

Youngest Italian Parish Now Largest in Diocese

Msgr. Gambino Proud as Holy Cross Nears Its Silver Jubilee With 10,000 Communicants.

Last of the 18 Italian parishes established in the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, Holy Cross Church, Maryland and Seventh streets, will mark the 25th anniversary of its founding Oct. 1.

From a humble beginning with only 400 families, the parish has grown steadily in the last quarter of a century until now it is the largest Italian parish in the diocese with more than 10,000 parishioners.

Remarkable growth of the West Side parish is traceable directly to the zeal of the pastor, the Rt. Rev. Joseph Gambino, one of the best-known priests in the diocese. His modest and self-effacing Msgr. Gambino has been a powerful influence for good in his role as parish priest. He dislikes, however, to take any credit for the parish's development. Rather, he attributes it to "the faith, generosity and loyalty of the parishioners."

"Take People as They Are."
"The growth of Holy Cross is an example of what can be done with the Italian people if the priests put their whole heart and soul into the work," Msgr. Gambino said today.

What good has been and still can be accomplished by any priest who devotes himself to his work among the Italian people. Anyone willing to do so must look to himself for the primary cause. Either he has failed to understand his people or his heart has been lacking from his work.

The wise priest will look to the people for inspiration. Take the people as they are and make them the way you want them. Thus he will accomplish a great deal with the Italian people."

Msgr. Gambino said a parish celebration will be held a few weeks after the anniversary date with the Most Rev. John A. Hoff, bishop of the Buffalo Diocese, scheduled to take part.

Asked to Found Parish.
The religious significance of the anniversary will be stressed, he added.

Msgr. Gambino, at that time called "Father" Gambino, was designated in 1914 by the late Most Rev. Charles H. Colton, fourth bishop of the Buffalo Diocese, to found a new Italian parish to care for the rapidly growing Italian colony north of St. Anthony's Church.

St. Anthony's Church, which is on Court st. and South Elmwood st., is the oldest Italian church in the diocese. It was founded in 1891. The colony it served, however, was expanding so much that it soon extended northward as far as Porter ave., about 30 years ago.

Unfortunately some of these families because of the great distance from the nearest church, are seriously neglecting their church duties," Msgr. Gambino noted.

Revolved on New Parish.
This was the situation which brought about the founding of Holy Cross parish, Bishop Colton, who had done much toward helping Italian Catholics here, noted that a new parish for the growing colony was necessary.

After a year had been spent in finding a site for the church, Bishop Colton summoned Msgr. Gambino from his duties as pastor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church and directed him to undertake the founding of the new parish. This was on June 14, 1914.

Msgr. Gambino, who in 1906 had been ready to go to Australia when a heated request was sent to him by Bishop Colton for an Italian-speaking priest, was met with a determination to do something worthwhile for his new Italian colony.

Air of Simple Charm.
Difficulties, however, had arisen regarding the division of St. Anthony's parish," he said. This delayed the actual establishment of Holy Cross parish until Oct. 1, 1914, when I was formally named pastor."

24 St. James' Church, 250 Main ave., was chosen as the site for the first services and the first Mass was celebrated Oct. 11, 1914.

Poor though its furnishings be, the church boasted a lot of intimacy and of simple charm.

Due to economic necessity, he said, a room on the first floor of the two-story structure was used as a combination office and home for the pastor. The basement was used for catechetical work among the children. The upper floor was used as a kindergarten classroom.

Larger Church Built.
With the parish growing steadily, it became necessary for the pastor to seek a larger church. The present office was erected on March 23 at Maryland and Seventh sts. and the cornerstone was laid one month later by Bishop Colton. The new church was dedicated and the first Mass celebrated Sept. 5, 1915. The late Rt. Rev. Thomas J. Walsh, archbishop of Newark, who then was bishop of Newark, celebrated the Mass.

Many Italian societies marched in the procession from the rectory to the church for the first Mass. Msgr. Gambino said in dedicating the church, "The service was delivered by the Rev. Vincent Turini, a Capuchin."

Mass Visitors Attended.
Mr. Joseph Lynch of New City assisted at the organ. Throughout 1915, first day many came from neighboring parishes to visit the new church, and many out of curiosity. Others came out of devotion."

Other milestones in the parish's history include: May 27, 1916, first Holy Communion class; Sept. 1916, first Confirmation class; 1921, first lawn festival; 1921, dedication of Chapel; Jan. 31, 1926, dedication and opening of Our Lady



Rt. Rev. Joseph Gambino.

of Loretto Chapel; Nov. 4, 1931, church mortgage burned; June 4, 1938, construction of addition increasing church capacity from 800 to 1200.

"During the years, every effort has been made to increase regular church attendance and frequenting of the sacraments," Msgr. Gambino said.

Duty Taught People.
"The temporal welfare of the people was not to be neglected and the people were taught to realize that it was their bounden duty to support their church."

"Holy Cross as it stands today is a living proof of the faith, generosity and loyalty of its parishioners. Since its founding more than \$350,000 has been spent. The parish owns highly valued property, and its current debt is only \$10,000. It shows what can be done with the Italian people."

Born March 23, 1879, in La-Louga, a Piedmont village in North Italy, Msgr. Gambino as a youth was not inclined toward the occupation of his father, a cattle-raiser. He set out early to prepare himself for the priesthood. He studied in St. John the Evangelist School in Turin and the Seminary of San Gaudenzio, where he was ordained June 3, 1903, by the late Cardinal Richelmy.

Known Parishioners.
On his arrival in Buffalo he was assigned to establish Italian parishes in Lime Rock and LeRoy. Later, he took charge of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, the pastorate of which he relinquished when designated to found Holy Cross. He was elevated by the Vatican to the rank of monsignor in 1924.

A veritable fountain of information on affairs in his section of the city, Msgr. Gambino knows virtually every one of his parishioners by his first name and also can list his occupation. He has watched scores of them grow from boyhood to manhood and into careers as politicians, businessmen, lawyers, doctors and members of other professions.

"They never forget what they learned at Holy Cross," he said with pardonable pride.