

REBUILDING OHIO'S CRADLE OF THE FAITH

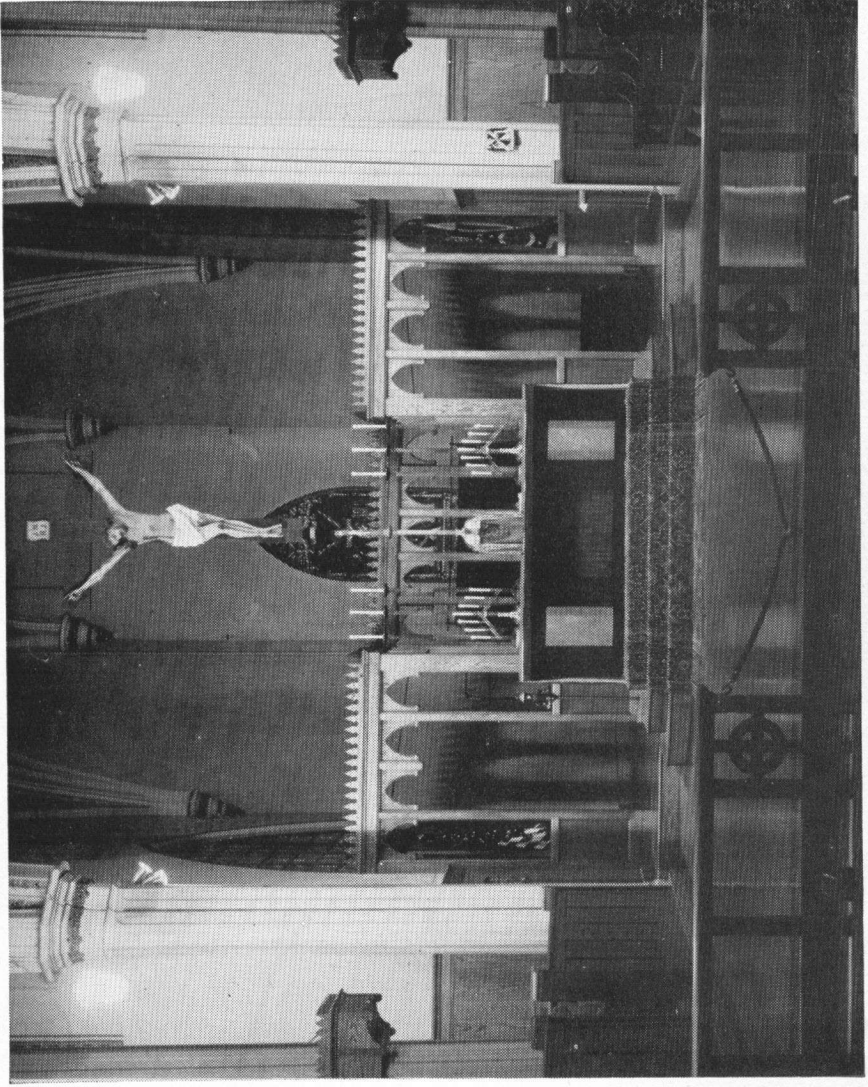
The Renovation of Historic St. Joseph's Priory, Somerset, Ohio



T. JOSEPH'S near Somerset, Ohio, the first Catholic church in the state, dating from 1818, and one of the oldest and most beloved churches in the Dominican Province of St. Joseph, has recently undergone extensive remodelling. As a result of these alterations, St. Joseph's is now better fitted to fulfill its three-fold function as conventual church, parish church, and shrine of St. Joseph.

The improvements were begun in 1946 with complete repair of the roof and conversion of the heating system from the use of coal to natural gas. March, 1951, saw the inauguration of interior changes which include a new combined sacristy and chapel, a new liturgical sanctuary and choir, several new statues, and much new equipment. The remodelled interior now makes the church a beautiful and appropriate place for the friars to carry out the splendid ceremonies of the Dominican liturgy. The new liturgical altar and enlarged sanctuary provide a spacious and proper setting for the elaborate ceremonies of the Dominican Solemn Mass and choral Office. The new choir stalls on either side of the sanctuary make a handsome appearance and give more ample space for the growing community to carry on the daily recitation of the Divine Office, a tradition which is more than one hundred and thirty years old at St. Joseph's. And the more efficient use of space for the needs of the religious community and parish, as well as the correct beauty of the remodelled church, make it a more appropriate spot for a votive shrine to its patron, St. Joseph.

The first major step of the renovation involved the removal of the choir stalls from the old choir and the adaptation of the area as a sacristy and chapel. The old choir was located in a wing which connects the church with the priory and which opens into the apse of the church, where the main altar was formerly located. The plans for renovation required that this wing perform a triple function: 1) as a sacristy for the main church, 2) as a chapel for three private altars, and 3) as a passageway between the church and priory. All three requirements have been satisfied with remarkable ingenuity in a room of uncommon beauty which combines both convenience and devotional atmosphere.



NEW HIGH ALTAR AND RENOVATED SANCTUARY, ST. JOSEPH'S PRIORY, SOMERSET, OHIO.



The sacristy contains two striking, original sculptures, done in wood by Father T. M. McGlynn, O.P. One of St. Joseph dressed in carpenter's clothes and holding the Christ Child is mounted over the sacarium. The other of the Blessed Mother at the the cross embracing the feet of Our Lord is placed over the middle altar.

The high altar which was formerly in the apse opposite the doors of the old choir was removed in 1951. A new, table-type, liturgical altar, located at the front of the apse, has replaced it. The new high altar has a table of finished walnut which rests on columns of birds-eye maple. The tabernacle is of bronze with a circular, lattice-designed crown of the same material. Each of the six walnut candlesticks is constructed in three removable sections.

The large old venerated crucifix which was mounted in the reredos of the former high altar has been suspended by chains from the main arch of the apse, directly over the new high altar. In the back of this historic crucifix have been mounted a relic of the True Cross and first class relics of St. Dominic, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Sebastian, and St. Anselm.

Behind the high altar and extending from one wall of the apse to the other is a screen in gothic style having arched doorways on either side of the altar which provide access to the apse and sacristy. Crimson damask curtains hang in the pointed arched openings on either side of these doorways. Back of the altar in this screen is a three-sided, rectangular recess which provides space for a Wurlitzer organ.

At the back of the apse an altar in honor of St. Dominic has been erected. The outstanding decorative feature of this altar is a bust of St. Dominic, a bronze casting from the original Vero Volto bust of the saint which was reconstructed by Professor Pini of Bologna, Italy, from the skull of St. Dominic. In front of it are a crucifix and a first class relic of St. Dominic, which is mounted in a small, oaken block of light, satin finish. The altar is dedicated to the departed brethren of the Province of St. Joseph.

Future plans call for the moving of the large St. Joseph window now located in the north wall of the apse opposite the sacristy to a more prominent position in the west wall of the apse directly above the altar of St. Dominic. There it will be visible from the back of the church. In its place in the north wall a new heraldic window will be installed representing by means of coats of arms all the authorities of the Church which St. Joseph's Priory has served since its foundation. The window will therefore contain the arms of the Holy Father, the Order of Preachers, the Master General, the Province of St.

Joseph and its two daughter provinces—Holy Name and St. Albert the Great—and of the Dioceses of Bardstown, Louisville, Cincinnati, and Columbus.

After the removal of the old altars and communion rail and of the first five rows of pews in the church, the sanctuary floor was extended out to the second pillar from the apse. Graded platforms in four levels for the new choir stalls were also constructed to the same point on either side. An eight-foot chancel screen of gothic style, similar to the one back of the high altar, was placed on both sides of the choir between the pillar and outer wall to divide the choir from the church. Crimson damask curtains, like those back of the high altar and in the sacristy, hang on the choir side of these screens. The curtains are mounted on moveable slides so that they can be opened or closed.

The new side altars are outside the communion rail on either side of the church just below the chancel screens. On the broad surfaces of these altars directly in front of the chancel screens stand original statues carved of linden wood by Mr. Henry E. Beretta. To the left on the altar of Our Lady is a Rosary group in traditional style and a small tabernacle of oak. To the right on the altar of St. Joseph is a statue of St. Joseph, wearing a carpenter's apron, holding in his left hand a carpenter's square, and supporting by his right arm a scale model of St. Joseph's Church and Priory.

Returning to the sanctuary and choir, the observer first notices the spacious width of the sanctuary floor. Then the eye is caught by the four, graded rows of eighty choir stalls on either side. Specially built for St. Joseph's, the stalls are generously constructed of oak with high backs and forms and give an effect of solidity and roominess. Along the wainscoting around the choir are brass plates giving the names of the donors who made possible the remodelling of St. Joseph's, or sometimes the names of those in whose honor the donation was made. Similar name plates are on each choir stall.

The following are some of the distinguished names which appear on these plates: His Holiness, Pope Pius XII; Very Rev. T. S. McDermott, O.P., Provincial of the Province of St. Joseph; Most Rev. Michael J. Ready, Bishop of Columbus; Most Rev. Karl J. Alter, D.D., Archbishop of Cincinnati, who gave a donation as a memorial to the late Archbishop J. T. McNicholas, O.P., of Cincinnati; His Eminence Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York, who gave a choir stall as memorial to the late Rev. H. L. Martin, O.P.; Most Rev. E. J. McGuiness, D.D., Bishop of Oklahoma City and Tulsa; Most Rev. E. C. Daly, O.P., Bishop of Des Moines;

Most Rev. W. T. Mulloy, D.D., Bishop of Covington, who gave a choir stall in memory of the late Rev. J. M. Stanton, O.P. A stall has also been donated in honor of the late Rev. James Luke Devine, O.P., murdered, if not martyred, missionary in China.

Future plans call for a new baptistry, to be located in the north-east corner at the back of the church. It will be done in medium oak panelling to harmonize with the sanctuary and choir. New stations will be also installed and the entire church will be painted and re-decorated.

One of the most striking improvements at St. Joseph's is the redecorated parlors of the priory. The walls of the north and south parlors and of the foyer have been painted harmonizing shades of blue and green, new drapes have been hung at the windows, a light gray rug has been laid on all of the floors, and the furniture has been upholstered. The principal feature, however, of these redecorated rooms is the new sculptures. In the foyer opposite the front door is a remarkable statue by Kratina of St. Joseph holding the Christ Child. It is placed and lighted so that it can be seen by visitors coming up the front walk when the door is open. In the south parlor facing the foyer is a statue of St. Rose of Lima by Suzanne Nicolas, and in the north parlor is a dynamic statue of St. Vincent Ferrer by Rev. T. M. McGlynn, O.P. All three of these statues are original and exclusive casts.