

Our parish community is celebrating their 60th anniversary in 2017

The first mass was celebrated in St. Anthony Parish on November 17, 1957.

Below... you will find parish history by the “decade.” Not everyone will want to read all of this, that we understand, for those that do we welcome you to a journey that will help you see how our one parish has impacted the growth of the Archdiocese of Anchorage.

Long before there was an Archdiocese of Anchorage, the Diocese of Juneau under the care of Bishop Dermot O’Flanagan was charged with the care of the people of God for Southeastern and South-central Alaska. Anchorage was growing and Holy Family Church at Fifth & H Streets was the only Catholic Church in the city. Father Harley Baker served as its pastor.

The 1950's

In 1955 the provincial superior of the Jesuits, Reverend Henry J. Schulthis, S.J. suggested to Bishop O’Flanagan the possibility of a Jesuit Parish in Anchorage. It would be beneficial both to the diocese due to an acute shortage of priests, and to the Jesuit community as well, as it would provide a refuge or gathering place for Jesuit Missionaries during their stay in Anchorage. After many letters back and forth between the Diocese of Juneau, Anchorage, the Extension Society and the Jesuit Fathers of the Oregon Province, the new parish was to become a reality. Bishop O’Flanagan requested Father Baker, the pastor of Holy Family, to begin the process of mapping out boundaries for what was to become St. Anthony's parish.

The population of St. Anthony's was estimated at 9,000 to 10,000 with the Catholic population being about 2,000. The parish was approximately 120 square miles; it extended along the Glenn Highway north to Eklutna 25 miles, where it met the

boundary of St. Michael's Parish in Palmer. On August 28, 1957 Bishop O'Flanagan formally designated the boundaries that would "constitute the territory of the Parish of St. Anthony in Mountain View, Anchorage, Alaska." The boundary began at Airport Heights Road went in a southerly direction and intersected with the North Fork of Chester Creek and on out to the south to its junction with 0 ' Malley Road. It ran east, to the summit of Mount Goode, then west to the source of Eklutna River and along the Eklutna River to its mouth and on to the eastern shore of Knik Arm. It continued along the boundary of the military reservation to Ship Creek and on to Thompson Street in Mountain View. Finally the boundary ran south again to the junction of the Glenn Highway and Airport Heights. That same day, Bishop O'Flanagan appointed Reverend Robert L. Whelan, S.J. as the first Pastor of St. Anthony.

A grant of \$10,000 from the Extension Society was given toward the \$35,000 total cost of building the new church. *The first mass was celebrated in St. Anthony Parish on November 17, 1957.*

The original rectory was the old Holy Family Parish rectory, donated by Holy Family to St. Anthony with the move paid for by St. Anthony. Father Whelan and his father occupied the rectory. Our parish address was established as 825 South Klevin Street.

Father Whelan oversaw the building of the original church, on our current site, and served alone as pastor until 1959 when Father Arnold Custer joined him.

With the coming of Father Custer the rectory proved to be inadequate and so to solve the problem of living Mr. Tom Carey offered the a mobile trailer home, was set up in the back of St. Anthony's. Father Custer on as assistant until 1961 he was replaced by Father Shirey S.J.



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The Parish Council, with Mr. Daniel J. Dougherty as chairman, began a study of various means of obtaining a parish hall, and was initially discouraged by Bishop O'Flanagan because "collections were only in the neighborhood of \$14,000 a year." Mr. Dougherty prevailed however and a small Quonset hut was obtained from Nunaka Valley and placed behind the church to serve as the parish hall, to be used for social functions and catechism classes.

The tenor of this new community of the people of God was apparent. Just seven months after the ground breaking, St. Anthony's parish had an altar society, a religious education program that boasted 93 students, and held their first Confirmation ceremony on May 14, 1958.

In these early days in the Quonset hut aka the parish hall, parishioners attended meetings and held parish functions, except that "many times in the cold winter months it could not be used due to lack of heat and frozen pipes." The Quonset hut quickly proved inadequate for catechism classes and so they were moved in January of 1959 to the homes of the Johnson family, 1419 Noreene St., the Mosser home at 4302 Glenn Highway, others within the Anchorage bowl, and in Chugiak at the Robert Johnson home. Diversity was evident from the start of the parish with Native, Filipino and Hispanic families along with Irish, French, Dutch and German just to name a few.