

History of St. Luke Parish

When Belleville was incorporated in 1850, it lay in the Diocese of Alton, Illinois. At that time, there was only one Catholic Church (St. Peter's) located in Belleville. German-speaking people largely attended and the vernacular parts of the Mass were conducted in the German tongue until World War I.

By 1866, the town had enough English-speaking Catholics to justify a Parish using their own familiar speech. The original boundaries of St. Luke were the same as those of St. Peter's, and until property and buildings could be acquired, St. Luke used the large hall of St. Agnes Orphan Asylum for a church, sent its children to St. Peter's school, and the Pastor resided at the Belleville Sister's hospital.

Bishop Baltes assigned Fr. Michael Gough as first Pastor on January 18, 1883. Born in Rhode Island on May 19, 1851, he was ordained on December 23, 1882.

The cornerstone of the new church was laid at the present corner of North Church St. and East "C" St. on July 4, 1883.

Opened in 1882, St. Luke School for English-speaking children actually predated the Parish itself. At first, it operated in the basement of the Immaculate Conception Academy near St. Peter's. In 1884, it was moved to a renovated stable on St. Luke property.

In 1887, the Diocese of Belleville was formed with St. Peter's as its Cathedral. On April 25, 1888, the Rt. Rev. John Janssen was consecrated first Bishop.

By July 1889, the first part of St. Luke's permanent school building was ready for use. By 1905, it became necessary to expand to accommodate the ever-growing student body. When Fr. Gough died unexpectedly on January 7, 1912, the parish had grown to over 600 families.

Fr. Patrick Byrne (who had been Fr. Gough's assistant since February 21, 1909) was appointed to succeed Fr. Gough and he served until January 1916.

Fr. Vincent Hartung became Pastor on January 20, 1916. During his tenure, other parishes were created in what was once exclusive St. Luke territory. These drained off many families who were obliged to fulfill their Catholic duty in the new parishes. Thus, by 1927, the student body at St. Luke had fallen to less than a third of its one time enrollment.

On October 26, 1927, Fr. Francis Kaiser became Pastor of St. Luke. He was born on August 8, 1891 in Cologne, Germany and came to the United States in 1908. He was ordained in September 1921.

His first project was to replace the old Church with a new and larger one. The new Church (which we still use today) was dedicated on December 23, 1928. The basic structure was erected for less than \$30,000. Furnishings, windows and other accoutrements, some of which were donated, ran the final cost up considerably above that sum.

On October 13, 1946, Fr Kaiser dedicated the Our Lady of Peace Memorial Shrine honoring Parish veterans of World War II. This statue still stands between the Church and the Rectory. His final project in 1965 was to build a new convent across from the Church (the present Don Bosco Center), which the Parish still owns.

Owing to advanced age and failing health, Msgr. Kaiser retired and was succeeded by Fr. Theodore Siekmann on October 21, 1968. Msgr. Kaiser continued to reside next door to the Church until his death on August 7, 1975.

Even the expansion of the boundaries for St. Luke, which occurred in 1955, proved to be less than needed. The School Sisters of Notre Dame, who staffed St. Luke School for 88 years, left the Parish on July 25, 1971. The school reopened under a lay faculty the following August. A new Parish hall, complete with kitchen and gymnasium, and designed to support the school, was finished in 1975.

On March 7, 1976, Otto Faulbaum became St. Luke's first Deacon.

On December 2, 1979, the St. Clair County Historical Society declared the Church and Rectory Landmarks.

For health reasons, Fr. Siekmann retired on March 12, 1982, and Fr. Dean Braun was named temporary Administrator.

Fr. Gene Neff was appointed Pastor on April 18, 1982. Because of its shrinking enrollment and the prohibitive cost of bringing the nearly 100 year old school building up to required safety standards (fire and building codes), the school was merged on May 27, 1982 with St. John School in Shiloh.

To afford Fr. Neff some relief from his added duties as head of the Ministry for the Sick and Aged, Fr. Fred Jones was assigned as part time Associate Pastor July 6, 1982.

The soup kitchen (brainchild of Earl Hasenstab) began in 1982 and continues today.

In 1984, St. John school closed and most of the remaining St. Luke school children transferred to St. Augustine.

Sadly, the old St. Luke school building was torn down in 1985.

An addition was constructed to the parish hall in 1986.

Otto Faulbaum, our first Deacon, passed away on Dec 20, 1987.

Pete Cerneka became Deacon at St. Luke in the Fall of 1990.

Sister Grace Marie Mueller became Pastoral Associate in August 1991.

Fr. Gene Neff left the parish on Aug 1, 1994.

Fr. Jim Margason arrived at St. Luke on Aug 6, 1994.

Fr. Jones died on Mar 13, 1996.

Bob Lanter became a Deacon at St. Luke on Apr 19, 1997.

Pete Cerneka left St. Luke as a Deacon in 1999

Fr. Margason was elevated to Monsignor in 2000.

In July 2004, Fr. Margason transferred to Shiloh Parish. Sister Grace Marie Mueller was elevated to Parish Life Coordinator and assumed total administration of the Parish. About the same time, St. Luke and St. Teresa began the clustering process with Fr. John Venegoni and Fr. Trevor Murry as Sacramental Ministers.

In 2005, Bishop Braxton was appointed to the Belleville Diocese replacing Bishop Gregory.

In 2005, Fr. Venegoni was diagnosed with cancer and his schedule was greatly reduced during his treatments. Fr. Murry transferred to assume duties of his own parish. In the interim, St. Luke was fortunate to call on Oblates, retired diocesan priests, and priests from Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis for weekly Masses. This continued until Fr. Von Deeke and Fr. Thomas were assigned to St. Teresa and as Sacramental Ministers to St. Luke.

In mid-2007 we welcomed Father David Darin, who was appointed pastor of St. Teresa's and St. Luke's.