In early July, 1914, in the churches of St. Anthony and St. John the Evangelist, priests announced the forthcoming founding of a new parish. The reason was that the farms in the area were giving way to new, modern and spacious homes. Many young families were populating the eastside section of Detroit. St. Anthony, a fairly new church, could not accommodate the larger and growing congregation. The school was filled to capacity. St. John the Evangelist faced an identical problem with an even more significant increase, since their permanent church was still a dream. Something had to be done. The result was the birth of St. Thomas the Apostle parish.

The Michigan Catholic published an article entitled "Will Organize New Parish" which stated "Rev. Patrick J. Cullinane of Yale, Michigan, comes to Detroit to organize the new parish of St. Thomas the Apostle. It is to be established on Miller Road, beyond St. Anthony Church near the northeast limits of the city." The land, purchased for our parish, was on Miller at the corner of Helen Avenue. Bishop Foley praised Father Cullinane for the work that he had done at Sacred Heart Parish in Yale, which he founded some sixteen years earlier. Totally confident in Father Cullinane's ability, the bishop gave the new pastor all the requisite powers to shape a new parish for the future congregation.

On July 23, 1914, Father Patrick J. Cullinane arrived at his new assignment. He visited the empty fields on Miller and Helen Streets - no building, no money, just some vacant lots of overgrown with weeds. He went about viewing the territory of his parish and meeting some of his future parishioners. Father Patrick offered the first Mass of this new parish on July 28, 1914 in a small store located on Carrie Street, just north of Harper Avenue. It was attended by approximately 100 persons. Mass was said on a plain pine board altar amidst the most humble surroundings of any parish in Detroit. St. Thomas the Apostle Parish became a reality.

Attendance increased Sunday after Sunday. In a few short months, the little store was inadequate. Continued growth forced Father Cullinane to secure a store adjoining the "Carrie" church. Walls were cut through to provide seating for 300 worshippers. Membership in the small parish was still increasing. The area was becoming quickly populated by young families moving to the limits of the city. Father Cullinane scheduled numerous Masses to accommodate his growing congregation. To aid him, he procured the assistance of Fathers Sharpe and Collins of Assumption College of Sandwich, Ontario.
Among the first families were the Hesslers, Morans, Doolittles, Schmidts, Sullivans, Burkes, Weilers, Pattersons, Cooks, Deweys, Mitulskis, Murrays, Wells, Browns, Dzuiks, and Hafelis.

During the first year of our parish, Father Patrick was in residence at St. Anthony rectory and for a short time at St. John the Evangelist. In 1915 the parish was able to afford a rented house at 267 Sherwood Avenue near Miller Road. It became the first parish rectory.

Father Cullinane's brief pastorate came to an end after two years and four months. For the third time, he was called to establish another parish, St. Ambrose Parish in Grosse Pointe Park on September 18, 1916.

On the last Sunday of September, 1916, the newly appointed pastor, Rev. Stanley S. Skrzycki, celebrated his first Mass. Unlike his predecessor, Father Skrzycki, who was granted the title of Rt. Rev. Monsignor in 1944, served the parish for 57 years. He passed to his heavenly reward in 1973.

Through the years, St. Thomas parish built two churches, two rectories and a convent. The Sisters of St. Joseph, Third Order of St. Francis, served both the elementary and high schools from their initiation to their closure. Together with dedicated lay teachers, they educated thousands of students, instilling in them high standards of academic excellence and preparing them to face life with faith and confidence. In sports' activities, the coaches fostered a high level of competition that rivaled larger schools as the numerous trophies indicate. Sisters Josaphat and Symphoria acted as principals for scores of years, and almost everyone passing through St. Thomas Elementary School was a student of Sister Carmella, who taught in its classrooms for 25 years. In the same manner, high school graduates remember Sister Mary Dulcia who organized St. Thomas High School and was its first principal.

Unfortunately, the sixties witnessed sad changes. School enrollment declined. The high school was closed and in time, the elementary school was disbanded. The Sisters had to leave. Even the number of priests serving the congregation was lessened. The families within the area decreased from 2500 in 1966 to 900 in 1969.

In the 70s the parish had to address the changing ministry of St. Thomas. The buildings had to be adapted to new purposes. The empty school building and its gym became the Thomas Traynor School for the retarded under the auspices of the County during the first nine years and under the Department of Education of Detroit during its final three years. The gym was also used in the evenings by PAL, the Block Club, and Neighborhood Watch.

The convent building served as a meeting place for lectures, films and entertainment. Most popular were the annual brunches and dinners prepared by our ladies of the St. Thomas Auxiliary. As Townsend House, it became a residential rehabilitation center. Most recently, Women in Transition used it as a facility to house abused mothers and their children. In the fall of 1984, the Convent will have new occupants. Goals Unlimited will make it a residence home for senior citizens. We extend a fond welcome to these, our newest neighbors and hope to work closely with them.

During the years of Rev. John Wilkerwicz, the rectory housed the Gratiot Vicariate Offices, the Bible school, NESCO, an Eastside Community Program, and all meetings of Parish organizations. Even today, the rectory still hosts meetings, the Quilting Circle and the Food Pantry. During the holidays,
parishioners fill it with song, games and merriment to the aroma of the good cooking of our women.

Inspired by the example of dedicated Sisters and priests, the parish has contributed numerous vocations. More than 60 young men and women have entered the priesthood and the various congregations of religious women and men in the Detroit Archdiocese and other dioceses. Our most recent vocation was that of Fr. Anthony Howard, a Franciscan, who was ordained on June 2, 1984, in Los Angeles.

Special thanks are due to our oldest parish members: Florence Reed, who has lived in the neighborhood since 1899, and to Anna Ulrich, who moved here in 1916. Their colorful stories of the early days of St. Thomas Parish contributed greatly to this historic summary. And Mrs. Reed's remarkable memory is substantiated by the record of the first baptismal entry of a pioneer family, the Doolittles.

The Parish Council of St. Thomas Parish was first formed in the early 70s and is considered creatively different from other councils in the diocese in that any registered parishioner may volunteer to be a member. Presently, there are twenty-three council members, with Emery Hrabovsky as President.

Our Senior Citizen Club consists of a small group of long-time parishioners who gather on an informal basis, meet at the monthly Polish Mass and occasionally sponsor field trips, such as: visiting the Capuchin monastery, the cider mills, scenic tours, and the most popular, breakfast socials. An hour or two are spent in playing card games. Eleanor Urban is the President of the Seniors. One of our oldest members is Stella Litkewicz.

Since that time, other parishioners, many Senior Citizens who live on fixed incomes have generously donated significant sums to pay for new boilers, to repair the roof of the Church and to fence in the Church complex.

May such goodness be returned to all of you in heavenly blessings in a measure "pressed down and overflowing"!