

EDITOR'S NOTE: This series of historical parish profiles is offered as part of the Diocese of Youngstown's 75th jubilee year. The celebration was launched on May 20, 2018, Pentecost Sunday. The diocese was formed in 1943. It consists of six counties (Ashtabula, Columbiana, Mahoning, Portage, Stark and Trumbull). Its cathedral, St. Columba, is located in Mahoning County.

St. Joseph, Austintown

St. Joseph Parish was established in 1966 for Catholics living in Austintown who had, for the most part, retained their membership in ethnic (or other) parishes throughout Youngstown rather than join nearby Immaculate Heart of Mary or St. Christine parishes, according to parish historian Paul Lettau, a founding parishioner.

The first Mass for the then 750-family parish was celebrated June 19, 1966, in the Wedgewood Cinema, while a church was being built on New Road. The theater would be the parish worship site for two years. Two apartments on Raccoon Road were the "rectory," and St. Christine Parish made a meeting hall available for its new neighbors.

Soon after the parish was established, a former 15-acre evergreen tree farm was purchased as a home for the faith community. On March 19, 1967, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for a church, school and social hall.

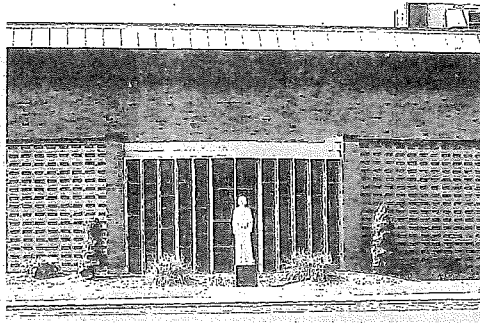
Lettau wrote that "a noble effort was undertaken to build this new parish without bingo, festivals or pledges to raise the money, deferring instead to a suggested weekly offering of \$5 per family. Some more than met the challenge; some never quite made it. But together, the funds were developed to build the church."

The dedication of parishioners, together with a family spirit, manifested itself in many ways in those early days. After construction was completed on the rectory in the summer of 1967, parishioners undertook the interior and exterior painting of the rectory. Parish men also cleared the evergreen trees that lined the property, selling some for Christmas trees as a parish fund-raiser, and transplanting others to nearby homes and Fairground Boulevard in Canfield. Twenty large blue spruce trees were also transplanted behind the area which became the hall. Entire families participated in the landscaping and other efforts.

The first Mass in the church was celebrated June 16, 1968, and St. Joseph School opened on Sept. 3 of that year, administered by the Sisters of Notre Dame. The school opened with grades 1 and 2, adding one grade each year until there were five grades at the school.

A parish council was organized in October 1970.

Early in the parish history, a statue of St. Joseph holding the Child Jesus was placed in front of St. Joseph Church, 4545 New Road, Austintown. It is a memorial to Thomas and Roy Scheetz, sons of parish custodian Carl Scheetz and his wife, Lee, who were one of the parish's founding families. The young boys had died in a treehouse fire. Sculpted in Italy, the statue is a compelling image of white marble on a black marble base, purchased through contributions of friends, relatives and parishioners. Each week, as St. Joseph parishioners arrive for Mass, they are reminded by the memorial of the parish's



commitment to family.

In 1976, Christ Renews His Parish began. The weekend retreat was observed as a men's renewal twice a year and a women's renewal on two other weekends each year. That same year, the Ursuline Sisters began staffing the school.

As sixth, seventh and eighth grades and a kindergarten were being added to the school, an addition was planned to the east end of the school building. A small meeting room equipped with a kitchen was also included. The addition was completed in February 1981, and dedicated on March 23. In the church, oak paneling was placed over the concrete block walls behind the altar, and permanent risers and seating for the choir were installed.

The Christ Renews His Parish program was ended in 1988. The following year, Renew, a three-year spiritual study program, began.

In 1990, Father Frederick Lukehart was named pastor. Father Lukehart strove to continue that dedicated spirit as an important part of parish life. He implemented a stewardship program that encouraged parishioners to increase their offerings of "time, talent and treasure" to help grow the parish and school.

Father Lukehart stressed that the Church must recognize that not every family is the "traditional" family. Divorce and death change the shape of the family for many. "We have to keep in mind the involvement of everyone - families and singles," he said.

In 1991, the Ursuline Sisters ended their tenure at the school and lay administrators and teachers assumed all duties at the parish school.

On Oct. 6, 1991, the parish celebrated its 25th anniversary, with Bishop James Malone as principal celebrant for the 12:30 p.m. Mass. A reception and dinner followed. A three-year Restoration and Renovation program was instituted in 1997 to repay parish debts and for parish upgrades.

In 1998 Father James Korda was appointed pastor. After the parish debt was repaid, the campaign began focusing on remodeling the church and sanctuary. Bishop Thomas Tobin dedicated the upgrades on March 19, 2000, the parish's

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2018
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feast day.

In the school, all the classrooms were painted, air-conditioning was installed, and two classrooms were added to accommodate an increased enrollment. A new playground was built in the front of the school.

The CCD and religious education programs were expanded to support the increasing number of parish children. The parish debt was retired.

A new parish pastoral council was established to bring the council more in line with diocesan guidelines.

In 2004, Father John Trimbur became pastor. Father Trimbur oversaw strong lay participation in the parish's 23 organizations and ministry groups.

Due to declining enrollment in the school, a decision was made at the end of the 2008-09 school year to combine St. Joseph School with Austintown Immaculate Heart of Mary School. Father Trimbur assisted in the planning to bring the two schools together and the logistics for closing St. Joseph School.

Father Gregory Fedor was appointed pastor in 2009. Father Fedor oversaw the implementation of the first year of the merged school, housed at Immaculate Heart of Mary for the 2009-10 school year. The closed school was reopened as St. Joseph Early Childhood Learning Center.

Under Father Fedor's guidance, the roofs on all parish buildings except the church were replaced. The school cafeteria was renovated to become the parish social hall. The church was painted, re-carpeted, and the sound system improved.

All remnants of the Christmas tree farm on which the parish was built were eliminated with the removal of the remaining 50-year-old trees.

A parking area was added behind the church and social hall. A large gathering space called the Blue Room was created when two classrooms were merged into a space that holds 90 people, which is used for meetings and small gatherings.

Father Fedor introduced a new program, Growing Families, which takes place once a month during the school year. The program is an adult education program for parents of the CCD students and all parishioners.

St. Joseph has a very active St. Vincent de Paul Society parish conference. Parishioners also helped build a house for Habitat for Humanity.

In 2016, the parish celebrated its 50th anniversary.

In January 2018, Father Fedor was installed as canonical pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in addition to his pastorate at St. Joseph. In July the Mass schedules for St. Joseph and Immaculate Heart of Mary Parishes were coordinated allowing one priest to offer Masses at both parishes.

St. Joseph Parish has 1,200 registered households.