

ST. COLUMBA PARISH
PAXTON, MA

OUR FIRST 60 YEARS

OUR CHURCH

The first Catholics who came to Worcester were chiefly Irish immigrants, and were brought here by the contractors of the Blackstone Canal. As time went on, the number of Catholics increased. In 1834, Bishop Fenwick of Boston appointed the Reverend James Fitton to visit the Catholics of Worcester once a month. This was welcome news.

The holy sacrifice of the Mass was first offered in Worcester on North Main Street at approximately the location of the Crown Plaza, in 1826. The foundation of Christ's Church, the first Catholic Church in Worcester, was laid July 6, 1834. Many churches followed as Worcester grew. Churches were built through the following years and began appearing further and further away from the center of town.

Religious gatherings were taking place in the Tatnuck area from about 1847. Tatnuck and Paxton were missionary journeys for Rev. James Fitton or the pioneer priests who followed him. Mass was celebrated in Catholic homes. Tatnuck (and Paxton) became a part of St. Paul's Parish in 1866 and Blessed Sacrament Parish in 1912. On September 15, 1936, the Sacrifice of the Mass was celebrated by Fr. John Reilly in the rectory of Christ the King Parish.

Catholics from Paxton belonged to Christ the King Parish. Fr. Reilly negotiated with the Town Fathers of Paxton to celebrate Mass in the Paxton Town Hall until a "more suitable" location could be found. An exchange of letters between Fr. Reilly and Mary M. Daniher, clerk for the Paxton Board of Selectmen, and news accounts of those days, indicate that Fr. Reilly's initial request in that regard (September 14, 1936, the day before the first Mass was to be celebrated in Tatnuck), was not received without some reservations.

A regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen on September 24 resulted in a two-to-one vote against granting Fr. Reilly's petition for the Town Hall Masses in Paxton. In a letter dated October 9, 1936, however, Miss Daniher told Fr. Reilly that at another meeting of the board the night before, the selectmen received a petition "containing 128 signatures of Protestants as well as Catholics, asking the selectmen to reconsider their September 24th vote". She further informed the pastor that "the other two members of the board ... feel that the responsibility of deciding this question should be passed on to the people and then there will be no criticism of them". Accordingly, "Miss Daniher's letter continued, "it was unanimously voted, under these circumstances, to ask the town clerk to issue a

warrant for a special town meeting, as soon as possible, for the purpose of acting upon an article to permit the use of the hall on Sunday mornings, for our services.

That special town meeting was held on October 26, 1936. It resulted in a vote of 88 townspeople in favor of Mass in the Town Hall and 50 against. The vote was subsequently made unanimous on a motion of Gustaf A. Rossier, a former deacon of the Congregational Church in town. Mr. Rossier and Earl Bemis, then deacon of the Congregational Church, earlier had spoken in favor of Fr. Reilly's application. The Worcester Evening Post of October 27, 1936 reported that "only two residents ... voiced their disapproval of the movement." One opponent, The Post reported, expressed his belief that "the town was establishing a precedent by voting in favor of the petition and intimating that the Catholics would be given a special privilege denied to others in the town." Town Moderator Rufus B. Dunbar countered that opinion, The Post reported citing that "the town itself was formed along parish lines and that the first public property was the First Congregational Church." That property in the center of town, Mr. Dunbar recalled, was later assigned to the religious body through an "amicable" exchange of deeds.

Fr. Reilly was celebrant of the first Paxton Mass with William Harney as "server" and 110 persons in the congregation on November 1, 1936. Masses were held in the town hall for 16 years. Each month families took turns setting up and dismantling the altar. Business as usual was the order on Monday.

During the October 26, 1936 town meeting in Paxton, The Evening Post reported, "application for use of the town hall for church services was made only as a temporary measure, until such time when chapel quarters are established within the town ..." When the new quarters have been established, services in the town will be conducted as a mission by the Parish of the Church of Christ the King in Worcester. That such a "chapel" was not only contemplated but was, indeed, almost consummated, was made public in early 1951. It was in the very first edition of the Catholic Free Press, on May 4, 1951, that a Page One headline stated: "Mission Church Planned for Paxton."

The Free Press story said that plans were being discussed "for the establishment of a mission church ... on a plot of Church-owned land facing the Common" and that it would be served by priests from Christ the King Parish. Three weeks later, On May 25, 1951, The Free Press further reported that "a generous gift from the parents of Arthur D. Lamotte" would be used in building a memorial within the proposed Christ the King mission church "to their patriot-son," a parishioner who was a Marine hero and gave his life during World War II.

Another significant event specifically concerning Catholicism in Paxton was reported just one week after that. It was the lead story in The Catholic Free Press of June 1, 1951, that announced: "Anna Maria College moves to Diocese." The news account reported that "Mooracres," a 293 acre estate on Sunset Lane had

been purchased by the Sisters of St. Anne and that the Sisters would move their five-year-old all-girl college from Marlborough to the new location in Paxton the following summer. The property, which had been a breeding and training ground for saddle horses, surrounded a picturesque 150-year old New England colonial residence, which was to be renovated for convent and classroom use until additional buildings could be built.

Whether it was because of the impending development of Anna Maria College in town or not, is lost to history; but within three months of that June 1st announcement, plans for a mission church of Christ the King in town were scuttled and a complete division of the Tatnuck-based parish occurred with the appointment of Rev. Harry A. Brabson as founding pastor of the new St. Columba Parish, effective on September 5, 1951.

The purchase of the land on which St. Columba Church stands was made from Arthur Maccabee on June 14, 1948. The Maccabee property was never put to church use prior to the establishment of the new church. Mass continued to be celebrated in the town hall by priests from Christ the King until Fr. Brabson decided, upon his arrival in September 1951 to have the campus of Anna Maria College also serve as the temporary center of St. Columba parish life.

Ground was broken in January 1952 and plans were that the structure would be finished by June of that year. The church would hold 300 people and would have a recreation hall, kitchen, check room, boiler room and rest rooms. J.E. Antell and Sons of Spencer were the contractors and Rev. Harry A. Brabson was Pastor. It is of Modified Colonial architecture.

The first Mass was celebrated in the new structure on July 27, 1952 and it was formerly dedicated on October 26th of that year. The years since 1952 and the formal dedication of St. Columba's have been busy and productive.

Monsignor John Martin renovated the church during the years of 1968 to 1970. Interior painting was done, new drapes, and pews were replaced. The church was given a fresh new look.

A plaque at the rear of the church pays tribute to the many generous parishioners that made this possible.

OUR PASTORS

Many priests have made their home here, each bringing a new personality, and new life to the parish family.

Rev. Harry A Brabson	Administrator Pastor	August 31, 1951 to December 12, 1951 December 12, 1951 to December 20, 1955
Rev. John M. Flaherty	Pastor	December 20, 1955 to June 1, 1960
Rev. Thomas J. Daley	Administrator Pastor	March 21, 1960 to June 2, 1960 June 2, 1960 to July 8, 1961
Rev. Edmond T. Tinsley	Administrator	July 8, 1961 to July 29, 1961
Rev. Harold F. Griffin	Pastor	Jul 29, 1961 to July 12, 1968
Rev. John P. Martin	Pastor	July 12, 1968 to June 26, 1970
Rev. Roy J. Devaney	Pastor	June 26, 1970 to July 1, 1975
Rev. Thomas F. O'Brien	Pastor	July 1, 1975 to Jul 8, 1982
Rev. James B. Kelly	Pastor	July 8, 1982 to September 26, 1985
Rev. John D. Thomas	Pastor	October 11, 1985 to June 27, 2003

Father Thomas received his BA in Philosophy from Boston College in 1950 and continued studies in Montreal, Canada before receiving both the Bachelor of Sacred Theology in 1953 and Licentiate in Sacred Theology degrees in 1955 from the Gregorian University in Rome, Italy. He was ordained to the Roman Catholic Priesthood on December 8, 1954 at North American College in Rome.

In 1956 he was named Assistant Director of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and then from 1957 to 1961 taught Theology at St. Vincent Hospital School of Nursing in Worcester while also teaching a course in the Classics at the Secondary School level. In 1961 Father Thomas was appointed Headmaster of St. Peter Central High School and Assistant Superintendent for Diocesan Primary and Secondary Schools. The year following his appointment, he received a dual Master of Arts in Guidance and Psychology from Assumption College in Worcester. In 1966 Father Thomas was made Superintendent, a position which he held for eight years. Again promoted in 1974, he became Director of Education.

Father Thomas was appointed Pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in West Boylston in 1976 and served there for two years before he was appointed Business Manager of the North American College in Rome and served as one of the Spiritual Directors for students in 1978. He remained in this position until 1985, when he came to us at St. Columba. On June 22, 2003, after 18 years of service, he retired as pastor of St. Columba.

Rev. James M. Shea Pastor June 27, 2003 to July 3, 2006

Father James Shea graduated from Sacred Heart Academy in 1965 and entered the US Coast Guard in 1966 serving on a buoy tender in Alaska. Later he served at lifesaving stations in New Jersey and Massachusetts. He graduated from Worcester State College in 1980 with a Bachelor of Science degree in urban studies but decided to study for the priesthood at Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora, NY. He was ordained by Bishop Harrington in St. Paul's Cathedral on January 5, 1985. Father Shea served as associate pastor of St. Peter Parish from January 18, 1985 to February 12, 1991 when he was named associate pastor at St. Joan of Arc Parish. While at St. Joan of Arc he spent three months in Puerto Rico studying Spanish. He was assigned as associate pastor at our Lady of the Rosary Parish on June 15, 1996. On June 27, 2003 he was assigned as Pastor of St. Columba Parish. On July 3, 2006 after a sudden hospitalization for a clot related stroke, he went home to god. The church was filled with mourners for a man that the congregation knew as "a big guy with a big heart".

Msgr. Thomas J. Sullivan Pastor July 15, 2006 to June 30, 2007

A week after the sudden death of Father Shea, Bishop McManus asked Monsignor Sullivan to be the pastor of St. Columba while he continued as diocesan chancellor and diocesan director of development. Msgr. Sullivan studied for the priesthood at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore and was ordained by Bishop Flanagan on June 18, 1977 in St. Paul Cathedral.

He was named associate pastor at St. Andrew the Apostle on July 8, 1977. From 1979 to 1984 he served as associate director of the diocesan office of religious education, specializing in adult education, and was the director of the south county religious education office. He served as associate pastor at St. Luke the evangelist parish in Westborough and St. Mary's and our lady of the rosary parishes in spencer.

In June 1990, he was appointed headmaster of St. Bernard's central catholic high school in Fitchburg and was in residence at St. Bernard's and St. Richard of Chichester in sterling. In 1995, Bishop Reilly named him diocesan director of vocations and secretary to the bishop. He was named chancellor in 1998. He continued as director of vocations until 2005.

He was named a monsignor by Pope John Paul II in 2001. He was administrator of St. Bernadette parish in Northborough from April 2002 until August 2003.

Rev. David E. Doiron Administrator December 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007
Pastor June 30, 2007 to Present

Father David Doiron was born on November 3, 1943 in Gardner, the son of Alphonse and Evangeline (Goguen) Doiron. He attended Cornwell Classical College in Cornwell, Ontario from 1957 to 1963. He studied for the priesthood at the Seminary of Philosophy in Montreal from 1963 to 1965 and at the University at Louvain, Belgium from 1965 to 1969.

He served as temporary associate pastor at St. Roche's Parish in Oxford before being named associate pastor at Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Worcester where he served from 1969 to 1975. He was named to the diocesan Tribunal as Pro-Synodal judge on November 5, 1974 and served in the Tribunal until 1982. He also served as temporary associate pastor at St. Anne parish in Manchaug from February 1 to July 1, 1978.

He obtained his Doctor of Ministry degree in psychology in 1981 from Andover-Newton Theological Seminary and was licensed in Psychology in 1983.

Father David worked as a priest-therapist at the House of Affirmation in Whitinsville from 1983 to 1986. He was named clinical director of the Worcester Pastoral Counseling Center on June 1, 1982. He was named pastor of St. Columba parish in Paxton on June 30, 2007 while continuing at the Counseling Center.

OUR PRIESTS IN RESIDENCE

Rev. Roger E. Racine	July 5, 1963 to June 1, 1967
Rev. Paul T. O'Connell	July 4, 1969 to February 28, 1970
Rev. Charles J. Dumphy 1970	February 28, 1970 to October 30, 1970
Rev. Wayne F. Benton	July 9, 1971 to July 21, 1972
Rev. Peter J. Inzerillo 1975	September 1, 1972 to September 5, 1975
Rev. Gerard P. Walsh,	July 16, 1980 to October 8, 1980
Rev. Daniel P. Dower	July 13, 1984 to October 1, 1984
Rev. Richard P. Hokanson	July 1, 1985 to May 25, 1987

OUR DEACON

Norbert "Deacon Archie" Archibald was ordained on December 8, 2001 at St. Paul's Cathedral and accepted an assignment at St. Columba just before Christmas 2001. This was a real blessing for our parish as he showed both zeal for the message of Christian non-violence and personal concern for those around him. His devotion to the Eucharist and his ability to network with people have had a very edifying effect on the life of St. Columba Parish. He departed St. Columba in June 2003.

OUR OFFICE STAFF

On November 12, 2002, our friend Anita Glondek was called home. Anita quietly and unassumingly worked for St. Columba Parish since before Father Thomas arrived in 1985. Over the years, she was a faithful and industrious help to father Thomas in the administrative affairs of the parish. She also served as a bookkeeper for many churches, including her own parish of St. Mary's in Southbridge.

Lisa Reider joined the staff of St. Columba at the end of 2002. She brought with her experience in new office technology which she utilizes in her own private business practice and has worked in an administrative capacity in other parishes as well. Lisa has been instrumental in modernizing processes such as electronic submission of the bulletin.

OUR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Sisters that have come here have cared for and educated our children and made the responsibilities of the parish priest a bit lighter. They have provided continuity in an ever-changing world.

Religious Education classes have grown and changed over the years. During the early and mid-sixties, Fr. Griffin held CCD classes in the Parish Hall with many mothers as teachers. This continued for about ten years until Fr. Devaney and Fr. Benton's time here. At this time, a change was made. For a period of time, classes were held at the Paxton Center School with Fr. Benton in charge. He was a man, full of energy, who had gone "door to door" to recruit many new teachers.

The early 70's brought three Sisters to our Parish Family. They worked as a team and re-organized our Religious Education Program.

Sister Catherine Guild, RSM	Grades 1to 4
Sister Dorothy McCarthy, SND	Grades 5 to 8
Sister Mary Herring, SSJ	Grades 9 to 12

This new approach to Religious Education was a tri-parish program. Three parishes were selected to pioneer this new program with St. Columba being one of them. The other two parishes were St. George's in Worcester and St. Christopher's in West Boylston.

The coordinators were responsible for recruiting and training teachers and planning the program. They were responsible to the Pastors, Religious Education Board and Parish Council. Classes were now being held in homes in small groups. This worked well for several years.

With the departure of two of the Sisters, Sister Catherine took the helm and directed our program for many years. Classes were brought back to the Church Hall. Teachers went through more training and a more formal program began.

The presence of Sister Catherine in our midst has indeed been a blessing. Her retirement in June of 2000 was expected and deserved, but left us all missing her and her leadership. Hopefully, the program will continue with new leadership and serve the children of our parish in the years to come.

Sister Catherine also made regular home visits to the elderly and homebound of the parish. Her visits were always a joy to them.

In September of 2001, Mary O'Neil, a teacher at Christ the King Parish in Worcester, accepted the position as Director of Religious Education. In her role here she introduced changes in the religious education program and sacramental preparation program, placing an emphasis on some of the diocesan recommendations such as frequent prayer experiences and expanded classroom time. She stayed at St. Columba for the 2001-2002 school year before accepting a position in the Catholic School System of Worcester. For most of the 2002-2003 year, St. Columba did not have an "official" Director of Religious Education. Hal Campbell was already busy studying the curriculum, schedule and resources available as an applicant to replace Mary as interim director.

Shortly after Father Shea arrived, the need to replace the interim director of religious education with a permanent position became apparent. Mrs. Terry Nummelin came to St. Columba in 2003 from St. George's Parish in Worcester, bringing with her an extensive background as a religious education instructor. Terry placed a fresh emphasis on liturgical details that displays itself particularly in the preparation and reception of Sacraments by children for the first time. She put in countless hours of time to grow the program and to collect new ideas through additional training and through contacts throughout the Diocese of Worcester.

We are pleased that Mrs. Nummelin is still teaching our children, here in Paxton, in 2011. She brings a vitality and excitement to the Program and the children love her. Her contributions to this parish are invaluable.

OUR MUSIC PROGRAM

Shortly before Father Thomas' retirement there was a change in the music program. Organist and Choir Director Myles Tronic was offered a position in a large active church in Fitchburg. His replacement, Clinton Fairbanks was organist and director for four short months. He passed away suddenly on May 2, 2003 after joining St. Columba in January of 2003. Prior to that he served six years as the music director at St. Mary's in Uxbridge and served as organist at the Church of the Notre Dame in Southbridge for 25 years.

After a very quiet Easter season, Diane Desautels joined St. Columba as organist at the beginning of June 2003, coming from Southbridge where she is a partner in a local law firm.

OUR ACTIVITIES & ORGANIZATIONS

Through the years the St. Vincent De Paul Society flourished, Thomas F. Harney was its first President. Some of the early committee members were: Frank Ryan, Ulysses Trudeau, John Ahearn and William Feen. At some point, it ceased to exist.

The Woman's Guild here at St. Columba also had many active years. Catholic women, here in Paxton, found that the guild provided friendship and strengthening of faith for many years. As new families came into town, the women of the parish found this to be a pleasant and happy place to begin to make friends. Needs change and family change also. We entered an era of "the working mom" so going to meetings at night became difficult. Social groups suffered and attendance dropped. Sometime in the mid 70's, the Women's Guild ended.

Activities through the years have been varied and have provided much enjoyment for Paxton families. Dances, family picnics, suppers, and flea markets are among the events that have taken place over the years.

Under Fr. John Thomas's leadership, The Human Service Committee was formed and continued. This Committee provided help and meals to those Parish members who have a need because of a family death. Those of us who have used this

service know that it is a tremendous help to families at a sad time. This was discontinued with the arrival of Father Shea.

A special event in the life of our parish family was the Outdoor Mass for the elderly and Shut-ins. Through the years it has been a high point for many people, some of who are not able to get to Mass. A festive meal makes the day a happy time for all. This was one of Father Thomas's "favorite things" and he and Sister Catherine worked very hard to make it a success. Father Thomas enjoyed cooking.

St. Columba in Paxton has been a family ~ a place and atmosphere where children can grow, young people are married and in the sad days of our lives, we are given faith and strength.

This passage of time brings changes ~ people we love pass away ~ people we love move away. But new people come and we learn to love them too. They bring new ideas, new skills and new enthusiasm. They settle into our neighborhoods, our town and our church and make them better places.

All of those people who came before us ~ who worked so hard because they believed ~ have left us a legacy that makes us proud. In the 60 years that St. Columba has served the Town of Paxton, many families have passed through here. This Church has touched their lives in many ways.

St. Columba is a work in progress. It is ever changing and ever fluid. It fits each one of us. We only have to reach out.

As we read this today, we know that the future looks bright here at St. Columba. There will always be people who care. As they were here in the past, they will be here in the future.

The arrival of Father David was a gift. He is a quiet man who has awakened us and shaken us up a bit. He has given our parish a new life. He is on a mission to bring out the best in all of us. We hope that he stays in our lives for a long time.

Joan Bedard
September 2011