

ST. ANN'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, JANESVILLE, MN

The Church is named after St. Ann, the Mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Ann and her husband, Joachim, were of the tribe of Judah of the house of David and lived in Nazareth. StAnn is the patron of all Christian Mothers; her feast is July 26th.⁸ To have a church built in the 19th century that is still in use is a rarity and should be considered very special.⁷

History of St. Ann's Parish

The history of St. Ann's Catholic Church is a part of the history of southern Minnesota. The first settlements of any size in [this] area were located in Faribault, Owatonna, and Mankato with Faribault being the closest Catholic settlement. In 1856, Fr. George Keller organized a Catholic group at St. Mary's in rural Waseca County and held the first services at the home of John Lynch.⁴ Another reference states the first services were at the home of Andrew Lynch.¹⁰ For some years thereafter, the Catholics worshiped in a nearby school house. Fr. Keller also visited the "old town" (name given to the first Janesville settlement), saying Mass for the Catholic settlers in private homes and in Okaman, a village to the east of Lake Elysian which existed only a few years.⁴

St. Ann's parish traces its history back to 1856, when a colony of sturdy Irish immigrants settled in what is now the northwest part of Waseca County. A church was founded in Iosco in 1866 and this church supplied the needs of the church community until after the founding of the new village of Janesville in 1869. In 1867 Father John McDermott, then stationed at St. Mary's, Waseca, attended to the spiritual needs of this group. He was followed by Father Bauman, Father Cullen, and Father Swift [saying Mass alternately on the second and fourth Sundays of the month].⁴

In 1874, Father Joseph Hermon was pastor at St. Mary's [in Waseca] and at that time St. Ann's congregation was organized. The first services were held in Jennison's Hall in Janesville, and in 1876 the first church of St. Ann's was built [of wood] in Janesville.⁴ On June 4, 1877 the cornerstone was laid by Bishop Ireland of St. Paul [and the same day he held confirmation services]....[By 1879, the Church was fairly well completed at a cost of about \$6,000. The chartering families included Cahill, Sullivan, Jewison, Burke, Mulcahey, Lilly, Vaughan, Joyce, Hugo, Murphy, Moonan, Campion, Keeley, Kenny, Gorman, Larkin, Glynn, Hogan and Bradish among others.^{6 8} The first child baptized in the new church was Mrs. Anna Burns.^{4, 8}

Father Hermon remained pastor until 1881. Father P. Diagnault was appointed the first [resident] pastor of St. Ann's, and he remained until 1885 when Father O'Neil came. During his stay, he built up the financial condition of the church and made St. Ann's congregation a happy and contented people. Father Alexander Christi, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish of Waseca, said Mass from Easter Sunday until August 1, 1888 when Father Patrick Ryan came to be pastor. It was in the year of 1889 that the Diocese of Winona was created.⁴

The sign at the St. Ann's Church cemetery indicates the cemetery was established in 1886. The first tombstone was placed in 1882 over the resting place of Miss McElroy [clipping from May 9, 1882, Argus]. On May 3, 1887, Timothy and Mary Sullivan deeded a tract of land two miles southeast of the town to St. Ann's Church for a cemetery at a price of \$300 [as per Warranty Deed, County of Waseca]. The statuary in the cemetery is a scene of the crucifixion of Jesus with the Blessed Mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, and John the Beloved standing below the cross.¹⁰ Five priests are buried at St. Ann's Cemetery: Rev. Edmund Matthew Ryan (1851-1902), Fr. Joseph Hermon (1835-1905), Fr. Patrick J. Fox (1858-1916), Msgr. Frank T. English (1876-1960), Fr. Francis Michael Glynn (1920-2001).¹²

April 29, 1890, Father Ryan's residence was torn down and plans were drawn for a new Catholic parsonage. It was built just south of the present site by July of that year. In 1903 he was replaced by Father Riordan who was succeeded by Father Patrick J. Fox two years later who remained until his death in 1916. His dying request was that his remains be laid in St. Ann's Cemetery as close as possible to those of Father Hermon, the pioneer apostolic missionary of the district.^{4 8}

Father Thomas J. McCarthy served the parish as administrator until the appointment of Father Stephen Condron a year later. Father Condron gave emphasis to enlarging the church property entrusted to his care. In mid October of 1923, the work was started to brick the exterior of the church. The church was cut in two and the front end was moved so that 50 feet could be added in between. The entrance to the church is the original one. The basement was also dug at this time, as it had just been a hole under the church previously. Parishioners with horses and slushers did the work of digging the basement. The work was completed the following spring at a cost of about \$35,000. The church would now seat many more worshippers.⁴

May 29, 1924 will long be remembered by the members of St. Ann's Catholic Church of Janesville, as it marks the most important event in the history of the parish, the dedication of their beautiful church. At the conclusion of the [pontifical] High Mass which was assisted by clergy from parishes in the diocese, the Bishop congratulated the parishioners of the church upon their great achievement.⁴

The new church, a fine example of Gothic architecture, presented a substantial and imposing appearance. The exterior was of pressed brick veneer with Kasota stone trimmings. The building was 110 feet in length by 60 feet in width. Three brick towers adorned the front, the main central tower rising to a height of 80 feet housed the bell. The central tower was surmounted by a large golden cross with gilded outlines that could be seen from a long distance.⁴ The lofty, arched ceiling, the artistic stained glass windows, the handsomely carved altars, and the rich oaken pews, all combine[d] to visualize the grandeur and dignity of the house of God. On the east side was a broad stairway which led to the dining hall or auditorium in the basement where several hundred could gather. At the south end of the dining hall was a large and well arranged kitchen, a furnace room and coal bin.⁶

After Father Condrón's death, Father John Parkinson was assigned as pastor of St. Ann's Church. Under his supervision, the present rectory was built. In August, 1927, the parsonage was bought and moved to a lot on East Third Street. The house was moved onto its foundation in September and Father Parkinson resided in the house while the new one was being built. The new rectory was finished by Christmas time. A barn once stood where the present garage is located. It was used to keep a cow and horses. The horses were used to take Father to Losco to say Mass.⁴

In 1941, Fr. Frank T. English assumed the pastorate becoming Monsignor in 1959 and served the parish until his death in 1960. He is buried at St. Ann's Cemetery. In 1961 the six room Catechetical school was built [at a cost of \$83,552. The St. Ann's Elementary School was dedicated by Bishop Edward A. Fitzgerald on October 12, 1961¹; however, due to shortages of staff, the school never opened and was converted for use as a parish center and location for catechism classes.⁸

In 1966 the original wood altars were removed from the church [and were replaced with a main altar facing the congregation]. In July 1974 Father Sullivan was replaced by Father Clayton J. Haberman. This was the year the parish auctions as fundraisers were started along with re-establishing the church dinner. One of the first projects undertaken was to repair the exterior of the rectory and church which included a new roof on the rectory. Work on the school included taking out a wall in one of the classrooms to make a large dining hall.⁴ The church interior was completely renovated in 1976 using Kasota stone for the altar, baptismal font, and side altars for statues, and an open stairway was installed in the front entrance of the church. During the renovation, Mass was held at St. Ann's parish center.^{1 4 10} In 1977 the kitchen was removed from the church basement to the parish center. Renovations to the rectory were done in 1980 and 1982. It was also in 1982 that a new constitution was drawn up for the Parish Council so that there would be more lay leadership and involvement such as in religious education and celebration of the Mass.⁴

Since that time, there have been many projects completed to improve the school, parish house and the church including the reshingling of the parish house and church. Just as generations past have done, parishioners continue to be committed to their faith, worship, fellowship, and to the betterment of their church.^{9 10}

[In July 1998] a memorial flower garden and a marker for the unborn was placed fronting First Street by the Knights of Columbus and a retaining wall was built. In the church, air conditioning was installed, the stained glass windows were refurbished and protective glass added; the roof was re-shingled and a lift for the infirm was added in the Sacristy. Additionally, a canopy was put over the side entrance, a gathering area made under the balcony, new furnaces installed and restrooms updated.⁹

A retaining wall was placed on the west side of the church [in 2001]. Additional property [to the south of the church] had been purchased [in 1989 and 2007] for a parking lot [and that was completed in 2016].⁹

In 2006 a new chapel, known as The Chapel of Divine Mercy, and parish office was constructed adjoining the east side of the church.¹

In 2015, due to the shortage of priests in the diocese, the priest of St. Ann's Church was also assigned to serve the parishes of Waldorf and New Richland, namely St. Joseph's Church and All Saints Church. This resulted in only Mass on Sunday for St. Ann's Church and shared office staff support. The new alignment was referred to as the "Communion of Saints Catholic Community". Then in 2023 another realignment occurred combining St. Ann's Church with All Saints Church of Madison Lake, and Immaculate Conception Church of St. Clair.

The St. Ann's Church parish center was demolished in April 2019 and groundbreaking at this site for a new parish center was held in June 2019. The new 6,000 square foot parish center was completed in 2022 at a cost of \$906,500 and serves as a gathering place for social events, fundraisers, and catechetical classes. The current number of parishioners is about 300 families and it takes everyone to make these improvements happen.

Brass Bell

The brass bell, which was housed in the central tower of the church and had been rung to signal the start of Masses and announce the Angelus since 1923⁷ was made by J.G. Stuckstede & Bros. foundry, St. Louis, Missouri, and was donated by the St. Ann's altar boys 1920-1923.¹² The use of the bell was discontinued in 1976 and replaced with a carillon system in 2001. The last bell ringer was John Janson. The bell tower structure was deemed unsafe, and, [in 2018] the bell was removed and is now located inside the entrance to the parish center.⁷

Stained Glass Windows

Beautiful stained glass windows can be found throughout the church.¹² Specific information about the windows can be found in a separate document.

Statues and Other Icons

Statues of the Blessed Mother and of St. Joseph that stand on either side of the main altar have been in the church for years, certainly before the 1940s. Two kneeling angel statues, one on each side of the tabernacle, were replaced in 2005. Other long-time icons are the Stations of the Cross which can be found on the east and west walls of the nave. A statue of St. Ann is next to the lighted church sign which was erected in 1995 on the lawn on the north side. There is also a statue of St. Ann located in the parking lot flower garden that has a granite marker and was donated by the Knights of Columbus in memory of abortion victims. Next to the steps leading to the choir loft is a statue of St. Ann with Mary as a young girl; this was donated in memory of Dr. Raymond and Hilda Hottinger. An anonymous donor provided a statue of the Lady of Fatima which is located in the niche near the lift. A framed tapestry of St. Ann hangs in the front vestibule and was donated by Fr. Michael Cronin. A picture of Mary with the Christ Child, in memory of Harold and Marian Sexton, is at the top of the steps going into the sacristy area.

Parish Prayer

“Gracious God, we keep forgetting all of those who lived before us. We keep forgetting those who lived and worked in this community. We keep forgetting those who prayed and offered Mass and received the Sacraments in our Church before we were born. We keep forgetting what our fathers [and mothers] have done for us. We commit the sin Lord, of assuming that everything begins with us. We enjoy freedoms which we have not earned. We worship in Churches which we did not build. We live in communities that we did not establish. Make us grateful for our heritage. Turn our minds to those who lived in another day and under different circumstances, until we are aware of their faith and work. We need to feel our oneness, not only with those of recent generations who lived here, but those of every generation in every place, whose faith and works have enriched our lives. We need to learn from them in order that our faith will be as vital, our commitment as sincere, our worship as alive, and our fellowship as deep as many of the devout and faithful who lived in another time and place. Amen.”²

References

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2. Church of St. Ann, Janesville, Minnesota, 2015 [Parish Directory]
3. “Father P.J. Fox Passes Away on Friday Last”, Mar. 22, 1916, Janesville Argus.
4. History of St. Ann’s Parish, November 1985, St. Ann’s CCW-Unit #7.
5. “Janesville Parish is More than 110 Years Old”, January, 1987, The Courier.

6. “New Janesville Catholic Church Dedicated”, May 29, 1924, Waseca Herald, Waseca, Minnesota
7. St. Ann’s Church bulletin, 2013 [from statement by Fr. Klein]
8. St. Ann’s Catholic Church, Janesville, Minnesota, 1985 [Parish Directory]
9. St. Ann’s Catholic Church, Janesville, Minnesota, 125 Years as a Parish, 1876-2001.
10. St. Ann’s Catholic Church, Janesville, Minnesota, Parish Directory, August 1995.
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