

IN OUR KEEPING
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“On the Frontlines in Chicago”
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I want to thank Sister Janet Welsh for the wonderful opportunity to be part of the In Our Keeping Conference. My presentation this morning is an attempt to take a look back at the Dominican presence in Chicago and to consider the ways in which Dominican sisters, brothers, and priests operated on the frontlines in the Windy City, beginning in 1868. This is, sadly, an unknown story but one that deserves to be better understood—and appreciated.

The myth embraced by historians and journalists is that the Catholic Church in Chicago was a monolithic institution, a well-oiled machine with a bishop at the top, issuing orders to priests who ruled their parishes with an iron fist. Curiously absent from these narratives are Catholic Sisters, a sin of omission as we used to say in the 1950s! Archivists of religious communities know better. After all, they have in their collections primary source material that tells a more complicated story, especially when it comes to education.

In the nineteenth century and through most of the twentieth century, the future of the Church was intimately connected to the schools and convents built and paid for with the nickels and dimes of working-and-middle-class families. You can't travel very far in Chicago without seeing visible signs of “brick and mortar” Catholicism, architecturally significant churches, schools, auditoriums, convents and rectories. What I hope to demonstrate, visually, this morning is that Catholic schools profoundly shaped urban life in Chicago and that this investment paid dividends over time—for students, their families, their neighborhoods, and their city. Equally significant, Catholic schools fostered religious vocations that helped orders such as the Dominicans grow and expand and meet new challenges.

It is no exaggeration to say that schools built parishes and kept them vital long after neighboring Protestant and Jewish congregations left neighborhoods in the wake of dramatic ethnic and racial change. If you drive through Washington Park, Park Manor, Englewood and Auburn-Gresham today, you'll still discover Catholic churches founded a century ago, maybe not as vibrant, but still Catholic. Not so with various Protestant denominations. Like the synagogues, most have become Pentecostal or Missionary Baptist. The persistence of the Catholic Church in Chicago is a major accomplishment but one that remains unheralded and unacknowledged—by civic leaders as well as Catholic bishops and pastors.

The Dominicans' Chicago network began in Immaculate Conception parish on the North Side and eventually included more than 35 schools within the city limits as well as in flourishing parishes in suburban Oak Park, River Forest, Winnetka, Homewood and Flossmoor. When it comes to Chicago we all know that place matters, and while I won't be able to show every parish in which the Sinsinawa, Adrian, and Springfield Dominicans lived and worked, as well as those staffed by the Dominican Sisters of St. Catharine Kentucky, I hope that the general outlines of their remarkable accomplishment will become clearer.

Although parishes throughout the Chicago Archdiocese had much in common with each other, they also had unique identities and in the case of English-speaking parishes, definite boundaries. When Chicago Catholics answer the question, “What parish are you from?” they not only locate themselves precisely in time and space but they identify themselves with a particular part of the city. Merely to say the words “Sabina” or “Visitation” or “Columbanus” or “Philip Neri” is to conjure up images of a sacred space, one full of personal meaning, a community with geographic limits that does not appear on any Chicago map.

Perhaps because Catholics have regarded their parishes and schools as simply part of the fabric of urban life, they have not appreciated the radical difference these institutions made in Chicago. They invested as heavily as the Catholic Church in creating educational institutions that extended from the downtown business district

to the very edge of the city and beyond. My hope is that in taking a closer look at the parishes where Dominican Sisters and priests and brothers served we will have a renewed appreciation for their life on the frontlines, first as pioneers in Protestant-dominated strongholds, and later as religious who stayed put in racially changing neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side. The historical record shows otherwise. No other denomination in the city invested as heavily as the Catholic Church in creating educational institutions that extended from the downtown business district to the very edge of the city and beyond. My hope is that in taking a closer look at the parishes where Dominican Sisters and priests and brothers served we will have a renewed appreciation for their life on the frontlines, first as pioneers in Protestant-dominated strongholds, and later as religious who stayed put in racially changing neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side.

Here is one of the earliest pieces of evidence I have found that Chicago Catholics wasted little time in putting their imprint on the urban landscape. The 1853 engraving depicts the new cathedral of Holy Name towering high above the North Side, its bricks and mortar proclaiming that the Irish were intent on using their churches to build community. But far from receiving acclaim, Catholics were lambasted by the *Chicago Tribune* for investing scarce resources in creating sacred space. The well-respected abolitionist newspaper thundered that Bishop O'Regan should give his house over "to the widows and orphans of his flock" and turn Holy Name Cathedral "into a workshop for the unemployed."

If you're a fan of Kelsey Grammer's new series, *Boss*, filmed in Chicago, be sure to look for the painting over his desk in city hall. It's James T. Palmatary's 1857 view of Chicago. Palmatary captured not only the city's distinctive grid, but also the major changes underway to Chicago's economy. The ribbon of blue in the center is the Chicago River and along its banks are full-masted ships. But if you look closely at the foreground you'll see the Illinois Central Railroad steaming along the shore of Lake Michigan, up to what is now Millennium Park. By 1865, Chicago would be the railroad capital of America, one of the fastest growing cities in America, home to growing numbers of Irish, German, French, Bohemian, Polish and Swedish immigrants.

The first foundation of the Sinsinawa Dominicans in 1862, was not Chicago but Waukegan, Illinois, located nearly 40 miles north of the city. At the time this postcard was produced shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, Waukegan was no longer a remote outpost but an important manufacturing center. While the frame church of Immaculate Conception remained a visible sign of the parish's pioneer days, its eight-room school was regarded as thoroughly modern. Building on their success in Waukegan, in 1868, the Sinsinawa Dominicans put down roots in Chicago on the North Side, in another Immaculate Conception parish, just blocks from Holy Name Cathedral.

And then came what can only be regarded as baptism by fire.

The Great Fire of Oct. 8, 1871 allegedly began in the O'Leary barn on DeKoven Street on Chicago's West Side and spread across the river, destroying the city's downtown district and residential areas along the lakefront, all the way to Lincoln Park. Among the many Catholic institutions engulfed by flames were Holy Name Cathedral and Immaculate Conception Church where the Sinsinawa Dominicans had spent many hours in prayer before the new main altar painted "in white, gold and ultra marine blue and purple [with] a splendid Immaculate Conception" over the tabernacle described by Fr. Butler, the pastor, as "worthy as Raphael."

Fully one-third of Chicago's 100,000 residents in 1871 were of German birth and news of the fire struck terror in the hearts of families back in Germany. In this haunting sketch from the *Illustrated Zeitung*, a family gathers on the rooftop—the mother holds a baby in her arms and reaches out for the hand of her other child. The father in the foreground hangs over the ledge and the grandmother sits with her hands clasped, in prayer.

News reporters quickly put the blame for the fire on Catherine O’Leary and her cow, creating perhaps America’s first urban legend. In recounting his search for the O’Leary home, a *New York Daily Tribune* correspondent drew on accepted stereotypes of Irish Catholic women as poverty-stricken superstitious hags, declaring that: “There was no shabbier hut in Chicago nor in Tipperary.” And that was just for starters. He informed his readers that the O’Leary house bore a curse as powerful as any in Greek mythology and predicted, correctly, that: “Mrs. O’Leary is in for it, and make no mistake. Fame has seized her and appropriated her name, barn, cows, and all.” Catherine O’Leary was in fact a successful Chicago businesswoman whose earnings had helped to buy property on DeKoven Street and she was a respected member of Holy Family parish. After being demonized as “Our Lady of the Lamp,” Mrs. O’Leary fled to the South Side with her family and refused to answer the door when reporters came knocking every year on the anniversary of the fire.

Skilled German labor had helped to build the brick and limestone stores and hotels in Chicago’s business district that vanished in the fire of 1871. This scene depicts the horror as fire spread downtown. While it is clear that women and the elderly are being carried to safety, the sinister-looking figure in the foreground wearing a top hat has no time to help. In his haste to escape the burning city with important documents and papers he steps on a child who has fallen in his path. Little wonder that for years to come, the Great Fire of 1871 continued to be the subject of sermons on God’s wrath and the evils of city life.

This *Harper’s Weekly* cartoon from September 1871 offers a powerful reminder that Americans feared the growing presence of Irish Catholics and the influence of the clergy and politicians, especially in matters of education. Thomas Nast portrayed Irish immigrant bishops as crocodiles who threatened to take over American public schools. If you look closely you’ll see that the crocodiles’ jaws have been transformed into the distinctive mitres worn by Catholic bishops. A Protestant public schoolteacher—with a Bible tucked inside his jacket—tries to protect his students from this Irish invasion.

Having worked so hard to establish churches, schools, and charitable institutions, Catholics had to start all over again after the Great Fire. What is remarkable is the speed with which this occurred. By 1874 a new Immaculate Conception Church had been dedicated on North Park Avenue near Schiller Street, quickly followed by a brick school, convent, and rectory. But as the Sinsinawa Dominicans were keenly aware, their predominantly Irish pupils were a minority in the neighborhood. Just a few blocks north was the Great Redemptorist church of St. Michael that had risen like a Phoenix from the ashes of the fire and was rededicated in 1873. Fifteen years later, German parishioners had raised enough money for a 290-foot tower, and they continued to invest in their complex, providing spacious schoolrooms for their children. According to local tradition, anyone who can hear the bells of St. Michael’s is a resident of the Old Town neighborhood.

It may come as a surprise but depictions such as this were still common in the 1880s. Journals such as the humorous British “Puck” published cartoons that demonized the Irish. Here Paddy relaxes by smoking a clay pipe after tossing an empty bottle of whiskey on the ground. Bridget stands in the doorway of their tumbledown cabin whose shutter hangs precariously. Not only has the artist drawn the faces of Paddy and Bridget with ape-like features, but his cartoon conveys the message that the Irish are shanty dwellers, a stereotype that followed immigrants to America.

All the more reason, then, that the Chicago Irish favored boulevard locations for their parishes and generously donated money to ensure that their houses of worship compared favorably with Protestant churches and Jewish synagogues. The Sinsinawa Dominicans found themselves very much on the frontlines in parishes such as St. Jarlath, established on Jackson Boulevard in 1869.

Sadly, we know very little about the experience of Sisters as pioneers in predominantly Protestant neighborhoods in Chicago. Historians and journalists have been quick to characterize Irish parishes as ghetto

institutions, but St. Jarlath was anything but. Could we make such glib assessments if we knew more about the day-to-day life of the Sinsinawa Dominicans in the 1880s and 1890s? After they were creating a parochial school that met the needs and aspirations of Irish-American children whose feet were already planted on the rungs of the ladder of upward mobility. When it comes to understanding parishes such as St. Jarlath there are more questions than answers. In light of the Sisters' well-deserved reputation for art and music, isn't it likely that the children of Protestant neighbors also found their way to the convent on Hermitage Avenue? How did the Sisters respond to the challenges of teaching Puerto Rican students in the 1950s and, finally, what was it like to watch the church and school being demolished in 1969?

One of the most enduring stereotypes Irish Catholics confronted was that of Bridget the domestic. Although generally depicted on the stage as a figure of fun, cartoons such as this reinforced the idea that Irish immigrant women tyrannized households and made life difficult for their middle-class and well-to-do Protestant employers. Here Bridget, wearing a shamrock dress, threatens the woman of the house with a well-muscled arm. The pot on the stove is boiling over and Bridget has thrown crockery on the floor in her "declaration of independence." It was no coincidence that Irish American parents refused to christen their daughters Bridget and encouraged their female immigrant relatives to go by another name as soon as they got off the boat.

As this undated image from a family album attests, women religious were familiar figures in Chicago, a stereotype if you will, but one with much more depth and complexity than Bridget the domestic. Yet because many orders did not permit photographs of their members to be published in newspapers or even parish anniversary volumes, the unintended consequence is that Sisters have been written out of the narrative, with disastrous consequences for women's history. One example: we know from Jane Addams's acclaimed memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, that in the 1890s she was mistaken for a Catholic sister. One evening wearing her customary black dress, she boarded a streetcar and discovered that her fare had been paid. When Addams asked the Irish conductor whom she should thank for that "little courtesy," he responded: "I cannot tell one dago from another when they are in a gang, but sure, any one of them would do it for you quick as they would for the Sisters." Indeed, at the time Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr opened Hull-House in 1889, approximately 100 Catholic sisters were already living and working in the immediate neighborhood.

Frontlines come in many forms and we might not ordinarily think of Chicago boulevards as having anything in common with a military fortification. But I think a case can be made that the schools established by the Sinsinawa and Adrian Dominicans helped create flourishing Catholic communities in outlying residential areas and steam heat apartment districts. The challenge was enormous.

Although the Irish had made significant gains educationally, socially, politically, and economically, their religion rendered them suspect in the eyes of native-born Protestants. In the nineteenth century, the *Chicago Tribune* insisted that Irish Catholics could not be real Americans because their allegiance was to the Pope in Rome. Controversies over citizenship are not new as this 1889 cartoon reminds us. Here an angry Irishman, dressed all in green, raises his knife to Columbia as she tries, unsuccessfully, it appears, to assimilate the Irish with other immigrants in America.

Little wonder that Irish Catholics invested so much energy in creating parishes and schools, especially in areas where they were minorities. A classic example is St. Thomas the Apostle, founded as a country church in Hyde Park, in 1869. This was the first foundation of the Sinsinawa Dominicans on the South Side in 1887 and their school quickly established a reputation for excellence. Before long, the Sisters were living in close proximity to the new University of Chicago, a Baptist institution built on the grand scale by philanthropist John D. Rockefeller.

Few Catholic parishes ever get the chance to reinvent themselves but St. Thomas the Apostle did in the 1920s when Father Thomas V. Shannon hired architect Barry Byrne, a young draftsman in Frank Lloyd Wright's

studio, to design a modern church at 55th Street and Kimbark Avenue. Its unusual terra cotta exterior sent a powerful signal that Hyde Park's Catholics were determined to put their imprint on the urban landscape.

Barry Byrne's design for St. Thomas the Apostle was a radical departure from Catholic church architecture of his day and it anticipated liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Parishioners enjoyed an unobstructed view of the main altar as well as stations of the cross designed by the internationally famous artist Alfao Faggi.

Not only was Father Shannon a good friend of Mother Samuel of St. Clara's, but he also became a confidant of Ellen Gates Starr after her conversion to Catholicism.

Barry Byrne's design for classrooms on Woodlawn Avenue was without parallel in Chicago parishes, but equally important, St. Thomas the Apostle achieved a national reputation as a Progressive Catholic school, thanks in great measure to the vision of Sister Nona McGreal, pictured here receiving an award at the 2006 Dominican Leadership Conference. In 1937, Sister McGreal, a first-grade teacher at St. Thomas, and principal Sister Joan Smith, pioneered the curriculum series, "Faith and Freedom" that became standard texts in classrooms throughout the nation, introducing students to the concept of social justice.

As the Sinsinawa and Adrian Dominicans know from experience, place matters. For thousands of Chicagoans, their world was profoundly shaped by the stockyards on the South Side, the livestock market encompassing more than 300 acres of land from 39th to 47th street, from Halsted Street to Ashland Avenue. Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel, *The Jungle*, exposed the dangerous conditions under which poor immigrants lived and worked and led to strict meat inspection laws.

Visitation parish, organized in 1886, just south of the stockyards, quickly attracted Irish Catholic families who had begun to climb the social and economic ladder, leaving behind frame shanties in Bridgeport and Canaryville for modern housing near Garfield Boulevard. A powerful symbol of faith and respectability, the Gothic church known as "Vis" was constructed between 1892 and 1899. The Sinsinawa Dominicans began their long commitment to the parish in 1891, teaching in makeshift quarters until 1903 when a brick school was finally completed at 54th Place and Peoria Street.

If walls could talk, what could historians learn from the Visitation convent built in 1906 on Garfield Boulevard? Surely we would want to know more about the day-to-day life of Sisters who considered this convent community their home. In the days before Sisters had any say about their assignment, did they welcome a transfer to Vis as a sign that they had the necessary expertise to manage classrooms of upwards of fifty children?

In Dominican schools throughout Chicago and the suburbs, Sisters not only knew the names of hundreds of students but also their family connections. They had more contact with children than parish priests, but you wouldn't know it from standard parish histories. This photo of an unnamed Sister is a powerful reminder that in pre-Vatican II days, it was women religious, often eighth grade teachers, who identified young men with academic talent and encouraged them to consider vocations to the priesthood.

In order to understand the experience of Dominican Sisters in the Chicago Archdiocese we need to know much more about the world in which they lived and worked. For example, when they opened Visitation as a co-educational high school in 1915 did they encounter criticism from the Christian Brothers at DeLaSalle or the Augustinians at St. Rita? To create and sustain a Catholic institution within walking distance of Englewood public high school took vision and determination. In addition to preparing young women for employment in offices in downtown skyscrapers, the Dominican Sisters also challenged many to pursue careers as Sisters or as public school teachers.

Every time I look at this photo I wonder what was it like to teach in a school where your duties included organizing May Crownings on the Boulevard, a tradition begun by Msgr. Daniel Byrnes on Mother's Day in 1939 that flourished through the 1950s.

Children who grew up in Vis remember in vivid detail what it was like to march along the boulevard or participate in the annual St. Patrick's Day productions, but these events would never have occurred without the labor of Dominican Sisters or their own mothers. Indeed, considering all the work involved in ironing white shirts and dresses for five, six or more children in a single family, we can only wonder how much mothers shared their pastor's enthusiasm for this massive show of Catholic strength.

Not only would we benefit by knowing more about the day-to-day lives of the Sisters at Vis, but their experience might also provide new perspective on racial change. As Suellen Hoy's fine book, *Good Hearts*, reminds us, "Catholic sisters lived where they worked," and as neighborhoods changed racially from white to black, they remained in their classrooms welcoming African American children.

All too often historians have relied on what pastors said from the pulpit or wrote in letters to their bishop, ignoring the fact that it was the Sisters who were really on the frontlines, day after day. In September 1960, for example, only priests, not Sisters were invited to the first major meeting about racial change, called, not surprisingly, the Clergy Race Conference. How would the narrative on race change if we could hear the voices of women religious who had first-hand experience of these tumultuous events?

You've probably read news accounts in recent years about the hostility Muslim groups encountered when they attempted to build a mosque in south suburban Palos Hills. It's a story that should resonate among the Adrian Dominicans who helped to break religion barrier in Oak Park. Pleasant Street was anything but. When fifty Catholic families began organizing St. Edmund parish in 1907, the rallying cry was NIMBY—not in my backyard! Irish Catholic newcomers were regarded as "hordes of undesirables" who would shatter the tranquility of Oak Park.

At the first mass, celebrated in a barn, Fr. John J. Code challenged parishioners "to build here, with God's blessing, a church and school that shall be a glory to God, a credit to ourselves, an ornament to our village and a source of pride to every citizen." Little wonder that St. Edmund Church, dedicated in 1910, was an architectural gem, followed by the parish school seven years later.

Here, I think, is a classic example of how the "bricks and mortar" mattered. St. Edmund School, designed by Henry Schlacks and opened in 1917 was so beautiful and monumental that Oak Parkers often mistook it for a church. Although many Protestants continued to resent their Catholic neighbors, there could be no question of their loyalty to America.

Did the architect intend the depiction of Jesus and the Little Children suffering unto him as "in your face" Catholicism, reminding all who passed by that Oak Park Catholics were not welcome? We may never know, but the Latin inscription above left no doubt that the children of St. Edmund School were being raised "For God and Country."

The old real estate adage, Location, Location, Location, also applies to Catholic parishes. In large part because St. Columbanus was built at 71st and Calumet on what Chicagoans call vacant land—"prairies"—there was no opposition to the construction of a parish complex. These three buildings might not look like much to us, but they symbolized a new, progressive approach to parish formation, where the school came before the permanent church. Unlike Oak Park where the Adrian Dominicans had to wait seven years, St. Columbanus school help jumpstart the parish.

St. Columbanus in Park Manor grew rapidly, thanks in large part to the residential building boom of the 1920s. Upwardly mobile Catholic families were attracted by the neighborhood's bungalows and multi-family structures such as the two-flat owned by Al Capone at 7244 S. Prairie. It may be a myth that Capone money helped build and decorate the Gothic church on 71st Street dedicated in 1925, but there was no disputing that this house of worship, designed by James J. Burns, dominated the landscape. What made St. Columbanus a vital community, I would argue, was its parochial school and the investment made by Adrian Dominicans in the future of the children and grandchildren of Irish and German immigrants.

As a child growing up in Chicago in the 1950s, I was aware of a world called Columbanus. My mother, Margaret Murphy, pictured in the first row, third from left, was in the graduating class of 1931 and formed friendships that lasted a lifetime. The children pictured here were profoundly shaped by the Great Depression and while many never made it to college, significant numbers graduated from Catholic high schools. It was with a great sense of delight in the 1990s that I discovered historian Suellen Hoy's father Chris was also a member of the St. Columbanus class of 1931.

At a time when so many parishes on the South Side have been shuttered, it is nothing short of remarkable that St. Columbanus Church and School have begun their second century of service and continue to reach out to the larger neighborhood. On Nov. 16, 2008, phones across the nation rang as news spread that President Barack Obama and his family were handing out Thanksgiving dinners at St. Columbanus' food pantry.

As this advertisement makes clear, the work of the Sinsinawa Dominicans was well known in Chicago by 1916 when George W. Mundelein began his long tenure as Archbishop. Read through the fine print and you'll find language that has a very contemporary ring. Catholics in Chicago were encouraged to recognize the high standards set by the Sinsinawa Dominicans who labored quote "in a time when secular colleges and universities, favored by enormous wealth and worldly reputation, are offering extraordinary advantages in the world of education."

Mother Samuel of St. Clara's found an ally in Archbishop Mundelein and he became a staunch supporter of Rosary College in River Forest. Recently Sr. Martha Curry shared with me a document she found while writing the history of Barat in Lake Forest that shed light on the nature of his support. Although Mother Samuel waived any objection to plans for Barat College, Archbishop Mundelein was not so generous. In 1918, he insisted that Mother Jane Fox promise that Barat would accept only students from Sacred Heart Academies, effectively limiting the school's enrollment for decades.

Rosary College opened at a time of growing confidence among Catholics. Not only were Catholics the largest denomination in the city but their churches and schools dominated the urban landscape, often eclipsing Protestant institutions. In this 1925 view of North Michigan Avenue you can clearly see Quigley Preparatory Seminary rising up above Chestnut Street, just west of the Water Tower. If members of 4th Presbyterian thought they had erected a beautiful Gothic edifice on Michigan Avenue, Archbishop Mundelein upped the ante. Quigley Seminary was modeled after San Chapelle in Paris and on dedication day in 1918, Archbishop Mundelein predicted that it would become a landmark in Chicago. Although it took more than 75 years, in 1996, the National Register of Historic Places added Quigley to the list, an honor accorded few Chicago buildings. It is now the pastoral center for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

When Prohibition outlawed the sale of alcohol in 1920, Chicago earned the dubious distinction of being the crime capital of America. The sound of machine gun fire echoed throughout the city as gangsters fought to control the manufacture, sale, and transport of beer and whiskey. In the summer of 1926, the Eucharistic Congress provided a more positive image of the city and its large Catholic population. The international

gathering of lay people and clergy was a massive show of Catholic strength during a period of American history marked by nativism, anti-immigration legislation, and anti-Catholicism. On June 21, 1926, sixty thousand children from Catholic schools in the diocese sang the Mass of the Angels in Soldier Field, described by the *Chicago Tribune* as the “Open Air Cathedral on the Lake Front.”

During the closing ceremonies at Mundelein, Illinois, only the Sisters seemed to have anticipated adversity, but they were prepared with umbrellas as the rains came pouring down, drenching bishops and cardinals and giving new meaning to the term “watered silk.” In the background you can see water-soaked newspapers that pilgrims threw to the ground before beating a hasty retreat back to Chicago.

It’s one thing to say that the network of Catholic parishes and institutions extended all the way from the downtown business district to neighborhoods at the edge of the city and beyond, another to show it. As part of the 1926 Eucharistic Congress, the Daprato Statuary Company commissioned this map, documenting every parish in the city of Chicago. Clearly visible is the band of parishes along 55th Street and 79th Street, that were becoming home to more and more Catholic families.

A tangible reminder of the Eucharistic Congress of 1926 is found in the cornerstone of St. Philip Neri Church at 72nd and Merrill Avenue. Designed by Cardinal Mundelein’s favorite architect, Joe W. McCarthy, and dedicated in 1928, the modern Tudor Gothic edifice quickly became a landmark in the South Shore neighborhood. But, I would argue, this monumental church might never have risen as quickly as it did if it were not for the parish grammar school and high school opened by the Adrian Dominicans.

So great was Archbishop Mundelein’s belief that the future of the whole Church was linked to education that he made it official policy: the school must come before the construction of a permanent church. Here is the original St. Philip Neri School as it looked in 1914, two years after the parish was founded. Surrounded by “prairies,” only a few homes are visible in the distance.

In 1915, the Adrian Dominicans opened a coeducational high school, as they had done in Visitation parish. Over time Aquinas became an all-girls secondary school providing young women from St. Philip Neri and surrounding parishes with a college-prep curriculum.

While the Sinsinawa and Adrian Dominicans tended to teach in parishes settled by Irish and German-American Catholics, the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine, Kentucky took a different route when they agreed to staff the school of St. John Berchmans, the first Belgian parish organized on Logan Boulevard on Chicago’s North Side. Not until the 1920s did the Sisters enjoy anything resembling modern classrooms, much less a new brick convent. In 1955, St. John Berchmans may have been one of the few parishes ever to acknowledge all 180 Dominican Sisters who had taught since the school opened in 1907.

We can only guess what it like was for Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine to leave St. John Berchmans for a new assignment in Our Lady of Peace Parish some 14 miles from Logan Boulevard. Founded in 1917 in the South Shore neighborhood, Our Lady of Peace experienced dramatic growth. By the 1930s spacious three-story apartment building lined Jeffery Boulevard and 79th Street had emerged as a bustling commercial strip.

The distinctive bell tower of Our Lady of Peace soon became a familiar landmark in South Shore, evidence that Catholics had created a community for themselves in a neighborhood that was also home to significant numbers of Protestants and Jews. As Dominicans, I wonder, did the Sisters at Our Lady of Peace have any contact with teachers in St. Philip Neri or collaborate with them in any way when their parishes began to change racially, from white to black?

While parish development in the nineteenth century tended to be haphazard, all that changed during the administration of Archbishop George Mundelein, who took care to ensure that Catholic churches would be located near major streets and accessible by public transportation. St. Sabina, founded in 1916, is a classic example of the “mile-square” parishes that came to be such a distinguishing feature of Chicago in the twentieth century. The Sinsinawa Dominicans began teaching school in September 1917 in a combination building but before long plans were underway for a monumental Tudor Gothic edifice.

Parishioners may have lived in modest bungalows and two-flats, but they sought to create a sacred space that was a place of great beauty, in their lives and in their neighborhood. Even after the Depression struck, there was no talk of halting construction; indeed, the parish forged ahead, confident that the church would ‘provide employment for workers in the building trades and at the same time [take advantage] of lowered prices in materials.’”

Architect Joseph McCarthy incorporated marble and mosaics from Italy and hired artisans trained in Oberammergau to carve the Stations of the Cross. According to the *New World*, the cut stone on the exterior of St. Sabina’s was “unsurpassed by anything in Chicago, with the sole exception of Tribune Tower.” [dedicated June 18, 1933]

Now some parishes would have stopped after building a magnificent church, especially in the Depression, but not Sabina. In 1939 it opened this community center which quickly became known throughout the South Side for its CYO basketball teams, Sunday evening dances, and roller skating parties. Looking at these photos I’m reminded of the investment made in ordinary parishes in the 1930s that, together with the parochial school, helped parents of modest incomes provide a range of activities for their children.

As an historian, one of the questions I’d like to ask Sinsinawa Dominicans is whether priests at St. Sabina knew the pioneering scholarship of Sr. Mary Ellen O’Hanlon on *Racial Myths* and *The Heresy of Race?* Beyond the wonderful entry in *Women Building Chicago* I’ve never seen references to Sr. O’Hanlon in the literature about the Southwest Community Organization and its attempts to stabilize the neighborhood.

Chicago men and women who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s in parishes such as St. Sabina have vivid memories of their school days when classrooms were bursting at the seams and hundreds of children lived on a single block. As racial change occurred, many recall heated conversations by parents and relatives around the dinner table and some have written what it was like to wake up in the morning and discover their long-time neighbors had moved out under cover of darkness. I find it sad beyond belief that if the Sisters appear at all in these memoirs it is as knuckle-wrapping nuns, not as women who found themselves in the midst of a battle for civil rights, played out day after day in their classrooms.

Judging from news accounts, in the years to come historians will know plenty about Father Michael Pfleger and Cardinal Francis George, pictured here in 2000 at one of many moments of reconciliation, but next-to-nothing of the Sisters who devoted their entire careers to making a difference in the lives of thousands of children.

Most Chicagoans are unaware that Cardinal George has Dominican connections and that his family were early members of Epiphany parish in what is now called the Little Village neighborhood. Cardinal George’s grandfather, Jacob George, was baptized in St. Francis of Assisi on Roosevelt Road and his grandmother, Mary Connelly George, was christened just down the street at Holy Family. Like many couples from a “mixed marriage,” they ended up joining a parish with sizeable numbers of Irish-Americans and German-Americans.

Beginning in 1910, Sinsinawa Dominicans welcomed children to the red-brick three-story structure known as Epiphany on 25th Street, just west of Keeler Avenue. Not only did the building blend in well with neighborhood homes, but it was an eminently practical model of parish development with space for classrooms as well as worship.

Cardinal George's parents were married at Epiphany on August 10, 1929, just weeks before the stock market crash.

While the Georges moved first to Austin and then to the Northwest Side in St. Pascal's, Epiphany parish soldiered on, weathering the Depression and World War II, meeting the needs of Polish-American and Slovak-American families.

One of the astonishing things about the Catholic Church in Chicago is its sheer persistence. At the time when urban planners were predicting the demise of cities in the 1950s, Epiphany parishioners invested in a permanent house of worship. Some might argue that this was money poorly spent but I believe a compelling case can be made that far from being luxuries, sacred spaces such as this provide common ground for very different ethnic groups. With masses in Spanish and English, Epiphany church continues to be an oasis for Mexican-American families and their older European neighbors.

Every building in Epiphany's parish complex matters, and the old Dominican convent has taken on new life as a center for the Erie House Settlement.

I'm very much aware that my time is running out and I hope you will forgive me for moving rapidly through the next set of images, but I'd like to leave you with a sense of the extraordinary reach of the Dominican mission in Chicago. Not well known is that in the 1920s, Sinsinawa Dominicans began teaching at St. Philip Benizi school located in one of the oldest Italian neighborhoods on the Near North Side.

It was here in St. Philip Benizi parish that Father Luigi Giambastiani convinced city planners to locate the low rise public housing named after Mother Francis Cabrini.

At a time when most Adrian Dominicans worked in Irish parishes, several Sisters welcomed the challenge of teaching in St. Mary of Mount Carmel School at 67th and Hermitage Avenue.

Also in the 1920s, the Dominican Fathers stepped in to avert scandal at Holy Trinity Croatian parish in Pilsen. A Benedictine pastor had absconded "with all the church funds, and leaving a debt of \$99,000" and furious parishioners. And if that wasn't challenge enough, the Dominicans agreed to staff the nearby parish of St. Pius, which had become predominantly Polish, even as they made plans for their new College of St. Thomas Aquinas in River Forest and Dominican high school in Oak Park.

Recently while doing research for the National Shrine of St. Francis Xavier Cabrini I came across more evidence of the Dominican Fathers' engagement with urban life and their sensitivity to race. In 1937, Dominican priests and brothers began to work for the canonization of Martin de Porres, depicted here, the lay Dominican brother who died in Peru in 1639. As part of their campaign, they sponsored an exhibit in their House of Studies featuring the work of Sr. Stanisla, the nationally known "artist-nun" of Longwood Academy.

From the depths of the Depression on, novenas to St. Jude gave new life and identity to the old Irish parish of St. Pius on Ashland Avenue and provided the Dominicans with resources to meet the needs of Mexican-American families who were being displaced by urban renewal and the construction of the Chicago Circle campus of the University of Illinois.

The Dominican commitment endures. For more than 30 years now, this is the scene on Good Friday as parishioners from St. Pius, visible in the distance, join with members of other Pilsen parishes in the re-enactment of the Way of the Cross.

There are few sadder sights, in my opinion, than Catholic schools and churches such as St. Basil that have fallen to the wrecking ball. Although these sacred spaces live on in memory, they leave a very large hole in the fabric of urban life. Which is why I'd to conclude my presentation with images from parishes that have persisted.

To look at St. Barnabas School on Longwood Drive, the last thing you might be thinking is that it had a difficult birth. While the construction of this stately building was cause for celebration in 1959, many parishioners still carried with them painful memories of being outsiders in a Protestant-dominated neighborhood.

Back in 1924, it had been a struggle to secure property for the parish but the Catholics of Beverly finally succeeded and watched with pride as construction began on their combination church and school, depicted here. Its American Colonial design was no accident but a deliberate attempt at fitting in. It didn't work. Just as St. Barnabas was nearing completion, the KKK burned fiery crosses in front of the church and attacked priests in the rectory. So humiliating was this event that more than fifty years passed before it was acknowledged in the parish history.

So you can imagine my surprise one day at the Archdiocesan Archives when I found this telegram from Father Hurley to Cardinal Mundelein, sent in white-hot anger in 1927. The pastor of St. Barnabas denounced "the sordid motives behind the creation of St. Cajetan parish," claiming that he would be unable to pay the \$200,000 debt on his parish and keep St. Barnabas School open." In Fr. Hurley's mind, fellow Catholics threatened the future of his parish more than the KKK!

Well as you tell from the size of St. Barnabas Convent, constructed in 1947, the parish survived the formation of St. Cajetan and before long, both schools, staffed by the Sinsinawa Dominicans, were bursting at the seams. In fact this part of the South Side of Chicago was growing so rapidly that a call went out to the Springfield Dominicans for yet another parish.

St. Walter's, founded in 1953 at 118th and Western Avenue began by placing a sign on the parish property "emphasizing the word School in larger letters than the word Church." As the founding pastor recalled, "We rightly deduced that many young Catholic families would be induced to settle in the area by the attraction of the school." And he was right.

By 1963, 900 families belonged to St. Walter and the Springfield Dominicans taught nearly 600 children in the school. A poignant sign of the time, masses were offered practically on the hour each Sunday from 7 a.m. till noon.

Photos like this one, found in attics and basements of Baby Boomers, evoke vivid memories of school life, but what I notice now, more and more, is the invisibility of the Sisters.

Whether by choice or not, they were rarely photographed with their classes—perhaps there wasn't room enough for another body. But the unintended consequence is that they disappear from the picture.

It has been a pleasure to be here this morning to discuss how Dominicans operated on the frontlines in Chicago from the late nineteenth century throughout the twentieth. Far from being the last word, I hope my

presentation today will begin a conversation about the need to document this fascinating story—in detail. Understanding the particular places in which Dominicans lived and the neighborhoods they encountered can only deepen our appreciation of the investment they made day in and day out in their classrooms and convent communities. Thank you.