Northfield Township was a sparsely settled farming community with fewer than 25 Catholic families when the missionaries of the Society of the Divine Word arrived in 1898. The local German farmers welcomed the priests and brothers from Style, Holland. Reverends John Peul and Joseph Fischer and brothers Michael, Wandelin, and Homobonus had been sent by Father Arnold Janssen, founder of the Society of the Divine Word, to establish a religious foundation for the promotion of the SVD (Societas Verbi Divini) missionary work through publications in both German and English. Arriving in Chicago, the five SVDs were asked by the Archdiocese to establish a trade school for orphaned Catholic boys in Northfield Township. On March 11, the Society was incorporated in Illinois and on June 25 it purchased the Russell Farm - 337 acres - for $41,000. The Russell family also donated some land, all of which remained unincorporated until 1988 when Northbrook annexed 778 acres of the Divine Word properties.

When the SVDs were informed that there were no Catholic Churches along the route of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad, they realized that Catholics in the area from Mayfair north to Deerfield and from Hubbard Woods west to Buffalo Grove did not have a place for worship. The missionaries were determined to find a place for Mass and Eucharist, so Father Peil set aside one room as a chapel in a rented cheese factory. On Pentecost Sunday, May 21, 1899 the first mass was celebrated in the cheese factory.

Early in 1900 Chicago Archbishop Patrick Feehan authorized the formation of a parish for the faithful residing between the Skokie lowlands on the east and the Des Plaines River on the west. The parish was to include Shermer (incorporated as Shermerville in 1901 and Northbrook in 1923) on the north and extend as far south as Winnetka Road.

The oldest available parish records from 1906 noted 23 families and by 1910 there were twice as many families. Population growth continued in the area served by the parish, with 58 families registered in 1915.

In 1917 George Cardinal Mundelein authorized the construction of a combination church and school on the east side of Glenview Avenue (Waukegan Road) about one-tenth of a mile north of the Divine Word Missionaries Seminary. The cornerstone of this building was laid on May 13, 1917 and the new building was dedicated on September 29, 1917. There were two classrooms on
The original two-room school on the west side of Waukegan road was converted into a kindergarten in 1941, while the upper grades met in the building on the east side of Waukegan road. Enrollment continued to increase to 117 students by 1942. The four nuns who staffed the school each earned $40 per month.

The combination church and school on Waukegan road remained spacious enough for the parishioners and school children until the 1940s. Homes sprung up in the once rural Northfield Township countryside. Population doubled and redoubled. The pastoral farmland of the early settlers was transformed into a bustling suburban community. St. Norbert needed to expand its facilities to keep up with the population explosion.

His Eminence Samuel Cardinal Stritch decided that St. Norbert Parish should be relocated from Techny to Northbrook. Plans for a new school and church were drawn up. In 1945 Rev Charles Haefner, SVD, became the pastor of St Norbert Parish. He made a down-payment of $500 towards the purchase price of $20,000 for land on Walters Avenue.
on April 22, 1948, for the first buildings which today form the St. Norbert parish campus.

In addition to a rectory (parish house), there was a school with seven classrooms, an all-purpose room, and a small chapel accommodating 200. At that time the chapel was intended as a future convent for the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit who staffed the school.


By 1950 the Catholic population of Northbrook had increased to 250 families, with a school enrollment of 250. The seven Sisters of the Holy Spirit who taught at the school received a monthly allowance of $50.

The post war building boom hit Northbrook in the 1950s as the village population increased to 5100 in 1953. School enrollment continued to expand, and 6 classrooms and a gymnasium/auditorium were added in 1952. The new gymnasium/auditorium was an outstanding achievement for the parish. In addition to the principal Sister Florence,
SSpS, 14 Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit now staffed the school.

School enrollment grew from 525 in 1953 to 640 in 1954. The tiny church could no longer accommodate all the parishioners, and the gymnasium was converted into a temporary church. In May 1954, in just one week, a temporary altar was set-up and carpenters from the parish worked well into the night to add extra pews and prepare the gymnasium/chapel for confirmation to be conferred by Cardinal Stritch. Three new classrooms were also added to the school by September of 1954. The former church was used as a meeting hall for two years and then divided into four more classrooms. The gymnasium served as a parish church for 10 years.

During 1954 and 1955, St. Norbert registered as many as 10 to 12 new families every week, with a total of 850 families enrolled in the church. The Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit had been living at their Motherhouse at Willow and Waukegan Roads, commuting to St. Norbert each day. Increased financial support of the parish enabled the building committee to erect a convent, and ground was broken in the spring of 1956.

In 1956 the sisters of St. Casimir agreed to staff the school, as the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit returned to missionary work. Sister Mary Corinthia, SSC, the new principal, and nine teaching sisters moved into the new convent at 1808 Elm Street. The building was dedicated on May 26, 1957.

Kindergarten classes had been discontinued in 1955 because of space limitations. However, in 1958 four new classrooms were added to the school to keep pace with the growing enrollment, giving the school a total of 24 classrooms. Sister Mary Emma, SSC, became principal, and was succeeded in 1960 by Sister Mary Scholastica, SSC.

The village of Northbrook and the parish continued growing at a rapid pace. By 1960, Northbrook’s population reached 11,000 and St. Norbert Parish consisted of 1300 families. Meanwhile St. Norbert School enrollment reached a capacity of 1,158 students and was staffed by thirteen Sisters of St. Casimir and nine lay teachers.
Tuition was $3 per child, and families with more than two children in school paid only half tuition for the third child and subsequent children. Although income from tuition only provided a small amount, the generosity of the parishioners boosted the treasury through bazaars, bake sales, fashion shows and sales of Christmas trees.

From 1962 to 1966, Sister Mary Vianney, SSC, served as principal, and Sister Paul Marie, SSC, followed from 1966 to 1969.

In September of 1963, ground was broken for the final piece of the St. Norbert Parish campus - a permanent Church. Construction began in October of 1963 and the first Mass was celebrated in the new church on June 28, 1964. On May 2, 1965 Bishop Cletus F. O’Donnell presided over the solemn dedication of St. Norbert Church, by this time parish membership had grown to 1600 families. After 10 years as a temporary church, the school gymnasium/auditorium was returned to the students.

Father Hugh O’Reilly served St. Norbert Parish from 1953, becoming Pastor in 1958, much of the parish campus was developed under his leadership.

In 1976, Father O’Reilly retired and was replaced with Monsignor Hagarty in 1977. The school leadership continued under the Sisters of St. Casimir with Sister Daniel, SSC, serving as principal from 1969 until 1977 when she was succeeded by Sister Benetta, SSC, and then in 1978 by Sister Helene, SSC who served as principal until 1984.

In 1984 following Monsignor Hagarty’s death, Rev. Robert Lutz was named pastor. Miss Alice Halpin became principal of St. Norbert School and continued in that role until 1991 when Sister Ann Busch, OSF, succeeded her. In 1988, St. Norbert School added a preschool program for 3 and 4 year olds. Many students would now spend 11 years at the school under the guidance of our excellent teachers and staff. By 1990, there were 1883 families registered in the parish, with 359 children enrolled in the school.
Following Father Lutz’s retirement in 1994, Rev. Richard J. Mueller became pastor of St. Norbert Parish. In 1999 as the parish celebrated its Centennial Year there were 2160 families registered in the parish with a school enrollment of 425.

In 2001, Sister Ann Busch, O.S.F, retired as principal of the school and an interim principal, Mrs. Anne Balzanto, assumed the role from 2001-2002. In 2002, Mrs. Maureen Brennan was selected to be the new principal, and served until 2009; when she was succeeded by Mr. Robert Loranger.

Following the centennial of the parish in 1999, a new fund-raising program was begun and resulted in the last major addition to the St. Norbert Parish campus. In 2003, a new building was dedicated which included Grace Hall and a new junior high facility, the building replaced the original chapel from 1949. This represented St. Norbert School’s continuing efforts to improve both its facilities and the quality of education that it provided.

Today, St. Norbert School is led by Mrs. Kimberly Rich who became principal in 2010, and Fr. Bob Heinz who became pastor of St. Norbert Parish in 2007. They continue to strive for the very best education as well as a developing a solid foundation in Catholic values for the students and families of St. Norbert School.

And now we look forward to 2017 when we will celebrate the 100th Birthday of St. Norbert School.

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**Principals of St. Norbert School**

**1917 - 1957**

Missionary Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS)

- Sister Frances Jane (Bertille) Klingele
- Sister Benna Henken
- Sister Rose Mueller
- Sister Bernice (Berchmans) Fenske
- Sister De Pazzi Zurowski
- Sister Jane Frances Millane
- Sister Florence Henry
- Sister Aelicia Hess

**1957-1984**

Sisters of St. Casimir (SSC)

- Sister Mary Corinthia: 1957-1958
- Sister Mary Emma: 1958-1960
- Sister Mary Scholastica: 1960-1962
- Sister Mary Vianney: 1962-1966
- Sister Mary Julie (Paul Marie): 1966-1969
- Sister Mary Daniel: 1969-1977
- Sister Mary Benetta: 1977-1978

**1984 - 2012**

- Miss Alice Halpin: 1984-1991
- Mrs. Anne Balzanto: 2001-2002
- Mrs. Maureen Brennan: 2002-2009
- Mr. Robert Loranger: 2009-2010
- Mrs. Kimberly Rich: 2010-