

Celebrating Our 75th Year

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October 21, 2018

On Oct. 21, 2018, we begin our 75th year as a Catholic diocese. We were separated from the Diocese of Fort Wayne on this date in 1944.

During the next 12 months, we will be celebrating by looking back and ahead in our own evangelizing mission. Stories will be told in *The Catholic Moment*, presentations will be given around the diocese, and much will be shared through social media. Since some of our parishes are more than 150 years old, our retrospectives can include narratives from several older written histories that help to explain the present.

The word “diocese” originally referred to a governance area within the Roman Empire. Church dioceses are created in order to serve the salvation of souls. There are many reasons for founding a new diocese: population growth and migration, sufficient availability of clergy and the presence of sustaining resources, to name a few.

As these celebrations begin, it is necessary to know who we are, and where we are, both in time and geography. In 1944, the United States was involved in global wars. Imagine Bishop John G. Bennett, our first bishop, being assigned to start a diocese when so many human and financial resources were occupied with the war.

A good number of our readers still relate personal and family stories about that era.

To get an idea about the scale of the war effort, I refer you to the online 1991 article by Professor James H. Madison titled “Hoosiers at War: An Overview of Indiana During World War Two” (<https://www.in.gov/history/4350.htm>).

The same author published “Hoosiers: A History of Indiana” in 2016. For me, at least, knowing the wider historical context of Church activity can suggest unique things about Indiana Catholics and their expectations for our Church.

While 75 years may not seem impressive, the world was quite different in the 1940s. For the Catholic Church, Sunday worship was mostly in Latin and many city parishes were located so parishioners could walk to Mass.

Today, we can go online and get statistics about how few houses had full indoor plumbing arrangements. And while maybe half or more of Indiana residences had telephones, many of these were connected on a “party line.”

While I am reminiscing, I recall the day two decades ago when my nephew asked, “Dad, what’s a black-and-white TV?” A more recent magazine cartoon captures our present day as a young

boy says to his mom: “Go play outside? What do you think this is, the ’60s?” I am sure that you have your own examples about how personal computers and mobile devices have changed work, home, school and religious environments. It is important to be able to identify how God’s presence among us has been enhanced through time, and sometimes obscured.

In terms of our faith, any era is a part of “salvation history,” a continuation of what began with Abraham and Moses, Jesus and the Apostles and all the saints. Families, parishes, religious sisters, brothers and priests, and diocesan clergy all had and have a role in what we have received. It is my hope that our grateful accounting about those who brought us through 75 years will produce insight and awe. Awe is the basis of thanksgiving, which is the foundation of prayer. We are not about nostalgia for its own sake, but for the deeper appreciation of how faith in Christ expresses itself in manifold ways. The past has no monopoly on religious imagination.

It is my hope that some knowledge of our history will help to continue our efforts toward “Uniting in Heart,” a pastoral vision that you can find online at www.dol-in.org. Because so much of our present day concentrates on what divides people, we together as the Body of Christ, the Church, can exemplify alternative ways of building community.