

## History of St. Anthony Parish

1904-2013

St. Anthony's story unveils a few years after the turn of the century when an Italian priest, the Rev. Eugene Raschiotti of Torino, Italy, came to Spring Valley to care for the spiritual well-being of his fellow Northern Italians both in Spring Valley and in the neighboring village of Dalzell, Ill.

With no church building of their own, the parishioners attended services conducted by Fr. Raschiotti in the hall of the old Immaculate Conception School Building from 1904 - 1906. Fr. Raschiotti officiated at the first recorded parish baptism on December 13, 1904.

Three years later - 1909 - another Italian priest, the Rev. Nicholas Blanc from Aosta, Italy, came to Spring Valley and was appointed the first official pastor of St. Anthony's and its 237 member families. Fr. Blanc would serve St. Anthony's as pastor for the next 44 years and would become known and loved as a pillar in the foundation and history of the "Italian" Church in Spring Valley.

Fr. Blanc celebrated the first mass of the parish on July 25, 1909, in the hall on the second floor of the old Prosperity Club located on west St. Paul St. in Spring Valley. Later, he held services in a small building on east St. Paul St., formerly occupied by the Methodist Church and later purchased by Ignatius J. (I. J.) Jagodzinski, a highly regarded merchant of the times. Jagodzinski then donated the building to the Italian parish and it was dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua.

In the years that followed much remodeling took place in the church building. It was enlarged and provided with pews and art windows; a bell tower, sanctuary and two sacristies were installed; the ceiling was raised six feet to make room for a choir gallery; and a furnace was added for central heating.

Later renovations were also necessary following the first World War, including enlarging the sacristy. Additionally, the church exterior was veneered with brick. In 1939, Fr. Blanc installed a new furnace and shortly after, an electric organ was purchased.

Time passed, and on March 19, 1951 the pastor and trustees of St. Anthony's purchased four lots to the east of the church building, including a two-story house. The house was later sold and moved to make space available for a new rectory.

In January 1953, due to a persistent illness, Fr. Blanc retired as the pastor of St. Anthony. He was succeeded by Rev. Koloman Kassovic.

Under the direction of the new pastor, the completion of a rectory and church hall was realized in 1955. The facility was built by Davito Brothers of Spring Valley and financed through the donations of both parishioners and non-parishioners alike. The rectory was blessed in ceremonies held January 27, 1955.

A very damaging furnace explosion caused extensive damage to the church's interior in 1958, necessitating much repair and remodeling.

The work was completed and Fr. Kassovic guided the parish onward through the sixties.

Discussion began to arise regarding the possibility of building a new church. A resolution was submitted to Bishop Franz and authority was given St. Anthony's to conduct a fund drive for the construction of a new worship facility.

In 1965 a campaign was kicked off to raise \$150,000 over a three-year period- off August 29, 1965. After three years, enough money had been raised through the generosity of St. Anthony's parishioners to move forward on the fulfillment of the dream of building a new church.

A five-acre plot of land located on routes 6 and 89 just west of the Hobbs plant in Spring Valley was purchased in the spring of 1968 and ground was broken. The foundation for the new structure laid in the summer and fall of 1969. Later, a purchase of land adjacent site brought the total acreage for the new church and grounds to eight.

As winter in 1969 drew near, work on the new church ceased. Fr. Kassovic resigned as pastor due to illness in November 1969, having served St. Anthony's for 16 years, and having played an instrumental part in the planning of the new church.

Rev. Berthold E. Drendel was appointed the third pastor of St. Anthony's on January 7, 1970 and was faced with task of seeing through to completion the construction project.

Work on the church resumed on March 17, 1970 and was completed in January of 1971, the culmination of years of planning and work.

The finished structure gave the parish of St. Anthony's an octagonally shaped facility with a seating capacity of approximately 350 in its main section. The new church additionally provided two wings off the main area: one for use as a parish hall and catechetical center and the other, the rectory.

The last mass in St. Anthony's old church building on east St. Paul St. was said Saturday, January 30, 1971, with the first mass in the new facility offered the next day, Sunday January 31.

Most Rev. John B. Franz, Bishop of Peoria, officiated at the dedication and blessing of the new church June 13, 1971, the feast of St. Anthony of Padua, the patronal feast of the parish.

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

***This history was developed using excerpts of the History of St. Anthony's written by Michael L. Yerly for the St. Anthony's commemorative booklet. Also, a special thanks to the Spring Valley Historic Association Museum for contributing material used to develop this brief history.***