

GOD'S GRACE REVISITED

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Office of the Archbishop



Post Office Box 1979
Chicago, Illinois 60690-1979

June 22, 1993

Dear Deacon Barone:

Thank you for your gracious invitation to join you for the events being planned in celebration of the Silver Jubilee of St. Ansgar Parish, to take place on Sunday, July 11, 1993.

Although I would be delighted to join you, regretfully, I will be making a pastoral visit to the Ukraine in early July, which is also my vacation month, and I am therefore unable to accept your invitation. I know you will understand.

Although unable to be with you in person, know that you and all in the parish family will be in my thoughts and prayers as you celebrate. Be assured of my special prayers throughout this important year in the history of St. Ansgar's. May God continue to bless you all and to work good things through you.

With cordial good wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Joseph Cardinal Bernardini
Archbishop of Chicago

Rev. Mr. Louis F. Barone
Silver Jubilee Chairman
St. Ansgar Parish
2041 Poplar Avenue
Hanover Park, IL 60103-3599

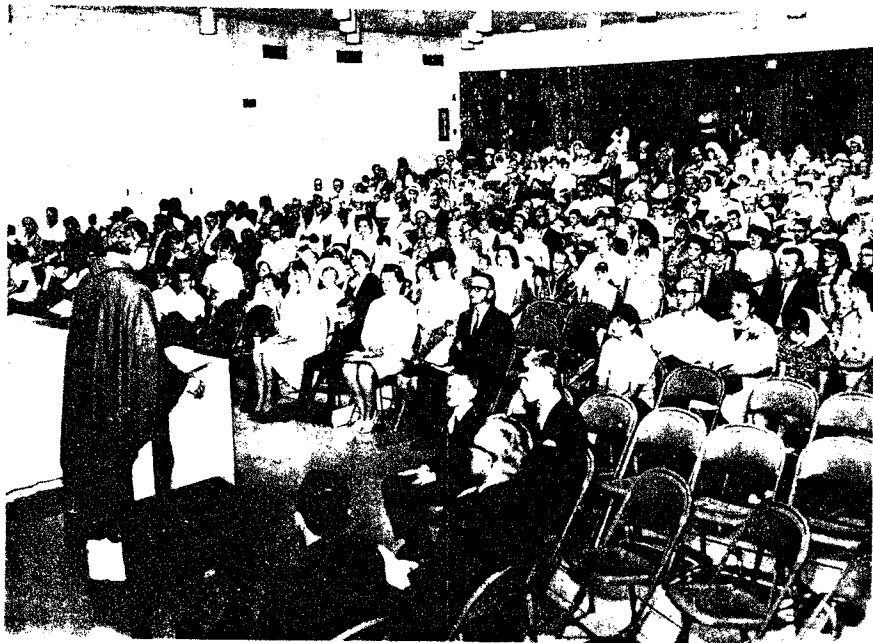
From what was once a farm community of 305 people known as Ontariville, the village of Hanover Park was born. It was incorporated as a municipal government on August 14, 1958. With the opening of the Northwest Tollway, many of the cities and villages along its route saw a virtual population explosion. Hanover Park's population swelled to over 10,000 people by 1968; and, in that span of time, the nature of the area changed from that of a quiet rural community to that of a fast-developing suburban municipality. For a time, Hanover Park was the fastest growing community in Cook County.

A religious census taken around this time reflected that 64% of the people who moved here, coming primarily from the city of Chicago, were Roman Catholic. Those early-settling Catholics found it necessary to attend churches in neighboring towns. They moved from church to church as new parishes were formed, such as starting at St. Peter Damian in Bartlett, then going to St. John the Evangelist in Streamwood, and then to St. Marcelline in Schaumburg. But Bartlett, Streamwood, and Schaumburg experienced comparable growth and, with the influx of an ever increasing Catholic population, the time had come to bring a Catholic parish to Hanover Park.

This process began on April 25, 1968, when Father Jerome F. Riordan, then an assistant pastor at St. Peter Church in Skokie, was asked by the Archbishop of Chicago, John Cardinal Cody, to investigate the possibility of establishing a parish "in the vicinity of Hanover Park". On May 15, 1968, the Cardinal formally appointed Father Riordan to organize a parish in Hanover Park.

Father Riordan spent the next several weeks putting the Cardinal's directive into motion. He celebrated his first Mass as pastor of the new parish on July 7, 1968, in the auditorium of Tefft Junior High School in Streamwood. Music at the

first Mass was provided by a guitar-playing seminarian, Jim Balijs. "St. Tefft", as the temporary worship location was affectionately referred to, would be home for its parishioners for almost ten years. Parishioners often observed: "Although St. Tefft was an auditorium, on Sunday it took on reverence."



Four Masses were celebrated that first weekend, which brought in a total collection of \$309.47!

In August of 1968, the members of the congregation took part in a process to select a name for their new parish. Four names were recommended for consideration, and the result of the balloting that took place was: Church of the Holy Spirit (130), St. Anskar (sic)(56), St. Elizabeth of Hungary (54), and Parish of the People of God (48). These names were submitted to Cardinal Cody who, on November 8, 1968, notified Father Riordan that he approved of the name St. Ansgar ("This will be the official spelling") because "he will be a suitable patron" for the parish. Ansgar was Archbishop of Hamburg, Germany, which included

the city of Hannover (sic), after which Hanover Park was named. Obviously, the Cardinal's decision was motivated by the historical connection between Ansgar's ministry and the village in which the new parish was being formed. (It should be noted that Cardinal Cody just happened to be a member of the St. Ansgar International League!)

A parish office, and later Father Riordan's residence, were temporarily established in a dental office building at Walnut and Pine Tree, in back of Gromer's (a supermarket that preceded Dino's). Because the site on which the church would eventually be located was still being farmed, a parish house could not be located there. So, in October of 1968, a building located at 2041 Poplar was acquired by the church. It was remodeled to serve as the priests' residence, parish office, and chapel. The chapel, remodeled primarily by parishioners from what was originally a 2½-car garage, provided the worship space for Saturday afternoon Mass for several years, often to overflowing crowds. (The workers involved in remodeling the garage into a chapel gave an extra effort to their labors so that it would be ready for the very first Christmas Midnight Mass celebrated at St. Ansgar Parish.)

In 1971, Operation A.B.C. (Ansgar Builds Community with Adoration, Brotherhood, and Catechesis) was begun. A.B.C. was an effort to determine the overall needs of the new parish and was initiated with a meeting held on June 27 at the Embers Restaurant. Members of the parish were invited to provide their input as to what they would like to see happen in their parish community.

On October 2, 1972, Cardinal Cody granted permission for St. Ansgar to construct a new "multi-purpose worship center...not to exceed \$500,000", on a 12-acre site located at Laurel and East Avenues. A groundbreaking ceremony took place later that month, attended by the Cardinal's representative, Father John McEnroe, Vicar of Vicariate II.



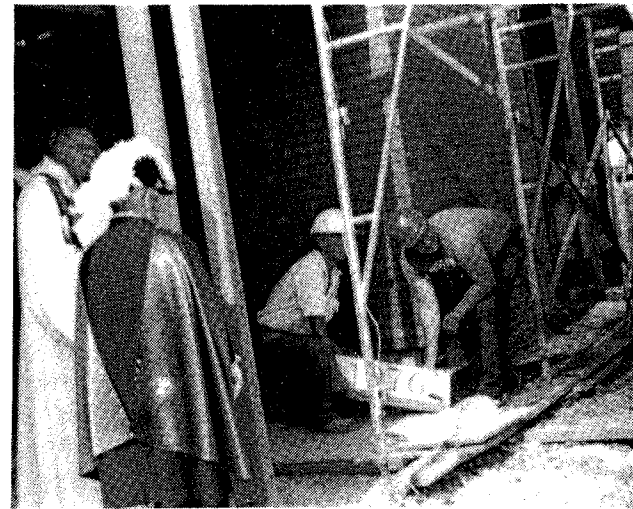
Months of meetings followed, with engineers, planners, village officials, and a committee of parishioners, in an effort to develop a project that complied with building codes. Finally, a site plan received the blessing of the village board on June 14, 1973.

But the satisfaction with this progress soon turned to disappointment. Due to construction delays and an economy that saw an annual double-digit inflation rate, it was determined that the \$500,000 authorized by the archdiocese would no longer provide the facilities originally planned. It would now cost about \$750,000 to build the proposed structure. This turn in events required going back to the drawing board to come up with a revised plan. The announcement of this unfortunate news started out by saying: "As Joseph's quest for a shelter must have seemed endless, so indeed does ours." In order to meet budget

requirements, the proposed structure had to be modified and, in some instances, improved.

In spite of these disappointments, the people of St. Ansgar continued their support of the revised structure. By Christmas of 1976, pledges toward the Building Development Fund campaign exceeded \$300,000 and the foundation work had been completed.

On July 10, 1977, St. Ansgar celebrated its ninth anniversary with the ceremonial placement of the cornerstone in the Worship Center while construction was still in progress.



Much of the work on and around the building was done by parishioners. As an example, on October 22, 1977, preparing for the first Mass scheduled the following weekend, 125 people placed 3,400 square yards of sod on the property and completed the underground wiring and lighting.

On October 31, 1977, although the Worship Center was relatively incomplete, more than 600 parishioners braved the rain on a Halloween night to attend "The Mass of Entry" celebrating the opening of the church. Concelebrating with Father Riordan in what began with a candlelight ceremony

were the associate pastor Father Eugene Nowak, Father Terry Deffenbaugh (who spent his deacon years at St. Ansgar), and Monsignor John Hayes. The story in the local paper reported the event with this headline: "St. Ansgar Finally Has A Home!"



Although the new Worship Center was a multi-purpose facility that did not reflect the traditional church building from which most of the parishioners had come, the people found many treasures from the past to furnish their new church building. Several artifacts were salvaged from schools and churches that had closed. The presider's chair and the holy water receptacle (which was once the baptismal font) came from All Saints Church in Chicago; the marble altar, the base of the tabernacle, and the vestment case in the sacristy came from the Augustinian Seminary in Holland, Michigan, (where Father Deffenbaugh studied for a time); and the tabernacle came from the chapel at Aquinas High School in Chicago. A real treasure is the baptistry from Holy Name Cathedral, now located in the tower space in the outer lobby.

The final formal act celebrating the new church facility was held on June 11, 1978, when Cardinal Cody presided over the dedication ceremony.

With the completion of the Worship Center a reality, the energies of the parish could be focused on further developing the various aspects of a growing church community. St. Ansgar proved to be a pioneer when, in April of 1977, it developed the concept of a Parish Advisory Committee. This committee, composed of lay people and staff personnel, was given the opportunity to assist the pastor in deciding how the parish would be managed. P.A.C. eventually evolved into the Parish Ministerial Commission that exists at St. Ansgar today. In addition to P.A.C./P.M.C., other committees assisted the pastor in more specific areas. These have contributed to the growth of the parish through the years, and include a Finance Committee, Liturgy Committee, Building Maintenance Committee, and Ministry of Care.

Newer parishes such as St. Ansgar were formed with the understanding that it was no longer possible to support a parochial school system. As a consequence, novel and creative programs to pass on the faith to children were devised. These programs, provided under the guidance of Religious Education coordinators and staff, relied on parent and parishioner participation in this very important ministry. Religious education of children has always been - and continues to be - an uppermost priority at St. Ansgar.

In 1979, a Players theater group was formed. It performed its first Broadway musical for the parish, and has since turned this into an annual event. Other spiritual, educational, and social groups that developed over the years include a Men's Club, The Women of St. Ansgar, an Over 50 Club, parish-sponsored Scouts, and T.B.C. (To Be Continued - a group for high-school teens). The first group to experience the new Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.) attended classes beginning in September of 1988. And a Pre-Cana program was started at St. Ansgar that has attracted engaged couples from outside the parish.

St. Ansgar was served well by many fine priests and religious over the past 25 years. Those serving as associates were Leon Rezula, Patrick Rabbitt (now deceased), Charles Obie, Eugene Nowak, and Earl Thomas (now deceased). Assisting throughout the years at Sunday Mass from the Carmelite Provincial House in Barrington were Malachy Smith, Quentin Duncan (now deceased), and Murray Phelan. Many deacons and seminarians ministered to the parish, including James Baliya, James Kubijak, Vince Cvitkovic, Terry Deffenbaugh (who continues to minister as a priest to our young people preparing for Confirmation), Thomas Cabala, Thomas Campana, and Patrick Batuyong. The sisters, many of whom served primarily as religious educators, were Dorothy Akey, Frances McElmeel, Michelle Dermody, Barbara Kober, Mary Lou Henderson, and Jane Nienaber.

Father Riordan retired in January of 1989 and received the title of Pastor Emeritus. He was succeeded by the associate pastor of four years, Father John Tapper. Under Father Tapper's leadership, a debt reduction drive was initiated, and the balance of the parish debt was paid off in less than a year. Then, a major renovation of the Worship Center was undertaken, again with most of the labor done by members of the parish. Recognizing the responsibility to accommodate a substantial Hispanic population within the parish, St. Ansgar welcomed a new culture into its community with a regularly-scheduled Mass in Spanish early in 1992. And as the parish of St. Ansgar moves into the next phase of its growth, plans are being studied to construct an annex that will provide space for classes, meetings, and other parish activities. This would allow the existing building to be used primarily for worship.

During his tenure as founding pastor of St. Ansgar, Father Riordan became legendary for his philosophy that "a church is not a building; it is the people". One observer even proclaimed

that "he repeats the words almost ritually!" Those early parishioners who did without a permanent house of worship for almost ten years certainly longed for a physical church building. But, throughout the succeeding years, even after the Worship Center became a reality, the second part of the Riordan philosophy rang true.

For the most part, the people who comprise the church community of St. Ansgar have proven themselves to be a special breed: friendly, caring, generous, willing to sacrifice for a good cause, supportive, and - to sum it all up - great examples of disciples of Christ. So often visitors have observed the special warmth that comes from the people. That kind of characteristic has developed and sustained itself over the last 25 years; and it is that same kind of characteristic that will cause St. Ansgar Parish not only to sustain itself in the future, but to continue to grow in God's grace! Yes - as far as the church of St. Ansgar is concerned, church is, indeed, people.

