

History of the church of Our Lady of Good Counsel



The history of the parish of Our Lady of Good Counsel goes back to the year 1947. In that year Father Tom Moriarty arrived to form a parish and he rode around on his bicycle looking for Catholics. At first he stayed with the Murphy family at the bottom of South Parkway. He celebrated mass in the chapel in Killingbeck Cemetery and the community centre on South Parkway.

Land was purchased in the early 1950s in the Foundry Mill area. A hut was quickly erected to serve as a temporary church, dedicated to Our Lady of Good Counsel. A house was also purchased on Foundry Lane which was used as the presbytery. The church proper was built between 1953 and 1954. Parishioners were greatly involved with the construction in ways such as clearing the land, cleaning second hand bricks and fundraising.

While the church was being built a vast building programme was getting underway which would make Seacroft one of the largest council estates in Europe. The parish was very active and full of enthusiastic parishioners. Groups such as the Saint Vincent de Paul society, the Young Christian Workers, the Legion of Mary and the Knights of Saint Columba were thriving.

This vast building programme, which saw people from all over Leeds being re-housed and a new, diverse community made up of people from all kinds of different backgrounds being formed, led to the foundation of a new parish in the north of Seacroft. The title of Our Lady of Good Counsel was given over to the new parish and the newly completed church in the south of Seacroft was given the name of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.

In September 1954 Father Donal Stritch arrived in the newly formed parish in the north of Seacroft where he found only a half-completed school which was to serve both of the parishes in Seacroft. The first celebrations of mass were held in the builders' canteen, with the oven being used as the altar and the only light coming

from gas mantles. A meeting of the parish was called after the very first mass. This meeting saw the formation of a committee and the task of building a church was begun. The committee began to realise that the parish priest had a difficult task in getting the people together as a team, as they had all come from many different areas with different memories and ideas. The zeal and diplomacy of Father Stritch meant that these differences were quickly put aside.

At Christmas 1954, one of the classrooms was in a good enough state for the celebration of mass. The first mass to be celebrated there was the Christmas Midnight Mass. Soon after Christmas the school hall was ready, and mass was celebrated there from the beginning of 1955 until the opening of the church. The first parish social event took place in the almost-completed school on March 17th 1955 – a Saint Patrick's Day Dance. Many other social events followed to raise money for the building fund.

The school buildings were completed in June 1955, which was significant in that Catholic children could now attend school in their own parish. The men's and women's confraternities were formed in December 1955. By this time the parishioners had come to know each other and the formation of the confraternities was of great importance for the work that lay ahead. It was at this point that the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour was begun – a devotion which continues in the parish to this day.

A very important occasion came in December 1957 with the visit of the Bishop Dwyer. He was satisfied that the parish had proved, by its faith, zeal and work, that the time had come for the building of a church. There was great joy in the parish when, some time later, Father Stritch announced that permission had been given for the building of the church and that plans were already been drawn up. The builders arrived on September 3rd 1958 and the work commenced. Bishop Dwyer officiated at the laying of the foundation stone on May 9th 1959.

The work continued and the confraternities set about raising funds for the interior of the church. The women's section provided the altar carpet and candlesticks and the men's section provided the monstrance and the font. The school children provided the tabernacle. Other furnishings were donated and subscribed to by families and individuals. The church was completed in 1960 and on June 12th of that year Father Stritch blessed the interior and exterior of the building. Everything was now in place for the opening of the church.

On the evening of June 13th 1960, before many of the clergy from all over the diocese and many parishioners, some of whom had to watch on a television screen outside, Bishop Dwyer celebrated a Solemn High Mass. Father S. Casey and Father J. Lahart were the deacon and subdeacon at the celebration. Canon F. Holdright, Canon J. McShane and Father T. Moriarty assisted at the throne. The master of ceremonies for the occasion was Mr A. Wing and Mr J. Power, J.P., a knight of Malta,

was present in the sanctuary. The choir was on top form under the leadership of Mr. M. Fisher with Mrs. E. Whitaker playing the organ.

Some fifteen years passed until the debt was fully paid and the church could be consecrated. The ceremony took place on June 13th 1975. The ceremony was strange in that the consecration itself took place before the mass. The rite of consecration was a translation of the consecration ceremony of the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite, which was universally used before the Second Vatican Council. This was followed by the celebration of mass in the form used today. Archbishop Dwyer (then Archbishop of Birmingham) presided at the consecration and celebrated the mass, with Bishop Wheeler anointing the altar.

In September 1987, Canon Donal Stritch was buried from the church he had built. This was followed by the arrival of Father Michael O'Reilly. Many physical changes to the church building took place in this time. The font was moved to the sanctuary, the altar rails were removed, the choir loft was bricked up to form a room to be used for children's liturgy groups and the organ was moved to its present position. The body of the church was shortened, making room for a hall, and toilets were installed. The former baptistery became the current confessional. This was all quite unsettling for a number of people, but everyone soon came to realise the benefits of having a hall, especially when tea and coffee became a regular feature after the Sunday masses. It was during this time, in 1989, that the parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour closed. The church building was then used by Catholic Care.

Father Michael left in 1997 to go to Saint Joseph's, Pudsey, where he remains today. Father John Kelly was parish priest from 1997 to 1998. Before and after his time in this parish he worked on the diocesan mission in Peru. He is now parish priest of the neighbouring parish of Saint Gregory. He was followed by Father Dan Harrison, who stayed until 2006, when he became the parish priest of Saint Mary's, Horsforth. It was during this time that the number of Sunday masses was reduced from three to two, due to falling numbers. Father Steven Billington arrived in August 2006. He is also the chaplain to Leeds United and a part-time lecturer in philosophy at Ushaw College, Durham.

Written by Sean P. Crawley

Seminarian for the Diocese of Leeds