A NEW BISHOP FOR A GROWING DIOCESE

When the Irish-born John Baptist Purcell assumed direction of the diocese in the fall of 1833 he inherited a diocese that had under Edward Fenwick's leadership organized mission activities and established those institutions essential to a new see. From the cathedral and the Athenaeum branched forth many churches, seminaries, colleges, and academies in the diocese. The most spectacular growth of the local church occurred during Purcell's years in office. Besides building upon the visitation tours initiated by his predecessor, he helped secure more clergy and religious to operate the increasing number of churches, schools, and orphanages. To accommodate the growing Catholic population and institutions, the diocese by midcentury was raised to the status of an archdiocese. Following Fenwick's administration the local church under Purcell's guidance also helped bring the Catholic population and growing parishes into an organized and disciplined relationship with the church.

About a month before he died, Bishop Fenwick tried one last time to secure the appointment of a coadjutor for Cincinnati. Suspecting that Frederic Rese was now the likely candidate for bishop of Detroit, Fenwick requested as his coadjutor the Jesuit Peter Kenny of Georgetown College. The Jesuit General, however, opposed Kenny's appointment on the grounds of age and infirmity. The officials of the Propaganda shared these reservations. There was also the concern that the Dominicans, who still constituted the majority of the clergy in Ohio, would not welcome a Jesuit as their bishop. Having just appointed Rese bishop of Detroit, the Propaganda asked Bishop John England, then at Rome, for his opinion of Fathers John Hughes of New York and John Baptist Purcell of Maryland. Though England
thought either one would do well as bishop of Cincinnati, he leaned more toward Hughes. “There is one point . . . ,” he said, “which may deserve to be considered. Mr. Hughes is emphatically a self-made man, and perhaps he would be on that account more acceptable to the people of a western diocese than Mr. Purcell.”

Archbishop James Whitfield of Baltimore, moreover, initially opposed Purcell’s nomination. He did not want to lose him as president of Mount St. Mary’s College at Emmitsburg. Whitfield also shared with his predecessor, Ambrose Maréchal, a distrust of Irish bishops. Convinced that both Bishops England and Francis Patrick Kenrick had “strong Irish predilections in favor of Irish Bishops & Irish discipline,” he was concerned that if Purcell were named to Cincinnati he would be led by England as well as by Kenrick. Notwithstanding Whitfield’s concerns and England’s advice, the Propaganda chose Purcell. On the evening of May 12, 1833, Pope Gregory XVI named Purcell second bishop of Cincinnati. His selection appeared to have occurred partly out of a misunderstanding of England’s statement by the cardinal prefect. “As soon as I told the Cardinals what you said about Mr. Purcell’s being a self-made man,” the prefect informed Bishop England, “they agreed upon him at once” and submitted his name to the pope for his approval. England had, of course, described Hughes as the “self-made man.” Partly because of Whitfield’s strong protestations the Holy See delayed Purcell’s appointment for a few months.
Purcell, a diocesan priest, officially received his appointment on the second day of August. Born on February 26, 1800, in Mallow County, Ireland, Purcell came to the United States at age eighteen. Two years later he entered Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg where he began his study for the priesthood. In February 1824 the slender, sandy-haired Purcell left the Mount to complete his theological studies at St. Sulpice Seminary in Paris, where he was ordained on May 26, 1826. Ten years later he returned to Mount St. Mary's as a professor and later president of the college. Shortly before he became a bishop Purcell was naturalized a citizen of the United States.¹

Undoubtedly there were good reasons for Purcell to look forward to coming to Cincinnati. In about twelve years' time Fenwick, his clergy, religious, and faithful had laid the foundation for a viable Catholic Church in the region. But soon after the news spread of his appointment, Purcell received letters from fellow priests and laity urging him to hasten to Cincinnati. Bishop England, still in Rome, "strenuously" recommended to Father James Mullon, editor of the Catholic Telegraph, that he write to Purcell requesting he accept his appointment. "[I]t is by no means unlikely," Bishop England wrote, "that efforts will be made to urge his resignation." Mullon promptly wrote to Purcell and recommended that he assume the new post because the diocese was in a sad state owing to "Reese's want of energy and disposition to evade difficulties merely imaginary." Moreover, the layman M. P. Cassilly, a supporter of some local church activities and whose sons attended Mount St. Mary's College in Emmitsburg, complained to Purcell about the incompetence of some of the clergy in the diocese. The church and college were "in a retrograde state here," he wrote. "We have made priests of every one that has come this way."¹

After settling his affairs at Mount St. Mary's, the bishop-elect made an eight-day religious retreat in Pennsylvania in preparation for his new duties. On October 13 Whitfield consecrated him in the Baltimore cathedral. The following month Purcell set out on his first trip to the West, arriving in Cincinnati aboard the steamboat Emigrant on November 14. Later that day Purcell was led by a procession to the cathedral where he was installed in his new see by Bishop Benedict Flaget. Purcell was one of eleven bishops in the American Catholic hierarchy. With no previous episcopal experience, the thirty-three-year-old Purcell became the bishop of Cincinnati, one of the youngest men to hold the episcopal office in the history of the country. The diocese had been without an ordinary for more than a year. It now had one, and he would serve the faithful for about fifty years.⁵

Though the diocese was in a much better financial condition in 1833 than when Fenwick came to it in 1822, it still had few material assets. There were numerous debts and scarcely any funds with which to pay them. Purcell soon
discovered that the diocese had no adequate means of support for the clergy, the college, and the seminary, and the latter two were in need of physical repairs. Rese had had to borrow more than $500 simply to buy groceries and supplies. For three years the principal and interest on the mortgage of $750 for the cemetery lot at Liberty and Vine Streets had not been paid. The diocese also owed $1500 on property at St. Martin’s in Brown County, where Father James Reid had recently built a brick school. For the maintenance of the cathedral house, the diocese was forced to use the money collected by the Germans and entrusted to Rese. The 5,000 or so German-born or second-generation German Catholics were members of the cathedral parish and had raised $720 to build their own church. As Cincinnati was without a bishop, Rese had delayed construction until a new bishop was installed.6

Shortly after his arrival to Cincinnati, Purcell confided to Bishop England that he was “under a debt of 6000 dollars” and was “badly disappointed.” In the journal that he kept for the first six months of his administration, Purcell seemed to have recorded every possible defect he found in his diocese. Though filled with hasty and, perhaps, intemperate remarks, the journal does reflect Purcell’s pessimism and perceptions of the state of the church. “Thousands upon thousands of Dollars,” he wrote, “had been expended on buildings which are ill-constructed & inconvenient, of wretched materials, half-finished, leaking, mildewed roofs & walls; floors loose & badly laid, hydrants left insecure against external injury.” He also noted that the president of the seminary had taken “the young Seminarians to Whiskey shops & to the Theatre” and returned “home drunk at midnight.”7

One of the first problems that the new bishop encountered had to do with Fenwick’s estate. Fathers Nicholas Young, Frederic Rese, and Anthony Ganilh were the executors of Fenwick’s will. Both Young and Rese had turned over their papers to Ganilh. Before Purcell arrived in Cincinnati, Ganilh, who had recently been accepted by Bishop Flaget into his diocese, had brought all the diocesan legal papers with him to Kentucky. Notwithstanding Purcell’s request that they be returned to the see city, Ganilh refused to send them, thus forcing the Cincinnati ordinary to travel to Bardstown to personally argue his case. Convinced that Rese had misused and embezzled funds, Ganilh instituted suit against Purcell for the property deeded to the Cincinnati bishop in Fenwick’s will. The court later decided in favor of Purcell, giving him a clear title to the church property in the diocese.8

Purcell was also fundamentally concerned with the lack of priests. In 1833 the local church had fourteen diocesan and secular priests to attend to the scattered Catholics in Ohio, which in 1835 Purcell estimated to be between 25,000 and 50,000. Of that number, approximately 8,000 resided in Cincinnati. Among the sixteen Catholic churches in Ohio, three were within the
present boundaries of the diocese of Cincinnati, namely, St. Peter Cathedral in Cincinnati, St. Martin in Brown County, and St. Stephen, which was under construction in Hamilton, Ohio. Nine of the sixteen churches had been deeded to the Dominicans in Fenwick’s will. From the very beginning Purcell was hopeful that he would be able to secure enough competent priests to serve the growing Catholic congregations. A few days after his arrival in Cincinnati he wrote to his Philadelphia counterpart, John Hughes, that although he found the “astonishing” number of applicants to his seminary encouraging, it would always have room for “two or three truly eligible subjects.” In addition to the presence of Dominicans in central and eastern Ohio, there were resident priests stationed at St. Martin’s, Zanesville, Steubenville, Canton, Peru (near Norwalk), Tiffin, and Cincinnati. As interim administrator, Rese had stationed the Redemptorist Francis X. Tschenhess at Peru, who was joined soon after by two other Redemptorist priests and lay brothers. A month after his arrival, Purcell sent Father William J. Horstmann of Osnabrück, along with his German congregation, northwestward where they established the town of Glandorf, in Putnam County. Horstmann also attended to the Catholic German settlement of Stallotown (now Minster) that had been established two years earlier. Seven priests resided at the cathedral in Cincinnati. They attended to the English-speaking and German congregations, the latter constituting at least half of the Catholics in Cincinnati. In addition, the priests in Cincinnati ran the seminary, the college, the diocesan paper, and visited neighboring missions, especially in Dayton and Hamilton.9

At the beginning of Purcell’s administration there was only one German-speaking priest for the 5,000 German Catholics in Ohio. Though the cathedral held special services in German, the German Catholics thought they needed more German-speaking priests and their own separate church. Besides, the cathedral was too small to accommodate the growing congregation. After consulting with some of his clergy, Purcell expedited the ordination of Henry Damian Juncker, a German-speaking native of Lorraine, to the priesthood. Though he had not yet gone through a regular course of theological studies, “the situation of the German congregation,” Purcell wrote in his journal, “seems to require his advancement to the Priesthood.” On March 16, 1834, Purcell ordained Juncker, the first time the bishop had performed that ceremony.10

Even though by 1838 Purcell had seen the number of priests in the diocese increase from fourteen to thirty, there was still a dire need for English- and German-speaking clergy. Purcell, like other bishops in the Midwest, made repeated petitions to church leaders in Rome for European priests. On occasions, other provinces sent him priests, but they were not always satisfactory.
In early 1837 he complained to Archbishop Samuel Eccleston of Baltimore, his superior and friend from student days, about "the ungenerous conduct of the bishops of N[ew] York & Charleston" in sending him clergy with questionable credentials. "This," he argued, "is not honorable." Through his diocesan newspaper the bishop warned against clerical impostors, such as Fauvel in Fenwick's days. He was determined to have a competent staff. "[W]hatever be the dearth of Missionaries, or pastors, in this poor diocese," Purcell wrote to Bishop Joseph Rosati of St. Louis, "I am determined to receive none of the applicants from Europe . . . unless they are known to myself as well as unequivocally commended to me by those in whom I have confidence abroad."  

To help enhance the quality of the priests in the diocese, Purcell initiated the practice of holding synods, or meetings of the clergy, and clergy retreats. Joined by the Jesuit John McElroy of Maryland, who came to the diocese in early March 1840 to give retreats, Purcell sponsored an eight-day retreat in the cathedral. Thirty-eight priests attended the retreat. McElroy was impressed by the seriousness of the sessions, noting in his diary that "strict silence" was observed and that Purcell gave a daily exhortation on Catholic doctrine. The following year the Jesuit John Larkin conducted the retreat, and in 1842 the Vincentian John Timon did. The retreats were serious enough that the laity of the diocese were excused from attending Sunday Mass while the clergy were in session.  

VISITATION TOURS

In 1833 Purcell began his first of several three- to four-month visitation tours. Like Fenwick, the Cincinnati bishop felt the weighty responsibility of evangelizing and personally providing spiritual care to Catholics throughout the diocese. On his first tour Purcell began the practice of sending to the Catholic Telegraph detailed and candid accounts of his visitation. In the late spring of 1834 he left Cincinnati and traveled to Holy Trinity Church at Somerset, where he praised the fine work being done by the Dominicans. From the Dominican center he continued his ambitious journey to the Catholic settlements in western Ohio. He proceeded northwest to the Danville area in Knox County, south to Newark and Zanesville, further east to Guernsey, Noble, and Columbiana Counties, and then westward to Canton, another Catholic center. The latter and its surrounding missions, attended to by Fathers John Henni and John de Raymaecker, were increasing rapidly. There were already some 2,000 Catholics, mostly Germans, in the area, where ten years earlier, Purcell wrote, "there were scarcely thirty resident Catholic families." From there he and Henni left by carriage and visited
Wood and Mansfield, and then went north to visit with Father Francis Xavier Tschenhess’s congregation in Norwalk. In their attempt to cross the flooded Mohican River, the carriage broke and the bishop and Henni got drenched. But they still made it to Peru, Ohio, in time for Purcell to bless the new St. Alphonsus Church on July 6. Purcell preached to the large congregation in English, and Henni and Tschenhess delivered the German sermons. This was a custom that became standard procedure with Bishop Purcell.13

From Peru Purcell journeyed to Lower Sandusky (now Fremont) and Tiffin. Then he proceeded southward through the Wyandot Indian Reserve where he found, he wrote, “nothing to break the cheerless dreariness of the wilderness, but the recollection of the immense numbers of the fast disappearing sons of the forest, once the proud owners of the soil.” From there he continued southward to Urbana and Dayton before entering his final leg back to the see city. He found Dayton to be “most advantageously situated” and had “no uncertain prospects of great increase in wealth and numbers.”

The Catholics in the community, he believed, were “among the most zealous and exemplary in the State,” noting that a few families made generous contributions to the church and adorned “religion by their lives.” From 1832 to 1834 the popular priest, Edward T. Collins from Cincinnati, lived in the home of Robert and Sarah Conway and their family, and then served as Dayton’s first resident priest. As Father Emanuel Thienpon and the German Catholics in the region in the mid-1830s collected money to erect a German church, Protestants donated generously to the building fund. On November 26, 1837, Purcell dedicated Emmanuel Church. Days in advance of the dedication, Catholics and non-Catholics lined up at a bookstore on Main Street or at a home near the church to buy fifty-seven tickets to the event. The proceeds helped defray the remaining church debt. Seven years later it was estimated that the number of Catholics in Dayton and neighboring missions was about 1,650.14

Traveling by river steamer, canal boat, stagecoach, and on horseback, Purcell’s annual trips were anything but leisurely. While visiting dozens of communities of settled or scattered Catholics each summer, he performed his pastoral and sacramental duties. In getting to know his diocese firsthand, he could identify the more pressing religious needs. He said Mass, baptized, gave communion, confirmed, heard confessions, and evangelized in private homes, in public buildings, and in the open air. Purcell had untiring energy. In one instance, while at a settlement near Danville, he replaced the sick pastor and preached nearly four hours every day for three days. His visitation tours contributed much toward the growth of Catholicity in his diocese, always seeking means to furnish his scattered flock with religious service.15

At times on his tours Purcell expressed concern over the Protestant influ-
ence in the public schools. "[I]n every town in the state, there are," he wrote, "sectarian free-schools, which the children of poor Catholics frequent for the purpose of learning to read, and where, under pretext of Charity. . . , the fountains of spiritual life are poisoned and those unsuspecting children have tracts placed in their hands, insinuating the vilest and most malicious slanders of our real principles." Very much aware of the practice of some Catholics to frequent Protestant churches when no Catholic service was available to them, he urged them not to do so. He felt "it was infinitely better [for parents] to stay at home on the Sabbath to instruct their children, to read good books, [and] to pray . . . [,] than to repair to scenes where all they could see or hear was mere human substitute for the [Catholic] doctrine."

Purcell was not one to avoid doctrinal issues. His early sermons tended to be dogmatic and apologetic rather than moral, and his favorite topics dealt with the "Rule of Faith" and the infallibility of the Catholic Church. While at Mount Vernon in central Ohio, Purcell was invited to preach in the Methodist church. After speaking on the "vulgar prejudices against the Catholic Church," he rejected the notion that all religions were equal in the sight of God.

Purcell's first year in office was a full and effective one. An optimist with an enormous amount of energy, the young bishop made an admirable start. "You have no idea," Father Stephen Montgomery wrote to him, "what deep root you have taken already in the hearts and affections of the good people of Cincinnati, Protestants and Catholics." Stephen Badin, who had come to Cincinnati to give the bishop a hand, commented in a letter to the recently installed Simon Bruté, bishop of Vincennes, on Purcell's extraordinary enthusiasm and dedication. "He is overpowered," he wrote, "by being obliged to attend to all sorts of offices & functions, which would keep several men very busy." While performing "all the functions of a parish priest, visit the sick not only in town but some times at a notable distance," he continued, "he must & does preach (sometimes twice) on Sundays, [and] hear many confessions."

Purcell was aware of the fact that he was trying to do too much. But the demands of the diocese were enormous. "The increase of Catholics keeping pace with our beautiful and flourishing city," the Catholic Telegraph editorialized in the fall of 1834, "renders a third and even a fourth church necessary, had we the means of erecting them." Besides the need for additional financial support and priests, the diocese was also in need of a "pious and learned professor of theology," Purcell wrote, "and a president of the seminary." Finding himself "distracted with a variety of duties" and concerns, the hardworking and zealous Cincinnati ordinary seemed unable to fulfill any one of them as fully and as quickly as he would have liked.
DIOCESAN GROWTH AND TERRITORIAL CHANGES

Since the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory by the United States in 1803, the country had been consistently expanding westward. In 1845 John O'Sullivan, writing in the *New York Morning News*, coined the phrase “manifest destiny,” suggesting that the country was destined to expand “from sea to sea.” That year the United States annexed Texas. The following year, when the country waged war with Mexico, Purcell was optimistic about the growth of the state and of his diocese. At that time there were an estimated 65,000 Catholics in the diocese, one of the fastest growing sees in the West. He was equally optimistic about Cincinnati, speaking glowingly about its continued growth. The tremendous movement of people westward helped make the river metropolis one of the fastest growing urban centers in the country. In 1846 the Catholic population in Cincinnati alone was 25,000, approximately one-third of the city’s total population. “Our city,” Purcell wrote, “is increasing rapidly. I suppose 2000 houses in progress of building. Mechanics all employed—Journeymen, carpenters, masons, plasterers—from $1.50 to 1.75 per diem.” The city’s growing population and rapid economic development stimulated social and cultural growth.

What also facilitated the economic development of Cincinnati were internal improvements. In addition to the Ohio River, two roads from the East gave access to Ohio for the immigrants. Zane’s Trace ran from Wheeling, Virginia, through Zanesville, Lancaster, and Chillicothe. In the 1820s the National Road crossed through Ohio, passing through Cambridge, Zanesville, Columbus, Montgomery and Preble Counties. Paddle-wheel steamers plied the Ohio River and expanded river traffic. In the 1830s the Miami-Erie Canal and the Ohio Canal were built, connecting Cincinnati and Portsmouth on the Ohio River with Toledo and Cleveland, respectively, on Lake Erie. The Little Miami Railroad, chartered in 1836, ran from Cincinnati to Springfield, where it connected with another line that extended to Lake Erie. This gave Cincinnati access to the Great Lakes. By the 1850s railways crossed the principal towns and cities of the archdiocese. Migrants from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina and immigrants from the British Isles and Germany made up most of the Ohio population. Most of the settlers in the diocese were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, Congregationalists from New England, Baptists, Methodists, and Campbellites. In the midst of the various Protestant sects, Purcell had reason to be happy about the phenomenal growth of Catholicity in Ohio. In the 1830s and 1840s the new arrivals from Germany and Ireland would not only significantly change the size of the city but also its religious and ethnic composition. They were the two principal groups in the first thirty years of
Purcell's tenure from which the diocese received yearly increases to its population.21

Overwhelming as the lack of physical resources for the Catholic Church was in Ohio, it was not as serious as the shortage of personnel. With the growth of Catholicity Purcell needed more clergy, religious, and churches. In the early 1840s he estimated the number of Catholics to be at 50,000 in Ohio. The number of Catholics baptized in Cincinnati alone in 1843 was 1,156, an increase of 39 percent in three years. Purcell informed Father Louis Amadeus Rappe, who had just joined the diocese in 1840 and was sent later to Toledo, that the pastoral care necessary in the midst of so many Protestants and those without much faith was very great. He was concerned over efforts made by the Protestants by invitations, presents, and ridicule to take the Catholics away from their faith. He needed more clergy to combat these difficulties as well as more women religious to instruct the children. Hoping to make the faith available to the widely scattered Catholic flock throughout the diocese, he helped build up the church in the physical and institutional sense. Increasing immigration also put pressures upon the diocese to help foster religious solidarity among the immigrants and establish institutions to meet their spiritual and temporal needs. In conjunction with the city of Cincinnati, local Catholics often helped provide homes for the new immigrants.22

As Catholics in the eastern states in the early nineteenth century busily consolidated new urban parishes, in the Midwest they expanded the faith into the new frontiers. In many ways Catholics in the western communities drew upon the experiences of their counterparts in the East. Purcell was very much concerned with the ability of the diocese to establish parishes and build churches rapidly enough to meet the needs of the fast growing ranks of the Catholic population. He thought he could establish twenty new parishes if he had the priests. “From every little town, from settlements in almost every county,” the Catholic Telegraph wrote in 1840, “there come continued appeals for clergy to direct the old and watch over the youth who are exposed to innumerable dangers for the want of a Pastor. . . . Like an army without a chief, Catholic communities are scattered over the land. . . . Fifty additional clergymen would find ample employment in Ohio.” By the early 1840s Purcell had seen the completion of churches in twenty communities. By 1844 the diocese counted fifty priests. Among them were nine Americans, twelve Germans, eleven French, ten Irish, four Italians, three Belgians, and one Spaniard. Moreover, as the Catholic population grew and more churches were built, Purcell was optimistic. “[A] brighter Era,” he observed in the early 1840s, “is now dawning on the United States and the day is not far distant when we shall have a Catholic house to stop at every ten miles and a Catholic Church every twenty miles, even in Ohio.”23
The local church was also in need of more religious women. At the time they provided able service. The Dominican Sisters at Somerset were operating boarding and day schools for girls in the eastern part of the state, and the Sisters of Charity at Cincinnati were teaching 130 young girls in their school as well as caring for slightly more than thirty orphans. Living rent-free in a house owned by M. P. Cassilly, the Sisters of Charity expected to receive the property as a gift. By the time Purcell assumed his new post, however, Cassilly had changed his mind. Besides being influenced by his anti-Catholic wife, Cassilly was offended by the fact that his donations were published prematurely in the Catholic papers. At one point Cassilly instituted a suit against the sisters. Disappointed by Cassilly’s behavior, Purcell recorded in his journal in 1833 that Cassilly’s wife was “a bigoted and bitter Protestant [who] . . . has worried him and put him to great and unnecessary expense, reproaching him with reluctantly granting her articles of costly dress etc. when he could afford to squander 5000 Doll[ars] on Lazy nuns.”

The Cassilly incident forced Purcell and the sisters to search for a new home for the religious order. As the former president of Mount St. Mary’s College in Emmitsburg, Purcell was familiar with the able work of the Sisters of Charity. A few weeks after his arrival in Cincinnati, he purchased a new home for them on Sixth Street for $4,000. For their support, the lay people in the community helped found on Christmas evening in 1833 the St. Peter Benevolent Society to aid in the education of the female orphans. Membership in the society, which in little time grew to approximately 400 members, required an initiation fee of fifty cents and a monthly contribution of twenty-five cents. As early as January 1833 a number of women had sponsored a fair for the benefit of destitute orphans under the care of the Sisters of Charity, raising more than $160. Along with charity sermons delivered by Purcell in support of the institution and continuing support from the members of the Benevolent Society, an annual fair, soon joined by such civic events as charity balls and concerts, constituted important sources of income for the work of the sisters at the orphanage.

Though Purcell was most conscious of the need for parochial schools, he was unsuccessful in his early efforts to secure additional Sisters of Charity or a new religious order for the diocese. As the orphanage and school conducted by the sisters continued to grow, money and space became problems. In 1836 Purcell, with the aid of the St. Peter Benevolent Society, bought a mansion for $15,905 on the corner of Third and Plum Streets for an academy, school, and asylum for the female orphans of the city. During the cholera epidemic of the early 1830s, more children had become orphans and steps were taken to help provide shelter for them. The asylum, which by then attended to eighty-seven children, among whom were twenty Protestants, was found
too small to admit more orphans. During the next fifteen years two additions to the orphanage were built. Alongside the asylum was St. Peter Academy, which was the first attempt to provide secondary education for girls in Cincinnati. By the summer of 1836 the sisters had taught nearly six hundred female children. The bishop also had to be pleased with the establishment of the Mary and Martha Society by the women of St. Peter congregation. These women, as well as local Protestant women, who had raised six hundred dollars in a fair to benefit the Catholic orphanage, made possible the establishment of this parish-based lay society. The members of the Mary and Martha Society paid $1.50 in annual dues and assisted the poor in the community. Members of the newly established lay societies across the country favored the traditional subscription method and low annual dues as they tried to get most parishioners, who were from the working class, to participate. Doubtlessly encouraged by the sisters' activities in his diocese, Purcell hoped to persuade the order at Emmitsburg to establish a separate orphanage for boys for the German-speaking Catholics of Cincinnati. The latter "would be rejoiced beyond measure, and generous to excess," the bishop wrote, "if they had an Asylum for their orphans and a school for their children." At that time, however, the Emmitsburg community could not spare any more sisters, nor were they willing to accept boys into an orphanage. In the first half of the nineteenth century many communities of women religious believed that they were not suited to teach or care for boys.²⁶

In need of more priests, religious, and money, Purcell in 1838, like Fenwick before him, went to Europe seeking assistance. As bishop, this was the first of seven trips he was to make. "My chief object in going [to Europe]," Purcell wrote to Archbishop Samuel Eccleston of Baltimore, "is to obtain a colony of Jesuits for a college, ... the Ladies of the Sacred Heart for an Academy, [and] the means of establishing both." For about a decade European contributions to the diocese of Cincinnati had been waning. Since Purcell's arrival in the see city in 1833 the local church had received only one donation from the Leopoldine Foundation, and contributions from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith continued to get smaller. Though Purcell had sent John Henni to do some diocesan begging in Europe in 1835, he had returned without any priests or money. To make matters worse, Bishop Rese of Detroit had arranged that all money from Germany pass through his hands. That raised the suspicion, as Father Stephen Badin had pointed out to Purcell, that it was unlikely Rese would be charitable to any diocese but his own.²⁷

Before leaving Cincinnati, Purcell in May 1838 placed the care of his diocese in the hands of his two vicars general, Edward Collins and John Henni. Because of language differences in the diocese, Collins was appointed to the rank for the English-speaking Catholics and Henni attended to the German
Catholics. Furthermore, the bishop constituted his brother, Father Edward Purcell, his attorney with full authority to act for the bishop in financial matters. Born on March 31, 1808, in Ireland, Edward Purcell came to the United States in 1822, four years after his older brother did. After studying for a few years at Mount St. Mary’s College in Emmitsburg, he left to pursue law studies and work in the East. In the summer of 1836 he gave up law and resumed his priestly studies in Cincinnati. On March 10, 1838, Bishop Purcell raised him to the priesthood. Having much confidence in his thirty-year-old brother’s financial and legal abilities, he gave him full charge of the diocesan finances. The bishop, who had allowed some of the people of Cincinnati to deposit their savings with him following the nation’s financial panic in 1837, now placed the entire business in his brother’s hands. Edward Purcell operated the diocesan bank from his office in the episcopal residence adjacent to the cathedral. Before long the bishop also authorized his brother to open his letters when he would leave the city to visit parts of the diocese. Moreover, by the end of the decade Edward Purcell occupied the editorial chair of the Catholic Telegraph. He would serve as editor for almost forty years. When the bishop drew up a will during the cholera epidemic of 1849, he named his brother Edward his heir and administrator of the diocese in case of his death. He was to hold the property for the bishop’s successor.28

Bishop Purcell sailed from New York on June 16, arriving at Liverpool on July 7. His trip took him to Ireland, Belgium, England, France, Germany, Austria, and Italy. His first major stop was in Dublin at the end of July. From there he visited his relatives at Mallow, whom he had not seen since he left Ireland in 1826. Entertained at a public dinner, he took the opportunity to respond to Bishop William Clancy’s criticism of the United States. Clancy, who had served as coadjutor at Charleston, South Carolina, had returned to his native Ireland for a visit before he took on a new assignment in British Guinea. Critical of widespread American anti-Catholicism, Clancy sought to dissuade Irishmen from going to the United States. In his after-dinner speech, Purcell correctly minimized the extent of anti-Catholicism, countering that only a few Americans were guilty of the charge. Though he admitted there were “fanatics and bigots in religion” in the United States, as there were in other countries, he argued it was “unfair and illogical to conclude . . . that this religious rancour generally pervades the Union.” He maintained that the very growth of Catholicity itself “contradicts forcibly” the assertion there were national prejudices against the church. In defense of his new country, Purcell praised the American principles of liberty, equality, and the separation of church and state. The latter, he argued, was contrary to the “unnatural connexion [sic] with the temporal power” that existed in many countries in Europe. The bishop’s opposition to an established church
and his defense of freedom of thought and speech arose from a sincere Americanism. Consistent with his evangelism, Purcell also endorsed both religious liberty and competition among denominations.99

While in France Purcell visited the Ursuline convent at Boulogne-sur-mer, where he was well received by the sisters. The bishop was hopeful that the Ursulines would someday establish a foundation in his diocese. In early September he made a presentation to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Paris on the financial status of his diocese. With the exception of one year the Cincinnati see had been receiving annual donations from the Society. Following Purcell’s visit the Society allocated 39,827 francs, which doubled the amount of the previous two years. Also, while in Paris, the Superior of the Sacred Heart Congregation promised Purcell that he would send sisters to Cincinnati to open a boarding school for girls. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century more and more orders of sisters in Europe viewed the United States as a vast field for missionary endeavor. Confident that the Sisters of the Sacred Heart would come, Purcell proved less demanding for the services of the Sisters of Notre Dame at Namur when he visited the motherhouse. He simply expressed his hope that someday they, too, would extend their ministry to Cincinnati.100

When Purcell left Paris for Germany and Austria, Father Hercules Brassac, a longtime friend, accompanied him. Brassac had recently left the diocese of New Orleans to return to France. He agreed to serve as Purcell’s agent in Europe. Pleased with his reception in both countries, Purcell hoped that he would obtain additional financial assistance. From Munich he obtained a chest of church furnishings and books. From the Leopoldine Foundation he received 8,000 florins (about $3,200), which was double the amount Cincinnati had received in the past five years. Also, while in Munich, Purcell tried to obtain the services of Franciscan missionaries. He and his episcopal colleagues in the Midwest very eagerly sought the missionary services of the Bavarian Franciscans for the German congregations in the United States. Francis Louis Huber, a Franciscan, received permission from his superior to go to Cincinnati. He was one of seven priests who subsequently accompanied the bishop back to Cincinnati in 1839, the others being Michael Olivetti from Turin, and Joseph P. Machebeuf, John Baptist Lamy, Claude Gacon, William Cheymol, and Louis Navarron from the Province of Auvergne in France.11

In early February 1839, Purcell’s journey took him to Rome, where he had a special audience with Pope Gregory XVI. Purcell also had profitable meetings with the General of the Society of Jesus and the General of the Dominican Order, respectively. In his meeting with the former, he extended an invitation to the Jesuits to take over Cincinnati’s diocesan college. As Purcell
wrestled with the problem of getting qualified priests and laymen on his college and seminary staff, he came to believe that the progress and stability of the Athenaeum would be better provided for by entrusting it to the care of a religious order. Purcell was ready to close the struggling school if the Jesuits did not take charge. The Jesuit General promised that the next house established by the order in America would be in the diocese of Cincinnati. In his meeting with the General of the Dominicans, Purcell was assured that even though the 1828 agreement between the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda and the Master General of the Dominicans was still being contested, the order would pay him the annual three hundred dollars. But that never came to be. When Richard Miles, the provincial of the Dominicans, consulted with his predecessor Nicholas Young on the matter, Young considered the agreement "a dead document" and nothing was ever paid. The issue dragged on for several years until Purcell dropped the claim in 1853.\(^7\)

In July 1839 Purcell and the seven priests sailed from Le Havre for the United States, reaching New York forty-four days later. Upon his return to Cincinnati in September, after sixteen months' absence, the St. Peter Benevolent Society sponsored a public reception in his honor. The bishop informed his flock that he had "knocked, with the pilgrims and the beggar, at the gate of the rich, and the cottage door of the poor," and that he had done so successfully. The thirty-nine-year-old ordinary had helped rekindle the generous spirit of the societies of the Propagation of the Faith at Lyons, Munich, and Vienna. The generosity of the mission-aid societies enabled him to liquidate a large portion of the debts that the Catholics had contracted in the building of churches, in the purchase of the Orphan Asylum, and in the support of the seminary and clergy. This kind of foreign benevolence, consisting not only of monetary gifts but also the sending of clergy, and later religious, to work in Cincinnati and other dioceses in the United States, remained important throughout the nineteenth century.\(^8\)

In the spring of 1840 the Jesuit general recommended to the Jesuit provincial in St. Louis, Peter J. Verhaegen, that the Jesuits take charge of the Athenaeum and thus relieve the diocesan clergy of the responsibility of operating the college. When Verhaegen in August wrote to Purcell, inquiring about the arrangement and conditions at Cincinnati, Purcell replied immediately. "I propose," he wrote, "to give you up forever, on condition that they should ever be held sacred for Church and School, the College, Seminary and Church" on Sycamore Street, "that you may have there a College and a Parish Church to be served by y[our] society in perpetuity." The Jesuits accepted Purcell's offer.\(^9\)

News of the transfer spread quickly. In the fall of 1840 the Catholic Telegraph announced that the Athenaeum, now rededicated to St. Francis Xavier,
would open under the auspices of the Society of Jesus, with Father John Anthony Elet, formerly president of St. Louis University, as its president. Purcell became the first person in charge of St. Xavier College’s Board of Trustees. “No one,” the Catholic Telegraph editorialized, “... ever regreted [sic] that their sons were educated under their direction, for the society is justly celebrated for success in developing the minds of youth, in leading them to the acquisition of every branch of knowledge, and sending forth men into the world, who have been enriched with the purest lessons of morality and fitted for the highest circles of society.” In mid-October Purcell, pleased with the arrival of the Jesuits, wrote to Bishop Hughes that the “bigots have not so far shewn [sic] many of their teeth, but I presume they are on an edge.”

St. Xavier College, with six professors and five assistant tutors, opened on November 3, 1840. Before the end of the year there were seventy-six students enrolled. The Jesuits also assisted the diocese in attending to the Catholics at the city hospital and in doing parochial work in the community. To make room for the Jesuits at the college, Purcell moved the seminary to St. Martin’s in Brown County. He liked the rural location for the seminary, thinking that the pastoral setting would be healthier for the seminarians. In 1842 the General Assembly of Ohio granted a temporary thirty-year charter to St. Xavier College. That year 217 students attended the college.

Shortly after Purcell transferred the college and seminary buildings to the Jesuits in 1840, he embarked on the ambitious undertaking of building a new and more imposing cathedral at a new site. There were three Masses every Sunday and the crowds were getting larger. At each of the Masses there were individuals “compelled to remain out of doors,” Purcell wrote, “for want of sufficient room” inside. It was estimated that “every day, for the last five years,” he further observed, “there have been from thirty to fifty applications for pews, which notwithstanding the erection of galleries in the cathedral it has been impossible to satisfy.” In addition, he wanted the new cathedral more centrally located. The city was now growing more to the west and the north, away from Sycamore Street. On December 1, 1840, he bought a lot 293 by 192 feet for $24,000 on Eighth and Plum Streets. By building “something uncommon” and majestic, Purcell thought, the new cathedral would help “put the heretics in good humour by beautifying the City. A fine steeple would command a view of ten miles down and up the river and be seen a great distance.” For the next several months Purcell worked on the design of the cathedral. On May 20, 1841, he laid the cornerstone.

The cathedral was an ambitious and daring financial venture. It was the bishop’s major material concern between 1840 and 1845. Though funds raised on his trip to Europe helped him take the initial step, Purcell had to
rely largely on local support, both borrowed and donated. Because Cincinnati was in the midst of an economic depression, and the monetary assistance from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith decreased by approximately thirty-three percent in the early 1840s, Purcell had to proceed more slowly with the building of the cathedral. Though a “heavy and oppressive debt still hangs over the churches,” he wrote, the “first and most urgent want of this diocese is a suitable Cathedral.” Through the newly formed diocesan Church Building Society, he urged each Catholic to contribute twelve and one-half cents per month. In order that sufficient time would be allowed to organize the Society in every part of the state, the first monthly contribution was taken on August 1, the feast of St. Peter in Chains. Because there is no documented evidence of the Society raising money during the next few years, there is every reason to believe that it failed in achieving its goal. Credit financing, made possible in part by people’s savings entrusted to him and his brother, was also a source that Purcell tapped. Following the failure of several banks in Cincinnati in 1842, more people deposited their savings with the bishop. By offering competitive interest rates of four to six percent, Edward Purcell, with the approval of his brother, encouraged the faithful to deposit their money with him. Bishop Purcell’s bank was not the only episcopal bank in the United States. Archbishop Peter Richard Kenrick of St. Louis eventually became engaged in a similar enterprise.8

On Sunday, November 2, 1845, Archbishop Samuel Eccleston of Baltimore consecrated the new cathedral. After “more than five years labor,” the Catholic Telegraph wrote, “the Catholics of Cincinnati have crowned their hopes by the erection and consecration of a Cathedral.” What added to the solemnity was the dedication of the German churches, St. John Baptist on the northern edge of the city, the day before, and Christ (later known as All St.s) in the northeastern end of the city the following Sunday. Several church dignitaries were in Cincinnati for the occasion. Seven bishops, sixty-seven clergymen, seminarians of the diocese, Jesuit scholastics, and lay people from various parishes took part in the four-hour services. With the dedication of St. Peter in Chains Cathedral, the old cathedral was turned over to the Jesuits. They and members of the old parish then formed St. Xavier parish.9

Designed by the architect Henry Walters, St. Peter in Chains Cathedral was a large-scale model of a Greek temple, a style very much in vogue at the time for public buildings. The elegant neoclassical cathedral asserted the substantial Catholic presence in the city. Cincinnati Catholics delighted in its design and ornamentation. Like its counterparts in New Orleans and Louisville, the new cathedral reflected the change in architecture in the immigrant church. Ornate European styles of design and ornamentation replaced the republican simplicity of the earlier years of the nation. As the
shift to devotional Catholicism, imported from Europe and the heart of which consisted of devotion to Jesus, Mary, or one of the saints, began to take place in the 1840s, more American churches were filled with statues and stained glass. These changes reflected the majesty of the European Catholic past. The local historian Charles Cist praised the new cathedral as a worthy “ornament to our city. . . . It is the finest building in the West, and the most imposing, in appearance, of any of the cathedrals in the United States.” It was also one of the material evidences of the growth of the Catholic Church in the community. The entire cost of the building was about $120,000. To sustain the new cathedral the parish repeatedly suggested the renting of pews “as the only effectual means of preserving” it.40

With the continuing growth of Catholicity in Ohio, Purcell began thinking of the diocese being raised to the status of an archdiocese. As early as 1840 the Cincinnati ordinary, aware of his own authority, expressed interest in seeing the “Queen City of the West,” which he described as “a calm, beautiful City, having great facilities of access and as thriving as any other in the Republic,” become a metropolitan see. No longer a frontier settlement, the burgeoning city had become an important western river community. Steamboats
on the Ohio River and the opening of canals had provided the foundation upon which Cincinnati grew. Besides becoming heavily industrialized, Cincinnati was a place where banking services, hog slaughtering and packing, and furniture-manufacturing, clothing, and iron- and metalworking industries prevailed. By 1850 Cincinnati was the third largest manufacturing center in the United States. At this time there were twenty-six dioceses throughout the United States. As the trips to the metropolitan of Baltimore proved to be a great imposition on the dioceses and on the bishops, some of the ordinaries exchanged letters in which they discussed the possible creation of new archdioceses. Like other western bishops, Purcell minded more and more the inconvenience, expenses, and time of having to travel to Baltimore, the sole archdiocese, to attend the provincial councils every three years.41

At the Sixth Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1846, the American hierarchy discussed the possibility of establishing new metropolitan sees for New York, New Orleans, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. Though about a third of the group favored the erection of new provinces, nothing was decided. The Propaganda nevertheless went ahead the following year and established a western archdiocese in St. Louis. As Roman authorities attempted to centralize the authority in the Catholic Church, the Cincinnati ordinary and some of his confreres argued for some national episcopal autonomy. Purcell resented the way the Propaganda thought fit to decide on the matter without the recommendation of the American Council.42

Three years later at the Seventh Provincial Council of 1849, the American hierarchy petitioned authorities in Rome to establish new metropolitan sees in New Orleans, New York, and Cincinnati. Upon the recommendation of the Propaganda, Pius IX issued on July 19, 1850, the bull elevating Cincinnati, then ranked as the sixth most populous city in the United States and the largest west of the Allegheny Mountains, to an archdiocese. Both New York and New Orleans were also elevated, with John Hughes and Anthony Blanc, respectively, as archbishops. Doubtlessly pleased with the news of the elevation of his diocese and himself to the rank of archbishop, Purcell noted that in this instance, “at least, no underhand intrigue, or influence,” he wrote to Blanc, “was allowed to interfere with the authentic and solemnly expressed will of our Prelates assembled.”43

At the Sixth Provincial Council the American hierarchy had also discussed the possible erection of a see at Cleveland. After several visitations to northern Ohio, Bishop Purcell had realized his inability to administer the entire state. The subdivision of his diocese was a matter he discussed with Samuel Eccleston of Baltimore when the archbishop visited the see city in 1845. At that time Eccleston informed Purcell that he had placed the possi-
ble division of Purcell's diocese on the Council's agenda. At the meeting in Baltimore, Purcell persuaded the majority of the bishops to petition the pope for the establishment of a new see in Cleveland with Amadeus Rappe, the pastor of Toledo, as its first bishop. On April 23, 1847, Pope Pius IX, who succeeded Pope Gregory XVI upon his death, issued the bull erecting Cleveland into a diocese, thus dividing the diocese of Cincinnati into two parts, generally north and south of Holmes County. About six months later Purcell consecrated Rappe in the Cincinnati Cathedral. The diocese of Cincinnati that had covered about 41,000 square miles was now reduced to about 25,728 square miles. The division also reduced the number of churches in the diocese of Cincinnati from seventy to fifty and priests from seventy-three to fifty-seven. It was discovered later that the line cutting the diocese of Cincinnati into two parts inadvertently cut ten counties in such a way as to make the interpretations of ecclesiastical jurisdiction difficult. The two bishops met and agreed to modify the demarcation. They constituted the counties of Mercer, Auglaize, Hardin, Marion, Morrow, Knox, Tuscarawas, Carroll, and Jefferson as the northern boundary of the diocese of Cincinnati, and Holmes County, which was for the greater part south of the line, was assigned to the diocese of Cleveland.45

As church building in the diocese continued during the 1840s, the Jesuit John McElroy of Maryland complimented Purcell in January 1848 on his "magic powers for church-building." Since his return from Europe in 1843 to the end of the decade, Purcell saw, in addition to the building of the new cathedral, the completion of churches in the northern, eastern, and western parts of Cincinnati, at Piqua, Sidney, Chillicothe, Russia, Frenchtown, Dayton, Springfield, New Richmond, and Freyburg. By 1850 there were eight Catholic churches in Cincinnati, six of which were German. There was a parochial school in each parish, ranging in size from 70 to 650 pupils, for a total of 2,607 children.46

The building and maintenance of new churches, asylums, and schools required additional financial assistance. And by the late 1840s, largely because of political disturbances in Europe, less money was pouring in from Europe. In 1847 and 1848 contributions from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith were cut in half. The Leopoldine Foundation made no contributions in 1848 and 1849, and the allocations from the nuncio of Vienna, done regularly up to 1847, were discontinued. Needing more money to meet the increasing needs of the diocese, Purcell tried to eliminate outside ecclesiastical beggars from Cincinnati. He proposed for the 1846 Provincial Council more effective policy against "indiscriminate begging." A year later Purcell published a signed statement in the Catholic Telegraph prohibiting outsiders from begging in Cincinnati.46
To staff the churches there were by the mid-1850s 110 priests in the archdiocese, second only to Philadelphia in the number of priests. By 1865 there were 163 priests. “One of the heaviest cares” assumed by his administration, Purcell wrote, “was that of providing for this diocese a sufficiently numerous body of saintly, learned and devoted priests. For this purpose,” he told the clergy and laity, “we have spared no pains. We have incurred debts. We have written innumerable letters. We have made repeated voyages to Europe and knocked at the doors of bishops and Seminaries.” But his office could have been more successful. “Had we succeeded to the extent of our wants and wishes,” he contended, “we would have, today, more priests and churches, and there would be fewer souls lost. . . .” Two years later, when there were seventy-nine students in the seminary being prepared for the priesthood, he was more upbeat about the number of priests in the diocese. The “diocesan vocations,” he wrote, “are as many, we thank God, as the wants of the diocese require.”

In the first three decades of his tenure, the growth of the diocese of Cincinnati had gone on briskly. It grew in self-consciousness, both ecclesiastically and politically. When Purcell came to the diocese in 1833, there were sixteen parishes in Ohio. Five years later there were thirty priests, twenty-four churches, and 40,000 Catholics. By midcentury, seventy churches and seventy priests attended to 75,000 Catholics. Cincinnati was second to New York in the number of Catholic churches. The “vineyard” under Purcell’s supervision, the Catholic Telegraph wrote, “has been enlarged beyond the hopes of the most sanguine.” When the diocese of Cincinnati was established in 1821, there were approximately 7,500 Catholics in the three communities of Bardstown, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. The new ecclesiastical provinces of Cincinnati and St. Louis, encompassing the same general area, now had a population of 400,000 Catholics. By 1860 baptism registrations in the archdiocese of Cincinnati had increased to about 9,000 per year and marriages to nearly 2,000. During the same period, the number of Catholics in the United States increased from about two hundred thousand to a million and a half in 1850. Ten years later the Catholic population doubled to three million. Though in the United States Protestant denominations, when taken together, still outnumbered Catholics by about two to one, Catholicism had become the largest single denomination in the country.

The metropolitan see of the Province of Cincinnati comprised the four states of Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan, and Indiana, with Louisville, Detroit, Vincennes, and Cleveland as suffragan sees, dioceses subordinate to the metropolitan. The see city of the bishop of Kentucky had been transferred from Bardstown to Louisville in 1841. After the erection of the new provinces, the first officially national, or plenary, council was held in Baltimore in 1852. It
was at that session that the first suffragan see of the archdiocese of Cincinnati was divided. The Council Fathers, with the approval of Purcell and Bishop Flaget of Louisville, petitioned authorities in Rome that the eastern part of the State of Kentucky be erected into the diocese of Covington. The pope approved the recommendation in the summer of 1853. This solution helped resolve a controversy over the towns of Covington and Newport, Kentucky, which had been placed in 1847 in the jurisdiction of the diocese of Cincinnati. At the time Flaget and Purcell saw advantages to the transfer of the two border towns to Cincinnati because they were too distant from the episcopal seat at Louisville. Though in less than two years’ time Flaget and his new coadjutor, Martin J. Spalding, had second thoughts about the transfer, the two towns continued to belong to the diocese of Cincinnati until an episcopal see was erected in Covington.

Shortly after he received the papal bull erecting the Cincinnati Province, Purcell informed his friend Archbishop Blanc that he had “a mind to go to Rome” for the pallium, the insignia of an archbishop, for “it may be several months if we wait for an occasion to get it.” Before he left Cincinnati in November 1850, his congregation gave him $1,000 for his journey. This was his third trip to Europe since his appointment as bishop, having gone in 1838 and 1843. He stopped first in New Orleans, where he visited with Blanc, then went to Mobile, where he preached at the dedication of the new cathedral. In early January he left New York for Europe, arriving at Paris later that month. Three months later, on April 25, Purcell received the pallium from the pope. Though Rome had already sent the pallium to Cincinnati, the pope went ahead with the presentation in his private chapel, instructing Purcell to destroy the first pallium upon his return home. While in Europe the archbishop again obtained financial assistance from the Association for the Propagation of the Faith and the Leopoldine Foundation. From the former he received $10,000 over three years, and $1,600 from the latter, one fourth of which was designated for the German Franciscans of Cincinnati to aid them in building a seminary.

Not long after the formation of the archdiocese of Cincinnati in 1850, Purcell decided to further streamline the Catholic Church’s organizational structure in the West. He recommended in the mid-1860s that the southeastern part of the state, with its 40,000 Catholics, be severed from the archdiocese. At that time, the area had forty-three priests divided among forty-one churches and twenty-three parochial schools. Purcell believed that this portion of the state would be administered better with its own bishop and more frequent visitations. On March 23, 1868, the pope, accepting the recommendation of the 1866 Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, issued the bull erecting the diocese of Columbus, the eighth suffragan see of the
province. The new diocese consisted of that part of the state that lies between the Ohio River on the east and the Scioto River on the west, with the addition of the counties of Franklin, Delaware, and Morrow. Sylvester Horton Rosecrans, a native of Homer, Ohio, and Purcell’s auxiliary bishop for six years, became the first bishop of Columbus. He served as bishop until 1878. With the departure of Rosecrans, Purcell was left without an auxiliary bishop until 1880, when depressions conditions in the archdiocese would occasion the appointment of a coadjutor. With this latest partition, the archdiocese of Cincinnati was now reduced to twenty-eight counties in Ohio. It covered about 12,043 square miles and counted 115 churches, forty-two stations, and thirteen chapels for a population of about 139,000 Catholics that were served by 135 priests. The establishment of the diocese of Columbus also meant the passing of the Sisters of St. Dominic and Dominican Fathers at Somerset from the territory of the diocese of Cincinnati to that of Columbus.51

ROLE OF THE LAITY AND PARISHES

In the early years keeping the faith alive in the diocese was mainly a lay responsibility. In the absence of a resident priest most Catholics had only occasional access to the sacraments. Whenever Purcell could, he would send the necessary priest to assist his flock. When the circumstances seemed ripe for growth and fund-raising, he encouraged them to form parishes and to build churches and schools. As more and more churches and schools sprung up, Catholics were more able to attend church regularly and to educate their children in the faith. These new institutions reflected the peoples’ faith and also helped shape the faith and religious practice of the laity over many generations. Through his leadership Purcell helped bring the Catholic population into a more disciplined relationship with the church. A more structured and organized religious life gradually led, after the mid-nineteenth century, to greater episcopal and clerical authority. The coming of a resident priest to a hitherto isolated mission almost always meant that the parishioners ceded a great deal of authority to the priest. As the local church became more hierarchical, there was a gradual shift from a congregational model of the parish to a clerical model.51

In Fenwick’s time Catholics had settled in various parts of Ohio, gradually organizing parishes and hoping to attract the services of a missionary riding a mission circuit. With the opening of better roads and canals in the 1830s and 1840s, new immigrants settled generally along the new thoroughfares. A priest in one of the neighboring communities would visit the newly arrived group and perhaps say Mass in a private home. When Purcell in the early 1850s learned from a resident of Greenfield, Ohio, who went to confession to
him in Cincinnati, that there were several Catholic families in the area without the services of a priest, he asked Father John B. O’Donoghue of Fayetteville to serve the Irish town. In 1856 O’Donoghue became pastor of the newly formed St. Benignus parish. Not infrequently, a parish would pay a family to house the visiting priest and stable his horse. On one occasion a member of St. James parish at White Oak in Cincinnati in the 1840s had to send a bill for $5.50 because the parish had neglected to pay him for eleven Sundays. As the visits by missionaries to outlying districts became more frequent and the number of Catholics increased, money was raised and churches built, first as missions and then as parishes with resident priests. In many instances a parochial school or a combination church and school was begun contemporaneously, thus giving stability to the parish. As Catholics—like their religious counterparts, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians—took to the frontier, they helped bring stability, education, and a sense of tradition to the Midwest. In the process, they would learn a valuable lesson in religious pluralism and adaptability.  

Though Catholics wished to live within the shadow of their church, many of them had to travel considerable distances to go to Mass. According to one account, in the early 1830s devout Catholics in Hamilton, Ohio, when there was no service at nearby Ross, would use the canal boats or even walk more than twenty miles to Cincinnati in order to attend Mass. Before Holy Name parish was formed at Trenton in 1871, every Sunday morning Catholics would climb on a farm wagon, upon which some chairs had been placed, and were driven to St. Stephen Church in Hamilton, eight miles away.

As the Catholic population grew, more and more parishes were formed in the diocese. The core families in these new parishes took their religion seriously. Shortly after the St. Augustine parish at Minster was established in 1834, the lay trustees, elected by the congregation, drew up a constitution. It provided Mass would be said once each month, preferably on Sundays. When German and Irish Catholic families in Harrison, Ohio, in the 1840s arranged for Mass to be said once a month in the home of one of the residents, they scheduled prayer meetings on the other Sundays. Because a private home was sometimes not large enough to accommodate the Catholics in the parish, Mass was said in a rented storeroom or, as in the case of Catholics in St. Paul parish in Springfield, Ohio, in the bowling alley of a local hotel until a church was built.

Steps taken to name a parish varied throughout the archdiocese. In July 1866 six men went to the home of Dr. Peter Liedel at Bridgetown in Cincinnati to organize a parish. Several months later they met to name the parish. The privilege of choosing a patron saint went to the highest bidder. When the bidding was over, a man with a bid of fifty-one dollars won and named
the parish St. Aloysius, a patron of his grandfather. Similarly, laypersons at Taylor’s Creek, Ohio, in 1867 took up donations and gave the highest donor the honor of naming the parish. Mr. Bernard Kielloeffe donated one hundred dollars and chose the name of St. Bernard. In another instance, because there were three Catholic families living at Coldwater in 1868, it was suggested to Purcell that the new parish be named Holy Trinity.  

Procedures adopted to build a church also varied among parishes. At mid-century members of St. Anthony of Padua parish in St. Anthony, Ohio, pledged four dollars per family and contributed labor and lumber toward the building of a log church. In most instances, however, Catholics, like the parishioners in Holy Name parish at Trenton, organized a building society and agreed to pay twenty-five cents per month to build a church and for the support of a pastor. But pledges were not always fulfilled. Even though forty-six families in Cincinnati’s St. James parish at White Oak pledged from $2.25 to $9 in the early 1840s, they paid only $90.93. Moreover, though the parishioners promised to contribute $214.35 to the support of the pastor for one year, they paid only $145.30. By the 1850s, however, the parish agreed to pay $300 per year, payable monthly, to the pastor, as well as provide him with the necessary firewood and fifteen gallons of Mass wine yearly. At times other sources of revenue were tapped. To help build St. Clement Church at St. Bernard in Cincinnati in 1850, real estate agents donated the church property and gave $800, a local priest made a tour of Cincinnati and raised $1,200, and Purcell gave $400 from the Leopoldine Foundation. The parish borrowed the rest, approximately $3,000.  

Though over time more and more new churches were built to accommodate the increasing Catholic population, priests were often advised not to start building a new church where there was not a high probability that the congregation could raise sufficient funds for its completion. “Better worship our Creator in the humblest log,” the Catholic Telegraph editorialized in 1846, “than be crippled with debt.” In the 1870s William Bigot, pastor of St. Michael parish at Fort Loramie, began exploring the possibility of building a new church. At first he encountered some resistance from his flock. “With the increase of parishioners,” he wrote, the church “was no longer large enough. On Sundays and holy days it was full to capacity, even the choir loft seats were occupied. Nevertheless the idea of building a new church did not want to take root. The farmers, especially, clung stubbornly to the old. They did think it nice when they could look over another’s shoulder and read in their prayer book. Also there were many things to do. They wanted to save some money and wait for some good years.” Before long, however, the congregation enthusiastically backed the idea. By the spring of 1878, a twelve-member committee began raising money for a new church. “Not one family
or single person of the parish,” Bigot wrote, “refused to give -$500 -$300 -
$200 -$150 -$50 and some $1 were given, each according to his own means.”
In sixteen days $16,000 were pledged, and collected during the summer.
“Besides this,” Bigot also noted, “all had promised to give half of what they
had given after 2 years. At the second collection some gave more than prom-
ised, for they felt they had not given enough the first time.” All told they col-
clected $24,000 in pledges and $1,800 from bequests and pew rent.58

What also grew in popularity in the United States in the second half of the
nineteenth century was the parish mission, a special form of preaching that
was especially effective in moving people’s emotions and wills toward the
goal of reviving the faith and moral conduct of the laity. Though the duties
of the parish priest generally consisted of the sacramental and pastoral func-
tions of baptizing, hearing confessions, celebrating Mass, attending to the
sick and dying, and conducting marriages and funerals, at a mission he espe-
cially sought to awaken Catholics’ consciousness to their sins and the need
for forgiveness. The parish mission, which lasted from three to four days,
sought to induce in Catholics a desire for confession and communion. Dur-
ing the spring jubilee of 1847, the diocese, under the guidance of the clergy,
experienced what the Catholic Telegraph called a “spiritual fervor.” The
preaching at a mission contained many parallels with Protestant revivals. For
two weeks, day and night, the churches were filled and confessional crowded.
More than twelve thousand people in Cincinnati alone received communion. By the end of the Civil War in 1865, the parish mission was a part
of Catholic religious life in most regions of the country.59

A leading figure in the parish missions in the local church was the Jesuit
and Austrian-born Francis Xavier Weninger. Shortly after his arrival in
Cincinnati in 1848, the St. Xavier College teacher began preaching in local
German parishes in his spare time. Generally he delivered two types of ser-
mons: one directed to all parishioners, and the other to separate groups of
married men, married women, single women, and single men. Weninger’s
first mission in the archdiocese took place at St. John the Baptist Church on
Green Street in Cincinnati between Christmas and New Year’s day in 1849.
In time the Jesuit also wrote his own doctrinal and devotional literature.60

Ritual and devotionalism during Purcell’s years of leadership came to play
an increasing role in people’s lives. Besides the official church rituals of the
Mass and the administration of the sacraments, there was the forty hours
devotion, which was a public exhibition of the Blessed Sacrament for a peri-
od of forty hours in memory of the forty hours Jesus’s body spent in the
sepulchre following crucifixion. Moreover, pilgrimages, increasingly emo-
tional church-based devotions to the Sacred Heart and the saints, corporate
recitation of the rosary, and the way of the cross were considered essential to
the parish mission’s goal of revitalizing and preserving the faith. In the process they generated closer attachments to the diocese. In the mid- to late-nineteenth-century music, hymns, and the sound of bells and booming cannon often contributed to the solemnity of the annual procession for the feast of Corpus Christi that was celebrated in some of the parishes. In 1852 a German Catholic noted that the “simple ecclesiastical chant [and] altars adorned with flowers and beautiful pictures” at the celebration at St. Clement parish in St. Bernard in Cincinnati “bore glowing witness of the honest faith of the parishioners.” At St. Michael parish at Fort Loramie, Lenten devotions in the 1870s were held twice a week and were well attended. Because most of the farmers lived far from church, the devotions were held after Mass. On Palm Sunday there was a procession with the blessed palms and singing of the Passion. During the Corpus Christi Feast on Easter Sunday, bells rang and the choir sang while the people marched around the village and the four altars that they had built for the occasion. Among the many happy and festive events in the life of the parish were the first baptism and the first wedding. The entire congregation almost always took part in the celebration. Increasing emphasis on these rituals and external conformity were consistent with a European ecclesiology that stressed clerical authority. In addition, the devotions were approved by Vatican officials and were seen as a means of standardizing practices and of making the church truly universal.61

There doubtless was in every parish a core number of Catholics who were devout laypersons and active members of church organizations. But at the same time there were those Catholics who performed only the required religious observances, such as fulfilling the obligation to go to confession once a year and receiving communion in the Easter season. There were those individuals, moreover, who were indifferent and did not make their Easter duty. The clergy spent considerable effort and time promoting the devotional life. They tried to establish one devotional society for married women and one for married men. During and after the mid-nineteenth century, many Catholics in the diocese of Cincinnati as well as throughout the country were active in the various devotional and church-supporting confraternities. Parish-based confraternities and sodalities were often established in conjunction with the parish missions. The women, who were usually the first to organize when a parish was formed and were generally more attracted to these groups than men, centered mainly on the rosary and other Marian prayers. The men often belonged to church-sanctioned benefit societies. Seldom attracted to devotions outside of Sunday Mass, they were more likely to join a church society when it offered insurance benefits in the event of sickness and death. The parish societies tried to make sure that members received the sacraments at least once a year. The more devout members
received them as frequently as once a month. Evidence suggests that in the nineteenth century daily attendance at Mass or daily communion was much less frequent than it was by the middle decades of the twentieth.61

Societies became the backbone of most parishes. Holy Trinity parish in Cincinnati served as the base of operation for such German societies as the Knights of St. Edward, Catholic Knights of America, Catholic Knights of Ohio, Catholic Order of Foresters, Ladies’ Catholic Benevolent Association, and the Central Verein. Those women’s societies that generally affiliated with parishes were the Ladies Auxiliary of the Knights of St. John, The Catholic Ladies of St. Frances, Ladies Catholic Benevolent Association, and Catholic Ladies of Columbia. Besides performing a variety of functions in the parishes, the societies gave financial assistance to the members and their families in sickness and death. The first society formed in St. Anthony parish at Madisonville in Cincinnati was the St. Michael School Supporting Society in 1861. It consisted of the young and married men who paid monthly contributions for support of the parish school. The following year some of the laywomen established St. Mary Ladies Society for support of the church. In the 1860s St. Carolina’s Young Ladies Society of St. Anthony parish on Budd Street in Cincinnati donated a new pulpit, and St. Anthony’s Men’s Society donated an organ. The first sodality, or society, in St. Michael parish at Fort Loramie was St. Ann, established in 1874. It was initially composed of more than ninety married ladies. Shortly after its formation, approximately eighty young ladies also came forward and organized the Holy Mary Young Ladies Sodality and nearly one hundred young men formed the St. Lawrence Young Men Sodality. In the 1870s Father H. Brinckmeyer, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Church at Carthage, worked among the youth and helped organize them into the Apostleship of Prayer and Devotion to the Sacred Heart Societies. In some parishes several hundred children also belonged either to the Society of the Infant Jesus or the Guardian Angel Society.65

Besides raising money and performing various committee functions, the parish societies played an integral part in the dedication ceremonies. At the cornerstone laying of St. Francis Seraph Church in Cincinnati on November 7, 1858, a lengthy parade preceded the ceremonies. As a sign of solidarity societies from several parishes took part in the program. Among these were the St. Aloysius Orphan Society, St. Boniface Young Men Society, St. Pius Men Society, St. Paul Society, St. Clement Society, St. Louis Society, St. Joseph Society, St. Aloysius Young Men Society, St. Charles Borromeo Society, and St. Augustine Society. Some six to eight marching bands, all wearing the distinctive badges of their organizations, furnished the marchers—who waved banners—with music. It was estimated that about twenty thousand people participated in or watched the parade. In the parish
processions the marshals, often wearing uniforms of Knights of Middle Ages, rode proudly on their horses.  

Most nineteenth century parishes in the archdiocese depended for revenue mainly on weekly Sunday collections, sometimes taken at the door of the church, and on pew rents. Individuals and families who did not rent pews were expected to contribute. In principle, all but the poorest members of the parish were expected to rent pews, which was generally paid in four annual installments. Those pews closest to the altar were usually the most expensive. Laypersons in Cincinnati's St. Patrick parish organized the Church Debt Society in 1870. Members of the parish contributed no less than twenty-five cents per month. Within four years the entire debt was paid. Parish organizations and bazaars, fairs, and picnics, among other social activities, also supplemented parish income. Some of the social events proved quite profitable.

As the Catholic population grew in the nineteenth century and more and more parishes were formed, lay people and parish-based societies became better organized and disciplined. Many Catholics in the diocese of Cincinnati as well as throughout the country participated in various devotional and church-supporting confraternities. In particular, German and Irish immigrants were especially active in the development of parish-based organizations and the diocese.