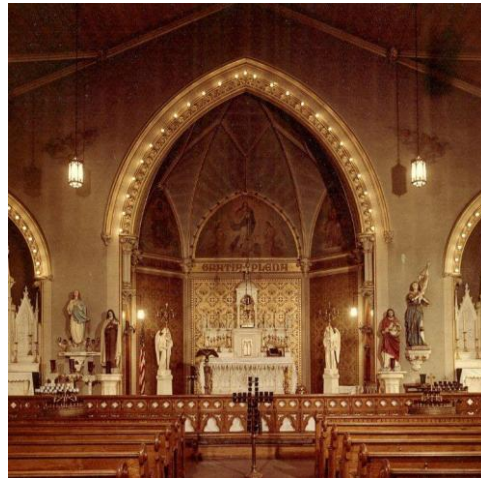
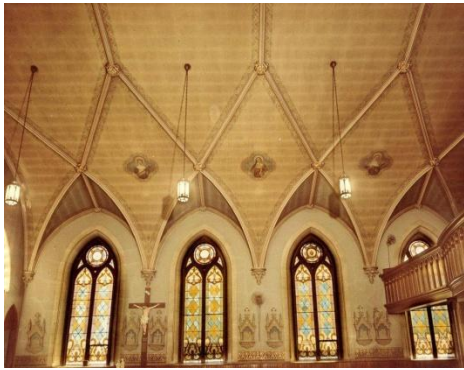


## A short history of Our Lady of the Assumption Church, Latham, NY

The original Our Lady of the Assumption Church was located on Hamilton Street in the city of Albany not far from the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. It was a French, ethnic parish –L’Assomption de la Ste. Vierge, established in 1869 by Bishop John Conroy, the second bishop of Albany. The first church structure burned to the ground in January 1892. The church was rebuilt in September 1892 and remained in use until the early 60’s. Here are a few photographs of the interior of the 1892 church.



Additionally, we have the original sacramental record books (baptism, communion, confirmation and marriage) dating back to 1869. The original record books are written in both Latin and in French.

Some other items from the old church which are now located in Latham are the statue of the Blessed Mother outside the Faith Formation office, the original monstrance used for exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and the chalice of Msgr. Gratton who was the last pastor at the original Assumption church.

Our Lady of the Assumption began its present location at 498 Watervliet Shaker Road 1963. It was the year Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller initiated the building of the “South Mall Project”, later to be named the Empire State Plaza. In order to construct this massive governmental complex, numerous city blocks were razed between State Street and Madison Avenue. Two of our Catholic parishes were numbered among the many buildings demolished in the process. Bishop William A. Scully, seventh bishop of Albany, wanted to retain the titles of the two parishes; so he re-established them: Our Lady of the Assumption to Latham and Holy Cross, the former German, ethnic parish, was relocated on upper Western Avenue in Albany.

In the early 1960s, the Town of Colonie began to experience phenomenal growth. What once had been rural farmland began to be developed and became within a few years a prosperous suburban community. The part of Colonie known as Latham was no exception. Although two

Catholic parishes were already located in the area, St. Pius X, Loudonville and St. Ambrose, Latham, Bishop Scully decided to establish a third parish between the other two. Coincidentally, it was that same year, 1963, that the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet began the building of a new provincial house on the Delatour Farm property just down the road from the new church. The diocese purchased from Charles & Lillian Sedlecek a twelve-acre parcel of farmland, and soon a new building was underway.

The cornerstone and blessing of the new church took place on September 8, 1963. Bishop Scully appointed Fr. Joseph Varden, the former editor of the diocesan newspaper, *The Evangelist*, as the first pastor. When the parish opened, there were 300 enrolled families and 490 children in the Religious Education Program.

Fr. Varden was a most remarkable man. A former military chaplain during WWII, he had the unique talent of bringing people together and building community. That is exactly what he did to strengthen his new parish by planning dances, cookouts, picnics, bazaars as well as establishing devotional celebrations, religious societies like the Holy Name Society for the men, and the Rosary Altar Society for women, creating a warm and welcoming community.

The new parish grew quickly and in the spring of 1967 it was necessary to add four additional classrooms and administrative offices for the Religious Education Program. Fr. Varden's beloved presence and leadership were of a much too short tenure. Sadly, he passed away on January 25, 1969. The original members of the parish still recall his friendly manner and true pastoral presence. His legacy as the founding pastor will always be remembered.

Fr. Jeremiah Noonan, parish associate at the time of Fr. Varden's death, served as administrator of the parish until a new pastor was named later that year.

On June 22, 1969, Bishop Edwin B. Broderick, eighth Bishop of Albany, appointed Rev. John F. Hardiman as the second pastor of the parish. Fr. Hardiman knew he had "big shoes" to fill, but like his predecessor, he continued on the path of building up the new parish. Fr. Hardiman was a gentle, kind and pastoral man who served as our parish shepherd for 33 years. His first challenge as a young pastor was the responsibility of implementing the changes following the Second Vatican Council. In his early years as pastor he also oversaw the renovation of the sanctuary to meet the needs of the new liturgical reforms and the establishment of the parish Lay Advisory Board.

Soon after Fr. Hardiman had been named pastor, he recognized the need for someone to lead and direct the growing Religious Education Program. S. Maria De Monte, OP was invited to take on the challenge. S. Maria brought with her new and innovative approaches to the catechetical program. Remember, this was the era of post Vatican II reforms, and we explored our faith in new and wonderful ways.

Fr. Hardiman and S. Maria shared their enthusiasm with the parish. Another development of the Second Vatican Council was the restoration of the Permanent Diaconate. Rev. Mr. Robert Archambault, a member of OLA, studied and trained in the first class of men who were prepared for this ministry. Deacon Archambault, a true teacher at heart, was also instrumental in the development of many new ministries and faith-based programs offered at OLA.

During Fr. Hardiman's tenure as pastor numerous priests were assigned to OLA, many of them newly ordained, and here they learned the ministry of priesthood. Not to single out only one, but it is an interesting piece of diocesan history that Fr. Howard J. Hubbard served at OLA as a weekend associate for over 10 years. In 1977 Fr. Hubbard was ordained the ninth Bishop of Albany, following Bishop Broderick. The parish also had the presence of the Franciscan Friars from Siena who assisted with Sunday Masses.

In 1989 it was time to expand again. Fr. Hardiman oversaw a 7,000-square-foot expansion of the existing building. New parish offices were built to meet the growing demands of the parish. A beautiful daily Mass chapel was added as well as a Gathering Space for social functions.

Ten years later, in June 1999, after celebrating his Golden Anniversary of priesthood Fr. Hardiman retired. On September 10, the Lord called him home to eternal life. An era had passed. A priest for 50 years and shepherd at OLA for 33 years Fr. Hardiman will always be remembered by the parish. We will forever be grateful for his wisdom, guidance and pastoral presence.

Bishop Hubbard appointed Rev. Geoffrey Burke as the third pastor of OLA on July 1, 1999. Fr. Burke had been Chancellor for Personnel in the diocese before he came to OLA and also served and continues to serve as the chaplain for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet down the street at the Provincial House. The parish was at this time in its 36<sup>th</sup> year and had grown to 2,000 families. New ministries were flourishing in the parish. Sunday programs like Children's Liturgy of the Word, Rainbows and Church Mice; Elizabeth Ministry for families with newborns, Vacation Bible School, Bereavement Ministry, are a few of them.

The Millennium Year – 2000 AD was welcomed with great rejoicing! It was celebrated by the Church universal, the diocese and certainly by OLA. On January 1, 2000 a large gong was struck on the portico porch and echoed throughout the neighborhood. The church bells rang to celebrate the occasion. In August of that year a new meditation garden was created on the northwest lawn and dedicated to the memory of Fr. Hardiman.

In 2003, OLA celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a special Mass and the blessing of the "Pathway to Peace". The pathway, constructed of bricks and inscribed with the family names of parishioners, was the inspiration of the Youth Ministry Program. During the year many programs and events celebrated the anniversary, culminating with a dinner dance at Wolfert's Roost Country Club.

Change is part of history. In 2004, following a successful Capital Campaign, OLA embarked on a two-part renovation project for the church and LaSalle Hall. The church renovations included the following: a new canopy entrance over the front doors; a large baptismal font to accommodate both children and adults; a reconfigured sanctuary and choir area, and a reservation chapel behind the main altar for the Blessed Sacrament. Five new stained-glass windows were designed and installed in the church. The creation window at the baptismal font, the tabernacle window behind the altar, and the prism window in the Eucharist chapel were designed by Sarah Hall Studios; the Mary and Joseph windows set into the doors leading to the reservation chapel were designed by Guy Kemper. When the sanctuary floor was being set, medals of the Holy Spirit, Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, St. Ann, the Rosary and Blessed John Paul II were placed under the altar. Bishop Hubbard rededicated the church in October 2005. James Hunt Architect and Sano Rubin Company oversaw the design and construction of the renovation project. It is interesting to note that in the renovation process, all the original pieces of the church were retained. The marble used for the new baptismal font came from Italy, from the very same quarry and vein that had provided the original altar, ambo and tabernacle stand back in 1963. LaSalle Hall was renovated in the summer of 2006. New windows, floor, room dividers, air conditioning and state-of-the-art cable and audio visual elements were added to the building. James Coleman was the project architect. In 2010, a stone Labyrinth was added to the meditation garden area by Eagle Scout Collin Sponable. The final piece of the renovation process was the installation of a new electronic Allen Organ in 2011. The organ was a bequest to the parish from the estate of Charles and Naomi Glover.

A parish is not buildings or structures but the tapestry of the individuals, families, staff and parishioners whose lives are woven together over the years by the celebration of their faith. There are so many names and individuals that should be mentioned in this brief history of the parish but it is impossible to include everyone. Please know that we are grateful to all who have contributed in some way to our history: to the present as well as to its future.

Our Lady of the Assumption Parish has been blessed in so many ways, and we give thanks and praise to God for all these blessings. As we approach our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, September 8, 2013, may we continue to share our faith with others as well as continuing to be a welcoming community for the building up of God's kingdom of justice and peace.