Celebrating a Century of Worship
St. Mary's
(1893-1993 • The Immaculate Conception • Alton, Illinois)
We are a Family

Since before any of us were born, God planned for us to share our lives with each other. He knew exactly how our strengths and weaknesses would balance one another, and the depth of love, understanding, and commitment we would learn to feel.

He knew that the richness of our separate characters would be developed through the hard times, and the mutual trust and respect would be born as a result of overcoming the trials together.

He knew that we would laugh together, and cry together. He knew we needed each... to hug, to help, to teach, to share... to love.

G. Greitland
Dear Bishop Ryan,

With great pleasure the Holy Father has learned that Saint Mary’s Parish in Alton is commemorating the Hundredth Anniversary of its Church. On this happy occasion he asks you kindly to convey his greetings and good wishes to the parish community.

His Holiness knows that over the years the grace of God has been active in the hearts of the faithful. Through the catechizing efforts of many people God’s word has taken root in the life of the community and numerous men, women and children have come to a better understanding of the great mystery of Christ and his Church.

In giving thanks to the Lord for the benefits received in the past, the Holy Father prays that the teaching of Christ, diligently transmitted, will be a source of inspiration and strength and that it will lead everyone to that joy and fulfillment which are the fruit of a mature faith. He also prays that the task of passing Christ’s message on to the younger generation will be zealously shared by all.

Commending the whole parish family to Mary the Mother of Jesus, His Holiness asks her to sustain them in the great task of making her Son ever better known and loved. As a pledge of strength and peace in Christian living he sends his Apostolic Blessing.

With personal good wishes for the anniversary celebrations,

I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+G. B. Re
Substitute

The Most Reverend Daniel Ryan
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois
1615 W. Washington
Springfield, IL 62708-3187
July 28, 1995

The Reverend Bruce Williamson, O M V & Parishioners
Saint Mary (Immaculate Conception) Parish
Alton, Illinois

My dear friends,

I am looking forward to being with you on the happy occasion of the centenary of the dedication of your present church building. What a wonderful host of reasons we have to join in praise and thanks to God for so many blessings of these hundred years of worship and building of faith-community within the venerable structure of Saint Mary’s

Although your parish was established in 1858, five years after the foundation of our diocese, its first church building was finished in 1859, the second Catholic church in the City of Alton. A year later that building was destroyed by a tornado, and the second church building consecrated in 1860.

Under the guidance of Brother Adrian, Franciscan Friar of Saint Louis, Missouri, as architect, the present church building construction was begun in 1891, the cornerstone laid in 1893, and the consecration on November 28, 1895.

Throughout the centenary of its holy use, Saint Mary’s Church has undergone a whole series of renovations and updating, culminating in the recently completed renovations to bring our space for worship into line with the norms which are fitting for our worship today.

Along with this venerable building, we wish to rededicate ourselves and our families to our God, through the patronage of His Mother and ours, the Immaculate Virgin Mary. To the day, one hundred years later, November 28, 1995, we are graced by the Lord to present to him our lives and our families in this solemn act of worship and dedication.

May God bless you abundantly! With best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Daniel L. Ryan
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois
Occasionally, we meet someone who reaches his 100th birthday. We can truly say: “That person is old.” One doesn’t make too many plans for the future except perhaps the future with Christ in the kingdom of heaven.

Our church has reached its 100th birthday, but with its recent face lift and renovation, it is hard to call it “old.” This is a story of God’s providence and the people of St. Mary’s love. It started the week I arrived when the organ (built in 1945) breathed it last. A group of parishioners was gathered to address this problem. “But,” they said, “We cannot repair the organ unless we repair the ceiling above it, and the roof above that; and what about the windows, the chimney, the painting, the carpet.” I felt things were getting out of hand and said, “It seems presumptuous of me to begin a project of this size as soon as I arrive.” Then Jim Horn stood up and said, “Padre, don’t you ever apologize; these things are needed and we will find the money.” Thus was born the Restoration project.

Then, as the work was well under way, the diocese told us what we had feared all along - that we would have to address the codes and liturgical norms as outlined by Vatican II. It seemed Jesus was saying to us as he said to Peter, “When you are old someone else will bind your hands and lead you where you do not want to go.” This challenge seemed too much and we wanted to quit, even if it meant leaving the interior of the church in disrepair.

A few years ago, I began to lose my voice and felt I could not continue in my ministry. But I began speech therapy, and to my surprise, gained a voice stronger than ever. I even began singing lessons and improved my voice such that it brought me greater joy. I deeply believe that out of weakness and disease can come something new and healthy. As I learn more of the history of this parish, it becomes increasingly apparent to me that this has often been the case. When challenged, the people of St. Mary’s were not about to give up. The more they studied and the more they prayed, the more they began to see solutions rather than problems. The bigger the challenge, the harder they worked and the more they sacrificed. The result is a renewed and more beautiful church, which is the envy of the area. While this work went on, God was working in the parishioners’ hearts. They took more interest and pride in their church and began serving her in new and varied ways. In this service, they found new life, joy, and love.

St. Mary’s celebrates its 100th birthday today, but looking at it’s fresh paint and new furnishings, I find it hard to call her old. She has been renewed by her sons and daughters who love her so dearly. Perhaps the challenge that was presented to the people of St. Mary’s engendered new life in them. Perhaps it was just the occasion for them to share the love and life they already had in their hearts. But one thing is certain: the generations to come will be able to say that in 1995 St. Mary’s was alive and well. Happy birthday, St. Mary’s.

May God’s abundant blessings remain with you,

Fr. Bruce Williamson, O.M.V.
The Catholic Church in the Alton area.

In all probability, the first white men to gaze upon the natural beauties and attractions of this area were the explorers led by Father Marquette, S.J., who passed by in 1673. During the late 1700’s two French Catholics from St. Louis erected a small cabin for trading purposes on the bank of Piasa Creek, which at that time flowed down Piasa Street and emptied into the Mississippi.

In 1873, the first known Catholic Mass in Alton was said at the home of Sebastian Wise by a visiting priest from St. Louis. A year later a small frame church was erected in Upper Alton, and Rev. George Hamilton ministered to the spiritual needs of the Catholics in the area. St. Matthew’s Church at Third and Alby was completed in 1844 but was partially destroyed by fire in 1851. By 1856, its pastor, Rev. Michael Carroll, was conducting services in the new Cathedral of SS. Peter & Paul on State Street.

The Beginnings of St. Mary’s Church

The German community of Alton dramatically increased in 1857. With no other Catholic Churches in the surrounding communities, these new immigrants were at a serious disadvantage among the English-speaking Catholics. Not only were they unable to understand the language in daily affairs; they were unable to follow the sermons in the Cathedral. Therefore, the first Bishop of Alton, Most Rev. Henry Damian Juncker, arranged for separate service hours at the Cathedral, and Father John Menge, Chancellor of the Diocese, was charged with the care of their spiritual needs. He urged a new church be built, and permission was granted.

Church of the Immaculate Conception was so named because of the Blessed Virgin’s words to Bernadette at Lourdes in 1858. Completed in May 1859, the new church served the forty German families of the area, most of whom rented farms far from the church but eagerly attended services. Their new building was a two-story brick structure containing apartments for the newly ordained pastor, Father Francis A. Ostrop, with classrooms on the first floor and the church proper on the second. Unfortunately, a tornado destroyed this building and 150 others in June, 1860, leaving no church and $3000 debt. Father Ostrop, pinned beneath the ruins, was freed later that evening and brought the Blessed Sacrament to safety.

Since Bishop Juncker insisted the debt be paid before construction could begin on a new church, Father Ostrop personally undertook raising the funds in Cincinnati, Dayton, and other eastern cities, as well as St. Louis. One year later, on July 21, 1861, he laid the cornerstone of the new St. Mary’s— a testament to his success and faith of the parish. The church was complete and dedicated on December 8, 1862, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.
The Early Years

By 1867, the year of the official consecration of this church, the nearby 10-year-old congregation had grown to 150 families and was noted throughout the region for its generous Sunday collections. During the next 20 years, growth continued in the congregation, church property, and the school.

The second and third pastors each only served a year. Father John Sandrock gained the respect and affection of his parishioners, but the smallpox epidemic of 1873 cut short his life. Father Vincent Nagler was in poor health when he arrived in May 1873, and he succumbed in May 1874.

The fourth pastor, Rev. Peter Peters, who came to St. Mary’s in August 1874, was responsible for increasing property adjacent to the church, obtaining the teaching services of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, constructing a residence for them, and adding a tower to the church that could be seen from a great distance. One of Fr. Peters’ great hopes was to finish a new parsonage by 1904, because priests from all over the world were expected to attend the World’s Fair in St. Louis, and many hoped to stay in Alton at the parsonage. Although the parsonage was completed in time, Fr. Peters did not live to see it.

His greatest achievement, however, was his determination to build a new church replacing the 30 year-old structure which was in danger of collapsing due to a heavy slate roof put on at the same time as the tower.

The Present St. Mary’s

The decision to build the present St. Mary’s Church was made on the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, 1892. The design architect of this church was Brother Adrian, O.F.M., of St. Anthony’s Monastery, St. Louis. Lucas Pfeiffer of Alton was the supervising architect. The neo-Gothic structure was designed to feature a triple arched entrance with each tympanum composed of stained glass in stone tracery. Rib vaulting of the ceilings of the nave, sanctuary and aisles would accentuate the interior height. The foundation was completed in 1892, and a year later, on July 16, 1893, the cornerstone was laid with appropriate ceremonies by the most Rev. James Ryan, third Bishop of the See of Alton. The stone contains copies of the Telegraph, Sentinel-Democrat and Banner, and a brief history of the parish in both English and Latin.

As the months passed, the new building slowly took shape. The walls and roof were completed during 1893. With the completion of the outside of the building, the interior work could progress more rapidly.

Vincent Wardein, the contractor, supervised the carpentry on the church and was helped in this work by several parishioners, among whom might be mentioned Joseph Wuellner, Christopher Hellrlung, Peter Blazier, and Henry Wardein. It was now well into 1894. The original organ was moved from the old church, as were the bells and the tower clock. The three bells, cast in St. Louis in the early 1880’s are dedicated (in ascending order of size) to the Immaculate Conception, St. Theresa, and St. John the Apostle.
The entire structure was completed and furnished in the summer of 1895. It measures approximately 150 feet in length and 65 feet in width. The tower is about 96 feet high. Candles in sconces along the side walls and crosses inscribed in the marble on either side of the entrance way signify it as being a consecrated church.

The Solemn Consecration took place on Thanksgiving Day, November 28, 1895. A cousin of Fr. Peters, the Most Rev. John Janssen, Bishop of Belleville, acted as celebrant at the consecration of the marble altars. At the Pontifical Mass, Father Michael, Provincial of the Franciscan Fathers, preached the sermon.

Building the present St. Mary’s took it toll on Father Peters, however, and he died March 5, 1896. Rarely had the city of Alton witnessed a sight so impressive as the funeral procession that formed to do homage to this priest. It is recorded that when the first part of the procession entered St. Joseph’s Cemetery, the last part had not yet left the church.

The fifth pastor, Father Joseph Meckel, arrived in July 1896, and began his work at St. Mary’s with vigor.

The first 12 years of Fr. Meckel’s tenure were both active and significant. He remodeled the old church into a schoolhouse, changed the old school into a convent, built a rectory for the priests, retired old and new debt, and created a chapel in the church basement to hold Masses for children. For the Golden Jubilee in 1908, Father Meckel carefully compiled an extensive history of the parish. Written in both German and English the souvenir book contained a wealth of information and pictures.

During his pastorate, St. Mary’s parish experienced continued growth. In 1911, more than 200 children made their First Communion. During World War I, a service flag was placed in the church to remind everyone of the 143 parishioners who served in the conflict. In 1924, when he was 80 years old, Father Meckel retired and moved to Pennsylvania, where he lived until his death in 1927.

The sixth pastor, Rev. John J. Brune, had served as one of Father Meckel’s assistants. In 1924 he became parish administrator, and was named pastor in 1927. During his service to St. Mary’s Father (later Msgr.) Brune proved a worthy successor to such pioneers as Father Ostrop and Father Peters.

While he accomplished many physical changes in St. Mary’s (the construction of the convent and the present school building, for example), his spiritual leadership was outstanding, especially in the area of establishing and encouraging a number of new organizations to promote greater participation in parish life - including several musical, theatrical, spiritual, and youth-oriented groups. On May 31, 1954, after celebrating the parish’s Memorial Day field Mass at St Joseph’s Cemetery, he became ill and died at St. Anthony’s later in the day.
The Second Half of the 20th Century

The seventh pastor, Rev. James A. Suddes, who served as an assistant under Msgr. Brune from 1938 until 1947 returned to St. Mary's from his post as Diocesan Director of the Propagation of the Faith on June 7, 1954. During the next 33 years he focused on the individuals and families under his care, tending to their spiritual needs selflessly. He knew everyone by name. His desire to serve his people, educate the children, and minister the sacraments in the church, hospitals, and homes stood unmatched.

Three days after he arrived to bury Msgr. Brune, Bishop William A. O'Connor told Fr. Suddes, "This is your parish now," and asked if St. Mary's still needed a German-speaking priest. Father said, "Yes, but I'm Irish." Later that month, the bishop sent two assistants, Fr. August Sperl and Fr. Kristo Jelenic, both of whom spoke German. During the next 16 years various assistants served (Frs. Anthony Schmidt, Joseph Schmeitmann, Thomas Gallenbach, Vincent Worland, Richard Neiburgge, William Hembro, Victor Kaltenbach, and G. Neal Dee). From 1971 to 1978 he served alone, with the assistance of various visiting Jesuits. St. Mary's was again assigned a permanent assistant in 1978, Fr. Don Roberts (from the parish), who was followed by Fr. Lawrence Anschuetz from 1985 to 1987.

Besides adding his lively Irish personality, Msgr. Suddes accomplished many changes at St. Mary's - in the liturgy, buildings and property, and in the parish community as a whole. (Ordained a priest in 1938, Fr. Suddes was made a Monsignor upon his 25th anniversary in 1963.)

In 1954, he led a special novena to end the Marian Year observances of the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Later that month, for the first time at St Mary's, midnight Mass was celebrated to an overflow crowd. Ten years later, on November 29, 1964, English was used for the first time at Mass at St. Mary's - the first of many changes that would come about as a result of Vatican II. In 1968, an altar of sacrifice was added, allowing the celebrant to face the congregation. On Saturday, April 25, 1970 a new 5:15 p.m. Mass was added to the schedule to fulfill the Sunday/Holy Day obligation.

Just as the earlier pastors had done Msgr. Suddes continued to acquire buildings and property surrounding the church. All houses with the exception of one located at the northwest corner of the block were demolished. Parking and playground facilities were expanded and dedicated in August 1963, including the statue of Jesus blessing the children. The last of the buildings to be acquired was the yellow Kenny house built in 1893 at the corner of Fourth and Langdon Streets. In 1972, after its purchase from the Koehler family who had owned it since 1920, parishioners
painted this building red in one day, making a nice homey place for the kindergarten for the next 15 years - the "little red schoolhouse." Parents also wallpapered and painted the inside, put new flooring and tile in the kitchen and carpeting in the other two first floor rooms.

Msgr. Suddes was responsible for various church remodeling, including a major renovation in 1957 in anticipation of the Centenary of St. Mary's as a parish. Painting, refinishing pews and confessionals, simplifying the appearance of the sanctuary and church walls, the addition of a cry room and produced a commemorative album for the parishioners. Ten years later, red carpeting and red kneelers were installed. In 1975 the interior of the church was repainted, with only subtle changes in appearance.

In the 1960's the pastor's room and meeting room in the rectory were remodeled and improvements were made in the church basement. These included a new entrance to the church for the school children and completion of the "Mary Anne Room". This new room provided a place for brides to dress, church meetings, and social functions. The early 70's also saw the addition of two school rooms and a library in the church basement. The generosity of the parishioners was never-failing in assisting Monsignor Suddes in financing and completing any and all projects that became necessary to the life of St. Mary's. "Time, talent, and treasure" were assets of St. Mary's well-known throughout the diocese.

Msgr. Suddes' devotion to his flock was well known. During the lunch hour he was often on the school playground with the children, engaged in a game of football, baseball, or kickball. He was responsible for beginning the first annual picnic, held in 1957 at the VFW Park in Cottage Hills. Around this time, the first annual appreciation dinner was held in the school hall to honor the choir, servers, officers of societies, ushers, lectors, teachers, maintenance and office help, etc.

Major school renovations occurred in 1965 and 1966 in the form of new lighting, floors, desks, and improvements in the cafeteria. Even with these expenses and other necessary and increasing costs of providing quality Catholic education, the Monsignor was a firm believer in tuition-free education for the children of St. Mary's; he was adamant that this was the responsibility of the entire congregation.

A special honor for the parish occurred on 1980. Four members of the parish were ordained deacons in St. Mary's by Bishop McNicholas, who held St. Mary's in great esteem. This was the first time the Bishop had ordained deacons outside his own cathedral. That same year, two other special Masses were said with the bishop in attendance. One, on November 25, the 25th anniversary of Msgr. Suddes as pastor of St. Mary's and the other, on December 9, observed the 125th anniversary of the Papal Declaration of the Immaculate Conception. On June 14, 1987, Msgr. Suddes retired after serving as pastor of St. Mary's for 33 years. He returned the following year, to celebrate his Golden Jubilee.

Fr. Edward C. Domme, O.M.V. was appointed eighth pastor of St. Mary's, also remaining pastor of St. Patrick's parish. The Oblates of the Virgin Mary began co-staffing St. Mary's and St. Patrick's with four assistants. These new priests brought a different style of pastoral interaction, and even encouraged the use of their first names when being addressed.

The years between 1987 and the present have been filled with changes in the church, the liturgy, the functions of the parish, and personnel. Throughout this period of sometimes even tumultuous change, the spirit of St. Mary's, the faith of its people, and the dedication of its leaders has endured.
The first of the changes came quickly in 1987 with new liturgical reforms (including shaking of hands at the Sign of Peace and standing for Communion) and scheduling changes for Masses. The Altar of Sacrifice was moved down from the high altar level. St. Mary's began training and using Eucharistic Ministers in 1988, and within two years these 36 servants were an integral part of our Masses, helping the priests and serving the rest of the faithful.

Both the rectory and church underwent some refurbishing in 1987 in the form of cleaning and repairs, some new wallpaper painting, and refinishing of the church's oak doors. The sound system was upgraded. With the arrival of the Opus Dei, major remodeling was necessary in the rectory in 1988. The priests themselves took a special interest in their new home, and were often seen landscaping and doing repair work.

The brass hinges on the front doors of the church were removed and polished in 1988. The clocks on the steeple were completely refurbished. A wooden altar and matching lectern were installed, and the baptismal front was moved from the cry room to the front of the church.

Another change in St. Mary's as a community took place in 1988. The Golden Age Society was formed to provide activities for senior members. Since the Notre Dame sisters no longer resided at the convent, it was decided to remodel the first floor and use that space as a Golden Age center. Being in need of major repairs, the upper floors would not be used.

The ninth pastor of St. Mary's, Fr. Bruce Williamson, O.M.V., arrived at St. Mary's in September of 1989, and was appointed pastor in December, succeeding Fr. Domme, who had been transferred.

With the dawn of the new decade, St. Mary's moved forward toward the 21st century, encompassing the new norms of the Roman Catholic Church, in accord with diocesan standards. During the first part of the 90's, St. Mary's instituted a new parish council and finance committee, a school board, a stewardship program, and an adult education program. New efforts toward inclusion of those with disabilities (such as the use of a signer at Mass for the hearing impaired) also began. This all contributed to an increased spirituality and participation in the church's various activities and liturgical services. While the spiritual life of St. Mary's was flourishing, the aging physical property that is St. Mary's was at risk. In fact, very soon after Fr. Bruce Williamson arrived, the pipe organ failed. This magnificent pipe organ, originally built for the church in 1896 and customized by the late Professor Hiendlmayr in 1945, was found to be in need of more than $40,000 for repairs. In addition, a major leak creating serious damage in the church roof was discovered, and the irreplaceable sanctuary stained glass windows were in danger of falling from their lead casings. This brings us to "The Bells of St. Mary's Restoration" that was later to be termed more appropriately "St. Mary's Renovation" - the fourth, and probably most extensive, in the church's history.
Since the consecration of this present church, many changes have been made to enhance its beauty and utility. In 1896, the pipe organ was installed; in 1902, the High Altar (containing the relics of the holy martyrs Boniface and Maria Anna Jesus de Paradis) was enlarged and the side altars rebuilt. This remodeling program was the result of a sacrilege committed on April 14, 1902, when ruffians entered the church and demolished the tabernacle door, carrying off the sacred vessels and the Blessed Sacrament.

The church was redecorated for the first time in 1918. Later-donated furnishings include the gold tabernacle (1927) and the Inlaid Mosaic Stations (1930).

In 1940, the church was redecorated for the second time. In connection with redecoration, marble steps at the High Altar, as well as a new marble communion rail and new rubber floor covering for the sanctuary, were donated and installed. The loudspeaker system and sanctuary light fixtures also date from this time. In 1943, the present stained art glass windows were donated and installed in the sanctuary. In 1945, the present rose window in the choir loft was donated and installed. The present organ was also rebuilt in 1945, including a new console comprised of three manuals and pedal. This organ contains 40 stops, 1456 pipes, and more than a million feet of electrical wiring. The windows for the church proper came in 1948. That same year a new floor covering was installed, the entrance to the choir loft rearranged, and the rear of the church paneled. Electric fixtures were installed and the entire electric system was rewired. White marble statues of the Sacred Heart and St. John were donated and placed in the sanctuary.

In 1957 and 1958 the church was redecorated for the third time in its history. Simplicity was the guide in this redecoration program. No unnecessary frills were allowed which might distract the attention of the people. The original oak pews of the church were completely refinished and five new pews were added.

In conformity with the times, a new room for babies, or cry room, was added in the rear of the church. The confessionals were remodeled and refinished, and a new baptismal font and stand were installed. White marble statues of St. Pius X and St. Theresa were also added.
The fourth effort in the church’s history to effect changes in its physical appearance, a move from restoration to renovation, began as an addendum to a critical need to repair the organ that through the years grew to be such an integral part of our worship. The cost estimate of the project to rebuild and restore the organ was over $40,000 and the fact that its replacement would cost more than $185,000.

But as is frequently the case with projects, especially when an old building is involved, one thing leads to another. Due to an increasing roof problem in the area above the organ, it was thought prudent to investigate its correction before the investment in the organ was made. This study led to the discovery of some other very serious problems and needs: roof and gutter repairs, bell tower exterior repairs, plastering to take care of rain damage, sanctuary stained glass windows restoration, and electrical and heating work. A general repainting and carpet replacement were also needed.

Professional estimates for these projects came to $500,000. A major fund drive, entitled the “Bells of St. Mary’s Restoration Project,” was begun in November of 1989 with Jim Horn leading a group of very dedicated parishioners in raising the project. The group was committed to proceeding only as funds were available. Within two years, 2% of the goal had been met, and we seemed to be quite on target toward our self-imposed deadline of July, 1993 (the 100th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone).

Each step of the project required approval by the Diocese prior to letting of contracts. All efforts came to a sudden stop in the last months of 1992 when the request was made for the interior contract phase (painting and carpeting) to begin. What was thought of a simply redecoration was extensive enough to be considered by the Diocese as being “changes in interior space.” The restoration had become much more expensive and arduous renovation requiring that plans for meeting the liturgical guidelines as set by Vatican II, the U.S. Conference of Bishops, and our diocese be absorbed into the project. (Although these “new” guidelines had been in effect since the late 1970’s our church had not had interior work done since prior to that time.)

The next year and a half was difficult for Fr. Bruce and the smaller steering committee formed from the initial “Bells of St. Mary’s” group with Tom Fahnstock as chairman. There were many meetings, great deliberations over all of the courses of action that St. Mary’s could take, and finally several proposals completed that could be formally presented to the Office of Worship.

The summer of 1993 was quite busy meeting the comprehensive plan required of us by the diocese. The first step was for the committee to formulate an action plan and have it approved. This plan included providing educational information for the parishioners, a process to gather their input and suggestions and a timetable and full plan for meeting the complete guidelines.

Much care was taken throughout the process to assure and respect the dignity and integrity of the architecture of St. Mary’s. The committee found an architect, Arthur Stauder of St. Louis, whose firm is well known for both its building and renovation of Roman Catholic Churches in the St. Louis region (over 100 in all).

The final plan that was submitted addressed all the areas required: the gathering space, the assembly space, the altar and ambo, the presider’s chair, the Baptismal space, Eucharistic Chapel, Reconciliation Chapels, and music spaces. The plan, of course, included the painting and carpeting, but now also added greater handicapped accessibility, a new main level restroom, new heating and air conditioning, a new acoustics and sound system, a new lighting and electrical system all completely meeting the liturgical guidelines without sacrificing the beauty of St. Mary’s. The total project now had grown from its original estimate of $500,000 (in 1989) to over $800,000. The parishioners much in the same manner as their ancestors, generously contributed to this monumental project to avoid amassing any debt. Fr. Bruce, in the same manner as his historical predecessors, provided the leadership and foresight to keep encouraging the committee and the entire parish to have the strength and fortitude to see the project through to its completion. St. Mary’s lives on into its next 100 years, renewed, strengthened, and enlivened due to the providence of God, the leadership of its pastors, and the generosity and faith of its people.
The cornerstone was laid July 16, 1893, by Bishop Ryan. Copies of the Telegraph, Sentinel-Democrat and Banner, and an instrument written in both English and Latin was put in place by Bishop Ryan, after being blessed. Following is a free translation of the document, which contains a brief history of the church as well as other interesting matter:

In the year of the Lord 1893, July 16, the eighth Sunday after Pentecost, on the feast day of our most Holy Redeemer, during the most glorious reign of Leo XIII, and the Rt. Rev. James Ryan, being the third Bishop of Alton, and Rev. P. Peters, Rector of this Mission. His Excellency Grover Cleveland, by the will of the people President of the United States of North America; Excellent John P. Altgeld, Governor of the State of Illinois, this stone was placed in the name of

The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. “Mr. Vincent Wardein built the church, while Mr. Lucas Pfeifferberger superintended the building. The process was slow but sure. The congregation grew very anxious that the church should be completed. At last the work was done. The church built, frescoed and furnished, and the day appointed for the solemn consecration had come: Thanksgiving day, 1895. It was a gala day for the congregation and for the City of Alton. Two Bishops, a great number of priests and an immense number of people, called by the beautiful chime of the bells, recently blessed, were in attendance. Bishop Jansen, a cousin and friend of the pastor, acted as celebrant of the consecration, while Bishop Ryan aided in the consecration of the marble altars. At the Pontifical Mass Father Michael, Provincial of the Franciscan Fathers, preached the sermon. Bishop Ryan addressed the congregation in English, and complimented them for their successful completion of the monumental church. But where was Father Peters? While a great number of priests formed the circle around the officiating Bishops in the Sanctuary, Father Peters’ heart was swimming in joy his eyes in tears. Away from the view of the people he had found a hiding-place in the organ loft, where he might, unobserved, thank the Lord and the glorious Mother on the happiest day of his life.

The cost of the church was about $60,000.”

December 8, 1993, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Bishop Daniel Ryan celebrated a Centennial Mass at St. Mary’s commemorating the 100th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone. A reception followed in the school cafeteria.
Pastors of St. Mary’s

Rev. Francis A. Ostrop
1859-1872
Rev. John Sandrock
1872-1873
Rev. Vincent Nagler
1873-1874
Rev. Peter Peters
1874-1896
Rev. Joseph Meckel
1896-1924
Rt. Rev. Msgr. J. J. Brune,
V.F. 1924-1954
Rt. Rev. Msgr. James A. Suddes
1954-1987
Rev. Edward C. Domme, O.M.V.
1987-1989
Rev. Bruce Williamson, O.M.V.
1989-Present

Parish Statistics

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<td>546</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>210</td>
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The Light of God...

The

Windows of

St. Mary's

Here then, is the message we have heard from him and announce to you:
That God is Light;
In Him there is no darkness.

The first epistle of John: 5.
The windows of nave, sanctuary, and choir are the ecclesiastical glass artistry of the Conrad Schmitt Studio of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The 16-foot Gothic casements are of lead came construction and consist of quarries of stained painted glass arranged in pictorial, symbolic, and geometric medallions. The heads of these lancets exhibit bar tracery. The rose window of the east facade is contained in stone tracery. Two early windows (1895) remain and can be seen in the second floor of the belfry which contains at its apex the familiar bells of St. Mary's. The windows can best be appreciated when studied in three divisions: sanctuary, nave, and choir.

SANCTUARY WINDOWS

The four windows of the sanctuary were the first of the “new” windows. In January 1943, Monsignor Brune began to work with the Conrad Schmitt Studio to design windows which would serve as a constant tribute and “visible” prayer of adoration to the Blessed Virgin Mary, patroness of our church, by depicting the holiness, the humanity, the humility, and the honor of Mary’s role in our faith. The 16 medallions of these four sanctuary windows indeed accomplish this goal.

Windows one and two are to the left of the main altar and three and four are to the right of the main altar.

Window number one, panels one through four:

1. ANNUNCIATION
2. THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
3. THE EXPULSION OF ADAM AND EVE FROM PARADISE
4. THE ESPOUSAL OF MARY AND JOSEPH

Window number two, panels five through eight:

5. THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, JESUS, AND JOHN THE BAPTIST
6. THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AMONG THE HOLY WOMEN
   This panel also shows the holy women holding a lily and a rose. The lily being the symbol of purity and rose the symbol of love.
7. THE NATIVITY
8. THE PRESENTATION

Windows three and four are to the right of the main altar.

Window number three, panels nine through 12:

9. VISITATION
10. THE CORONATION OF MARY
11. FLIGHT INTO EGYPT
12. JESUS IN THE WORKSHOP OF JOSEPH

Window number four, panels 13 through 16:

13. MARY KNEELING BEFORE JESUS IN INTERCESSION
14. MARY HELP OF THE AFFLICTED
15. FINDING OF THE CHILD
16. THE DEATH OF JOSEPH
In 1944 Monsignor Brune suggested to the artist at the Conrad Schmitt Studio, “to me it would seem a fitting climax. St. Joseph died while they were still at Nazareth.” The events (in other windows of the Holy Family) would show the flight into Egypt, the finding of the child in the temple, the child Jesus in the workshop of Joseph, and finally the death of Joseph in the presence of the Blessed Mother and his son.

NAVE WINDOWS

Work on the design of the nave windows was begun in 1945. These windows are dedicated to the twelve apostles and twelve martyrs of the church who are named in the Roman Canon of the Mass now called the Eucharistic Prayer Number One.

The center medallion depicts the apostle or martyr. The lower medallions are symbols of their work, life, or method of their martyrdom for their faith. The upper medallions are ecclesiastical symbols of Christianity used either generally or specifically as it applies to the individual window. The medallions of 10 of the 12 trefoils or quatrefoils depict a crown, the symbol of highest honor, authority or reward. In this sense it is the crown of martyrdom, the reward of eternal life for those who died for their faith. Sixtus the Second said, “Soldiers of Christ are not killed, but crowned.”

The quatrefoils of window 16, that of Peter and Paul, show the anchored cross and a single fish. Peter and Paul were martyred and are honored as anchors of the early church and representatives of our savior, symbolized by the single fish.

The trefoil of window five, that of Sts. Lawrence and Crysogonus, shows an open book and a lily, symbolic of the word of God and purity of faith.

1. ANDREW AND JAMES THE GREAT:

Andrew was the first called of the Apostles of Christ. He was the son of Jonas, a fisherman, and a fisherman himself. He was brother to Simon Peter, also a fisherman. The lower medallion shows crossed fishes, a symbol of faithful Christians as well as their calling to be fishermen of men. He was also a follower of John the Baptist prior to joining Christ as His apostle. His evangelistic mission took him to Russia and to Scotland. He became and remains a patron of Scotland. St. Andrew was martyred by being tied rather than nailed to a decussant cross.

The cross of St. Andrew is the x-shaped cross with the lily of purity of faith in the center. James the Great was the brother of John, sons of Zebedee and Salome. James was also a witness to the Transfiguration of Christ. He was with Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. James visited Spain at some time in his Apostolic mission and he is the patron of Spain. It is said that his remains were taken to Spain following his martyrdom. Centuries later the spot of his burial was revealed to a monk by a bright and shining star pictured in the upper panel. He was martyred by decapitation at the order of King Herod Agrippa.

2. ST. JAMES THE LESSER AND PHILIP:

While Jesus was “across the Jordan,” He called Philip to serve as an apostle. Philip, who was from Bethsaida, was with Christ at the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. When Jesus, having crossed the Sea of Galilee to shores of Tiberias, asked of Philip, “Where should we buy bread for these people to eat?” Philip’s simple but earnest response was “not even two hundred days of wages could buy loaves enough to give each of them a mouthful.” The lower medallion of the loaves and the fishes commemorates this miracle. It was to Philip that Jesus said at the last supper, “whoever has seen me, has seen the Father.” His martyrdom is thought to have been by crucifixion in an up-side-down position.

James was the son of Alphaeus. He became the first bishop of Jerusalem and established the doctrine that gentiles who accept the faith need not be circumcised. He was also known as James, the Just, symbolized in the upper medallion as the scale, because of his constant prayer for the necessities of his people. His death was due to the blow of a club as depicted in the lower medallion. James had been placed on the pinnacle of the temple
where he was stoned until he would deny Christ. When he refused to deny Christ’s teachings he was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and beaten to death with this club.

3. SIMON AND JUDE:
Simon and Jude were missionaries to Mesopotamia and Persia. Simon is also referred to as Simon the Zealot. Jude is sometimes referred to as Thaddaeus. In John 14:22 Judas asked the question of Jesus, “Why it is that you reveal yourself to us and not the world?” In Jesus' answer the coming of the Holy Spirit was predicted. The lower medallion shows the book, fish, and axe. The axe symbolizes the method by which he met martyrdom, presumably by dismemberment. The medallion of the sailboat is the mark of Jude.

4. CLEMENT I AND SIXTUS II:
Clement, the successor to Peter as Pope, is depicted here wearing the papal mitre and holding the crozier with the three armed cross of the western popes. Clement was banished by the Emperor Trajan to work in a quarry where he labored for his fellow Christians. During this time he wrote his letter to the Corinthians which is a homily on Christian life, emphasizing the need to persevere in the faith, and to remember that the west member of the community may be the greatest in the eyes of the Lord. Clement is known as an Apostolic Father because he lived and wrote under the direct or very close temporal influence of the apostles. The method of his martyrdom is not known. The lower emblem of this window shows the anchor cross and rose, which signify the messianic hope. Sixtus II was the 23rd successor to Peter in the years 257-258 A.D., during the period of persecution of priests and bishops by the Emperor Valerian. Sixtus II and four of his deacons were seized during celebration of a Mass held in subterranean seclusion. They were publicly decapitated. Sixtus II believed that “soldiers of Christ are not killed, but crowned.”

5. LAWRENCE AND CRYSOGONUS:
Lawrence was one of the seven deacons who were serving the Church under Sixtus II and during the persecution of Valerian. As deacon, Lawrence’s responsibility was for the goods of the Church and distribution of alms to the poor. When Lawrence was arrested, he was ordered by the Emperor to assemble the treasures of the Church. He assembled the treasures as he understood it - the poor to whom alms had been given. Because of this insurrection, Lawrence was roasted to death on a grid which is shown in the lower medallion. His constant prayer and slow, agonizing death were responsible for the conversion of many important people in Rome to Christianity. He was venerated for his sanctity, and the reign of Constantine a church in Rome was dedicated to him which is indicated in the upper panel.

Crysogonus lived in the year 304. Little is known of his public ministry; however, he was imprisoned at a time of persecution of the Church by Diocletian, and Crysogonus was thought to be the spiritual father of Saint Athanasius, a doctor of the Eastern Church. It is reported that Crysogonus was killed by the sword by being beheaded. A stone was tied about his body and he was cast into the sea. The lower medallion depicts the stone and sword.

6. COSMAS AND DAMIAN:
Cosmas and Damian are mentioned together in the Mass and are thought to be twin brothers. They had skill in medicine and were kind and generous to all who sought their help; they were known for their charity and Christian zeal. The lower medallion depicts three apothecary jars with a Latin cross above. The medallion in the lower right corner shows a sword and crossed arrows. It is said that their martyrdom came from many attempted ways - crucifixion, stoning, being shot with arrows; finally they were killed with the sword. The upper medallion is the six-pointed star of God the Creator. The medallion in the upper right side shows the chalice and host, symbolic of the body and blood of Christ for which they gave their lives. A church, named in their honor, has been in Rome since the year 530.
11. JOHN AND PAUL:

John and Paul were martyrs to the Faith. John and Paul were brothers who, at the time of Constantine, served as major domos in the house of Constantia, daughter of Constantine. The victory of the Roman General Gallicanus over the Scythians, and his conversion to Christianity, is attributed to John and Paul. The brothers would not serve Emperor Julian, successor to Constantine, because of his disloyalty to the Faith. Under his edict, they were executed in their house on the Eolian hill. The Church later constructed over this site by Emperor Jovian was given by Pope Clement XIV to the Passionist priests, and that church remains in Rome today. The upper panel depicts the Church constructed in their honor. The lower medallions are the symbols of the Apostles James and John, sons of Thunder, and of the Apostle Paul.

12. CORNELIUS AND CYPRIAN:

Cornelius and Cyprian knew each other, and were friends who lived and worked through the years of the early church for preservation of faith. Cornelius, the 20th successor to Peter as Pope, is shown in the papal mitre and carrying the triple cross of the western popes. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, carries the crozier of his bishop’s rank. The symbol of the lower medallion is the face of the ox, the symbol of Jesus Christ who was able to carry many burdens. However, during his papacy Cornelius was troubled by the rise of the first Anti-Pope. He died in exile in the year 253. The medallion above Cornelius, the ark of the covenant, is symbolic of both the Old Testament worship, as well as the symbol of God Our Savior. The arches of the cherubim wings are symbolic of the arch of salvation.

Cyprian was one of the great leaders of the African Church. He encouraged the faithful to persist in their faith and was martyred because of this dedication to the Work of God, the book of the lower medallion. The gate in the upper medallion symbolizes Christ as the gate of heaven.

13. LINUS AND CLETUS:

These two popes and martyrs were second and third successors to Peter (A.D. 67-88). The three-armed papal cross and the cathedral are symbols shown in the lower medallions. Little is known of the events in their patriarchy. The upper medallions show a church and a rose as symbols of the perpetuation of the church and the love of God.

14. BARTHOLOMEW AND MATTHEW:

Bartholomew is sometimes referred to as Nathaniel. Philip and Bartholomew were friends, and it was through Philip that Bartholomew was brought to Christ and included among the apostles. After Pentecost, tradition has it that he preached in India when he met a cruel martyrdom by being flayed and then beheaded. The lower medallion is that of the flaying knife. The upper medallion is that of the chrismon, “chi rho.” Matthew, a publican, a tax gatherer for the Romans, was called by Christ from his booth as a tax collector to “follow me.” The Pharisees questioned Jesus as to why he would associate with the tax collectors as he did at Matthew’s house. His beautiful teaching, “I have come to call not the self-righteous, but sinners” was the answer given to their inquiry. Matthew, the author of the first gospel of the New Testament, is shown with his pen and long scroll. The upper panel shows the cup of Christ’s sorrow from which they were willing to drink.

15. JOHN AND THOMAS:

John was author of the fourth gospel of the New Testament, chosen apostle of Christ, present with him at his Transfiguration in the garden of Gethsemane, and at the hour of his death, and witness with Peter to the resurrection of Jesus. John is the only apostle thought not to be martyred. He lived to an old age in Ephesus, where he wrote the fourth gospel. The lower medallion shows the eagle which is the sign of this evangelist, for his writings are said to be “like an eagle soaring to the throne of grace.” The upper medallion represents the scroll of his gospel writings.
Thomas was a Jew, probably a Galilean who had great love for Christ. Because of his love, he was willing to accompany Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead. It was to Thomas that the Lord stated, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father but by me." After Pentecost, Thomas was thought to evangelize India where he was made a slave of King Gendafor. He was ordered to construct a palace for the King which was never completed because he spent all of the money on charity and care of the poor. Thomas was martyred. He converted the wife of a king and was ordered to be killed. His method of martyrdom was either by spear or by arrow which are shown in the lower medallion.

16. PETER AND PAUL:

Peter was appointed by Christ as the first Pope of the Catholic Church when the Lord said, "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It was Peter who in the period between the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Ghost kept the group of apostles and Holy women together. He escaped the first attempt on his life by the help of the angels, but was finally crucified during the reign of Nero. The crossed keys in the lower medallion are the symbol of Peter as leader of the Church. This is the other window which does not have a crown in the quatrefoil. However, the anchor and the fish are symbolic of Christ.

Paul was called by Christ to become an apostle at his conversion to Christianity. He became the apostle to the Gentiles. He made four known missionary journeys. He is the author of letters to his converts to Christianity. Paul is shown here with the open book, the work of God. The lower medallion shows the open book with the inscription Spiritus Gladius meaning "Sword of the Spirit." Paul met martyrdom by the sword and decapitation.

CHOIR AND BELFRY WINDOWS

The rose window of the choir was begun in June 1944 and installed in September 1945; it is also the work of the Conrad Schmitt Studio. The harp the symbol of joyful worship and heavenly joy, occupies the center of the rose from which radiates the eight petals of the rose itself. At the periphery of the rose the choir of angels sing their praise to God. Saint Cecilia, patroness of the choir, and David, harpist, are shown below the rose. It is in David's Psalms that we are admonished (150:3) "Praise him with trumpets blast praise him with lyre and harp" and (147:7) "Sing to the Lord with Thanksgiving, sing praise with the harp to our God."

In the belfry tower to the right of the rose window can be seen the oldest and original windows of the church dating since 1895. The central pattern of these windows is a flower within the flower. The four petals of the outer flower each contain the five petaled white or Christmas rose, symbol of the nativity. The anchor cross and the crown of glory are seen at the heads of the windows.

To the left of the rose is window 17, Joachim and Anna. Joachim and Anna, parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, were childless for many years to their sadness. Because of this Joachim fled to the desert to pray. His lamentations reflect, "If I beget either male or female, I will bring it as a gift to the Lord my God, and it shall minister to him in holy things all the days of its life."

Window 18, Joseph and Mary, parents of our Lord.
St. Mary's School

St. Mary's has a tradition of dedication to providing the children of the parish with the highest quality education and a solid foundation of religious formation. The German Catholics of Allentown had a school prior to the building of the church. The location of the school changed five times throughout our history to meet the parish's changing needs.

The current school was built under the direction of Fr. Brune in 1930 and, because it was well-designed, has served throughout these 65 years with only minor physical alterations. Of course, especially in the last 10 years, much repair and renovation has been required to maintain its structural and mechanical soundness.

From the late 1950's through the late 1960's, the school seemed to be bursting at the seams, as were other schools throughout the nation, with the influence of the "baby boom generation." Through the efforts of the School Sisters of Notre Dame (who had staffed the school since 1875) and under the leadership of Sister Vincent DePaul and Msgr. Suddes, St. Mary's was able to stay on course. Class size during this period could range from 55 to 60 children. During this time excellence in both academics and sports prevailed. In both 1965 and 1966, to keep up with the school's growth, renovations were needed and completed in the school in the form of new lighting, floors, desks, and modernization of the cafeteria. By 1987, however, the school enrollment decreased to 355, and the number of Notre Dame sisters serving the school diminished as well. Now only two sisters remained. Due to the requirement of providing housing for the sisters and the fact that the convent was in need of major costly structural repairs and had monthly heating bills averaging $1000, the decision was made to discontinue the sisters' services in the fall of 1988.

To help out in providing religious education in our schools, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George (who also serve at Saint Anthony's Health Center) began assisting with two nuns assigned to St. Mary's. This has continued since that time with three now teaching.

The decisions to eliminate the Notre Dame sisters, suspend the cafeteria service, and combine St. Patrick's and St. Mary's schools were dramatic and difficult for both parishes and the new pastor, Fr. Edward Domme, O.M.V.

Due to the severe and growing school financial problems, Fr. Domme worked to get the combined school families involved in the Friday Night Bingo at St. Patrick's Hall (which had been going on for some time before to help finance St. Patrick's school).
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In 1988 the parents also worked all summer to refurbish four of the upper classrooms and hall at St. Mary’s. Floors and woodwork were refinished and general painting and maintenance of the first floor classrooms were completed. The parents’ efforts were tremendous, but items such as a new heating plant boiler and exterior tuckpointing and waterproofing, as well as the increasing cost for teachers, created a need to end the long-standing policy of tuition-free education.

During the next three years, updating of school facilities helped cement its future. An audio-visual room and computer room were set up, and the libraries of the two schools were combined and returned to the historic location on the first floor of St. Mary’s. (The library had been located for some time in the church basement.) A new floor in the cafeteria and new thermal windows throughout the building, as well as new drapes and ceiling fans in all rooms were installed.

Just as it seemed that the renewal projects were coming to a close, the ceiling literally fell in. The wire mesh holding the second floor hallway ceiling failed, and on April 4, 1991, the ceiling fell after everyone left the building. A new round of structural efforts ensued, including a new ceiling, lighting, and electrical upgrades.

It is at this point, January 1992, that principal Peggy Oungst and Fr. Bruce announced the plan to establish a School Board. This was in conjunction with efforts toward upgrading the Catholic education system throughout the diocese and insuring continuing parental support and involvement. The St. Mary’s School Board has been very well received. With the assistance of Catholic School Management, Inc. (CSMI), the first board was seated on May 16, 1992 and began the process of sound planning and effective school management. This process has entailed creation of a strategic plan and the beginning of a funding cycle and Annual Fund to generate both restricted and unrestricted operational support for the school.
The second phase of the work was the establishment of a new system of discipline for the school children. Called "Discipline with Purpose," it is a systematic character formation program that stresses skills to help the children become self-disciplined and self-sufficient by being involved in the development of rules of personal and social behavior. This program has been an overwhelming success throughout the school and seems to be addressing one of the most severe needs that has been identified nationwide.

St. Mary’s School, although aging, is doing so gracefully. Beyond that, it has poised itself on the threshold of a new century, ready to prepare the next generations for living, working, and succeeding according to the truest Christian principles.

Recent Principals of St. Mary’s

Peggy Oungst

S. Theona, SSND
1929-1959

S. Vincent de Paul, SSND
1959-1965

S. Carine, SSND
1965-1968

S. Tarsilla, SSND
1968-1970

S. Mary Ann, SSND
1970-1977

S. Maureen, SSND
1977-1987

Mrs. Peggy Oungst
1984 (St. Patrick’s),
1987 (combined St. Patrick’s/St Mary’s)
At no time throughout its history has St. Mary’s been without a choir. Prior to 1880, this German parish sang hymns during High Mass and at Vespers in the native tongue of its people. At one time, the parish boasted of four choirs, all of the highest standards - men’s, ladies’, mixed, and children’s. In 1958 there was an adult and children’s choir - both numbering 22 in membership. Today’s adult mixed choir has over 50 members.

Over the years there have been several outstanding organists, but none surpassing the importance nor longevity of Max Hiendlmayer. St. Mary’s was most fortunate to secure the services of Professor Hiendlmayer upon his arrival from Germany in 1923. He served in this position throughout the rest of his life. For many years he was not only the organist, but also the choir director and composer of much of its music. Most notable among his compositions was his “Mass of the Immaculate Conception,” based on the theme of Shubert’s Ave Maria. This he dedicated to his current pastor, Fr. Brune, and it was first sung on Pentecost Sunday, May 29, 1939.

After the death of Professor Hiendlmayer in 1972, Ken and Jean Conrado assumed the responsibility for providing music for St. Mary’s. Ken continued as choir director, a position he had for several years, and his wife, Jean, began as organist. Jean continued for many years the tradition of the boys’ choir singing Silent Night with the adult choir at Christmas. Mary Hentrich assisted as an organist from 1977 to 1979. In 1981 the adult and children’s choir made a recording representative of the music of St. Mary’s. Maurice Schulz took over as organist from 1982 to 1989. Jean Conrado returned to the position of primary organist that year until 1991, when she and Ken switched rolls - Ken at the organ and Jean leading the choir.

In 1991, the 19 rank three manual Wicks organ was fully restored, with transistors replacing the original vacuum tubes of the organ, which had initially been installed (the largest in the city) in 1945 under the direction of Max Hiendlmayer. Fr. James Brobst, O.M.I., gave the dedicatory recital on the newly restored organ along with the choir in February 1991. The tradition of having a full orchestra plus choir for the Christmas Midnight Mass still continues today. Music from the Latin Mass can often be heard at this time. In October 1993, the choir gave an anniversary liturgical concert to help preserve the sanctity and beauty of the music at St. Mary’s. Featured also were harps, violins and flutes. In 1994, a concert of sacred music was also held. As of 1995, several organists assist in the music of our church. They are Anita Crane, Charles Fisher, Theresa Garon and Fr. John Paul Klein, O.M.V.. Several cantors help in directing the parishioners in song during the liturgy at St. Mary’s. They are Jean Conrado, Theresa Corona, Cathy Droste, Amelia Elsbach, Patricia Fischer, Mary Hentrich, Gail Hill, Sarah Heuertz and Mary Wendle.
Land was initially acquired in the late 1860’s for the establishment of St. Joseph’s Cemetery (located on Central Avenue across from the current Saint Anthony’s Hospital & Health Center). Subsequent additions have increased its size. The cemetery has experienced its most dramatic changes during the past ten years through special attention of a dedicated group of approximately 10 volunteers and the cemetery’s one paid employee.

Two hundred trees were removed from the 20-acre grounds which currently have 8000 graves (60 percent capacity, 100-150 years projected usage). The cemetery has also been upgraded by landscaping, fencing, realignment of headstones, the placing of 600 lot markers in a new section, renovation of the old shed, and the building of a new 30 by 45 foot addition. The meager $5000 value of the building and equipment has been expanded to more than $60,000. Included in the new equipment is an “electric dirt wagon” built by the chairman of the Cemetery Board, Carl Saale. This unusual piece of equipment makes it possible to easily load and unload dirt as needed.

Prior to the installation of fences and gates in 1991, much vandalism and dumping occurred on the grounds. Volunteers now lock the gates each evening, and unlock in the morning; vandalism has been reduced dramatically.
God invites us to gather in his name, promising that where two or more are gathered in his name, he is there in their midst. We who accept his invitation begin to gather at the door of the church. In the foyer one removes his heavy outdoor clothing and the dirt from one’s feet so that, upon entering the house proper, one is fit for the occasion. As we enter the gathering space of the church, we leave behind all distractions of the world that we might join worthily in the praises of God. The unobstructed view of the church through the glass partition begins to prepare our minds and our hearts for what we are about to celebrate, while shielding the church proper from the noise and distraction of the outside world. In this space, which separates the holy from the secular of our everyday world, we come together, almost as a family reunion. We greet the familiar faces of other believers, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Next we enter the church proper. We are immediately met by the Baptismal font, sign of saving graces, entrance to the life of the church. Without first passing through the waters of Baptism, we are not allowed to approach the table of the Lord and receive him in Holy Communion. The font is large enough to bring to mind the waters of the Red Sea and the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan. It reminds us of the baptisms of our families and friends. Most of all, it calls to mind our own Baptism, through which we became a son or daughter of God. Here we were washed clean of our sins. Here we renew our Baptismal promises by touching the water and blessing ourselves each time we restored in the Sacrament of Penance.

Here we will be recognized as belonging to Christ when our casket is brought into church for the final blessings. The holy actions the church performs are performed throughout the church. The whole building, not just the sanctuary area, is God’s holy place. Thus, all who enter here, not only those in the sanctuary, are called to be holy, as our Father in heaven is holy.

We take our place among the faithful and wait, in preparation, for the priest and ministers to arrive. Everyone is welcome. There is a place for all. Access for the elderly and handicapped has been made safe and convenient through the side door where handicapped seating is reserved. The gathering space also provides a handicapped accessible bathroom. In this gathering area, families with young children may also sit during the service, to have a place more conducive to the care of children, and also to provide less distraction to others.

From our places we see the Sanctuary reaching out toward us, as if through his church, Christ were saying, “Come to me all you who labor and are weary and I will refresh you.” It becomes the focus of the assembly gathered around to hear God’s word to share the Eucharistic meal. Embellished with marbles from around the world (white marble from Italy, salmon pink from Mexico, and Hulihian jade from Taiwan), the sanctuary leads us to understand that we are called from the four corners of the earth to form one universal church. It reminds us also of our missionary charter. God sends us forth to preach the good news in every corner of our world.
There in the Sanctuary, in the most prominent place, stands the altar. As the church is lit for Mass, special emphasis is placed here, as the focal point of our liturgy. The altar is permanent to remind us of the unshakable foundation of our faith. The four pillars, once used for a different purpose in the church, recall the generations who have gone before us, and their generosity and sacrifices which have kept St Mary’s alive. The massive stone top represents Christ, the solid foundation of our faith. Its whiteness symbolizes the purity of the sacrifice we offer. Here the saving events of Christ’s sacrifice are renewed daily. For this reason the altar is reserved for this moment and these actions. It is here at the table of the Lord that the children of God receive the strength for their journey by partaking in the bread from heaven. Hence its table-like appearance.

To our left of the altar is the ambo. It matches the altar in style, prominence, and color to show the essential unity between the Word we hear and the Eucharist we celebrate. It has a flat table top to tell us that here is where the children feed on God’s word before moving to the table of the Eucharist, and in preparation for this great Sacrament.

On the opposite side is the presider’s chair, prominent yet not imposing. It is made from the wood and design of the pews, and matches them in color, to connect the presider with the community which gathers. It is from these people he comes, it is for these people he serves, and it is with these people he now stands in praise of God.

Framing the sanctuary on either side is the old communion rail, preserving so many memories of so many people who gather there. Yet it still gently encloses the sanctuary to highlight its special importance. To the right is the handicapped access ramp, allowing the opportunity to all to participate in the liturgy, and providing access to the Eucharist chapel.

The gates, which might remind some of the great basilicas of Europe, enshrine the Eucharistic chapel. While preserving the marble reredos (or high altar), and the central locality of the tabernacle, they also provide a distinction between the Eucharistic presence and the Sacrifice of the Mass. During Mass we want to focus our attention on the great miracle which takes place here, in this very moment, for us. Christ comes and gives himself to us in this act of love. This is the focus of our liturgy. With the help of lights, our attention can be focused on the sacrifice during the liturgy, or on Christ’s abiding presence in the tabernacle, inviting us to continued devotion. (Though the ministers should bow to the altar during the liturgy, still it must never be thought that the faithful should neglect to acknowledge Christ’s Eucharistic presence by way of the genuflection as they enter church.) The gates are designed after the window motif, double Gothic arches enclosed in a single arch with a clover-like design near the point. Outside of Mass the side gates should be open to welcome all who desire to spend some time with the Lord in Eucharistic adoration.

Newly repaired and restored, the interior of this Gothic style building has been painted with a warm color, and a simple design, which enhances rather than competes with its impressive architecture. The church has been preserved for generations to come; its new lights, sound system, and handicap ramp bring it up to modern standards and enable better participation in the liturgy for the people of today. St. Mary’s is a church marvelous to its beholders and wonderful to its users.