

The History of St. Mary

1670 Fr. Claude Allouez founded St. Francis Xavier Mission

1671-1672 Allouez and his companion, Fr. Louis Andre, built a chapel on the east bank of the Fox River.

1687 Chapel burned during an Indian uprising

1728 Mission closed

1823-53 Catholics served by itinerant priests

1838 Ostensorium (monstrance) given to St. Francis Mission by Nicholas Perrot was discovered by Fr. Florimond Bonduel in Michigan.

1853 Various nationalities began to build a church. The building was directed by Fr. Florimond Bonduel, but it was destroyed by a fire before it was completed. Services were held in the Reynen and Cook homes until 1864.

1864 Fr. William Verboort was appointed first resident pastor of De Pere by Bishop Henni of the Diocese of Milwaukee. He built a chapel on Lewis Street.

1868 The Diocese of Green Bay was formed.

1869 Hollanders, Belgians and Germans separated from the Irish and established the Immaculate Conception Parish and built a new church in downtown De Pere. The Irish gave \$2,859 to build this church.

1870 Church completed. Legend has it that Fr. Verboort cut the cornerstone and carved the figures on it himself. The church contained 114 pews of 5 seats, 3 altars, 1 main and 2 small altars. There was also a statue of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. The smallest bell in the current bell tower is from this church.

1875 Fr. Verboort left De Pere and went to the state of Oregon (Portland). Fr. William Takken became pastor.

1876 Fr. Anthony Van Grotel became pastor.

1878 Membership of the parish reached 300 families. Fr. William De Kolver was named pastor.

1882 Fr. John Verstegen was appointed pastor. A school was built and served 246 pupils taught by four nuns. During this time, there were four societies in the parish:

- St. Joseph Benevolent Society – 50 members
- Ladies Altar Society – 100 members
- Catholic Knights of Wisconsin – 50 members

Young Ladies Sodality – 110 members
During this time, the church property was enlarged to the entire block bordered by Superior, George, Charles, and Huron Streets.

1890 First rectory built

1891 Stained glass windows were installed in church, donated by Mr. and Mrs. E. Verstegen and the Young Ladies Sodality.

1892 Four more stained glass windows were installed, three from the ladies group and one from Fr. Verstegen.

1893 Church enlarged and remodeled at a cost of \$7,000.

1902 Census – 277 families of 2 or more people
6 widows
7 widowers
31 single, not belonging to a resident family
644 males, 7 years or older
629 females, 7 years or older
296 children, under 7 years old

1903 A stained glass window was donated by Mr. and Mrs. E. Wellens. The congregation installed it.

1904 Fr. William Van Roosmalen was appointed pastor and served until his death in December 1925.

1906 Old rectory building moved to corner of Huron and Lewis Streets. New rectory built which is currently leased to the De Pere Christian Outreach Center.

1912 New convent built. The nuns had been living with St. Francis nuns until this time.

1925 Fr. Francis Peters became pastor and stayed until he retired in 1942. He was known to carry coins in his pocket to reward students for good grades when giving out report cards.

1929 Stained glass windows were repaired by Pittsburgh Art Glass Co.

1936 Charter for Boy Scout Troop 38 was signed by Rev. Martin Vosbeek, Assistant Pastor. There were 16 members in the original troop of which 4 still reside in De Pere: Clyde Thomas, Jim Francken, Melvin Michaels, and Howard Vissers.

1937 Parishioners were asked to donate 10 cents at each Mass in lieu of raising dues (referred to then as “pew rent”) to help finance the school.

1939 rev. Raymond Hietpas, Assistant Pastor, organizes Cub Scout Pack 38. Don Smits was in first Cub Pack and is still a member of Troop 38.

1940 Christian Ladies founded – first President, Mrs. George Smits.

1942 Fr. John DeVries was appointed pastor. On January 11th, a fire, which started in the Christmas trees behind the main altar during the 9:15 Mass, caused \$2,500 damage. The fire destroyed a 60 year-old painting of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

1943 Cornelius Raymakers became pastor.

1945 Altar Society was founded – first President, Mrs. Martha Smits.

1946 Fr. Thomas Peeters, assistant, was appointed to chaplain service in the U.S. Navy on September 7th, 1946.

1947 Fr. Martin Vosbeek was appointed pastor. Father broke his leg shortly before going to the Holy Land. He rode a white donkey during Palm Sunday procession while there.

1951 Christian Ladies (Altar Society) were inducted into the Confraternity of Christian Ladies.

1952 School built in 1822 razed. Present wing of school of Huron Street was built.

1956 Fr. Joseph Kools became pastor.

1957 Fr. Raymond Hietpas was appointed pastor. He organized the Cub Scouts. The Boy Scouts had been founded previously. St. Mary “Mighty Midget” boxers were started in school by Fr. Hietpas while an assistant.

1959 New convent built, choir loft remodeled and organ rebuilt.

1960 Cafeteria and 8 classrooms added to the school.

1967 Masses were now said in English and shortly thereafter the priest said Mass facing the people.

1968 Interior of church remodeled and carpeted for 100th year anniversary.

1971 St. Mary School consolidated with St. Francis School and was renamed Notre Dame, one of the first consolidations in the Diocese of Green Bay.

1976 During the painting of the church steeple in August, the steeplejack fell to his death. Fred Desmond was killed when the rope used to raise him to the top broke.

1977 Fr. Hietpas retires. Fr. John Vander Horst became pastor. Exterior of church sandblasted and tuck-pointed. Interior of rectory remodeled. Frank Kremer ordained

permanent deacon by Bishop Wycislo and assigned to St. Mary and St. Willebrord parishes.

1978 Fr. John Gallagher was temporary administrator from August 9, 1978 until January 31, 1979. Rectory was renovated and electric service was updated.

1979 Fr. Ronald Hopfensperger became pastor.

1980 Interior of church painted.

1982 Fr. Earl Brouchoud was appointed pastor. New doors and fans installed church.

1984 Fr. Frank Schrage was appointed pastor. Ventilator windows were installed in church. Sr. Jeanne Jarvis became Pastoral Associate.

1985 Rectory and church steeple painted.

1989 Fr. James Gilsoul appointed administrator for June. Later that year, Fr. John Gallagher became pastor. Carpeting in church was replaced and new chairs were purchased for the sanctuary. Rectory electric service was updated. Windows behind altar were uncovered. Parish records were computerized.

1990 Fr. V. Anthony Dolski was administrator from October 30 to November 28. Fr. John Harper was appointed administrator on November 28 and became pastor in March 1991.

1991 Bell tower and steeple were repaired and painted. Rectory boiler replaced. Portions of three stained glass windows repaired. Windows in sanctuary resealed. School boiler replaced. Began monthly Healing Mass. Sr. Kathleen Schlaefer became Director, Health Care Ministry and Coordinator of Adult Education.

1991-92 Church renovated. Liturgical changes included moving Blessed Sacrament to side chapel, new lectern and microphone installed. Entrances modified for handicapped accessibility.

1992-93 Re-roof gym, Huron Street wing and convent.

1992 Church and school insulated. Parish office moved from rectory to school in October. Asbestos removed when gym floor was replaced.

1993 Courtyard repaved. Christian Ladies' kitchen updated with additional cabinets, new refrigerator and commercial sink. Boiler replaced in convent.

1994 Christ Risen statue carved by Igor Vasilijev of Latvia unveiled at the Easter Vigil Mass. Asbestos removed and floor replaced in cafeteria.

1994 De Pere Parish Study meeting – parishes from East and West side of De Pere discuss the future need of the community and the shortage of priests.

1994 Pastoral Plan for the Care of Parishes in the City of De Pere issued by Diocese of Green Bay recommends that St. Mary plan for the building of new, larger church at a new location.

1995 Open forum with parishioners was held to discuss building a new church. 16.55 acres of land was purchased from Clayton and Gladys Bildings. Birschbach & Associates, Ltd. hired as architect.

1996 Advisory Board was established to initiate preliminary floor plan. Fund raiser program set up.

1997 New church and rectory construction started. Groundbreaking for new church with Bishop Banks, Fr. Hietpas and Fr. Jack as dignitaries. Miron Construction served as general contractor. The stained glass windows, marble panels form the altar, crucifix, statue of the Risen Christ, tabernacle, statues of Mary and Joseph and Stations of the Cross were taken from the old church and used in the new church.

1998 The last Mass to decommission the old St. Mary church was celebrated at 9:00 a.m. on March 29th. The new church was dedicated by Bishop Robert Banks at 2:00 p.m. the same day.

1999 Old church razed by Gauthier Construction. School playground expanded.

2000 Completing the Dream Campaign begun (3-year) to fund the bell tower, carport, and debt relief.

2001 New bell tower and carport were constructed. All-Timate construction served as general contractor. Bells ring before all Masses; the Angelus is rung at noon and 6 p.m. The first bell to ring is from the original school built in 1882. The second bell to ring is from the old St. Mary church bell tower. The third and fourth bells are new and were cast in Holland. The new bell tower was dedicated on December 8th.

2002 Wrap-It-Up Campaign started to help reduce the debt.

2004 In December, St. Mary commemorated its 135th Anniversary.