



**Immaculate Conception Catholic Church**  
Auburn, Indiana





# The Creation of Our Church

## The First Eighty-Seven Years



**Rev. August Young**  
1871 - 1874

Father August Young visited Auburn and celebrated Mass in the home of the Engelbert Ashley family, on August 5, 1871. The families of Engelbert Ashley, Jules Beuret, Justin Girardot, Charles Beugnot, Benjamin Goodman, William McIntyre, Jacob Hollinger, Stephen Girardot and Patrick Murphy gathered for the first service. For two years, services were held in the Ashley residence. In the meantime a committee consisting of Engelbert Ashley, Jules Beuret and Justin Girardot purchased lots facing on the corner of Fourth Street and Railroad Street (now Indiana Avenue).

### 1874 - 1912

On June 1, 1874 the foundation was laid for a small frame structure 30 ft. x 50 ft. Bishop Joseph Dwenger dedicated the church on October 18, 1874. It was erected at a cost of \$3,000 and served as a place of worship until August, 1912. On October 19, a day after the dedication, the parish was free of debt. The priest's residence adjoining the church was purchased on April 15, 1874 at a cost of \$1,900.

By order of the bishop, Father Young changed his place of residence to Garrett in November 1886 but continued to administer the affairs of the parish and to say Mass once a month in the church in Auburn until November 1891.

On August 30, 1881, four and a half acres of ground were purchased for \$543.54 to be used as a cemetery for the parish.

### 1912 - 1958

In August 1912 excavation for a new church building was started. A concrete foundation was put in and a roomy basement supplied for the whole church. Tiers of cement blocks raised the superstructure of the church about five feet above ground level. The old frame structure was utilized because of its splendid material.

The outside of the frame structure was finished in stucco, believed to be the only church building of its kind in the state. A steeple sixty-five feet high surmounted by a gilded cross of four and a half feet added much to the beauty of the exterior.

The remodeling included a furnace, a basement, new oak pews, a new Packard organ with pipe organ effect, and a beautiful altar. Red velvet carpet covered the sanctuary.



*Immaculate Conception Church Interior (photo taken in 1914)*





# 50<sup>th</sup> JUBILEE

Year 1958 - 2008



*Immaculate Conception Church • 4th Street, Auburn, IN*

In anticipation of an increase of parishioners and feeling the importance of having the Catholic Church in the center of town, property was purchased on Van Buren Street, between 10th and 11th streets in 1929 for future use. It was purchased with the intention of building a new church and converting an apartment building into a two-classroom school and residence for the teaching sisters. People at the time referred to the apartment building as "the Catholic apartments".

Due to the steady growth of the parish, the property was deemed insufficient and sold in June 1947.

Twelve and one-half acres of ground on East Seventh Street were later purchased from the Madden

estate to serve as a site for the future buildings of the parish. In 1955 the families in the Immaculate Conception parish numbered 235. Weekly catechism classes were attended by 180 grade school children conducted by Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters.

Recognizing the need of new parish facilities, Fr. Matthew J. Lange and councilmen Harry Girardot, J. Wayne Beuret, G. L. Foley, Gerry Souder and Anthony Lemish began to plan a new church and school. Realizing that "Unless the Lord builds, we build in vain," a two weeks Mission was conducted.

On May 6, 1956 an Expansion Fund Campaign was launched to raise funds for the new parish

buildings. Six weeks later the parishioners had pledged \$90,000 to be paid over a period of two years.

On November 4, 1956 the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart at Joliet, Illinois promised to staff the new school beginning in September 1958.

Permission was granted by Bishop Leo A. Pursley to proceed with the building program and contracts were awarded. On August 4, 1957 ground was broken for the new building to house the church, school and parish hall, costing approximately \$269,000. The cornerstone was laid on November 4, 1957.

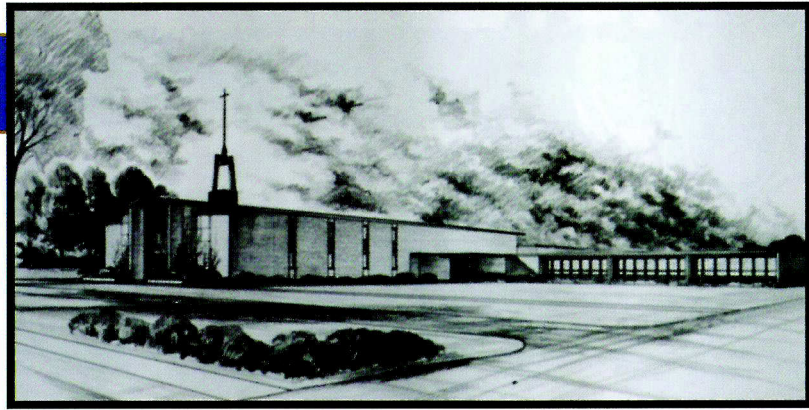
Building Committee members were Robert Cook, George Kelly, Edward Kokenge, Mel Parker, John Rountree and Park Roussey and Councilmen Girardot, Foley, Beuret, Souder and Lemish.

The present Immaculate Conception Church is a beautiful modern brick building that was erected expressly for the worship of God. This certainly was beyond any expectation Rev. August Young could have had on August 5, 1871 when nine families gathered in the Engelbert Ashley home to assist in the first Mass offered in Auburn. The former church on Fourth Street and Indiana Avenue was sold and no longer serves as a place of worship. The building, somewhat changed now, still stands at the corner of 4th and Indiana Avenue.





## Our Church Through These Past 50 Years



*Artist Rendering of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church*



*Ground Breaking Ceremonies (August 4, 1957)*

In May 1956, Pastor Matthew J. Lange assembled a group of dedicated councilmen and parish volunteers to address the needs of a growing Immaculate Conception parish in Auburn. Most agreed the parish had outgrown the small stucco church on Fourth Street and there had long been a desire on the part of Catholic parents for a parochial school to educate the more than 180 elementary school children. At the time, the only religious instruction the children received was a weekly hour of released time from the public schools.

There were a myriad of decisions and details to be worked out before the plans and financing were approved by the Bishop and construction commenced. A six-week campaign was successful in

raising the needed funds to receive diocesan approval. Every family in the parish was personally contacted by a fellow parishioner to explain the proposed building program and to solicit pledges to build and furnish the new church and school. Thanks to the generosity of ICC parishioners, the funds raised far exceeded the original goal.

A twelve and-a-half acre parcel of land in the 500 block of East Seventh Street had been purchased from the Madden estate in 1947 with the express purpose of providing for future church expansion. Contracts for the new church were awarded to Humbrecht Associates,

architect and Weigand Construction, general contractor.

Groundbreaking for the new church, school and parish hall was August 4, 1957. A Dedication mass was held Sept. 21, 1958 with the Most Rev. Bishop Leo A. Pursley presiding. Seven other priests were present, including Rt. Rev. Msgr. Thomas L. Durkin who had served the parish from 1935 to 1947.

Both the interior and exterior of the new church were designed in modern contemporary style. This was in stark contrast to the elaborate interior of the Fourth Street church. Seating capacity was 480 on the main floor plus a second-floor choir loft which housed a state-of-the-art pipe organ.



*Immaculate Conception Church Interior*





# 50 JUBILEE

Year 1958 - 2008



*Stations of the Cross Artwork "Photo by Sharon D. Little"*

The back Sanctuary wall drew one's eye to the massive terra cotta-colored masonry blocks as a background for the beautiful Botticino and Red Antique marble altar, framed by sidewalls of paneled walnut.

In addition to the life-size statues of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, the Stations of the Cross were also brought from the old church. Father Lange, with the help of parishioners, reframed them and added lights, which brought out their natural beauty. These precious treasures were hand painted on copper, a meticulous, high-quality process, and are still in place today.

The main altar is a combination of classic Italian marbles. Rising high above the altar is a hand-carved wooden corpus attached to a walnut cross, making it the focal point of the main altar.

A walnut canopy is suspended above the altar decorated with a dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit.

Skylights were built into the roof providing natural lighting so that in daytime the sanctuary was adequately lighted without the use of artificial lights.

The tabernacle, made of genuine bronze, was anchored through the marble altar table as a safeguard against theft.

The stately marble communion rail with its burnished bronze gates was later removed in accordance with other liturgy modifications.

It wasn't until June 1961, that the classic stained-glass windows replaced the original clear glass ones. Only the center panel was stained glass with art-colored glass in subtle hues above and below. Particularly on sunny days, these

richly-colored windows cast an air of reverence over the church.

Major changes in church liturgy came about as a result of Pope John XXIII convening the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in October, 1962. In December, 1965 following Pope John XXIII's unexpected death, Pope Paul VI, his successor, issued the edict that Catholics around the world hailed because of the many laity-friendly revisions to Church law as well as to the liturgy. Among the most dramatic changes Vatican II brought about was turning the altar around so the priest faced the people. This was an effort to draw peoples' attention more intimately into the liturgy. Observing the priest change bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood brought about a deeper reverence for the Consecration.

Another sweeping change was removal of the communion railing in 1980. With that change, an alternative to receiving the Eucharist on the tongue began and continues today, that of receiving the host in the hand standing at the base of the altar. In the mid-70s, lay parishioners were enlisted to distribute Christ's Body and Blood, increasing lay participation in the Mass.

The identifying outdoor landmark at the entrance of the new church was the beautiful Blessed Virgin mosaic, fabricated in Italy of small pieces of Venetian glass. Panels of Indiana limestone framed the mural. It depicts Mary, the Immaculate Conception, with her





## Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

AUBURN, INDIANA



*Immaculate Conception Church Mosaic  
Made in Italy (photo taken in 1961)*

hands extended in welcome to all who enter the church.

In addition to the new church, the dream of a Catholic grade school was also realized. The school opened its doors for the first time on Sept. 2, 1958, offering grades 1 through 4 with enrollment totaling 90 students. The rooms were large, capable of holding up to 50 students. In 1959, Grade 5 was added; in 1960, the addition of Grade 6 brought enrollment to 141 students. By 1962, all eight grades were being taught in five classrooms. However, in 1967 due to space constraints, grades 7 and 8 were dropped. The Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart at Joliet, Illinois staffed the school until shortly before it closed permanently in the early 70s. The prohibitive cost of hiring lay teachers in the absence of the Sisters was the primary cause.

While the Sisters' convent was also completed in 1958, it wasn't until 1962 that a new rectory was added at a cost of \$40,000, completing the building program.

The old church on Indiana Ave. and 4th Street (formerly Railroad Street) which had served Immaculate Conception parishioners for 84 years, was sold at public auction on Sept. 17, 1962. It was renovated and made into apartments.

Building costs for the new church and school totaled approximately \$269,000. In 1987, the debt on the church and school was formally retired while Father Mel Herber served the parish.

For the past 30+ years, Jim Garman, head of Maintenance / Custodian, has ably handled numerous remodeling projects as well as the day-to-day upkeep of the three buildings and grounds. A few of the updates included adding 100 spaces to the parking lot in 1973 and again in

1988 when the main lot was extended; building an addition to the Convent for a garage and storage space in 1974; refinished and restained church pews in 1985; air conditioning of the church and school in 1993; a new church / school roof in the mid 90s; and in 2004, repainting and replacing carpet throughout the church.

Currently, Immaculate Conception Catholic Church has a total of 480 families, with registered members totaling 1,297. By comparison, in 1956 when the drive for a new church was initiated, there were just 235 families. From its humble roots of eight families who gathered in an East Seventh Street residence in 1871, to an active, thriving parish that is privileged to worship in this modern, classic church home, we give thanks and gratitude to those with the foresight and vision to plan and build for the future which for us is the present.



*Our Catholic School - Opened September 2, 1958 (grades 1-4)*





50<sup>Year</sup> JUBILEE  
1958 - 2008

## Our Parish Firsts ...



*First Class of 1st Communicants - October 26, 1958*



*First Christmas in our new church*



*First Baptism  
Anthony Harold Stafford  
October 1958*

*First Funeral  
Arch L. Hooker  
January 22, 1959*







*First Wedding - September 20, 1958*



*First Class of 8th Grade Graduates - May 1964*





**50** JUBILEE  
*Year* 1958 - 2008

## Father Lange

- Born September 21, 1912 in Chicago, IL
- Ordained June 11, 1938  
Bishop John F. Noll in Ft. Wayne, IN
- First Assignment  
July, 1938 St. Ann Church, Monterey, IN
- Retired July, 1982 from St. Michael the Archangel Church, Waterloo, IN after 12 years

In 1956, Fr. Matthew J. Lange spearheaded the campaign to build a new church, school, rectory and convent.

Fr. Lange, with the help of ICC parishioners, made the frames for the Stations of the Cross brought from the Fourth Street Church in 1958. Throughout his priesthood, Fr. Lange's primary form of relaxation was woodworking. He also made all the picture frames for the

pictures of pastors in the St. Michael's Parish Hall, in Waterloo. He hand-crafted and gave away scores of wooden crucifixes made in his workshop. After retirement, he also enjoyed cross-stitching. Among his favorites was a large canvas of St. Francis which still hangs in St. Michael's rectory office.

Fr. Lange was very focused, efficient and organized as



**Rev. Matthew J. Lange**

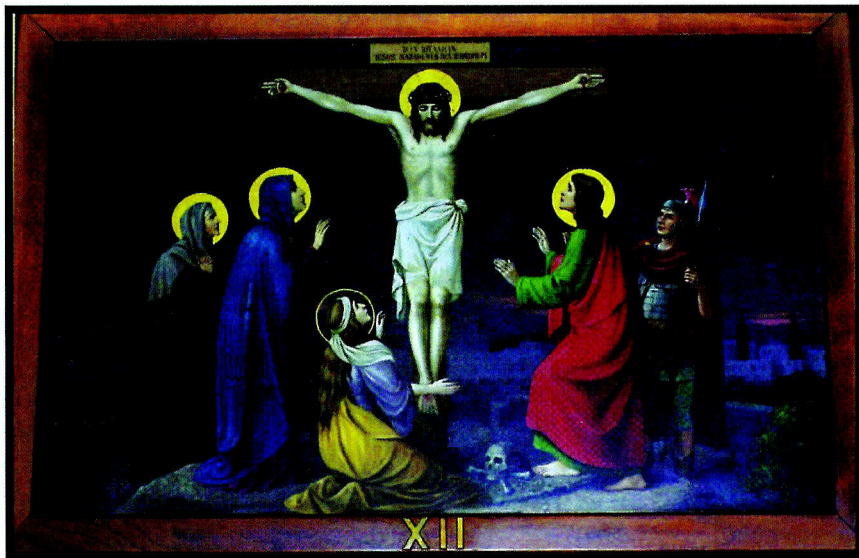
**1954 - 1963**

**1967 - 1970**

evidenced by the hugely successful fund-raising campaign he conducted in 1956 for a new church and school. The goal for the six-week drive was \$60,000; but when the totals were tallied, they had surpassed their goal by \$30,000.

Only a "take charge" person could successfully promote the dream of a new church and school, conduct the fund-raising campaign, get the necessary financing and work well with all the contractors. Fr. Lange would be described as a dedicated, "take charge" person and the Immaculate Conception parishioners are the beneficiaries of his success.

After 61 years of devoted service as a priest, Fr. Lange passed away December 30, 1999, at the age of 87 at his Waterloo home across from St. Michael Church and is buried in St. Michael Cemetery behind the church.



*Stations of the Cross frames were built by Father Lange & parishioners*