

THE FOUNDING OF OUR LADY OF
GOOD COUNSEL PARISH

By

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On July 26, 1928, the Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Rochester, was canonically erected by the Rt. Rev. Thomas F. Hickey, second bishop of the Rochester Diocese. To this newly established parish, the bishop appointed the Rev. Edward T. Meagher on August 1, 1928.¹ Father Meagher was then professor of Logic and History of Philosophy at Saint Bernard's Seminary. Departing from the classroom now, he applied himself vigorously to the task of providing spiritual facilities in the increasingly populous southwestern section of the city.

Fifteen days after his appointment as pastor, Father Meagher purchased a strip of land which originally formed part of the William's farm at 640 Brooks Avenue. The plot had a frontage of 262 feet on Brooks Avenue, and ran through to Ernestine Street with a depth of 225 feet. The principal parcel of land was that purchased from Mrs. Mary Shelter² on which stood part of the old William's farmhouse. This house was made over and opened as a parish community house on November 26, 1928.³

The parish was incorporated under the title of "Our Lady of Good Counsel" according to the laws of the State of New York on the twenty-fourth of August. Four days later when the first meeting of the corporation took place at 80 Prince Street, the Rt. Rev. Thomas F. Hickey D.D., the Rt. Rev. John F. O'Hern V.G., the Rev. Edward T. Meagher, Mr. James H. Ryan and Mr. Elmer A. Biesenbach were named

1. Our Lady of Good Counsel Archives: notes by Father Meagher.

2. Times Union (Rochester, N.Y.), Sept. 10, 1928.

3. Good Counsel Archives: notes by Father Meagher.

trustees of the church.⁴

Plans were drawn up and construction of the church began on September seventeenth. The building was a "temporary" wooden structure. As originally built it measured 43' by 112' and could accommodate 556 persons. There were three altars in the sanctuary and in the back at the left of the entrance was a small elevated choir-space. Mr. Daniel J. Meagher, brother of the new pastor, was the builder, and he had the whole structure finished in the remarkably short time of three weeks.

On Sunday, October 7, 1928, about fifteen hundred people crowded into the new church for the two morning services with which the church was formally opened. Low Mass was read by Father Meagher at eight o'clock and Solemn Pontifical High Mass was celebrated at eleven by the Rt. Rev. Thomas F. Hickey, Bishop of Rochester, who blessed the building. The Rev. J.P. Brophy, rector of St. Monica and Walter A. Foery, rector of Mount Carmel acted as honorary deacons. The Rev. George Predmore of Spenceport was deacon and Francis Luddy of St. Andrew's Seminary, sub-deacon. The master of ceremonies was the Rev. William Hart of Corpus Christi Church, as assistant priest was the Rt. Rev. M.J. Nolan of St. Andrew's Seminary. Among the many clergy in attendance was the Rev. Leo V. Smith, then assistant at the Immaculate Conception Church. At eight o'clock that evening there was a service of benediction with rosary and sermon preached by the Rev. Francis Luddy, prefect of studies at St. Andrew's Seminary, on "Our Lady of Good Counsel".⁵

As spiritual leader of this new congregation, Father Meagher

4. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Aug. 28, 1928. At this same meeting the trustees authorized Father Meagher to borrow \$ 75,000.00 at the lowest possible interest.

5. Times Union (Rochester, N.Y.), Oct. 8, 1928.

arranged for the first instruction class for children on November tenth with Sister Assunta and Sister Josina as the teachers.⁶ Realizing almost at once that two Sunday Masses would not suffice for the needs of the parish, he requested and received permission to establish a third Mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation beginning with Sunday, Nov. 11, 1928.⁷

In the January board meeting of 1930, Mr. Joseph J. Statt was elected the new member of the Board of Directors. It was also at this meeting that the motion was carried to open a parochial school. Here too Father Meagher was fortunate to be able to rely on the help and advice of his brother, the contractor. In a letter written to Father Meagher, Mr. Daniel J. Meagher outlined his plan as a general contractor to show the advantages in keeping at a minimum building costs. Realizing that his relationship with the pastor of Good Counsel might give rise to a suspicion of favoritism, Mr. Meagher declared that any contract entered into, as approved by the Diocesan Building Committee, should clearly involve no profit to himself. In fact, if the Committee were to decide in favor of general bids, he thought it unwise for him to bid at all, as some of the bidders might underestimate their chances to win against the pastor's brother, and through lack of interest on their part deprive Father Meagher the competition to which he was entitled.⁸ In the April Board Meeting of the same year, the Rt. Rev. John F. O'Hern D.D., as head of the Board and with the directors approved of

6. Good Counsel Archives: notes by Father Meagher.

7. Letter from the Chancery Office to the Rev. Edward T. Meagher on November 2, 1928. The continued growth of the parish has necessitated the addition of still more Sunday Masses since then, so that now there are seven Masses on Sunday all the year round.

8. Mr. Daniel J. Meagher to the Rev. Edward T. Meagher, Rochester, N.Y., February 27, 1928.

the plan and so excavation and construction began on March first.⁹

While the construction was under way, Father Meagher turned his attentions towards the Sisters who would staff his school. On May thirteenth, he wrote to Mother Dominica, general superior of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, at the request of Bishop O'Hern to arrange with her for the Sisters to come to Good Counsel as teachers. The nuns were slated to open a new parochial school in East Rochester, but the plans for that had fallen through. If he definitely knew of their coming, he said he would purchase a convent which he had selected.¹⁰ Four days later, Mother Dominica in her reply, requested an interview with the Bishop and Father Meagher and here arranged for the Sisters to come to the new parish.¹¹ The convent property was purchased and occupied by the Sisters of St. Francis on September third.

Sunday afternoon, July 20, 1930, saw the official laying of the cornerstone of the new Parochial School of Our Lady of Good Counsel by the Rt. Rev. John F. O'Hern D.D.¹² The Bishop announced to the people that the Sisters of St. Francis, for 700 years a religious order noted the world over for their charitable and educational work, would teach in the new school. This would be the first English speaking school in the Rochester Diocese in charge of these Sisters. The Bishop further stated:

You are erecting here a school which will be a center for Christian education, a center of good citizenship,

9. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, April 12, 1930. At this meeting Father Meagher was authorized to borrow \$ 125,000.00 at the lowest possible interest.

10. Rev. E. T. Meagher to Mother Dominica, Rochester, N.Y., May 13, 1930.

11. Mother Dominica to Rev. Edward T. Meagher, Rome, N.Y., May 17, 1930.

12. The present pastor, Rev. Leo V. Smith, was also one of the many priests who attended this dedication.

and for the promotion and development of social and religious life that will mean much for this southwestern section of the city of Rochester.¹³

Truly Our Lady of Good Counsel School has taken these words and made them into a living reality. The scholastic record, achieved under the direction of the good Sisters of St. Francis, is known throughout the diocese.

The Collegiate-Gothic building was completed and ready for occupancy by the children on September fifteenth. It had eight classrooms; 350 children; an auditorium for 800; 300 for a future gallery and a second story may be added at a minimum expense since all mechanical and structural work was arranged to provide for expansion.¹⁴

In caring for the physical needs of his parish, Father Meagher did not waste an opportunity to help the parishoners themselves by employing them whenever he could - a real work of mercy in those days of business depression and unemployment. A payroll of over \$ 50,000.00 was distributed on work exclusive of sub-contracts, a large portion of the money going into the parish; and employment was supplied to about seventy men per week during the "hard times". When the school was completed, the architects was able to report the total cost notably lower than that of similar buildings of the same type.¹⁵

With the parish constructional work successfully concluded at a minimum cost, many other storms had to be courageously weatherd by

13. Catholic Journal (Rochester, N.Y.), July 25, 1930.

14. Good Counsel Archives: notes by Father Meagher.

15. Ibid.

Good Counsel's founding pastor.¹⁶ But thanks to his efforts and the co-operation of his parishoners, the parish came through all right; and when Father Meagher died on November 25, 1946, he left Good Counsel in excellent condition.

One of Father Meagher's classmates, the Rev. Leo V. Smith, formerly spiritual director at St. Bernard's Seminary, was named second pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel. Father Smith has proved himself no less efficient than his predecessor. Consequently the entire property now stands debt free.

Of Course, spiritual soundness is more important in a parish than financial soundness, Good Counsel is fortunate in being well-grounded in both respects.

16. On June 30, 1931, Father Meagher was authorized to borrow \$ 225,000.00 from the Security Trust Co. In November of that same year, he had to borrow \$ 10,000.00 from Mr. Frank Fischer of 747 Joseph Avenue, to pay on the note. This was because he was being pressed by the bank which was not anxious to extend credit. In May 1932, a meeting was called at the Security Trust Company Office by Mr. Carl Potter, Mr. Edward Harris, and Mr. Julius Wyle representing the bank and the Rev. Edward T. Meagher representing the Church Corporation of Our Lady of Good Counsel. The bankers wished to place a mortgage on the church property to provide security for the demand loan of the Church. The suggestion was rejected by Father Meagher, however, with the backing of the Bishop. The proposal was again made and again refused. Finally the bank directors agreed to leave the demand loan as it stood with the understanding that the financial report of property and building cost would be submitted yearly to the bank. This was done and on January 1, 1951, the financial statement for the Church Corporation of Our Lady of Good Counsel had cash on hand of \$ 9,063.90 with no outstanding debts of any description against the church corporation. This is a good example of the generosity of Catholics in meeting their financial obligations and could be used as a reproof to bankers who may worry at times as to the enormity of the financial stress felt by church corporations over short periods of time.

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