



Supported by the Annual Appeal

Laying the Foundation: 1857-1916

The early days of the Archdiocese of Omaha trace back to 1857, when the Vicariate of Nebraska was established. At that time, its territory stretched throughout the states of Nebraska and Wyoming. Bishop James M. O’Gorman, the first bishop installed in 1859, focused on several hundred Catholic families who had settled in Omaha and along the Missouri River. He began laying the foundation for the strong Catholic education system that thrives today.

In the late 1800s, new immigrants came to Nebraska to pursue farming and railroad employment. They found strong support in Bishop James C. O’Connor, installed in 1876, who rapidly expanded diocesan parishes and schools to meet their needs. In 1885, the Apostolic Vicariate of Nebraska was raised to the Diocese of Omaha. By 1887, Wyoming and Lincoln had become separate dioceses. The Church of Northeast Nebraska grew in population as the city of Omaha welcomed an influx of Polish, Italian, Irish, Ukrainian and Hungarian immigrants.

Under Bishop Richard Scannell, installed in 1891, the diocese continued expansion with parishes and schools. After deciding to raze the old Cathedral, Scannell laid the cornerstone for St. Cecilia’s Cathedral in 1907. The Spanish Renaissance edifice took more than 50 years to complete. It was consecrated in 1959.

Establishing a National Presence: 1916-1945

With encouragement from Bishop Jeremiah J. Harty, installed in 1916, the now-renowned Boys Town USA was founded. Rev. Edward Flanagan established the community in 1917 to assist homeless and abandoned youth.

The archdiocesan tradition of laity involvement in fundraising originated during the Depression with Bishop Joseph F. Rummel, installed in 1928, who formed the first Committee of the Laity. During Rummel’s episcopate, Omaha hosted the Sixth National Eucharistic Congress in September 1930.

The Boom Years: 1945-1993

In August 1945, under Archbishop James H. Ryan, installed in 1935, Omaha was raised to an archdiocese. After Ryan’s death in 1947, Gerald T. Bergan, known as the

(more)

“Building Bishop,” led the archdiocese through a period of tremendous development. Church-related construction exceeded \$100 million and enrollment in Catholic schools exploded. Bergan’s assistant, then Auxiliary Bishop Daniel E. Sheehan, became the first native son of the archdiocese to become Archbishop of Omaha in 1969. Archbishop Sheehan earned a national reputation for his support of Catholic education by creating innovative development programs. Today’s endowments and tuition support plans to help families with elementary and secondary education are a direct result of the Sheehan years.

Assuring the Future: 1993-present

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the archdiocese responded to Omaha’s growth south and west, creating new parishes and schools. Meanwhile, jobs in meatpacking and industry attracted Hispanic, Vietnamese and Sudanese communities. Archbishop Elden F. Curtiss, installed in 1993, created new ministries to meet the needs of Omaha’s new immigrants. By 2006, nearly 26,000 students attended two Catholic universities, 58 elementary schools and 18 high schools. Among the 6 new schools opened was St. Peter Claver Cristo Rey High School in 2007. The school offers Omaha’s only model for secondary education combined with valuable career experience for low income students. Archbishop Curtiss convened a Catholic Schools Symposium in 2008 to keep education in the forefront and address challenges in education.

In 2008, the archdiocese increased outreach to the laity. Archbishop Curtiss created the St. Cecilia Institute for Laity Formation. The institute offers approximately 50 classes every fall and spring to people of all ages, including liturgy, music, arts, adult faith formation and leadership.