

# IN THOSE DAYS

Celebrating  
**175**  
Years

My grandfather used to say, “More changed in the ten years after World War II than changed in the first forty years of my life.” Grandpa and grandma married right before the great depression. They picked their first canning jars out of the dump, participated in the 1933 milk strikes, and collected scrap iron for the war effort. They went from the war’s food rationing to developing a 300-acre farm after the war. Their city counterparts moved from soup kitchen lines to the suburbs. The worldwide post war economic boom was rooted in the mechanical and technological progress brought about by the war effort, the housing needs of newly married soldiers, the production needed to rebuild war ravaged countries and, for United States veterans, the opportunities afforded by the GI bill. While my grandparents used their post war earnings to build-up the farm and secure a retirement and my parent’s imitated them, many of my parent’s generation not only purchased what they needed but were able to purchase what they wanted. That ability, in turn, created an even greater demand for goods. All of this fueled unprecedented economic growth. This post-war boom fizzled in 1973.

The economic boom had a positive effect on archdiocesan parishes too, especially in the area of construction. Suburbs sprouted on the farm fields immediately surrounding Milwaukee. With them, came new parishes and combination church-schools. The old urban and rural parishes also had the wherewithal to replace aging structures. St. Boniface had replaced its aging rectory in 1931 after a five year dispute, so our post-war project began with the replacement of a worn wooden two-story schoolhouse that doubled as a convent. Then a devastating fire led to the construction of a new church. And, finally the post-war baby boom, new educational methods and an increase in available teaching sisters set the scene for each grade to have its own classroom.

1948 – Construction of new four room school

1949 – Began using new school in fall, one room doubled as a temporary convent.

1950 – Nov. 21, Archbishop Moses Elias Kiley dedicates new school.  
1953 – Aug. 15, Sisters begin living in the new convent.



1953 – Nov. 9, Archbishop Albert Gregory Meyer dedicates the new convent.

1954 – March 4, church burns.

1954 – November, work on new church begins.

1955 – June 5, Bishop Roman Atkielski presides at church cornerstone laying.

1955 – Oct. 16, Archbishop Albert Meyer dedicates new Church

1958 – June, school expanded by four rooms and offices.

1959 – May 19, Archbishop William Cousins dedicates school addition.

St. Boniface, Goldendale, was still considered a rural parish in 1960. The post-war buildings served the parish well for the next thirty years.

The stage for Germantown’s eventual growth was set in 1963. That year Milwaukee annexed a small parcel of land in the southeastern part of the Town of Germantown to expand a landfill. Residents feared that Milwaukee would soon annex more of the town. As a defensive measure, the Village of Germantown annexed all of the surrounding unincorporated hamlets, Goldendale included, and they became neighborhoods of the village. At the time of the 1963 annexation, Germantown grew to an area of approximately 24 square miles eventually topping out at 34 square miles.

By 1988, the parish grew enough and parishioner’s expectations changed enough that a modest enlargement of the school became necessary.

1988 – Aug. 28, Pastor Lawrence Andre presides at the groundbreaking ceremony for a two room addition to the school. The classrooms were added he explains “so that there would be room to open a kindergarten and to update the educational program.” He also mentioned the need for more space for religious education in an earlier bulletin article. The Home and School was simultaneously raising money for computers.



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1988 – Sept. 21, construction of school addition begins.

1989 – April 2, “opening of new classrooms hasn’t happened yet

because chalkboards, cabinets and lockers did not arrive on time.”

1990 – By the fall semester new classrooms are being used.

Then it happened! Germantown and the parish began to grow by leaps and bounds. The parish which grew from 1982 to 1995 from 300 to 700 households gained an average of 60 families per year in the next ten years, eventually peaking at 1300 households. Something had to be done. The buildings were not meeting the needs. The school needed to be expanded. The church was too small.

1996-1998 – Conversations about building a parish center and additional classrooms, master plan and fund raising take place.

1998 – September, Village planning commission approves plans.

1999 – April, the convent is razed and the site for the parish center is prepared.

1999 – June 7, construction begins.

2000 – January 1, the parish center and additional classrooms are opened.

2002 – The multi-purpose center functioning as hall, gymnasium and temporary worship space is built.

2003 – March 2, Bishop Richard J. Sklba blesses the altar, ambo and font for the new worship space.



2003 - Summer, Pastor Bernie

Sippel and parishioners build a computer lab, library, art room, health room and science lab in the new parish center’s basement.

2005 – December, plans drawn up to convert basement hall into classrooms.

2006 – Summer, parishioners convert hall to classrooms.

It’s a bit early to interpret this period of growth from a historical perspective, but some questions might be asked.

- What role did the decline of the family farm, developers, tax rates and school quality play in residential development?
- Was Germantown becoming just one more suburb?
- Was its growth a matter of urban sprawl?

- Is it best understood together with the growth of Menomonee Falls, West Bend and Hartford?
- Were folks desiring a more rural life or escaping the urban area?
- Was its midway point between Milwaukee and the Fond du Lac area a factor?
- Along with that, how much did freeway access and the improvements made to Highway 45 play into the growth?
- Was it seen as a half-way point for those with connections to Fond du Lac, Sheboygan and Calumet counties?

Former pastor Bernie Sippel noted in a November 2014 interview that the growth began leveling off in 2005. Then the unexpected happened. Parish membership began to decline to today’s 800 households. Again it is too soon to figure out why. Some place blame on particular figures or decisions, but perhaps these factors are also at play.

- Are homes once filled with children in 1990s and 2000s now occupied only by their parents.
- Did folks refrain from having as many children during and after the 2008 recession?
- How much did the village’s decisions about the way to develop the area north of Freistadt Road slow parish growth?
- Are Mequon, Slinger, Jackson, New Berlin, Oconomowoc, Pewaukee and Hartland the up and coming suburbs of this decade?
- How did the pedophilia scandal and cover-ups affect church participation?
- Do today’s young adults have a different sense of what it means to be affiliated with churches and other institutions?
- Do most Christians today have less denominational and parish loyalty than prior generations?
- Do the majority of today’s young adults really leaving to join other churches or non-denominational movements or are they becoming “nones”?
- Then there are the anecdotes attributing the decline to the popularity of non-denominational churches. These congregations are so unique that there is little statistical analysis of their gain, retention and loss of membership. Some of my non-denominational friends say they have a problem retaining the children of their parents too even though they might attract some young adults from main-line churches. Hopefully someone will think of a way to seriously analyze such a unique and diverse movement.

The improvement of parish buildings and additions to those buildings always happens within a historical context. A half-century from now some historian will be able to sit down and write a more definitive history of St. Boniface’s immediate past and the transitional times we live within. Until then we do as the generations before us, we live in the present and face the future with hope.

*Fr. Mike*