - Fort Worth Diocese --1954

Thomas Kiley Gorman was born August 30, 1892, at Pasadena, California. He was the son of John J. Gorman and Mary Elizabeth Kiley Gorman. He was ordained June 23, 1917, at Fort River, Massachusetts. On August 19, 1931, he became Bishop of Reno, Nevada. He received his education at St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park and at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore. He was a special student in Canon Law at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C.. Of his tenure as Bishop of Reno, he recalled that "he had more jackrabbits than faithful in my diocese."

On August 19, 1954, he became Bishop of the Dallas - Fort Worth Diocese. He revived The Texas Catholic newspaper founded by Bishop Brennan and the University of Dallas founded by Bishop Dunne. He was instrumental in the development of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine [CCD] for children who were not in Catholic schools. October 1962, was the beginning of the Second Vatican Council under Pope John XXIII that was an "updating of the Church". In 1967, he called for the expulsion of the Paulist priests on the grounds that their work with the college Newman Club was unsatisfactory. He also decreed that the pastors of the parishes take control. Reverend Joseph Shumacher was named coordinator under the direct supervision of the diocesan priests.⁷ Bishop Gorman retired in 1969. Acting on Bishop Gorman's advice, Pope Paul VI split the Dallas - Fort Worth Diocese into the "*Dallas Dioceses*" and the "*Fort Worth Diocese*." He died August 16, 1980.

John J. Cassata, 1st Bishop of Fort Worth Diocese -- 1969

John J. Cassata was born in 1909. On October 21, 1969, Fort Worth was created as a separate Diocese, of which he became the first Bishop of the newly formed Diocese. During his 12 years of leadership, Bishop Cassata brought financial stability to the diocese, established twelve parishes, and allowed lay programs and leadership to flourish.⁸ He retired as Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Worth in 1980, and served as administrator of the diocese until Bishop Joseph P. Delaney was named ordinary in July 1981. He died September 8, 1989.

Joseph P. Delaney, 2nd Bishop of Fort Worth Diocese -- 1981

Bishop Joseph P. Delaney, the second bishop of the Diocese of Fort Worth, was ordained to the priesthood on Dec. 18, 1960, in the chapel of the North American College in Rome. He served in his home diocese, the Diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts, until 1967 when he went to Brownsville, Texas. It was while he was serving as co-chancellor of the Brownsville diocese in 1981 that he was named bishop of the Diocese of Fort Worth. He was consecrated bishop on September 23, 1981.⁹

EARLY HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC PRIESTS OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH



***F. X. Mielinger* – (1890 - 1900)**

On September 7, 1907, death closed the brilliant career of Father F. X. Mielinger. For many years before his death Father Mielinger was in poor health. His zeal would not permit him to use illness as an excuse from his duties. Shortly before his death he contracted spinal meningitis and died after a brief illness. His death was felt as a personal loss by every parishioner. He was buried in Saint Thomas Cemetery (Pilot Point, Texas) and a large crucifix now marks his final resting place.

***John Lenert* – (1895 - 1900)**

***Raymond Vernimont* – (1901 - 1935)**

It was not until the coming of Father Raymond Vernimont in 1901 that the parish had a resident pastor. In the passing years, Father Vernimont came to be loved by the parishioners as well as the non-Catholic acquaintances of Denton. "He was a holy man," was an expression that was heard many times in the area after he had passed on. Besides Denton, Father Vernimont administered the Mission Churches of Sanger, Celina and Whitesboro. He died in 1935.

Charles Smid – (1935 - 1946)

Father Vermimont was succeeded by an energetic young priest, Father Charles Smid. Father Smid completely redecorated the Church and Rectory. Through his efforts, a home next to the Church was secured and changed into a social center for the parish as well as for the increasing number of College students who held their Newman Club activities there. During the war years, Father Smid also attended to the spiritual needs of the Catholic soldiers of nearby Camp Howze. On February 1, 1946, Bishop Lynch appointed Father Smid to the newly formed parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary at Abbott, Texas.

Walter C. Bojniewicz – (1946 - 1954)

Reverend Walter C. Bojniewicz was transferred from the Sacred Heart Parish in Texarkana, Texas to Denton. Father Bojniewicz enlarged and completely redecorated the interior of the Church. With the influx of Catholic College students, the Church needed to be enlarged. The enlarging of the Church and the interior redecorating was made possible by a donation of \$2000 by the Catholic Church Extension Society and the donations of parishioners.

Gerard Groeneger – (1954)

In 1954 Father Gerard Groeneger replaced Father Bojniewicz but did not remain this capacity very long due to ill health.

James J. Reilly – (1954)

Father James J. Reilly followed but remained only three months likewise due to ill health.

Henry McGill – (1955-1960)

Bishop Gorman appointed Father Henry McGill Pastor on October 21, 1955. During his four and one-half year tenure, Father McGill was instrumental in constructing the modern, air-conditioned church edifice on the corner of Second & Elm Streets at a cost of \$89,000. This building has been widely lauded by visitors and parishioners alike. The parish community was enhanced tremendously and the number of parishioners increased. Father McGill was assisted in his Newman Club work by the Paulist Fathers: Father Thomas Connellan, who worked with the students for three years and Father Henry J. Dooley for one year. Father McGill purchased property and a home on Bolivar Street that served for a time as the Rectory and later on as used as a meeting hall during the construction of the Parish Center. Father McGill was responsible for laying the groundwork for the Immaculate Conception Parish Center costing \$105,000. Father McGill was appointed Administrator of St. Joseph's Church in Dallas and was to head the "Foundation" in the Diocese concerning legacies and wills.

***Joseph Thomas* – (1960 - 1967)**

Father Joseph M. Thomas was born in Hockendauqua, Pennsylvania and was the son of Mr. and Mrs. John B. Thomas, whose home is in Catasauqua, Pennsylvania. After having attended St. Lawrence Elementary School, he went on to graduated from Central Catholic High School in Allentown, Pennsylvania in 1942. He received a bachelor of arts degree from Little Rock College, Little Rock, Arkansas in 1945. His theological training was taken at St. John Home Missions Seminary, Little Rock, Arkansas.

He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Joseph Patrick Lynch, then bishop of Dallas - Fort Worth, in Sacred Heart Cathedral, Dallas, May 26, 1949. Father Thomas served as assistant pastor at St. Alice Parish (now Holy Family), Fort Worth; Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Dallas; Immaculate Conception, Tyler, and St. John's Parish, Ennis.

On February 20, 1960, he was presented a plaque of Our Lady of Guadalupe by Bishop Thomas K. Gorman at the annual Youth Convention and was named "Outstanding Youth Moderator" of the Diocese for 1959.

Father Thomas was appointed pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, Denton, on August 1, 1960. This pastorate includes being chaplain of the North Texas State University and Texas Woman University - Newman Clubs. He had completed serving a year as president of the Denton Ministerial Association, which numbers 65 churches. This marks the first time a Denton priest has served in this capacity. At the closing meeting of the association he was appointed membership chairman.¹⁰

***Robert Littleken* – (1967 - 1967)**

***Richard Johnson* – (1967 - 1969)**

Bishop Thomas K. Gorman announced the appointment of Father Richard Johnson, chancellor of the diocese, as pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, Denton.

Father Johnson, a native of Fort Worth, Texas, is a veteran of the U.S. Army. He attended Texas Christian University, St. John Seminary in San Antonio and St. Bernard Seminary, St. Bernard, Alabama. He was ordained May 21, 1960, in St. Patrick Co-Cathedral, Fort Worth, by Bishop Gorman. He has served at St. Rita Parish, Fort Worth; St. Elizabeth Parish, Dallas; St. Luke Parish, Irving and St. Cecilia Parish, Dallas. Father Johnson was appointed vice-chancellor July 20, 1966, and Chancellor on August 18, 1967.

Father Johnson contracted Morris Woodworks to construct a new altar, while serving as Pastor of Immaculate Conception. He redid the communion rail, and repaired the sanctuary. He served in several capacities as well as being Pastor of Immaculate Conception, he attended to the Newman Clubs at NTSU and TWU, and he traveled back to Dallas to carry out his Chancellor duties.¹¹

Father Johnson became Monsignor Johnson on February 2, 1980.

Joseph Schumacher – (1969 - 1980)

Father Joe Schumacher was ordained in 1957, and was appointed pastor in 1969 of Immaculate Conception Parish, Denton by Bishop Thomas K. Gorman. He reorganized the Newman Club for NTSU and TWU in 1967.

Father Schumacher received a doctorate in theology degree in Angelicum University -- the noted Dominican institute at Rome -- after three years of study. He served as head of the Newman Center at Southern Methodist University [SMU], Dallas and administrator of St. Jude's Chapel, downtown Dallas.

He is currently on a sabbatical for rest and study.

Jerome Mosman -- (1980 - 1983)

Father Jerry Mosman was appointed pastor on July 1980 by Bishop John J. Cassata to Immaculate Conception, Denton. His assistant was an African priest -- Sebastian Eboh to serve in this capacity. Father Eboh attended North Texas State University.¹²

John Mitchell -- (1984 - 1986)

Father John Mitchell was appointed pastor in 1984 by Bishop Joseph P. Delaney. His assistant was Hector Medina, the first Mexican-American priest to carry out these duties.

Dan Williams -- (1986 - 1991)

Father Dan Williams was appointed pastor in 1986 by Bishop Joseph P. Delaney.

Karl Schilken -- (1992 -)

Father Karl Schilken was born in Dallas, Texas. He graduated from Trinity High School in Euless, Texas, he attended the University of Dallas, he attended St. Meinrad Seminary, and was ordained March 29, 1980.

He came to Immaculate Conception in 1992, where he was appointed by Bishop Joseph P. Delaney as Pastor. He has set his goals at Immaculate Conception to encourage the active participation by the parishioners in the parish. He wants to increase involvement and participation in adult education, adult scripture study, and children's religious education. He wants to revitalize the liturgy in the Eucharist service, incorporate the outreach program in the parish, and to arouse spirited participation in the parish choir. He has opened a St. Vincent de Paul house, west of the Church, to provide food and clothing for the needy. The institutions served by Father Karl Schilken are Denton Regional Hospital, Denton Community Hospital, area nursing homes, Denton State School, and the Denton County jail.

The average Sunday Mass attendance is 2,500. He has reestablished the procession for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, with a potluck supper following the Mass.

Father Schilken started the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and Mass with Benediction for special occasions. In the short time, that Father Karl has been pastor of the Parish, he has redesigned the altar; bought a new Tabernacle and caused it to be placed back behind the altar; he has also placed the crucifix back behind the altar. Father Karl is a hard working priest with the welfare of the Church at heart.

He is also pastor of the mission church - St. Mark's on Teasley Lane. St. Mark's was established in 1989. The first Mass was celebrated in December, 1990. The original cost for the building was \$583,000. The land cost \$525,000 for 10 acres. It was originally planned as a Media Center, however, with the growth in the Catholic population in the community, three Masses are now celebrated and the attendance is approximately 600.

PASTORS WHO HAVE SERVED AT IMMACULATE CONCEPTION:

| | | |
|-------------|----|----------------------------------|
| 1890 - 1900 | -- | <i>Rev. F. X. Mielinger</i> |
| 1895 - 1900 | -- | <i>Rev. John Lenert</i> |
| 1901 - 1935 | -- | <i>Rev. Raymond Vernimont</i> |
| 1935 - 1946 | -- | <i>Rev. Charles Smid</i> |
| 1946 - 1954 | -- | <i>Rev. Walter C. Bojniewicz</i> |
| 1954 | -- | <i>Rev. Gerard Groeneger</i> |
| 1954 | -- | <i>Rev. James J. Reilly</i> |
| 1955 - 1960 | -- | <i>Rev. Henry McGill</i> |
| 1960 - 1967 | -- | <i>Rev. Joseph Thomas</i> |
| 1967 - 1967 | -- | <i>Rev. Robert Littleken</i> |
| 1967 - 1969 | -- | <i>Rev. Richard Johnson</i> |
| 1969 - 1980 | -- | <i>Rev. Joseph Schumacher</i> |
| 1980 - 1983 | -- | <i>Rev. Jerome Mosman</i> |
| 1984 - 1986 | -- | <i>Rev. John Mitchell</i> |
| 1986 - 1991 | -- | <i>Rev. Dan Williams</i> |
| 1992 - | -- | <i>Rev. Karl Schilken</i> |

ASSISTANT PASTORS

| | | |
|-------------|----|---------------------------------------------|
| 1975 - 1979 | -- | <i>Rev. Dan Williams</i> |
| 1979 - 1982 | -- | <i>Rev. Bob Breen</i> |
| 1980 - 1981 | -- | <i>Rev. Chris Davis, OSB</i> |
| 1982 - 1984 | -- | <i>Rev. Karl Schilken</i> |
| 1968 - 1975 | -- | <i>Rev. James Miller</i> |
| 1984 - 1988 | -- | <i>Rev. Hector Medina</i> |
| 1988 - 1989 | -- | <i>Rev. Gonzalo Morales</i> |
| 1990 - 1992 | -- | <i>Rev. Sergio Rizo (Administrator)</i> |
| 1991 - 1992 | -- | <i>Rev. John Staskowski (Administrator)</i> |
| 1992 - | -- | <i>Rev. Anh Tran</i> |

COMMUNITY SERVICES



Newman Club



The Newman Club is the college students link to the Church as well as a social meeting place for Catholic students. The Newman Clubs are named in honor of John Henry Cardinal Newman, 1801-1890. The Newman Club was started in Denton in the late thirties by Monsignor Charles Smid. It was serviced by the Paulist Order until 1967 when Bishop Gorman placed it under the supervision of the local parish priest. During World War II, the Club drew many soldiers to the parish from nearby Camp Howze, ministering to their spiritual needs and creating a home-away from home. Camp Howze was located near Gainesville.

Altar Society

The Altar Society sponsors the Golden Agers Christmas Dinner that is open to all seniors in the Church as well as many non-Catholics.

St. Vincent de Paul



The St. Vincent de Paul is a service organization that helps needy people in Denton. The organization provides food, clothing, soap, toilet paper, and shampoo to an average of 240 families a month. These provisions are donated by the parishioners.

Knights of Columbus



The Knights of Columbus is a Catholic organization that not only helps the Church, but contributes to the Texas State Deaf Fund, The Special Olympics, International Wheelchair Paralyzed Veterans of America, Dallas Wheelchair Tennis Association, and the October Columbus Day Dinner for Denton shut-ins that delivers about 150 dinners to shut-ins.

CHURCH

In 1970, the Church started the Hospital ministry, also, the outreach program to provide clothing and food for the needy. In 1974, a Eucharist ministry was started with the first female ministers, Dorothy Damico, Rosemary Hart, and Darlene Stewart. Darlene is still serving the Church today as a Hand-Maid to God.

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¹ Catholic Diocese of Dallas, Centennial Edition, 1890 - 1990, A Century of Faith. Rev. Msgr. James I. Tucek. Taylor Publishing Company, 1990.

² *History of Denton, Texas -- From Its Beginning to 1960*. C. A. Bridges, Texian Press, Waco, Texas. 1978.
(Source: *Denton County News*, July 6, 1892; August 3, 1893. *Denton Record-Chronicle*, August 2, 1953, II, p. 10.)

³ Immaculate Conception - Church records

⁴ *Our Catholic Heritage in 1836 - 1936*, vol. 7, Texas. p. 140

⁵ Bridges. *op. cit.*, p. 212

⁶ Tucek. *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁷ *Denton Record-Chronicle*, June 15, 1927

⁸ *Denton Record-Chronicle*, Dec. 3, 1982

⁹ Diocese of Fort Worth - Directory 1993

¹⁰ *The Texas Catholic*, 2nd edition, p. 1. Official Publication of the Diocese of Dallas-Fort Worth, Saturday, May 28, 1966.

¹¹ *The Texas Catholic*, Vol. 16, no. 11. p. 1. Saturday, Dec. 9, 1967.

¹² *The Texas Catholic*, June 19, 1981.