

The History of Saint Joseph Parish

In the early 1900's there were many Catholic churches in Fort Wayne to serve different nationalities in the city, but none for the Italian people. That led to a language barrier that precluded the people of Italian descent from going to confession and receiving the Sacraments. In 1913, Mr. Loreto Starace, a lawyer and lay apostle, appealed to Bishop Herman J. Alerding, who promptly appointed Father Loreto Monastero to the task of starting an Italian Catholic Church. In 1914 Saint Joseph Parish began in a rented house on the corner of Fairfield Avenue and Bass Street and ministered to the Italian immigrants. In 1916 Bishop Alerding purchased property on the corner of Frary and Taylor Streets. The first St. Joseph Catholic Church built was a white frame building with a basement, a sacristy and a choir loft. In 1921, after many clashes with parishioners, Fr. Vurpillot submitted a faulty report to the Bishop who then sold the property of St. Joseph's Church to Westfield Presbyterian Church. The parishioners were crushed by the loss of their beloved church. A committee was formed to begin resolving the numerous misunderstandings. In 1923 a final resolution was obtained. Land was purchased on the corner of Brooklyn and Hale Avenues in 1924 and a brick combination church and school was built. In 1960, this combination school and parish was demolished making room for a new church. On May 8, 1960, ground was broken for the new church (pictured above). Church services were held in the school basement while the new church was under construction. As the church neared completion the church's crucifix fell behind schedule. A large bronze cross hung on the marble wall in back of the altar and, exactly at midnight, on the feast of St. Joseph, the marble Corpus was carried through the doors and mounted on the cross, just in time for the dedication ceremonies at 4:00 P.M. that very afternoon. On Sunday, March 19, 1961, Bishop Leo A. Pursley dedicated the St. Joseph Catholic Church. St. Joseph Church faced another substantial challenge in the late 1980's when St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parish was established on the southwest side of Fort Wayne. The numerous families from St. Joseph were split apart during a much criticized formation of the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parish. Despite soar feelings the two parishes successfully shared a joint school until 2013 when Bishop Kevin Rhoades announced that Saint Joseph Church would have the esteemed honor of beginning a brand new Catholic School. Saint Joseph Catholic Church boldly continues a century long tradition of serving Christ, welcoming the stranger and worshiping the Lord who sustains this amazing parish.