

# Parish History

On June 14, 1942, the original St. Joseph Church was dedicated by Bishop Joseph H. Albers. When our parish was established it served about 230 families on the south side of the city of Battle Creek. In February 1947 Father Patrick Kenny, the first Pastor, announced that the time was ripe to erect a parish school. On July 1, 1947, Fr. Kenny was transferred and Father Adolph Oser became Pastor of St. Joseph's.

The school building was erected in 1949 at a cost of \$140,000. When the debt was paid on the school building, Father Oser announced plans for building a new church, the approximate cost of which was \$325,000. Groundbreaking took place on August 9, 1954, and on Sept. 18, 1955, the dedication of the new church was held with Bishop Joseph Albers officiating.

St. Joseph Parish has continued to grow - from the 230 families in 1942 to over 1,350 families currently registered. The parish has prospered through the efforts of dedicated parishioners and spiritual leaders.



First Church 1942

## Early Parish History

It is proper that we include in this short history the names of those Pastors who have served this parish:

Monsignor Maurice Walsh, who helped organize this "Church in the Fields"

Monsignor Patrick Kenny, Pastor 1942-1947

Father Adolph Oser, Pastor 1947-1962

Father Norbert B. Wheeler, Pastor 1961-1975

Father John M. Steffey, Pastor 1975-1983

Father Howard Murray, Pastor 1983-1984

Father Donn Taylor, Pastor 1984-1993

Father James O'Leary, Pastor 1993-2004

Father John D. Fleckenstein, Pastor 2004-2009

Father Robert F. Creagan, Pastor 2009-2011

The Very Reverend Mark J. Vyverman, V.F. 2011-2014

Father Christopher Derda, Pastor 2014-present

In 1941, Bishop Joseph H. Albers of the Diocese of Lansing established the parish of St. Joseph in the fast-growing area of Lakeview. It was the first time in 70 years that St. Philip Parish was divided. Father Maurice Walsh, Pastor of St. Philip Parish, announced in March, 1941, the purchase of the 20 acre M.W. Wentworth homestead at 1100 W. Territorial Road. The cost was \$18,000, of which \$8000 was paid by St. Philip Parish. The \$10,000 remaining due was paid through the sale of lots in the new "Bishop Albers Subdivision". One of the new streets became "Walsh Avenue." A large barn was moved from behind the home on Territorial Road to North 23rd Street and a full basement was provided. An entrance and a sacristy were also added.

In August, 1941, Father Patrick Kenny became the pastor of St. Joseph Church. He arrived in October and took up residence at Leila Hospital where he also served for a time as chaplain. From November 20, 1942, the rectory of St. Joseph Parish was the brick home at 46 North 23rd Street. The first Mass was celebrated on New Year's Day, 1942. There were about 230 families. On June 14, 1942, the rustic church was blessed by Bishop Albers with Father Hoyer from Notre Dame University as the celebrant of the Solemn High Mass. Priests were present from St. Philip of Battle Creek, Fort Custer, Lansing, and Kalamazoo. The first church furnishings were given by the Sisters of Mercy of Leila Hospital who were in the process of providing a new altar in the hospital chapel. Crucifixes and candle sticks came from the old St. Philip altar. Other items were also provided by Father Walsh. On February 9, 1947, with about 350 families, and free from debt, Father Kenny announced the plan to build a parish school.

On July 1, 1947, Father Kenny was transferred to St. Joseph Church in St. Joseph, Michigan and was later honored with the title of Monsignor. Father Adolph Oser replaced Father Kenny. Father Oser came from St. Mary Parish in Williamston and immediately organized fund raising campaigns for the school and building began in 1949 at a cost of \$140,000. School opened in the fall with 125 children and staffed by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Nazareth, Michigan. At first, for two years, the sisters lived in two unused classrooms in the school building itself. A house was purchased as a convent on Highland Boulevard at the corner of North 23rd street. The cost was \$16,800. Plans for a new church were made public on March 28, 1954. The cost, without furnishings, was to be about \$235,000. It was to be of brick veneer, trimmed with Indiana limestone and of contemporary style.

The cornerstone of the present church was laid on November 21, 1954, and the church was dedicated on September 18, 1955 with a Solemn High Mass offered by Father Oser with Bishop Albers present in the sanctuary. For many years, the old church remained as a social hall. Eight additional classrooms were added in 1958 - 1959 due to an influx of enrollment. The school now had 644 students with 200 attending catechism on the weekends. In 1959, the parking lot was blacktopped and the 12-room convent was begun.

The first assistant to Father Oser was Father Julius Hengesbach, appointed in June of 1952. Father Paul Cummings came July 10, 1955, Father John Shinnars came in 1956, Father Richard Kropf in 1960. Fr. Norbert B. Wheeler became pastor in 1962. In 1969 the Parish Center was constructed housing a library, a cafeteria, and a gymnasium. On March 22, 1980, the first permanent deacon for the parish, Deacon Ross A. Challberg, was ordained by Bishop Paul V. Donovan at St. Augustine's Cathedral in Kalamazoo.