



A brief history of our Parish

St. Anthony's Parish came into existence at the initiative of Cardinal Leo-Josef Suenens. In 1973, Ireland, UK and Denmark became members of the EEC (as it was then known) and this resulted in an increased presence of English-speaking people in the greater Brussels area, a certain percentage of whom were Roman Catholic. Cardinal Suenens asked the Irish Franciscans, who already had an Irish College in Leuven for several hundreds of years, to provide an English-speaking pastor for a new chaplaincy. The Franciscans responded positively and appointed Fr. Michael Bailey in 1973. Fr. Michael initially resided in the Irish College in Leuven and said Mass for the small but growing community in the Church of St. Joseph (a chapel of the Redemptorists in Brussels). It was not long before these premises proved to be too small and the liturgy was moved to the chapel attached to St. Julien's church in Woluwe.

As the community grew, it became evident that Fr. Bailey's full time presence in Brussels was necessary to serve the needs of the parishioners. In 1975 the Franciscans purchased a house on Avenue l'Oiseau Bleu (54) which effectively became the parish centre as well as Fr. Michael's residence. For the next five years, English-speaking individuals and families continued to arrive in the Brussels area. The community experienced the need to provide for a full programme of religious education as well as more room for adult education and for other parish events. In 1980, the community began its search for larger premises and asked the Irish Franciscans to support their intentions.

In the spring of 1983, the Parish with the support of the Irish Franciscans bought the present property. The maintenance, renovation and any possible expansion of the property, however, would be entirely the responsibility of the parish community. In November 1983 the decision was made to extend the church to incorporate the space between the last two A-frame supports, formerly outside the building, into the church itself and to make improvements to the Centre's main building, especially regarding the apartment for the pastor. A loan was taken with the Irish Franciscans for approximately two and a half million Belgian francs and was paid back within 3 years.

Despite the vastly improved facilities in our new premises, more work needed to be done. Two temporary buildings on the property were a fire hazard and had to be destroyed. Grounds work needed



to be done and the present parking lot needed to be put in. Garages and storage areas had to be built and a path laid to the entrance of the church.

In the spring of 1987, Fr. Bailey was recalled to Ireland, where he was appointed chaplain at Galway University. Fr. Edmund Dougan, a former professor of sociology and Guardian of the Irish College, once in Leuven, later in Rome, became our new Parish Priest. Fr. Edmund quickly adapted to the life of the community that was rapidly changing character during the second half of the 1980's.

To the great sadness of the entire St. Anthony community, Fr. Edmund died in January 1995, before work on the new church was even begun. Fr. Vincent Gallogley who had previously worked in parishes in Ireland, USA and the UK was appointed our new Parish Priest.

In 1993 Fr. John Kealy was transferred to the Irish College in Leuven as local Superior and later that year was appointed to St. Anthony's as assistant Pastor. In 2003 the Irish Franciscans terminated the Franciscan presence in Leuven and Fr. John moved into the Parish Centre. In the summer of 2008 the Franciscan Chapter assigned Fr. John to their Friary in Multyfarhnam in Co. Westmeath in Ireland and assigned Fr. Pat Power as our new Parish Priest with Fr. Vincent taking on the role of associate Pastor.

Under the guidance of Fr. Pat & Fr. Vincent our community continued to grow. There are in excess of 2000 parishioners now in the parish and over 42 nationalities are represented in the make-up of the Parish.

In 2011, the Irish Franciscan chapter confirmed that Fr. Pat and Fr. Vincent would remain in their present posts for a further 3 years. Fr. Pat and Fr. Vincent continued their ministry work within the Parish.

Fr. Philip Sandstrom continues to provide valuable support to the priests of our parish.

In 2014, after the Provincial chapter, Fr. Vincent returns to Ireland where he is appointed to the Franciscan community in Rossnowlagh, Co. Donegal and Fr. Brendan Scully was appointed to St. Anthony's Parish. In 2019, Fr. Brendan returns to Ireland due to ill health, he is appointed to the Franciscan community at Merchants' Quay, Dublin.

Fr. Michael Nicholas is appointed to St Anthony's Parish as Fr. Pat's associated Pastor. Fr. Pat is given an extension to his contract with the Diocese until 31st October 2020. Retirement age in the Diocese is 75, Fr. Pat who is 77 was given an extension to his contract up to 31st October 2020. This was good news also for the people of the parish who hold him in high esteem.

In 2019, Fr. Michael is appointed Provincial Delegate after the Provincial congresses. On the 31st October, Fr. Pat officially retired as Parish Priest and on 01st November Fr. Michael is appointed Parish Priest. Fr. Pat is asked to remain in the Parish by Fr. Aidan (Franciscan Provincial) to support Fr. Michael. The Cardinal extends facilities to Fr. Pat until 31st October 2024 so that he can remain and minister to the people within the Parish.



A brief history of our Church

The chapel located on the property at Kraainem was not originally built there. It was constructed in the Heysel (close to the Atomium) for the occasion of the 1958 Belgian World Exhibition. After the close of the event, the building was dismantled and brought to Kraainem for reassembly on the site of what was then a religious community. When the community of St. Anthony took over the property, it was evident that the building needed looking after. The beams of the A-frame needed repair and encasement, and it was only a matter of months before we realised that extending the outside wall to the last A-beams would significantly increase the floor space.

Until the end of the 1980's, the 'strengthened and enlarged church' served the community very well. But as the community continued to grow and flourish, it became increasingly obvious that we were becoming short of space. It was not long before we had to 'borrow' a church for the celebrations of First Communion and Confirmation. The children's liturgy alone on Sunday morning was becoming very cramped, as was the noon Mass on Sunday. We had again outgrown our facilities.

A 'lively discussion' took place during the period 1991-1994 regarding whether we should enlarge the church or the main building. While the benefits of the first were clear, a case could be made for more space for classrooms in the main building as well as a large multipurpose space for many different events, including the celebration of the liturgy for large congregations. The difficult decision was made with the presumption that an enlarged church could also function in a multipurpose way.

Deciding to expand the church rather than the centre was only the beginning of a long project. Before building could begin, mandatory tests of the ground revealed that the site of the church was in fact a marsh. To support the A-frame construction, which turned out to be the most suitable type of construction for this situation, piles had to be sunk deep into the ground. This added significantly to the total cost. It also delayed the project. The severe weather of the winter of 1995/96 also contributed to delays, and the building did not become available until early 1997. On 15 June 1997 Cardinal Godfried Danneels solemnly dedicated the new church to St. Anthony.