

History of St. Mary's – DePue

A history of Bureau County, published over a century ago, tells us that the first Christian services held in Bureau County were in 1673 when Father Marquette, a missionary priest, landed on the shore of Lake DePue, erected a cross, and said mass.

In the early 1900's, visiting priests from LaSalle, Peru, and Spring Valley, served approximately seventy-five Catholic families of DePue. Services were held in Fowler Hall which was located on Third Street across from the old bank building.

The Catholic population of DePue in 1908 was predominantly Polish and the parish was known as St. Mary's of Czestochowa, when it was organized. In 1909, a frame church building was erected in the White City area, on land donated by the late Oliver Keim. The parish was under the pastorate of Fr. Casimir Truszynski of St. Valentine's in Peru. He succeeded in turn by Fr. Przybyz and Fr. Dwernicki.

In 1914, Fr. Anthony Majewski became the first resident priest, serving until 1919. During his pastorate the parish purchased a large club house which stood on the present site of St. Mary's Hall. The building was converted into a school and rectory and was also used for a time for church services.

Located away from the main part of town, the frame church was inconveniently located for many of its parishioners, so in 1916 it was moved from the site in White City to the present site in the Park Addition.

Early in 1917, a fire destroyed the school and rectory building. A new brick parish house was erected in 1918.

In 1919, Fr. S.F. Kubiak replaced Fr. Majewski, serving until 1930. During this time a new school was erected. It was staffed by Felician Sisters with an enrollment of over 100 students. During the depression, the school was closed, and it became St. Mary's Hall.

Tragedy struck a second time in 1924, when the frame church building was destroyed by fire. Immediate plans were made for rebuilding and in 1925, a new brick structure was erected.

In September of 1930, Fr. M.T. Szalewski succeeded Fr. Kubiak, remaining pastor until 1952. He retired due to his health and was succeeded by Fr. Andrew Dzurko.

In 1952, when Fr. Dzurko became pastor, a remodeling and renovation program began. Due to illness, he was assisted by Fr. William D. Iserman and Fr. Nicodemus Russo. The

Benedictine Fathers of St. Bede played an important role in the parish. Fr. Dzuryo retired in 1966.

Bishop Franz appointed Fr. Edward Bawiec to DePue in June 1966. Fr. Ed finished the renovations during his six years in DePue and was assigned to St. Anne's Parish in East Moline. He was succeeded briefly by Fr. Vincent Valiquette in 1972, and then Fr. Louis Condon in 1973. Fr. Ed returned to DePue for a short time in 1974 and then was reassigned to Holy Rosary in LaSalle in 1975.

Fr. Ed was succeeded by Fr. Harold Schmitt in 1975. He was instrumental in combining the St. Mary's and Slovenic cemeteries. A mass of dedication to the merger and a new shrine was held at the cemetery. The grotto was dedicated to Fr. Bawiec for starting St. Mary's Cemetery Association and restoration of the cemetery in 1971. He served until 1978,

Fr. John Weishar succeeded Fr. Schmitt in 1978. During his tenure the church was painted and the four foot circular leaded stain glass window that had been covered over in the 1960's was restored. The window had been a gift to the church in 1925 from the children of St. Mary's Parochial Grade School.

In July of 1980, Fr. Edward Fitton was appointed as administrator and served the parish for one year.

In July of 1981 Fr. Ernest Pizzamiglio was appointed pastor. During his tenure Fr. Ernie renovated the confessional for face-to-face confessions. He also was instrumental and with the help of the Knights of Columbus had the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary placed south of the church.

The parish celebrated the 75th anniversary of the church on Oct. 7, 1984. There was a special mass, potluck supper, and dancing.

In 1985, Fr. Ernie was succeeded by Fr. Deo Gratias R. Mutefunya. Fr. Deo came to the Diocese of Peoria in 1976 from Bukoba, Tanzania. Speaking ten languages, Fr. Deo reinstated the Spanish Mass each Sunday. Also during his pastorate, a new carpet was installed and the stained glass windows had been renovated and preserved. He served St. Mary's until 1993.

Fr. Thomas Badovsky became pastor from 1993-1997. During his service to the parish, the church entranceway was redone. Trees were removed due to damage to the sidewalks and the ramp for easier accessibility was added.

Fr. Mubarak Anwaar Amar served at St. Mary's from 1997-2001.

In 2001, Fr. Bailey Clemens came to serve at St. Mary's. He introduced daily adoration prior to mass and established an active youth group.

In 2003, the church went through another renovation. The entire church was painted and Fr. Clemens attempted to bring back the original look in sanctuary with the tabernacle centered on the high altar once again. The mural was added as a focal point incorporating the round stained glass picturing the crucifixion.

Fr. Kevin Creegan replaced Fr. Clemens in June of 2004. Fr. Kevin immersed himself in the Hispanic community during his tenure. He became part of the Hispanic Curcio as the chaplain. He also began a parish food pantry. He served until 2024.

Organizations that were active in the past, supporting the church and necessities for the parish over the years have been: The Holy Rosary Society, The Holy Name Society, The Young Ladies Altar Society, St. Anne's Sodality, the Cemetery Association, and the Knights of Columbus Council under the title of "St. Mary's by the Lake". The Cemetery Association is still in existence.

St. Mary's has produced five religious vocations. Included in them were Sister Mary Benigna of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (Catherine Ladyga) and Sister Mary Vincetta of the Sisters of the Holy Cross (Nora Gurnett). Those called to the priesthood were Father Barnard Horzen O.S.B. of St. Bede Abbey, Father Rick Oberch, and Father Jeffery Edwards.