

*History  
of  
Our Lady  
of  
Mt. Carmel Church*

*Youngstown, Ohio*

## HISTORY OF OUR LADY OF MT. CARMEL

*An old and wise man of God once said, "You can determine the degree of religion and civilization of any city by the number of church spires contained therein." As one enters the city of Youngstown, so wealthy in ethnicity, one cannot help but be awed by the number of churches that compliment its citizens.*

*Outstanding among these churches is the only remaining original Italian church in the Diocese of Youngstown, which is comprised of six counties--Ashtabula, Columbiana, Mahoning, Portage, Stark and Trumbull. The mission-like appearance of this humble little church is a beckoning sight. As one nears the center of town, rising up to the sky is the dome of our Church, which at first sight sings to us not only the Sacred Hymn of the Father but also compliments this prayer with the patriotic hymn of a people.*

*This church, a symbol of the Italo-American people, stands on a hill by the name of Via Mt. Carmel (formerly Summit Avenue). And around this hill 75 years ago were concentrated the aspirations of our pioneers who, by titanic efforts, surrounded their pastor to begin to make a dream into reality.*

*In 1908, the Reverend Emmanuel Stabile arrived from the Diocese of Newark, New Jersey to conceive Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church. This young Italian priest was from southern Italy, around the area of Naples. Educated in Florence, Italy and ordained in Naples, Father was a professor of Greek, Latin and philosophy as well as being a doctor of Canon Law. He spoke five languages: Italian, French, German, Spanish, and English. Father Stabile came to America as an Apostolic Missionary.*

*Spirited by his flock, under the leadership of Luigi Adovasio and Frank Zarlenga, Father initiated the first excavation in 1908 with a 79-foot long basement rising about seven feet from the ground and roofed for church use. While the church structure was taking form, the early community of this parish worshipped in St. Columba's Cathedral; then, they moved to Sts. Cyril and Methodius before worshipping in a basement church of their own. Due to a serious illness, Father Stabile died in 1911.*

*It is not my intention to trace here the particulars of this eventful period, for I would have to rely on tradition, and I know that tradition is always a dangerous collaborator to be elastic, like the small balloon of a child at a picnic.*

*On May 11, 1911, the outstanding Monsignor Vito Franco accepted the shepherd's staff to lead and guide the flock of Mt. Carmel. The then Father Franco came from Niles, Ohio, where he had spent five years organizing and building Our Lady of Mt. Carmel there. The son of Gioachino and Rosina (Del Priore) Franco, he was born in the village of Bella in the province of Potenza, Italy. He was ordained a priest in Naples, and scarcely two years had gone by after ordination when he was sent to Niles as an Apostolic Missionary to organize and build a church.*

*After his arrival in Youngstown and after a two-year orientation, Monsignor called a meeting of the outstanding leaders in the Italian community. Some of those present were: Luigi Adovasio, Antonio Onorato, F. A. Maddas, Andrea Colucci, James Colucci, Dr. Rocco Montani, Raffaele Parilla, Gregorio Silvestri, Luigi Agnone, Atty. James Modarelli, Gabriello Masi, Francesco Pascarella, and many others. A leader was elected by unanimous vote--Mr. Antonio Onorato.*

*With the help of such zealous workers, the existing basement church roof was opened, and work on the new church was started on July 20, 1913. The vision of the new, beautiful church was radiant before the eyes of the immigrant community. Meeting followed meeting with a growing enthusiasm, adding on new workers of iron wills and inflexible principles who were blessed with assiduousness and Franciscan perseverance--such men as Marco Antonelli, Michael and Daniel Parish, Frank Mancini, D. Ferreri, Antonio Cafaro, E. Diana, M. Ricci, John Rondinella, N. Sebastiano, G. Capuzella, B. Vitullo, V. Fortunato, Vito Agostino, James Tisone, E. Porfilio, R. Marinelli, P. Gentile, J. Liga, Mrs. Melito, and others.*

Projects and contracts were analyzed until the ecstasy of reality was entered, and, as swift as an eagle, we soared into the sky with a sublime Roman dome which domineers over the imperishable monument of the Italian colony of Youngstown. The church was completed and dedicated on November 4, 1916. And so, a monument to an immigrant frontier settlement in this land of opportunity and betterment, which the parish family deeply loved, was erected. Like the Roman empire of old, the United States of America has become a melting pot of civilizations and nationalities, a mixture of cultures and races, and a blending of roots which now need to be protected and monumentalized for posterity.

Built of red brick in Romanesque design, with its Beaux Arts period mixtures of Italian Baroque and Georgian Revival forms, the church complementarily united Italian and Colonial cultures.

The Michaelangelo-style frescos are original and priceless today. They were first painted by the studio of Pizzi-Pascarella of Pittsburgh, Pa.

The bell in the tower was imported from Italy. Made of silver, brass and bronze, the bell is a replica of the one used in the village church of Bella, Potenza, Italy.

The Terra Cotta frame around the main entrance, again, was a labor of love in peasant artistry in a new land of freedom.

The original stained glass windows were brought in from Germany.

The joy of this Italian village church was short-lived due to a tragic fire of unknown origin on June 12, 1923. Among the scars of this destructive fire was the loss of the diamond of the pipe organs, a Holkamp Pipe Organ, which was donated, in part, by the millionaire Carnegie and in part by the faithful people. In all, the damage totaled \$20,000. Gutted and destroyed were the artistic windows, pews, 10 statues, three altars--one totally--the carpeting, the floor, the expensive candelabra, the brass chandeliers, and many other church articles.

However, the wake of this melancholic tragedy caused by the fire spurred the parish to emerge stronger and more united. On December 16, 1923, the restored church was dedicated. The Bishop and faithful were led into the triumphant church by the Societa Duca degli Abruzzi and by the Pious Union of the Mothers of the Crucifix, along with other local societies. As time passed, the flock of Mt. Carmel grew in grace, wisdom, and strength under the watchful eye of its pastor.

Together, with the rest of the community, the parish family suffered the heartaches of two World Wars, along with the joys of victory and peace. The return of war veterans brought a new heartache to this little church after the Second World War. The Italian quarter was being evacuated by the parishioners as they moved to suburbia. The vacant areas soon fell into decay and slum; yet, this titanic church forged on and blossomed, nourished by the strong loyalty of its members. After fruitful years of labor with and for his Italian people and having joyfully celebrated his 50th anniversary of priesthood, the aged Monsignor Franco died in 1961.

The new pastor, Reverend Henry Fabrizio, was faced with the tremendous task of rebuilding. A former assistant of Monsignor Franco, Father Fabrizio was born in Wilburton, Oklahoma, the son of Samuel and Pepina (Massaro) Fabrizio. Father was a graduate of Ursuline High School and had studied at St. Charles College in Maryland and St. Mary's Seminary in Cleveland before being ordained in Youngstown on April 29, 1950.

Under his able leadership, the Italian community, now intermixed with other nationalities via marriages, entered a second phase of building. Protecting the venerable old structure, the new generation, along with the remainder of the older members, bought parcels of property in what was considered a dead, run-down, inner-city slum and resurrected it into a beautiful setting for its diamond--Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church.

With the persevering vigor of Father Fabrizio and with the very generous help of his flock, a new rectory and a large social hall, with classrooms for religious and cultural education, were built and completed in 1963. Father Fabrizio ushered his flock into new horizons of growth and community leadership. The last addition to this beautiful setting was a shrine garden in honor of St. Anthony in 1971 to memorialize the deceased of the parish. Due to illness, Father Fabrizio

was forced to retire from active ministry after many untiring labors of love-service to the parish and to the entire community.

On July 3, 1973, the present pastor, Father Joseph Leo Iati, accepted the shepherd's staff. The son of Paolo and Brigida (Suraci) Iati who immigrated to Canada from Reggio Calabria, Italy, Father was born in North Bay, Ontario, Canada and came to Youngstown to complete his studies. Father Iati studied at Youngstown State University, John Carroll University in Cleveland, St. Gregory's and Mt. St. Mary's of the West Seminaries in Cincinnati. He speaks four languages: English, Italian, French, and Spanish. He was ordained in Youngstown on May 30, 1959.

The new pastor, with his flock, embraced a new effort of restoration and maintenance. Immediately the work began to seek out, restore, and protect the priceless works of art within the church.

The historic street on which the church shares residence with its people took on a new appearance by a change of name from Summit Avenue to Via Mt. Carmel. The ethnic search for roots by the younger generation brought in a new wave of interest and sharing. A plaque was donated to the church by the deceased Paul Yetty of Herkimer, New York. This plaque, from the original Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church in Italy, is believed to be the work of one of Michaelangelo's students. This plaque is housed in the church sacristy.

Quickly the church went into a complete restoration. The original altars of hand-carved wood from Italy, still bearing the scars of the tragic fire of 1923, were stripped and restored in 1978.

The frescos were restored and totally redone by artist Albert Rozzi of Youngstown, one of the last surviving artists of this Michaelangelo school of painting.

Some of the statues within the church were imported from Italy, while others are the works of a domestic sculptor, Mr. Del Prato. The molds for the casting of these statues were destroyed after the Second Vatican Council. As a result of this tragic misunderstanding, we have lost our source of domestic statues in America since new statues in the future must be imported. One of our own artists, Mrs. Rose (Monaco) Gaffney, has totally restored our statues.

The electric organ was replaced by a Mellor pipe organ donated by William and John Cafaro. The organ, originally located in a Baptist church in West Virginia, was re-assembled in its new home in August 1973 and has been increased to an 11-rank pipe organ with chimes; here, it is maintained and held in high respect.

The hand-carved pews were totally stripped, re-glued, and assembled in place by the local artistry of Steve Santha.

A statue of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel was imported and placed in the front of the church into a fitting niche to complete the original planned facade of the church.

The parish family was totally energized with a special joy as the effects of the second Vatican Council in new Lituart took form in the appearance of fruitwood nestled in the warm and colorful arms of the old law.

Indeed, many are the treasures of art within this little village church, which is an active volcano of adoration and praise to a Mighty God through the patronage of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

The labor of restoration took almost two years, and in November 1979, the completed diamond was dedicated in a provided setting equal to none. The ecstasy of this magic moment was increased by a sense of freedom in the security of knowing that the parish debt and the total restoration costs were paid, in addition to a small security in savings.

Many came to our help: Mr. Edward De Bartolo and family, Carmen and Rose Ambrosio, and State Senator Harry Meshel, who personally assisted us so that on May 23, 1979, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church was crowned with the honor of being declared and listed as a Historical Monument by the U. S. Department of the Interior.

This year we celebrate 75 years of religious growth and praise to the One True Living God. What a privilege it is for us, the children of America, to be able to live with and use today--to our great awe, joy, and pride--the monuments that memorialize our roots, which are rich in ethnic

culture. May we always maintain our heritage of the past, and may God bless the people of this parish and this great nation.

This brief history of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church has been accumulated by Father Joseph Iati. Some factual information was obtained from a program book, written in Italian by Monsignor Vito Franco, to memorialize the dedication of the restored church after the fire of 1923. Part of this history of Mt. Carmel Church is from a series of personal interviews of the older members of the parish, many of whom are now deceased.

These accounts of our history were common to the facts collected from many people who were witnesses to these events; therefore, they are true.

May we grow in an awareness and appreciation of our glorious ethnic monuments for the posterity of our America. Otherwise we risk becoming a nation without roots, void of heritage, ignorant of traditions and the valuable contributions of varied ethnic cultures that have made and continue to make us the great nation that we are.

We commend to you, O Mary the Mother of God, our prayers and our love. Be an open refuge to all who come to partake in this holy family. Guide and protect us through our exiled journey of life, as you have led our forefathers, until we are all one before the vision of the Almighty. Yet stay with us a while, "O Gran Signora." Hear the cries of your people and all who come to this temple in joy, in sorrow, in trouble, in anxiety, in praise, in thanksgiving, in delusion, in frustration, in weakness or confusion, and grant us our petitions.

Take our Adoration to God our Father and sanctify Your people of Mt. Carmel with His miracles of healing through your powerful intercession.

