

History of Sts. Peter & Paul Church

1891-2013

Sts. Peter and Paul's Parish in Spring Valley, Illinois was organized officially on September 30, 1891, for the Polish and Lithuanian Catholics of the area, who had attended the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church up to this time.

The cornerstone of the neat frame building located one-half block north of the present edifice was laid November 15, 1891. Father Likorski was the first pastor and on August 14, 1892, the structure was dedicated. Eventually the Lithuanians built their own church in 1897.

Many pastors succeeded the founding priest until the first building was destroyed by fire on December 17, 1906 just one week before Christmas. Following the disastrous church fire, a temporary place of worship for the parish was provided early in 1907 by I. J. Jagodzinski.

The property acquired for the present Polish church of Sts. Peter & Paul included the rectory which is the oldest house in town. This house belonged to the first Postmaster of Spring Valley, Postmaster Terry, resulting in the address of Sts. Peter & Paul Church as 220 North Terry Street. The non-Polish name in a stained-glass window is widow Ellen Terry, who deeded the property to the first bishop of the Peoria diocese, Bishop Spalding. It was later deeded to Sts. Peter & Paul Congregation by Bishop Schlarman.

The Reverend Jerome Blazynski was pastor as the parish undertook construction of the new church. Only the excavation had been made and the foundation poured when Father Blazynski was stricken ill and died.

Father Joseph Ciesla, at the time parish priest in Minonk, was appointed to complete the work. With remarkable energy and ability to obtain credit, he directed completion of the present magnificent structure in 1909 at a cost of over \$40,000. The edifice was dedicated June 29, 1909 by the Rt. Reverend Monsignor P. J. O'Reilly, administrator of the Diocese of Peoria.

In 1909, after the Polish parishoners moved to their new church, the Italians started their parish in the vacated property which was deeded to the Peoria diocese by I.

J. Jagodzinski. Later, the diocese deeded the property to St. Anthony's Church Congregation where it remained for many years until it moved to a new location.

In 1910, for the first time since the church was completed, Sts. Peter & Paul had the honor of greeting the Most Reverend E. M. Dunne, Bishop of Peoria, who came here to confirm more than 150 people of the parish.

On Sunday, May 13, 1917, beginning at 7:15 p.m., the Most Reverend E. M. Dunne, assisted by 20 priests solemnly blessed a new pipe organ which had been purchased from Hinner's Organ Company in Pekin, Illinois. Helping make the organ purchase possible was a gift of \$1000 from the Andrew Carnegie Corporation.

On May 31, 1920, the Most Reverend Bishop E. M. Dunne, Peoria, and Abbot Vincent Huber, OSB, St. Bede Abbey, assisted by 50 visiting priests, solemnly consecrated Sts. Peter & Paul's Church.

Father Joseph Ciesla, pastor of Sts. Peter & Paul's for thirteen years had been tireless in his efforts to free his church from debt, and so it was with intense gratification that he and his parishoners saw their work crowned in this significant manner. Father Ciesla at about this time had also been named a permanent pastor of the church.

According to sources, Sts. Peter & Paul's in Spring Valley was the first Polish Catholic Church in the United States of America to be solemnly consecrated.

Several priests have served as pastors. Among them was Monsignor Kapala, with a rich and distinguished history, who wrote his autobiography in Slovakian and had served as a diplomat in the Vatican. And coming from Sts. Peter & Paul Parish is Abbot Marion Balsavich, OSB, of Polish descent who served as Abbot at the nearby Benedictine St. Bede Abbey.

The extensive repairs and renovation which took place over the years of this traditional style Romanesque church, including the organ, was accomplished, and paid for by hard work and monetary sacrifice. Many visitors appreciated its beauty.

In July 2013, Sts. Peter & Paul Parish merged with St. Anthony Parish and Immaculate Conception Parish to form Nativity of Our Lord Parish.

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