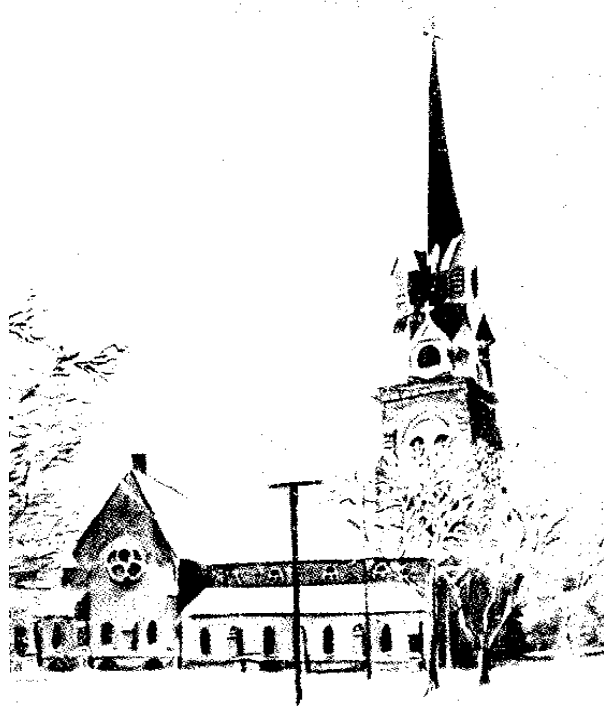


# History of St. Peter's Parish



Old Gothic Church built 1875-1880

Three years before Oshkosh was incorporated as a city, St. Peter Catholic Church was founded, the first Catholic parish in Oshkosh. That was in 1850, when St. Peter's was a mission church of 12 families served part-time by the Rev. Florimond J. Bonduel, a native of Belgium and resident pastor to the Indians at Lake Poygan.

Under Father Bonduel's guidance, a little white church and rectory were built. The Rev. Paul Farinacci, O.P., was named first resident pastor in 1851, and in 1853 the pastorate was assumed by the Rev. James Colton, a native of Ireland.

In June, 1855, the Rev. Francis Fusseder became pastor. Under his supervision the church was enlarged and a tower was added, with improvements completed in the fall of 1856. Because Father had a difficult time collecting money for the improvements, male members of the parish formed the Roman Catholic Association of St. Peter's Church for

"united action" on the part of the congregation "to relieve our pastors the duty of begging almost every Sunday from the altar."

St. Mary Catholic Church, Oshkosh, came into existence in 1858 after St. Peter parishioners of German descent asked for a church of their own. St. Mary's was served by the pastors of St. Peter's until 1866.

Father Fusseder was succeeded by the Rev. Thomas Keenan, a talented linguist to his mixed congregation of Irish, German, French, and Indian people. He served St. Peter's for eight years and supervised construction of the first parochial school (erected in 1863) on the parish premises. The Dominican Sisters, answering Father Keenan's Call, came to Oshkosh in 1866 and taught at St Peter School until it closed.

A new and larger church was needed, but after the foundation was laid, work was halted until additional funds could be found. Father Keenan was transferred in 1867 and was succeeded by the Revs. George T. Riordan, Joseph R. Hermon, John Gleeson, and Louis Cornelis, respectively.

During about an 18-month period when it had no official pastor, St. Peter's was served by the Servite Fathers of Menasha. The parish grew and prospered under its next pastor, the Rev. James O'Malley, another Ireland native who guided St. Peter's for 30 years, from Aug. 2, 1874, until his death on Sept. 26, 1904.

Personally soliciting funds from his parishioners, Father O'Malley spearheaded completion of a new brick church with a 206-foot steeple and a solid marble altar. A new brick school was also built, and a new convent and rectory were constructed. The church completed during Father O'Malley's pastorate served the congregation until 1954, when it was razed to make way for the present structure.

Begun in 1875 and dedicated in 1880, the congregation's second church was of Gothic design and had frescoed walls and stained glass windows. A pipe organ was installed in the church in 1902.

The Rev. Michael H. Clifford, a former assistant at St. Peter's, became pastor in October, 1904. During his pastorate, St. Peter High School and the recreational building were erected, in 1913 and 1926, respectively. Father Clifford was active in civic affairs, particularly during World War I.

The Rev. James C. Hogan, a nephew of Father O'Malley's, took over the parish in 1927. The former assistant served as pastor almost eight years. He died while attending a basketball game in St. Peter's gym on Feb. 1, 1935.

For the next four years the parish was headed by the Rev. Joseph C. Short, who made many improvements and repairs to parish buildings and who was instrumental in getting the Oshkosh Apostolate affiliated with the diocesan organization.

After Father Short was transferred on June 15, 1939, the Rev. John R. McGinley became pastor for the shortest term ever served by a pastor of St. Peter's--three months. On Sept. 14, 1939, he was succeeded by the Rev. Francis M. McKeough, the third former assistant to head the congregation. Father McKeough came to St. Peter's from St. John Catholic Church, Oshkosh.

Father "Mac," one of the most popular and respected pastors in the history of the parish, was the driving force behind great growth in parish membership and in the physical plant. It was, and still is, often said that he was "20 years ahead of his time" in planning the new church and in welcoming changes in the liturgy.

Father McKeough was pastor when the old convent was razed in 1949 and a new one built. The following year, 1950, St. Peter's celebrated its 100th anniversary with a week-long centennial program of spiritual and social events, culminating with a Pontifical High Mass and parish reception on Oct. 8, 1950.

Construction of the present church and rectory began in 1954. Final services in the old church were held April 26, and then the gym became the temporary church. Excavation began May 24 and the cornerstone was laid Dec. 2, 1954, after being blessed by Auxiliary Bishop John B. Grellinger of the Green Bay Diocese.

General contractor was the Ben B. Ganther Co. of Oshkosh. The church was designed by architects Jack and William Sherer of E. Brielmaier & Sons Co., Milwaukee. Inspiration for the church was Psalm 25:8: "I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of Thy house and the place where Thy glory dwells".

The more than \$700,000 building project was completed late in 1955. The first Mass in the new church was Nov. 1 and dedication of the 900-capacity structure of contemporary design was on Nov 6, with blessing of the church and altar by Bishop Stanislaus V. Bona. An estimated 10,000 people toured the church that day.

The interior of the church is designed so the altar is the focal point. A 12 by 32-foot curved mosaic panel behind the original main altar is Venetian gold and silver fused between glass and comes from Murano, Venice. It forms a framework for an ebony cross.

One of the most striking features of the church interior--the bronze Shrine of the Resurrection from the studios of Carl Wyland, Cologne, Germany was unveiled with the beginning of the Easter Vigil in April, 1962.

The 35 by 20-foot scene took three months to fashion. Below it are 12 bronze plaques containing symbols representing each of the Apostles.

Also in 1962, in August, Father McKeough was invested to the rank of monsignor.

Major remodeling of the interior and construction of a one-story addition to St. Peter School were carried out in 1963, with the Ganther Co. general contractor. The school housed grades 1-8, the high school having been discontinued in 1941.

A centennial program honoring the Dominican Sisters took place on Oct. 29 and 30, 1966. At the time, there were many second and third generation students at the school, which had an enrollment of 343.

Msgr. McKeough served St. Peter's until his retirement at age 74 in 1968. He became pastor emeritus and took up private residence in Oshkosh. Bishop Aloysius J. Wycislo appointed the Rev. Robert L. Colle pastor. It was Father Colle's first pastorate, after having been rector at Sacred Heart Seminary, Oneida. He was pastor from Sept. 1968, to June 19, 1974.

As the Catholic Church called for greater participation by the laity, more men and women became involved in programs and liturgies at St. Peter's. Men became commentators in the latter half of the 1960's, and women began reading at Masses in 1972. Men and women were both serving as communion ministers by the fall of 1974.

Lay participation in parish governance reached a major step with formation of the Parish Council, which held its first meeting on March 1, 1971. The Council was formed after months of study and groundwork by a special study group, a bylaws committee, and an election committee.

Father Colle said the Council would probably have to be a decision and policy-making body since "no priest can possibly give his full attention to all the things which demand decisions." The purpose of the Council is to share in all responsibilities of the parish, make recommendations to the pastor, and provide continuity, coordination, and unity of parish efforts.

Members of the first Parish Council were: Thomas Stadtmueller, president; Dr. Michael Schumerth, vice president; Mrs. Lawrence Kellerman, secretary; Mrs. William Bartlett, Dr. Thomas Cunningham, Dr. Michael Weinzierl, Thomas Binner, Mrs. Al Grota, John Kennedy, Robert Plier, Mrs. Leon Luker, Don Zahalka, Mrs. Donald MacDonaId, Edward Schwartz, Gifford Gibson, Larry VanAlstine, an Mrs. Frank Dobish.

Major changes in the St. Peter School program in the 1970's were reorganization into nongraded multi-age units in 1970-71, and addition of a kindergarten in 1973.

Father Colle was succeeded by the Rev. Henry W. Bedessem as pastor on June 19, 1974. Another major move for lay participation was the establishment, early in 1975, of a Parish Planning Committee to study short and long-term needs and make recommendations to meet them. Since June of 1974, The Place 2B youth center has been formed, and St. Peter's has started a St. Vincent de Paul Society chapter.

The first official observance of the parish's "125 Years of Faith" was on Pentecost Sunday, May 18, 1975, with an anniversary Mass and reception. Celebrants of the Mass were Monsignor McKeough, Father Bedessem, and the Rev. Martin Carr, associate pastor. In front of the altar was a scale replica of the altar in the old St. Peter Church. A cross from that altar was also used at the Mass of Thanksgiving on Pentecost.

In the following years the parish was served by Rev. Paul Koszarek, Rev. John Becker and Rev. Robert Kollath as pastors.

On Sunday July 8, 2007 the final liturgy was celebrated by St. Peter's Parish. On Saturday July 14, 2007, Most Blessed Sacrament Parish officially became a parish with liturgies at St. Peter and St. Mary sites.