

St. Angela Parish Timeline

Although our parish closed in 2005, there are many whose memories are of the parish as the center of family and neighborhood life. This timeline appeared in the program for the Brunch of Hope in 2012.

1916

As war raged in Europe; and while America edged closer to the hostilities, young Archbishop George Mundelein established St. Angela as the first new parish of his episcopate. Its new pastor, Reverend Joseph Fitzgerald, said his first parish mass at the little storefront church at 5814 W. Division (near what later became the Rockne movie theatre). By the end of the year, the first formal wooden church was erected at the corner of Menard and Potomac (where the rectory now stands) igniting a new fire of faith in this community.

1920

Following the tragedy of World War I, the nation entered a period of peace and prosperity. The Roaring Twenties roared with new wealth, more cars, along with a dramatic spurt in the number of Austin homes and parishioners. Their generous contributions meant the building of a school immediately east of the little church. And while North Austin was still marked by as many empty lots as residences, a growing student population began eagerly signing up for classes. They came from tight-knit families who wanted “the best” for their children and saw it in the nourishment of their own church-school.

1921

St. Angela School officially opened its door in September 1921 with a staff of five Sisters of Providence from St. Mary-of-the-Woods led by Sister Teresa Marie. These next five years were bursting with organizational activity as the ‘nuns’ trained the children in both the immutable traditions of their Catholic faith and in the knowledge of a swiftly changing society where new faces like Lindberg, Dempsey, Tunney, Ederle, Grange, Ruth, the Four Horsemen, Capone and Chicago mayor Big Bill Thompson filled the news.

1929

Pastor Fitzgerald died and Cardinal Mundelein appointed Monsignor Frank O’Brien to guide the swelling parish. Its expansion, however, crashed along with the national economy starting in October of that crisis year. As the Great Depression ate its way into the muscle of the nation, plans to continue St. Angela’s building growth were forced aside. The entire Austin community was now suffering the same economic devastation the rest of the nation was. About 30% of Austinites struggled without jobs over these next painful years. But not without faith, as the parish’s crowded Sunday Masses testified.

1936

By the mid-30's FDR's New Deal program began re-energizing the economy. Slowly the overcrowded church, school and rectory buildings were replaced to keep up the demands. The old Church was razed to make room for the current rectory while an interim church and enhanced school building were built in tandem on Massasoit Avenue. At this same time, new faces began populating the rectory including Fathers Trainor, Lynch, Lawler and Hills.

1943

Pastor O'Brien died in the midst of World War II along with 26 young men from among young men from among the 869 who served in their nation's armed services. Father Thomas Hayes was assigned to succeed him, but died a short three years later when Monsignor D. F. Cunningham was chosen to lead the now booming parish. Additional priests enriched the outstanding clerical staff over the succeeding years including Fathers Kennelly, Hosty, Dorney, Cure and Dufficy. Monsignor Cunningham (after whom Cunningham Hall is named) remained pastor for more than a quarter century as St. Angela emerged as the focus of spiritual, academic and social life for thousands of families and their offspring.

1949-1952

After a generation of faithful support, the parishioners enthusiastically witnessed the ground breaking for their new gothic church at the corner of Massasoit and Potomac on April 29, 1949 with the first Mass celebrated there on December 23, 1951 and the official dedication on May 18, 1952. This stunning 1200 seat building was the last great church of its kind built in the city of Chicago, and still stands here as a monument to the thousands of husbands, wives, fathers, mothers and children who have been proud to reside in this deep-rooted community.

1952-2001

In this last half century St. Angela has been both anchor and sail. It has been anchor for the many Catholic families who have grown up and old in this steadfast neighborhood, sustaining a way of life and faith that traces back to the beginning of the last century. It has also been sail in the way in which it has contributed to the many new values, families and social patterns that have marked our nation and our cities. New names like Sister Frances Maureen McGory, Sister Mary Finnegan, Father John Ryan, Father Kenneth Velo, Monsignor Pellicore, Father James E. Flynn, Father Dennis S. Riley gave new life and purpose to St. Angela. New enrollments, new demographics and new building enhancements as we...But always the same driving force that was the sinew and soul of this historic parish. This fact was personified in the leadership of Principal Sister Mary Finnegan who was the force for the good that we call: St. Angela until she left the school in 2011.

2005

Our wondrous St. Angela Church closed its doors May 2005. But not its soul and energy. The school continues to thrive, enrollments are increasing and the students are excelling in the very same way they always have throughout the creative history of this faith community. Nothing good ever dies...!