

## ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH

1927 - 1995

In the years spanning more than three-quarters of a century, St. Joseph Church has grown from a mission of approximately thirty families to a firmly established parish of more than 550 families.

### ***ORIGIN OF A MISSION CHURCH***

The first recorded event, which effected the Catholic community, rose from a movement started in the public schools of Marion. All children were sent to weekly religious instructions at the church of their choice. Occasionally a priest would come to say Mass in the home of Mr. Joseph DeFrank on Union Street. On June 21, 1927, Fr. Leo Mondt was transferred from St. Elizabeth Parish in East St. Louis to St. John Parish in West Frankfort as assistant pastor. He was assigned to St. Joseph, which at that time had the status of a mission. On June 22, he arranged to hold a meeting of all Catholics of Marion. About fifteen families were represented. From this meeting arrangements were made to rent a small abandoned store building to use as a place of worship. The following Sunday, June 26, 1927, Holy Mass was celebrated for the first time in this mission church. Fr. Mondt was determined to build a mission church in Marion. He received permission from Bishop Henry Althoff, then bishop of the Diocese of Belleville, to pursue this plan.

### ***CONSTRUCTION OF CHURCH BUILDING - 1927***

The laying of the cornerstone took place on Sunday, September 4, 1927. Fr. Tragesser, pastor of St. John Church in West Frankfurt, and Fr. Mondt presided at the ceremony. The dedication was held December 11, 1927. Bishop Henry Althoff presided at the ceremony. At the time of the dedication the church had a choir under the direction of Mrs. Grace Duty, two children's Sunday School classes, and an Altar Society, which was the first organization established in the parish. The first baby baptized in this church was John DeLeonardo. The First Communion class of February 5, 1928 numbered about thirty children. On June 22, 1930, the first Confirmation was held. After the transfer of Fr. Mondt, St. Joseph came under the direction of Msgr. Robert DeGasperi of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Herrin. Fr. Paul Holthaus, the assistant pastor of the Herrin parish, served St. Joseph. In 1939, a petition was drawn up stating the parishioners' desire to have a resident pastor. The petition acknowledged a minimum cost of \$7,000 to build a rectory. The Bishop approved the building of a rectory, which was completed on October 23, 1940.

## ***THE MISSION BECOMES A PARISH - 1940***

On October 21, 1940, Bishop Henry Althoff elevated St. Joseph from the status of a mission to that of a parish. Fr. Paul Holthaus was appointed the first resident pastor. The parishioners of the new parish hoped eventually to have a parish school and/or parish hall. At this time the Holy Name Society was a very active organization for the men of the parish. Under the inspiration of their president, A. A. Moore, an interesting and informative program of religious instruction began.

## ***FIRST EXPANSION***

In the 1940s, it became necessary to have a place to hold parish meetings and gatherings. At this time there was also an interest in a parochial school sometime in the future. In 1950, specifications were drawn and construction began on a parish hall. Unfortunately, it was destroyed in the tornado of May 29, 1982. In January 1952, Fr. Paul Holthaus was transferred to St. Martin of Tours Parish, East St. Louis. He was succeeded by Fr. Bernard P. Mongan, who served a parish of about 420 Catholics. Each Saturday the Franciscan Sisters from St. Paul Parish in Johnston City provided religious instruction for the children in the parish hall. In 1953, Fr. Mongan announced that a parochial school would be the next program of expansion. He hoped to accomplish this within the next five years.

## ***PARISH ACTIVITIES INCREASE***

While Fr. Mongan was pastor, lay organizations were active in the growth of the parish. The Altar Society numbered about sixty members. The Holy Name Society, also numbered about sixty members. These organizations held monthly social and business meetings and conducted various activities to raise money for the betterment of the parish. The Study Club for high school students continued to meet weekly for religious discussions. In 1953, Marion's Boy Scout Troop 11 received its charter under the sponsorship of the Holy Name Society. St. Joseph Credit Union was established in January, 1953, providing a means for parishioners to save and borrow money at a low rate of interest. Relations between Catholics and Protestants were at a low ebb when St. Joseph was established. Fr. Mongan took an active part in fostering a better climate. He became well known for his Sunday radio programs on station WGGH in Marion. He also taught inquiry classes on Mondays and Fridays. In 1955, Fr. Mongan began to plan an addition to the parish hall which could also serve as a school. At this time there was a projected enrollment of 56 pupils for the fall of 1955 in Grades 1-6. During the late 1950s, the need for further expansion became apparent. The church census was increasing. It was clear that more worship space would be needed very soon. After many deliberations, it was decided to purchase a plot of ground on North Russell Street consisting of 31.5 acres for the approximate price of \$30,000. With the acquisition of this land, it would be possible to fulfill the needs of the growing parish. In 1959, Fr. Mongan was transferred to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Herrin. Fr. Donald Lenzini served as administrator of the parish from January to June, 1960.

## ***TRINITARIAN FATHERS ARRIVE***

The Trinitarian Fathers had been serving St. Paul Parish in Johnston City for several years. With the building of the new federal penitentiary the Trinitarian Fathers were asked to assign a priest as chaplain for this institution and the Veterans Hospital. Subsequently Bishop Zuroweste assigned them to St. Joseph Parish. In June, 1960, Fr. Aloysius Sylvester, O.S.S.T., became the first Trinitarian Father to become pastor.

## ***NEW CHURCH AND RECTORY***

In the spring of 1962, the Bishop gave approval for the construction of a new church and rectory. The contractors received blueprints on May 1, 1962. Bids were opened on May 28, 1962. Contracts were signed on July 25, 1962, with an anticipated cost of \$243,000. On November 20, 1963, the church was completed with the exception of the ceramic tile mosaic on the facade. Fr. John Cedilot was designated by the Bishop to officiate at a ceremony commemorating the blessing of the cornerstone. Local newspapers, documents containing names of civil and religious authorities, and coins minted in 1963 were sealed inside a copper box and placed in the cornerstone located on the inside sanctuary wall. The inscription "1962" commemorating the beginning of construction was carved in the concrete. On December 8, 1963, Bishop Albert Zuroweste dedicated the church as his first official act upon returning from Vatican Council II. The following Sunday, December 15, 1963, the eight-year-old children received their First Holy Communion marking the first parish function in the new church. On April 26, 1964, Bishop Albert Zuroweste celebrated the first Confirmation in the new church.

## ***GROWTH CONTINUES***

The completion of the new church provided parishioners with a beautiful and spacious place to worship but did not solve the problem of providing a Catholic education for the children of the parish. When Fr. John Cedilot arrived in Marion, he was enthusiastic about fulfilling the task of providing a new place of worship for the parishioners. After Fr. Cedilot's death, Fr. Marc Toal, O.S.S.T., was appointed administrator. He continued his duties as chaplain at the Federal Prison which had opened in 1963. On December 7, 1966, Fr. Marc received permission from the Bishop to have the old church razed. This was accomplished during the summer of 1967 by A. C. Mohler Lumber and Construction Company. On May 13, 1967, Fr. Stephen James Humphrey, a member of St. Joseph Parish since his elementary school years, was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Zuroweste. He has been the only vocation to the priesthood from St. Joseph Parish. In the late 1960s, Fr. Raphael Hollis, O.S.S.T. was appointed pastor. He served the parish about six months. In 1969 Fr. Ignatius Estes, O.S.S.T. was appointed pastor. For a time Fr. Ignatius lived in the work sacristy of church. He repaired and remodeled it, and it served as the rectory until the late 1970s. In 1977 when the sisters left, the present rectory was vacated.

## ***PARISH CENTER***

In August, 1978, the priests moved into their new residence. The building in which they had lived became the Parish Center. On July 5, 1971 Fr. Ignatius was transferred to St. Paul Church, Johnston City. Fr. Albert Buratto, O.S.S.T was appointed pastor. He served in this position until April 2, 1978. On April 2, 1978, Fr. Edward Balestrieri, O.S.S.T., became pastor and served the parish until April, 1981

## ***LAY PARTICIPATION DEVELOPS***

During the 1970s there was a substantial increase in lay participation in the parish. October 15, 1979, was the first time Eucharistic Ministers took an active role in the Sunday Eucharist. On September 7, 1980 the first Parish Council was elected to serve in an advisory capacity to the pastor. On April, 1981, Fr. Richard Filice, O.S.S.T., was assigned as temporary administrator pending the designation of a new pastor. Fr. Richard diligently assisted the parish for four months, working closely with the Parish Council and the parishioners. On August 26, 1981, Fr. Thomas N. Cerulo, O.S.S.T. was installed as pastor. In 1982, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) was initiated. A Lay Leadership Training program also began at this time. In the fall of 1982, the Parish Council was expanded to six members with two trustees. In April, 1982, Project Manna, an emergency food pantry sponsored by the Marion Ministerial Alliance, began. During the week of June 21 - 25 1982, the first Summer School of Religion was held. Terri Lawler directed the program in which approximately fifty children, ages four to nine, participated. In 1981, the need for a Director of Religious Education was sent to the School Sisters of Notre Dame in St. Louis, MO. Sister Bernita Wassinger, SSND, responded to this need and became the first sister to serve in the parish since the Trinitarian Sisters. In June, 1982, Sr. Martha Ann Schaefer, SSND, succeeded Sister Bernita as Director of Religious Education.

## ***TORNADO STRIKES***

On May 29, 1982, a devastating tornado struck Marion. The parish sponsored a Tornado Relief Fund with a goal of \$30,000 to assist with the immediate needs of families affected by the disaster. The Knights of Columbus suffered the complete loss of their complex. The members worked very hard to prepare plans for a new hall. On July 24, 1982, Bishop Wurm gave his approval to deed four acres of St. Joseph parish land for the building of a new Knights of Columbus Hall.

## ***FAMILY LIFE CENTER***

In 1983, the Parish Council passed a resolution to build a Parish Center to the west of the church to accommodate the increased number of parishioners and expansion of many programs. On May 15, 1983 ground-breaking ceremonies were held for the new Family Life Center. The dedication was held on March 18, 1984. The crucifix originally used in the church in 1963 was hung in the lobby of the Family Life Center. The new Catholic complex in Marion was now complete. In 1987, the Trinitarian congregation transferred

Fr. Tom Cerulo to Rome, Italy. Fr. Wes Lamb, O.S.S.T., a previous associate pastor of St. Joseph and U.S. federal penitentiary chaplain, was appointed pastor. During the tenure of Fr. Tom Cerulo, several Trinitarian Brothers who were in Formation assisted in the parish for short periods of time. From 1988 to the present, the northwest corner of the property has been used extensively for soccer fields for the city's youth in spring and fall.

### ***TIME CAPSULE***

On March 20, 1988, the 100th anniversary of the Diocese of Belleville, a time capsule containing parish memorabilia, photos, parish directory, and newspapers was buried in the front lawn of the church. A stone marker was placed over the capsule. Bishop James Keleher officiated at a ceremony assisted by Fr. Wes Lamb.

### ***RECENT HISTORY***

In 1989, Sr. Martha Ann Schaefer, SSND, was transferred to a hospital chaplain program in central Illinois. Sr. Anastasia Wehner, SSND, succeeded her as Director of Religious Education. In early 1990, the Trinitarian order decided to leave southern Illinois and to concentrate on serving the eastern United States. Rev. Bishop James Keleher, Bishop of Belleville, Illinois, assigned Fr. Richard G. Mohr, a diocesan priest, as pastor. Fr. Mohr was installed in July, 1990. On May 17, 1992, many family members, priest friends, local officials and parishioners, participated in Fr. Mohr's 25th anniversary celebration of his years in the priesthood. In 2007, Fr. Mohr was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Marion Chamber of Commerce for 40 years in the priesthood. Sr. Anastasia retired from St. Joseph in June 2008. Bill Harper was hired to serve as Pastoral Associate and Director of Religious Education beginning July 2008.

Fr. Mohr announced his retirement effective June 2009. He plans to reside in Marion.