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History of Gorham Maine - St Annes Church

St Anne's Catholic Church

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ST. ANNE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Gorham, Maine

Parish History

The Catholic Community of Gorham was founded 70 years ago, in 1944, by the Rev. John Finn, pastor of St. Mary's Church in Westbrook. The first Mass in Gorham took place in 1944 at the Grange Hall with the Rev. William McDonough, curate at St. Mary's Church, as celebrant. There were seven people in attendance, and this group of seven parishioners became the Mission Church of St. Mary's.

Over the following nineteen years, growth of the Mission was rapid and new quarters were needed at frequent intervals; church-goers went from the Grange Hall to the Town Hall and later to the local movie theater. The theater seated about three hundred people, and at times people were standing for lack of seats. Eventually a second Mass was added to accommodate the growing number of Catholics in Gorham.

The first "home of our own" was the basement of our present church which was completed the Fall of 1963 with a seating capacity of 450 people. St. Anne's continued to operate as a Mission until April 15th, 1967 when it became a parish with the appointment of Rev. Roland E. Normandeau as pastor and also as Chaplain of the Newman Apostolate at Gorham State College, now the University of Southern Maine. A house was purchased at 342 Main Street to serve as the rectory.

At that time, the parish of St. Anne's consisted of the towns of Gorham, Buxton, Standish, Windham, East Baldwin & East Sebago. The parish also included Our Lady of Sebago in East Sebago as a summer mission, of which it still is today. Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Windham was also a year-round mission church of St. Anne's before growing into a separate parish a few years later.

After worshipping in the basement for seven years, it was quickly realized that it was not adequate in size or dignity for its place in the life of local Catholics or the Town of Gorham. A hardworking Parish Council, Building Committee, and Furnishings Committee held countless meetings. Parishioners participated in the process thru input sessions where their ideas and feedback could be voiced; and professional consultations were organized to raise the funds and develop the plans for an upper structure to be erected.

During the last few years of that process, the roof of the basement church began leaking badly – huge sheets of plastic with drip lines were a constant reminder during rainy periods of the fact that something needed to be done. No one wanted to waste money fixing it when the funds could be used toward the building of a new structure.

Finally, on April 9, 1972, the Most Rev. Peter L. Gerety, D.D., Bishop of the Diocese of Portland and a host of priests concelebrated the Dedication Mass at St. Anne's Church. As evidence of St. Anne's standing in the Community, the Gorham Ecumenical Choir was part of the celebration. It was a day of Thanksgiving, pride, satisfaction and welcoming. The parishioners of St. Anne's welcomed the Community and the Community welcomed this new addition to the religious life of the region.

In the 70 years the parish has existed, hundreds of hard-working, talented parishioners have given and continue to dedicate countless hours of their time to build a community to serve God, each other, and the towns that make up the parish. They were aided in this work by the many priests who have served at St. Anne's church.

Postscript:

St. Anne's parish has been blessed with a succession of caring dedicated priests who guided the faithful and put their individual stamp on the parish. In the beginning the pastor was the Rev. Roland Normandeau (1967 to 1975). He was appointed at the time of the formation of St. Anne's parish and oversaw all aspects of the building of a new church. Father had a flare for the artistic and much of the esthetic aspect of the church is attributed to him.



The New Church **As described in the written program for the Dedication** **April 9th, 1972**

Though simple and economical in a contemporary style, the church should nevertheless be an inspiring place for worship and a real sign of God's presence to the community.

The natural cedar shingles give a rustic appearance which is appropriate since the church is situated against a pastoral scene of fields and trees. Looking at the building from the east, one sees the nine windows of the clerestory which shower natural light onto the sanctuary. The three central panes combine stained and mirrored glass in a design which points upward to the cross – a modified form of the Jerusalem cross.

On the west side of the church is a large glassed-in-lobby providing spaciousness, easy flow of traffic, and a pleasant view as one enters and leaves the church. The lobby incorporates the Blessed Sacrament Chapel and the Baptismal Font.

The Baptistry

The lobby serves appropriately as a baptistry since by the sacrament of baptism we make our entrance into the body of Christ – the Church. The font itself is of Maine Granite. Both the Paschal Candle (symbol of the Risen Christ) and the Baptismal Bowl are portable and can be carried in the Offertory Procession to the sanctuary when baptisms take place within the Mass. Near the font are two stained glass windows depicting Christ being baptized by John the Baptist, and four saints representing the Communion of Saints entered into through the Sacrament of Baptism. Nearby is also a tapestry of St. Anne, the patroness of the church.

Blessed Sacrament Chapel

The chapel will be easily accessible at all times to people who wish to make prayerful visits to the Real Presence of Christ in the tabernacle. The design on the ceiling and wall of the chapel focuses attention on the tabernacle. The circular wall is of dark bronze tinted acrylate. The chapel will also have a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary and an Ambry containing the Holy Oils used in baptism, confirmation and for the anointing of the sick.

The Sanctuary

There are three focal points in the sanctuary: the Celebrant's Chair in the center of the apse wall, the pulpit on one side, and the altar with its crucifix and candles on the other side. The Chair symbolizes the coming of Christ in our midst as the Christian assembly gathers for prayer under the leadership of the celebrant. The pulpit, or ambo, is the place where the Scriptures are proclaimed so that Christ, the Word of God, may come into our minds and hearts. The altar is another meeting place between God and men where Christ offers his sacrifice to the Father and gives himself to us in a unique way under the appearance of bread and wine.

The lower part of the sanctuary wall will display seasonal banners behind the altar and occasional Word banners behind the pulpit. The upper part will be used for meditative slide presentations.

Church Interior

At the rear of the nave is a beautiful stained glass window with a design that reminds some of a cross.

The end walls are of natural cedar shingles bringing into the church an element of continuity with the exterior of the building just as we seek to make our daily life in the world part of our worship.

Since the Blessed Sacrament is now kept in the chapel, the church can be used for cultural events and other meetings of an appropriate nature. This is another way of helping us to relate to real life to our worship life.

Seating Arrangement

The seating arrangement is such that no one is at any great distance from the sanctuary. People thus sense that they are gathered around the sanctuary as a family. This favors participation in the action of the Mass by the people and diminishes the feeling of being mere spectators.

The small pipe organ and the choir are part of the congregation on one side of the sanctuary to better support congregational singing.

Confessional

The confessional, near the sacristy at the rear of the nave, is a room rather than a booth and accommodates only one penitent at a time for greater privacy. The penitent may sit or kneel. Since the screen is opaque, the lights in the confessional do not destroy privacy. The penitent may speak to the confessor through the screen. However, if he prefers, it can be pushed aside in order to speak to the priest face to face.

Other rooms at the rear of the nave are the sacristy, a bridal room, a multi-purpose room, and a storage room.

Basement

The basement incorporates a Religious Education office, a Thrift Shop, a fully equipped kitchen, and a large hall which is well adapted as a Religious Education facility. The classrooms are formed by movable dividers and each has a wall cabinet with blackboard and corkboard attached. The hall is still available nevertheless for meetings, suppers and socials.



Acknowledgements: Council & Committee Members Design & Completion of St. Anne's Church April, 1972

PASTOR: Rev. Msgr. Roland Normandeau
Sister Pauline Dione, C.C.D. Coordinator

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BUILDING & DESIGN:

Architect – Allied Engineering, Inc., Gorham, Maine

Design Consultant – Rambusch Associates, New York, New York

Contractor – 4D Construction Co., Yarmouth, Maine