

Station Church Pilgrimage

A religious pilgrimage is a practice which began in early Christianity, where the faithful journey to notable shrines and churches significant to their Catholic faith. Every year in Rome during the 40 days of Lent the faithful are invited to take a pilgrimage to a designated station church* and meditate on the historical significance of the Church. St. John the Evangelist Spiritual Life Commission invites you to make a mini-Lenten pilgrimage, mentally or in person, to connect with and learn about the wealth and heritage of our Catholic Church, and spend a quiet moment in prayer, reflection and thanksgiving to our Lord for our great faith.

St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church - 3rd Station Church

63 Pine Street, West Springfield

Established 1900

- *Reverend Patrick Healy, of Drumgooly, County Kilkenny, Ireland came to America shortly after his ordination. He served, as a curate, in and around Boston for almost nine years until, in 1864, Rev. Healy was assigned as Pastor of the Holy Name of Jesus, in Chicopee. At that time Mittineague (West Springfield) was one of the mission areas under his care. Saint Thomas, canonically, was a 'station' church served by Rev. Healy.*
- 1865 – Rev. Healy purchased land and from the Agawam Canal Company on Pine Street with plans to build a church, rectory, and a garage.
- 1871 – Rev. Healy purchased land between King's Highway and Westfield Road to provide the Mittineague Catholics with a cemetery.
- 1872 – Construction of a wooden structure for St. Thomas Church was completed. The architecture was *Gothic styling of 12th Century France. Inside the church dark varnished pews filled the huge interior. The tabernacle was flanked with [six sculptured gold candlesticks](#).*
- 1877 – West Springfield became a separate parish, Rev. Patrick B. Phelan, was assigned pastor. He purchased land on Main Street and built another church, Immaculate Conception, servicing both, albeit at that time St. Thomas was considered a 'station' church. [When St. Thomas' Church was built, the Catholics in Mittineague were very few, not numbering more than thirty or forty families, but they were always remarkable for a sturdy, generous faith, and a practical piety. They were always ready to share their last dollar with the Church of God.] [Sacred Heart Newspaper, 6/22/1895](#)
- 1900 – St. Thomas the Apostle Roman Catholic Church was established as a separate parish. Rev. John Francis Griffin was assigned 1st Pastor, Mittineague, St. Thomas.
- June 8, 1905 – *Flames were noticed breaking from the windows in the south vestry. The alarm brought an immediate response from the firefighters. However, a lack of sufficient water pressure, a delay in obtaining aid from the Bond St. Engine House, and a strong wind resulted in the complete destruction of the church, St. Thomas Hall, and the rectory.*
- The fire swept St. Thomas Church, *all was destroyed except the [candlesticks](#) on the main altar and a few chairs. [Thursday, June 8, 1905 – 10:50 AM ... The Roman Catholic Church, St. Thomas', was ablaze! Within two hours a hot burning, fierce, withering fire consumed the thirty three year old gray, wood edifice. Bits of flam winged shingles and whits of intensely glowing wood exploded sporadically and sprayed the nerve – stunning scene. The stark lines of the walls and the slender wavered in the shimmering heat, trembled, then collapsed, sighed, and slipped into a smoldering pit besmirched with ash blackened waters. The original Roman Catholic Church of West Springfield had been suddenly snatched away by a swirling summer wind.]*
- The pastor of St. Williams (renamed St. Theresa), the French church in North Agawam, offered the use of the church, hall, and parochial school to Rev. Griffin. The members of the Mittineague Congregational church passed a resolution offering the use of their church until better arrangements could be made.
- December 1905 – Rev. James Joseph Tyrrell was appointed Pastor by the Rt. Rev. Thomas D. Beaven, Bishop of Springfield. Rev. Tyrrell's assignment was to rebuild the church and rectory, repair any other fire damage, and boost the morale of his disheartened parishioners.
- April 1906, under Rev. James Joseph Tyrrell, construction began for a new church. The Gothic Revival style with a red brick was designed by Springfield architect John W. Donohue. The rebuilt church is *a mixture of Gothic – Romanesque architecture of red brick and white stone. Over the main door, there are the symbols of the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Seven leaded stained glass windows... depict the symbols of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church and Stations of the Cross are mounted on the walls of the church. Although there is a bell tower at the left*



Wooden Frame St. Thomas Church



front of the church, *bells were never installed.*

- Rev. Tyrrell promised his parishioners the church would be completed by Christmas 1906. He kept his promise; the first Mass was celebrated Christmas morning, December 25, 1906.
- Rev. Tyrrell served his parishioners faithfully for almost 20 years until illness claimed his life. He is buried in St. Thomas Cemetery.
- 1926 - Reverend James Dolan was appointed Pastor of St. Thomas. *Under his guidance and direction, Rev. Dolan would develop the property until it became one of the best-groomed church properties in the state. He firmly believed that the site of the Eucharistic Presence of Christ should be surrounded by beauty.*
- Rev. Dolan wanted to provide the children of his flock a Catholic education. He purchased property for the school, the building designed by Springfield architect John W. Donohue.
- 1932 – The two story eight room building was completed welcoming 125 students, as well as a convent to house the Sisters of St. Joseph who taught at the school.
- 1939 – Rev. Harry J. Hackett from Portland, Maine was assigned Pastor. He pastored his flock through the Second World War leading *parishioners in prayer* [for families and relatives sent overseas], *for victory and peace.*
- 1952 – A building fund drive was established to purchase more land to enlarge the school building. Rev. Hackett *could no longer stand turning Catholic children away from a Catholic Education, 'there must be room, we must make room' was his plea.*
- 1953 – A six room addition to the school was built to accommodate 240 students.
- 1957 – A second wing, with four more rooms would provide space for 160 more students.
- 1962 – An auditorium with a cafeteria was built for student and parish activities, CCD classes, additional space for masses, basketball games and special events.
- Rev. Harry J. Hackett made lasting contributions over the 29 years he served as pastor of St. Thomas. Maintaining the church buildings and caring for the needs of the St. Thomas community took priority over personal needs. His vision and hard work for the parish was fulfilled with the help, dedication and support of his parishioners.
- 1964 – Rt. Rev. Msgr. Harry J. Hackett: *In recognition of his long and loyal service, Pope Paul VI made him a Domestic Prelate, with the title Monsignor. On January 22, 1964, Bishop Christopher J. Weldon invested him in the robes of his new office. Almost completely unnoticed, during the service, were the [six century-old sculptured gold candlesticks](#) that flanked the tabernacle.* Rt. Rev. Msgr. Harry J. Hackett is buried in the family plot in St. Thomas's Cemetery.
- St. Thomas Parish is a Christ centered, faith-filled and caring Catholic community.
- Rev. John K. Sheaffer, KCHS, Pastor of St. Thomas, assisted by Rev. Stanislaus Achu, Provisional Priest, Deacon Joseph W. Kielbasa, Jr. and Deacon James H. Marcus, carry on the legacy of their predecessors that began in 1864.



St. Thomas' patron saint *was called to be one of the twelve Apostles... best known for his role in verifying the Resurrection of his Master. Thomas' unwillingness to believe that the other Apostles had seen their risen Lord on the first Easter Sunday merited for him the title of "doubting Thomas." Eight days later, on Christ's second apparition, Thomas was gently rebuked for his skepticism and furnished with the evidence he had demanded - seeing in Christ's hands the point of the nails and putting his fingers in the place of the nails and his hand into His side. At this, St. Thomas became convinced of the truth of the Resurrection and exclaimed: "My LORD and My God," thus making a public Profession of Faith in the Divinity of Jesus.*

Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you. Amen. (St. Thomas Aquinas)

May the spirit of the holy pilgrims inspire your prayers and reflections. Peace be with you!

Most of the information taken from:

<https://stthomaswestspringfield.org/our-history>

[Massachusetts Historical Commission](#)

*Rome Station Churches - <http://frcoulter.com/pics/station-churches>

Bulletin: [St. Thomas the Apostle Parish - West Springfield, Massachusetts 01089-2898 | Parishes Online](#)

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