

AN EARLY HISTORY
OF
ST. VINCENT DEPAUL CATHOLIC
CHURCH
1835-1935

Researched and Compiled
By
Sister Joan Luterman and Sally Dreho Bl Bullock
June 2005

An Early History of
St. Vincent DePaul Catholic Church
1835-1935

"Fine Stone Church of St. Vincent DePaul stands where pioneers made humble the beginning. Devoted work of priests and people."

"In a commanding position amid the hills of Lawrence County, its spire rising high above all other buildings in this thriving "Stone City", stands the beautiful Gothic pile which bears the name of St. Vincent DePaul. This stately edifice was once described by Bishop Chatard as one of the most beautiful churches in Indiana in a public address at Bedford in which he complimented the congregation on the beauty of their place of worship. But the church property is far more beautiful and imposing now that Father Lannert, the present (1912) pastor, has added a splendid school and a handsome rectory, all built of the same material as the church, rock-faced Oolitic limestone. These two new buildings adjoining the church are practically completed and the entire improvement will not cost more than \$24,000. Any judge of building and architecture would think the school and rectory cheap at \$40,000 and the general feeling of all competent authorities who view the buildings is that Father Lannert and the members of the building committee have done remarkably well in the work they have completed. The moderate cost was made possible by the fact that Bedford is the center of the great stone industry and the cost of transportation was practically eliminated."taken from Indiana Catholic Newspaper, 8-9-1912

EARLY HISTORY

According to Daniel Driscoll, one of the pioneers of Bedford and St. Vincent's who was somewhat of a historian and who has left considerable written matter on the subject, there were Catholics in Bedford as early as 1835. The town had been founded only ten years previous to that time. Prior to 1825 the county seat was at Palestine, four miles south, but the location was so unhealthy that the legislature appointed a committee to relocate the county seat. The new site was selected and they named it "Bedford", on the suggestion of Joseph Rawlins, a prominent and prosperous businessman who had come to Lawrence County from Bedford County, Tennessee, in 1812.

In the early 1850's, Father Patrick Murphy, a trustee of Indiana State University and pastor of the Catholic Church in Bloomington, rode by horseback from place to place to attend to the spiritual needs of the early settlers, many of them Irishmen who were pioneer railroad builders who cut no small part in the early development of Indiana, as well as a few Germans and French. Father Murphy was much beloved by these hard-working frontiersmen. The first Mass was celebrated in the home of John Johnson and then in various sites around the town, including the lobby of the county courthouse.

Tradition has it that Dr. Ben Newland, an early, popular Bedford physician, was instrumental in making it possible for the courthouse to be used by the Catholic people for their church services. Dr. Newland, while not a Catholic, had a high regard for the Catholic people and proved his friendship to the church on numerous occasions.

Then, from 1860 to 1864 came Father Francis Louis Neyron, a famous French missionary priest who was a most saintly and devout man. Prior to embracing his sacred calling, he had served as a surgeon in the French army and had won a high place in that profession.

The Indiana Catholic Newspaper quotes George C. Heitger, a prominent merchant of Bedford, as follows: "This great missionary priest stayed at my father's house many times. I came here with my parents in 1856 from Louisville. We had witnessed the bloody Know-nothing riots that broke out there and in other cities about that time. When Father Neyron visited us here to take up the work begun by Father Murphy, it was soon discovered that, in addition to being a priest, he was a great physician. His skill was demonstrated in many very serious cases, and people of all denominations sought him in serious illness. There were many calls for his services, which were given without charge. Father Neyron came about twice a month as Father Murphy had been doing. In 1864 the congregation numbered about 30 families."

Father Neyron's tenure was during trying times. The nation was broken in two and brother fought against brother. Father Neyron bound up wounds and treated epidemics of fever and "winter fever" (as pneumonia was commonly called). His services as a physician were

frequently so needed that his ministerial visits every other week sometimes overlapped.

After Father Neyron, for a short time came Father Joseph O'Reilly of Greencastle. The records are not clear, but it may have been that Father O'Reilly was called upon to say Mass in Bedford when Father Neyron was detained in other communities as surgeon and physician. Again, George Heitger is quoted: *"I have a very distinct recollection of Father O'Reilly. He used to say Mass in Peter Francis' hall, the first public meeting place in the town. Mr. Francis was a merchant and had a hall over his store. He was also a member of the congregation. We boys used to meet the priest when he came to town and pass the word, 'Father O'Reilly is here; there will be Mass tomorrow.' When he came twice a month one of the duties of myself and some other boys was to arrange the altar in the hall and prepare for the services."*

PURCHASE OF METHODIST CHURCH

Later in 1864 and early 1865, Rev. Philip Doyle attended Bedford from North Vernon and advocated the purchase of a lot and the building of a church. The Bedford Catholics agreed with this plan. Father Doyle stayed at the home of George Heitger, father of the Mr. Heitger who has been quoted above. As a result of Father Doyle's suggestion, a lot was secured in 1864 in the rear of the Methodist Church, which was a brick building located at the corner of High and Culbertson Streets, what is now known as 18th and I Streets. The Catholic congregation bought their building material, moved it to the lot, and began to lay the foundation just west of where the present Catholic Church stands.

Just at this time, the Methodists decided to purchase the Presbyterian Church located on the corner of 14th and K Streets and made a proposition to sell their church to the Catholics, who stopped their building operations pending the deal.

In the meantime, the Rev. C. John Mougin, a French priest, had succeeded Father Doyle, and he alternated with Father Theodore Mattingly in charge of the Bedford mission. Father Mougin was instrumental in closing the deal and the Methodists sold their church to the Catholics for \$500 and the building material that lay on the lot.

The congregation was overjoyed at this happy turn of events. Now, instead of a building program, they were ready to move into the already-completed Methodist Church. Father Doyle journeyed to Bedford from North Vernon, bringing his entire choir to take part in the dedication program, which was no small feat in those years.

Church records show that Angelina Tyree (grandmother of Lottie Pierce, who is the oldest member of the parish in 2005 at the age of 98) was the first child to be baptized in the new church.

From 1868 to 1879 Reverends Jules Clement, Henry Kessing, and Leo Burkhart served successively as pastor.

Father John Unverzagt arrived in 1879. He was a progressive man and one devoted to the thought of a seemly place of worship. He had the windows, made square when built by the Methodist people, properly arched. While he introduced many improvements in the exterior and interior of the building, the congregation was steadily growing and there was beginning to be a great need for a larger church. A parsonage was purchased and improvements made amounted to about \$1,200. Empty lots to the north of the church were purchased with the thought in mind of building a school. Father Unverzagt's days were very busy, but his building plans came second to the diligent care of his flock, visiting Catholics in Stinesville, Bloomfield, and the settlement near Oolitic known as Dark Hollow. Such trips were made on horseback.

Father F. X. Logan served from 1883 to 1885.

Rev. Theodore J. Mattingly served from October 1885 to 1887.

NEW CHURCH BUILT

Father M. H. Bogemann, who became the first full-time, but still non-resident, pastor in 1887, was a noted architect and builder. He had designed several buildings in Bloomington, including IU's Kirkwood Hall, the old Monroe County Courthouse, and the old St. Charles Church.

By 1893 Father Bogemann had drawn the plans for a beautiful church in Bedford and was ready to begin construction. He appealed to the people to help and every family responded with such donations of money as they could, and as well as they could with the labor. It was in this way that the small, brick church was torn down to make space for the new structure, the stone was hauled to the building site, and the church erected.

The magnificent new church cost only \$22,000. Most of the material and labor were donated. The limestone was quarried from Oolitic. The church measured 127x54 feet with a tower elevation 150 feet above the sidewalk. (Later, when lightning struck the tower and it was demolished, the steeple was replaced to a height of 107 feet.)

Construction of the church was underway when the Columbian Exposition opened in Chicago in May, 1893, where Father Bogemann first saw the stained-glass windows that were destined to become the ones used for the new church. The windows had been made in Belgium. It is believed that each window cost about \$300, paid by individual donors. There are 12 windows in the nave and 23 others of various sizes, from high in the tower to over the Sanctuary and back in the Sacristy. Tributes to the donors of the windows are to Father Bogemann, to "visiting friends", in memory of our parents Joseph & Constantia Heitger, in memory of Dennis O'Connell, to Michael O'Connell and family, in memory of Henry C. and Gerhard Schmitte, in memory of Daniel Driscoll, to Maria May, in memory of John Johnson, in memory of John Broxterman.

On July 24, 1894, the handsome new stone church was dedicated, the date being slightly more than a few days past the thirty years since the first dedication service was held in the little church building purchased from the Methodist congregation. Father Bogemann served as celebrant of the High Mass and many priests were present. On this same day, the bishop confirmed a class of thirty-nine.

Father Bogemann received a leave of absence for study in Rome, and during his absence Father Edward Quade served as pastor. Father Bogemann returned and in 1902 concluded 15 years as pastor of the church.

Father Theodore J. Mattingly returned as rector and became the first resident pastor of St. Vincent DePaul Church. He remained until 1904 when Father Joseph Lannert of Evansville came to Bedford as rector.

Father Lannert served for eleven years and it was during this time that planning a parochial school began. Father Lannert always recognized the value of Catholic education. He contracted with the Sisters of St. Francis from Oldenburg to staff the school, which was located west of the church on 18th Street. This building served not only as a school, but also as a residence for the nuns. Thirty-nine pupils were enrolled.

In 1912 a new school was constructed, again of Oolitic limestone, and located on I Street. The Peter Filion home, across the alley and adjacent to the new school, was purchased as a residence for the sisters.

Father Lannert helped organize and establish the Knights of Columbus Council in Bedford.

With his parochial duties and the mission at Oolitic, Father Lannert was a very busy pastor, and it was felt that Bedford had become of such importance that one priest had far more than enough to do. In 1915, the first assistant to the pastor was assigned to St. Vincent's.

The *Indiana Catholic Newspaper*, 1912, ran the following story:

***"BEDFORD'S PAROCHIAL SCHOOL
Large Attendance Marked the Open-
ing and the Number of Pupils
Steadily Increased***

"The large attendance at the parochial school shows how well the Catholics of Bedford and the vicinity appreciate the advantages of a thorough Christian education. The school was started by Rev. Father Lannert on September 8, 1908. The work of educating the young in a Catholic school was begun in a seven-room cottage and the pastor selected the Sisters of St. Francis from Oldenburg to take up the good work. It was an innovation for Bedford, but parents and children fell in line with the project.....All grades are taught in the school, and beginning with September 1 of this year a high school course will be added."

"In the new school there will be splendid equipment and every modern convenience for a first-class educational institution."

Father Shea and Father Eisenmann served the parish for brief intervals and were followed in 1916 by Father William P. Garrity who remained as pastor until his death on April 28, 1935. During his long tenure, Father Garrity became a most beloved pastor. Speaking in tribute to Father Garrity, Bishop Chatard said, "In twenty-five years, Father Garrity has been faithful to his trust and has flung out a fortress of the church. In accordance with this, his friends have gathered to break an alabaster box of thanks and praise."

REMODELING OF CHURCH

In 1927, plans for beautifying the interior of the church were begun and resulted in the church which now stands – one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture in the entire Midwest. Under Father Garrity's guidance, many changes were made, some of which are as follows:

- A new communion railing and new altar, featuring tracery, were installed
- Doors to the sacristy were moved from the side altar areas to the sanctuary
- Wooden paneling was changed to two-inch select buff cut stone from Oolitic behind the side altars and in the sanctuary (Sadly, beautiful murals behind/above the three altars were covered over with the stone veneer.)
- It is thought that purchase of the 14 Stations of the Cross was included in the renovation, along with 6 chandeliers in the nave of the church
- Additional statues were purchased
- Installation of a new pipe organ

The entire project cost in excess of \$25,000, slightly more than the cost of the church itself.

Great rejoicing took place at the midnight services of Christmas Eve, 1927, when the final details were completed.

After the death of Father Garrity (1935), Father William V. Boland became rector and served the parish faithfully and well. A man of the people, with broad sympathies and understanding, Father Boland brought his kindly influence to bear on community and individual problems, as well as in church life, so that his leadership as a Man of God was recognized throughout the city and environs.

During the days of depression and national emergency, Father Boland became a Moses to the community and his patriotism encouraged and strengthened the people of his parish and, indeed, the city. His interest in the parochial school and in all children and young people was a powerful factor for good throughout.

The parochial school became a thriving, busy place. Sister Vivian Rose was the music instructor, and is well remembered by many for her work with the students of St. Vincent's, as well as being sought by parents from outside the parish as an instructor for their children. The St. Vincent DePaul Drum and Bugle Corps was comprised of her students, and she was often seen on the school grounds, or on a blocked-off street, leading and instructing the group.

Some of the groups organized and sponsored by the parish were ball teams, Boy Scouts, Knights of Columbus, Altar Society, Young Ladies Sodality, Parent-Teacher Association, a study club for Catholic women known as the Chartrand Club, and a study club for young girls in high school. All of these groups took active part in defense and Red Cross work, the recreation room of the parish house being used as a center for Red Cross sewing by the women of the parish.

The *Indiana Catholic* newspaper, 8-9-1912, also included the following interesting reports on 3 Bedford businesses:

"The banks of our city are one of the best indices of our prosperity and the record and growth of the Stone City Bank in the past few years has shown the stability and prosperity of Bedford in the commercial world. This bank is one that is ably and carefully conducted and it exercises the utmost care in the safe-guarding of its customers' interests. With such a showing the Stone City Bank is well equipped to benefit Bedford in every legitimate way. The bank is most conveniently located for all our people on the East

side of the Square. Among its officers and directors the bank numbers some of the most successful and sagacious businessmen of the community and their names inspire confidence and respect. In publishing this Education Issue of the Catholic, we are pleased to accord this bank most prominent mention and to wish for it a continuance of the growth and success which it has so amply merited."

"Prominent among the old established houses here which have done much toward the upbuilding of Bedford, is that of the Heitger Hardware & Stove Co., 1522 I St. They carry a complete assortment of builder's, shelf and heavy hardware, wire fencing, roofing materials, sporting goods, cutlery and silverware, paints, oils, glass, etc., and also make a specialty of high grade furnaces. They will gladly submit estimates and bids on contract work and have furnished the hardware which entered into the construction of some of our finest homes and buildings. Messrs. George C., George H. and Louis C. Heitger, the members of this firm, are too well known to our people in this community to require introduction here. The house is well known to the trade and stands high in the commercial world, where their personal popularity is not less great than their commercial rating."

"Nowadays no sane minded person questions the absolute necessity of ones carrying a sufficient amount of insurance to clear all risks involved from fire, tornado, accident or any cause which may result in a loss. Prominent among the business interests of Bedford is the agency of Walls and Walls, who conduct an exclusive general insurance and loan agency here in the Hodge and Walls Bldg., at 1422-1424 I Street. It is a matter of common knowledge that the companies they represent are among the strongest known and are most prompt in their payment claims, and as a result this agency has gained its full share of this line of business. Among the many lines which they write are fire, tornado, liability, steam boiler, plate glass, automobile and similar lines. Messrs. William L. and J. Frank Walls, who are at the head of this agency, are well known to our people and it is with pleasure that we commend their agency in this issue of The Catholic."

A significant accomplishment during Father Boland's tenure was the retirement of the \$40,000 debt owed by the Church. Father Boland was known for his ability to stretch a dollar.

Although this report ends with Father Boland's tenure, it is felt that the following significant event should be included: On July 28, 1939, a bolt of lightning struck the steeple of St. Vincent DePaul Church causing the cross to fall and the great bell, that had rung for brides and tolled for the dead, to be silenced forever. The organ was damaged by the water and the exterior of the building damaged by the flames, but the interior of the church was unmarred. Restoration was started immediately and the steeple was shortened from 150 feet to 107 feet, and the gold leaf cross was shortened from 15 feet to 8 feet. That cross has since been replaced with a metal one.

The original great bell was replaced with two. The smaller one, named Mary, was purchased at a cost of \$795, is 30 inches in diameter, weighs 600 pounds, and is tuned to the key of A. The larger one, named Joseph, cost \$1500, is 48 inches across, 3 feet high, weighs 1500 pounds, and is tuned to F. Together, the two bells can make 3 separate tones.

Researched and compiled by
Sister Joan Luerman and Sally Drehobl Bullock
June 2005

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- 1825** City of Bedford was moved to present site from Palestine
- 1850's** Father Patrick Murphy was mission priest and celebrated first Mass in Bedford
- 1860-64** Father Francis Louis Neyron, French Missionary priest, served in Bedford
- 1864** Father Joseph O'Reilly served intermittently
- 1864-65** Father Phillip Doyle oversaw the purchase of a lot behind the Methodist Church on which to build a Catholic church
- 1864** Angelina Tyree was first child baptized in new Catholic church purchased from Methodists
- 1865-68** Father C. John Mougin, French priest, and Father Theodore Mattingly alternated as mission priests. Father Mougin closed a deal with the Methodists to purchase their church for \$500
- 1868-79** Revs. Jules Clement, Henry Kessing, and Leo Burkhart served as missionary priests
- 1879-83** Father John Unverzagt arrived, purchased a parsonage, and bought lots on which to build a school
- 1883-85** Father F.X. Logan
- 1885-87** Rev. Theodore J. Mattingly
- 1885-1902** Rev. M.H. Bogemann was first full-time but non-resident pastor

1893	Construction of new church began
1894	Dedication of new church on July 24
1902	Father Edward Quade served as pastor while Father Bogemann studied in Rome
1902-04	Father Mattingly returned as first resident pastor
1904-16	Father Joseph Lannert
1908	First parochial school was started in a home on 18th Street
1912	New school building constructed A home was purchased adjacent to the school as a residence for the nuns.
1915	First Assistant Priest was assigned to the parish
1916	Fathers Shea and Eisenmann
1916-35	Father William P. Garrity
1927	Remodeling of church
1935-47	Father William V. Boland

In some instances there seem to be discrepancies in dates and it appears that dates of tenure overlap. This can be attributed to sabbaticals and reassignments, as well as difficulty deciphering old records.