

Lourdes: A Reminiscence 1940

Perhaps the person who had the most pronounced effect on Lourdes parish in the 1930's was its pastor, Monsignor Michael Lyons. Unlike other Indianapolis priests who were educated at St. Meinrad, Monsignor Lyons had attended St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland. He was about 5'9", 170 lbs, wore pince-nez type glasses and exuded an air of authority. His demeanor was serious, if not severe.

In an era when ecumenism was unknown, and certainly unknown in white anglo-saxon Irvington, Msgr. Lyon had established contact with some of the Irvington ministers. He was well-read, if not scholarly, and even in his sermons gave evidence of learning. I recall as a child his explanation of the derivation of etcetera and its latin origin delivered during a sermon. He preferred altar boys who were well trained and insisted on being handed his biretta at the end of mass in a particular manner so that he could grasp it immediately, as there are three ridges or flutes on the top. Unless it was handed to him properly it could have been awkward to grasp. To show his appreciation for the particularly cognizant altar boy, an award was given to the graduating eighth grader who was the best altar boy. I recall in the presentation Msgr. Lyons saying that the recipient at all times was aware of the liturgy and the needs of the clergy.

The second most effective pastor, earlier an assistant, was Rev. James Moore. Tall (6'2") and dashing, he was outgoing, laughed much and in his biretta and black cape greeted his parishoners as they left the church after mass. He was less severe than Msgr. Lyons, a person of another generation, but after Msgr. Lyons continued the tradition of strong leadership in the parish. It was during Fr. Moore's tenure (I believe) that the present church was built and the warmth and winning ways of his personality brought Lourdes to a high point of unity and peace. Everyone admired him and he reciprocated by serving with grace and style.

Many other priests, of course, served the parish very well during the 1930's, 40's and 50's. Father Louis Gootee as an assistant coached the boy's softball team. A fine athlete himself, Father Gootee could hit a fly ball higher and farther than anyone I have ever seen (perspective of a 12 year old youngster). Father Schottkotte (phonetic) served in the 1930's as did Father Ronald Hostetter. The latter was newly ordained

and full of life. After the graveside services at Holy Cross Cemetary one morning, Fr. Hostetter and his altar boys (all in their cassocks) noticed a commotion across from the cemetary. A bull had escaped from a nearby slaughter house and was being chased by a posse of policemen and firemen. Great excitement. Fr. Hostetter and his altar boys joined in the chase in his car, the bull being unmindful of his ecclesiastical pursuers.

Fr. Hostetter, even to young altar boys, seemed to drive very fast and unfortunately just a few years later he was killed in an auto accident. He was a handsome young man, full of fun and ready for the unexpected.

Another strong component of the Lourdes picture is the role played by the Sisters of St. Francis. They touched the lives of all the Lourdes children. Sister Marian, a tiny, pretty, gentle woman, taught the first grade for many years in the 1920's and 30's. As of about 1978 she was still living so she must have started teaching when she was 18 or less.

Sister Sylvester was a principal. Short Germanic and stout, she ruled and taught a class of 60 youngsters comprised of 5th and 6th graders. She was not reluctant to cuff an errant boy in the back of the head.

Other sisters: Sr. Marie Bernadette (3rd or 4th grade)— gentle, soft-spoken. Sr. Ancilla Marie—a principal, outstanding teacher with a refined, gracious presence, Lourdes School used the flash-card technique in many of its subjects and phonics in its reading and spelling instruction. I am grateful for the strong grounding provided by the Sisters.

Music was also taught, especially piano and many youngsters took from the nuns. Many of them went on to become outstanding musicians and pianists and organists and choir directors. Two of these are my brothers, James E. and Thomas J. Murphy.

Lourdes to a youngster seemed like a lively place. There were the softball and football teams. In the summer the big excitement was the lawn fete held on the parish grounds. It was a fund raiser and booths were built and wheels of chance brought in and there were wooden milk bottles to be toppled with baseballs. Even ponies were rented and rides provided. One year my father had that chairmanship which made me at least a sub-master of the ponies. Such prestige. Another year I worked setting up the wooden milk bottles

(more prestige). The lawn fete I shall never forget because when I was about 10 years old I was awakened one evening to be told by my father that I had won a bicycle in a drawing. It is the grandest (and almost the only) thing I have ever won. I prized it, kept it in perfect repair and had it for many, many years.

The liturgies at Lourdes were always quite beautiful.

Forty hours, feast days, funerals, Easter, Holy Saturday. The sounds of the Latin chants and the echoes of the polyphonic music of the choir form a lyrical mosaic in the memories of the youngsters who lived their early years in this environment.

An especially memorable day was the dedication of the present Lourdes church. Built by Mr. Wilhelm's firm, it was completed just before the War (II) and is an especially beautiful entity in the Irvington scene.

Some events present both sights and sounds, plus tastes. First Fridays ranked in this category. While the school children attended daily mass as a group, on First Friday everyone went to or rather, received Communion. Thereafter (in the old church/ school) we went to the basement auditorium and had very hot chocolate and cinnamon rolls with white icing. Sometimes the priests would come down and visit and pour the hot chocolate. It was a fun time and helps to explain my present strong preference for cinnamon rolls with white icing.

The Christmas program for the school children was always memorable. There would be songs and the school orchestra would play. Toward the end Santa (Mr. Hibbard) would appear, as would Msgr. Lyons and we would all be gifted with a bag of Christmas hard candy and an orange. It was a sure sign that all was right with the world and that Christmas was upon us.

In the late 1940's, as I recall, the Lourdes Forum was developed. It presented a season of lectures on topical subjects and may have been held at the Howe High School Auditorium. One speaker was the renowned Msgr. Fulton J. Sheen. He spoke on a Saturday evening at Howe in the Lourdes Forum and then on Sunday delivered sermons at each of the masses at Lourdes. It was a singular triumph for the parish.

There are many questions to be asked concerning Lourdes. Its setting in what had previously been a totally "WASP" environment must have caused a few ripples in the Irvington scene. My father recalled that Luther Shirley the mortician would loan chairs from his funeral home for use at the Lourdes' services and my Dad was always grateful. So there was a welcoming spirit.

There were some unpleasanties. Irvington was the home of D.C. Stephenson (his former home still stands in south Irvington). As Grand Kleagle

he and his Ku Klux Klan had wide support in Indiana and apparently some support in Irvington as a fiery cross was once burned in front of the old Lourdes rectory. (Score: my Dad, Robert L. Murphy). Date: unknown. Probably in the late '20's or early '30s.

That era fortunately passed. Several characteristics adhered to the Lourdes of the 1930's and 1940's and perhaps they continue to apply today. First, was the quality of the parishoners. They were very good people and by remaining in the parish provided marvelous continuity and a sense of permanence. Such families as the Murphys, Mahans, Mernels, Allrichs, Remmetters and so many others were faithful to Lourdes.

A second characteristic was the absence of obvious affluence. Of course the 1930's were depression years and there was relatively little affluence to be concealed. But even for those families who probably had greater means there was no ostentatious display. I personally had no particular cognizance that any of my school mates were either more or less well off than myself. This evenness of economic means may have contributed to a sense of unity in the parish.

The physical environment of Irvington undoubtedly contributed to the Lourdes ambience. A former college community (Butler) with its winding streets, some of brick surface, its towering forest trees and huge oaks, its tree-lined Ellenberger Parkway, its Ellenberger Park and Pleasant Run Golf Course—Irvington has a unique spirit that is enriching for the eye and supportive of one's need for a quiet haven in a busy and changing world. It is in this environment that Lourdes exists and as a believing community has nurtured the spiritual thirsts of its members for seventy-five years.

In any of the large cities of America it is rare for a neighborhood and an area to maintain the same characteristics for more than fifty years. Economic decline and the mix of demographics can render a neighborhood and a parish unrecognizable in a relatively short time. Perhaps that is what I most appreciate about Lourdes and Irvington. I can come back and worship in the same church I saw built as a school boy. I can visit with friends whose parents were the core of the parish in the 20's and 30's. My children can use the Ellenberger tennis courts as I did as a youngster and walk along the parkway as I did, heading up Lowell to Hawthorne Lane and then across Washington St. to Lourdes. I'm sure changes have taken place of which I may not be aware. But the Lourdes of today is my spiritual home, just as it was when I was growing up in the parish. I relish the continuity, the sense of permanence and the haven it provides.

Robert O. Murphy
Lourdes Class of 1940