

Father Sheehan, a tall, gaunt, Irishman with a booming voice, quick wit and temper and great determination, moved into the farmhouse that month and swiftly set about to transform the farm into a parish while retaining the "farm flavor" and the natural beauty of the hillside property intact. With the help of Glen Rock architect, Carl Kemm Loven, he came up with a plan to remodel the barn into a church, retaining the character of the barn as much as possible, and even transforming two old wagon wheels into large chandeliers. Men in the parish, who changed the barn into a church, also transformed a nearby rat-infested chicken coop into a parish meeting hall. (It is now the social building for teenagers.) The physical work, men hammering and clearing, women sewing and making snacks, brought the new community together and resulted in deep and lasting friendships.

On June 26, 1954, Archbishop Thomas Boland dedicated the new church, a bell specially cast in Loughborough, England, rang out from the newly-built steeple to announce the first Sunday Mass in our new church.

Fr. Sheehan and his enthusiastic hard-working parishioners then turned their attention to the landscape. A huge 30-ton boulder was used to form the base of the Lourdes Shrine, at the foot of the hill. The shrine is perhaps one of the most authentic replicas of the original in France. Nearby, outdoor stations of the cross were fashioned from wood. A star-shaped flower bed, to symbolize the star of Bethlehem, was laid out between the church door and the all-year around creche; both are still there. Another shrine, commemorating the martyrdom of the eight North American Jesuits, was dedicated two years later.

Other buildings were also restored. A little Dutch kitchen behind the original rectory was turned into a book store. (That building is still in use and is now the quarters for the rectory housekeeper.)

Community life spread, taking advantage of the lovely grounds. Fr. Sheehan conducted "days of recollection", attracting friends and parishioners from his former parish in South Orange. A Spring Festival, involving pony rides, cake sales and games, became an annual event. Both helped the fledgling parish raise funds. Apples grown on the property were picked each fall, distributed to parishioners for baking, and then sold to the public. Parish Boy Scouts, their leaders, and members of the Holy Name Society planted all the evergreens that line Prospect Street. One of the first "overnight" campouts by the scouts took place on the knoll behind the barn one bitter cold night amidst heavy snow fall. While the parents worried, their sons had a great time.

