

History of St. Anthony Shrine

Highlights of Presentation by Dominic Monti, OFM

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The main stages in the development of the Franciscan presence in Boston:

- 1) Lest we forget, the roots of St. Anthony Shrine go back to the ministry of several friars from the Immaculate Conception Custody (from Allegany, N.Y.), who founded St. Leonard's Parish in 1873 for Italian immigrants in Boston's North End. Also, the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany came to Boston in the 1880s to found St Elizabeth's Hospital. St. Leonard's, although intended for Italians, also attracted many Irish people, drawn to Franciscan devotions. As a result of their contact with the Franciscan friars and sisters, a number of Irish-American young people went to St. Bonaventure College, and there joined the Order. One of these was Fr. Gabriel Nangle, the great-uncle of Fr. Joe Nangle, OFM. In the re-configuration of Franciscan jurisdictions on the East Coast in 1901, these Irish-American friars became part of the new Holy Name Province. So, there were Bostonians in Holy Name Province from its founding. Naturally, they wanted to get Holy Name Province into their home town! This proved difficult.
- 2) In the 1920s, looking ahead, Holy Name Province purchased land in the Boston suburbs, hoping to build a house of philosophy there. The formidable William Cardinal O'Connell blocked this venture. However, the cardinal, in the midst of building a new residence for himself in Brighton, told the friars that he would welcome HNP into the diocese if we purchased his old residence! This was done, and in 1927, we opened St. Francis Friary on Rawson Road in Brookline as a retreat house for laymen (Boston Irishman Joachim Cunniffe, OFM, was the first guardian). The friary soon became the center of a booming Third Order (Secular Franciscan) fraternity, with 800 attending the monthly meetings by the late 1930s. One of the devoted members of the Third Order there was a young diocesan priest named Richard Cushing – this proved to be providential.
- 3) In 1944, Fr. Cushing was named Archbishop of Boston. Convinced that the Franciscans were perceptive and compassionate confessors, in 1946 he invited the Brookline friars to supply a confessor at a downtown chapel of St. Thomas More. Sensing the great demand for spiritual services there, he invited the friars to open their own chapel – and so, on Ash Wednesday, 1947, the friars began St. Anthony Shrine at 103 Arch St, with Harold Blake, OFM, as the first director. This chapel was an instantaneous success – in the first week of operation, the friars heard 3500 confessions! Plans were made for a new, larger Shrine across the street – ground was broken in October, 1952 – three years later, in 1955, the friars moved in. As Archbishop Cushing remarked at the dedication, “No other order but the Franciscan Order would ever undertake a work of such magnitude!” The architect was Br. Cajetan Baumann, OFM, and the massive structure cost some \$4,500,000.
- 4) Since its founding, “Arch Street” has been one of the “flagship ministries” of Holy Name Province. The following friars have served as guardians/directors of St Anthony Shrine – each one made his distinctive contributions to the life and ministry of the Shrine.

1947-1955	+ Harold Blake, OFM (at 'old' shrine, 103 Arch) – built the 'new shrine'
1955-1961	+ Hilary Sullivan, OFM (moved into 'new' shrine, 100 Arch)
1961-1967	+ Silas Rooney, OFM
1967-1973	Robert B. Lynch, OFM (a satellite chapel in the Prudential Center opened 1969).
1973-1979	+ Joseph Sullivan, OFM

1979-1982 Andrew F. Giardino, OFM
1982-1985 Louis J. Canino, OFM (the Prudential Center chapel relinquished, 1982).
1985-1990 Stephen Lynch, OFM
1990-1999 Kevin J. Mullen, OFM
1999-2002 John R. Ullrich, OFM
2002-2011 David I. Convertino, OFM
2011 - James P. Kelly, OFM