

## THE FOUNDATION OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH IN CELINA

Sometime in the late 1850's or early 1860's, an Irish Catholic named Owen Gallagher was making his pioneer way to a small village on the plains of northwestern Ohio. Mr. Gallagher settled down in Celina, Ohio. He was the village's only Catholic resident. Daniel Mahoney settled in the town in 1861, to be followed in 1862 by three more Catholics – Celestine Garnier, Joseph Briggs and John Hess.

No Catholic organization existed in Celina at that time; in fact, there were no priests, no services, and no church. But here were the beginnings of Mercer County's next Catholic parish.

In the latter part of 1863 or early months of 1864, these Catholic families came together in the home of Joseph Zenders to attend Celina's first Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered by Fr. Bernard Dickmann, C.P.P.S. Mass was held about every two weeks, and as the word spread and more people came, services were moved to the Zenders factory near the Reservoir (southeast corner of Walnut & Logan Sts). Christopher, Jacob, and Peter Schunck added their names to those gathering for Mass.

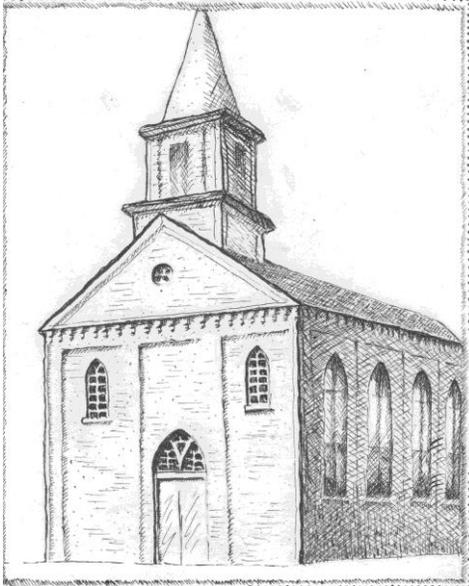


**Bishop Joseph Dwenger, Bishop of Ft. Wayne Diocese**

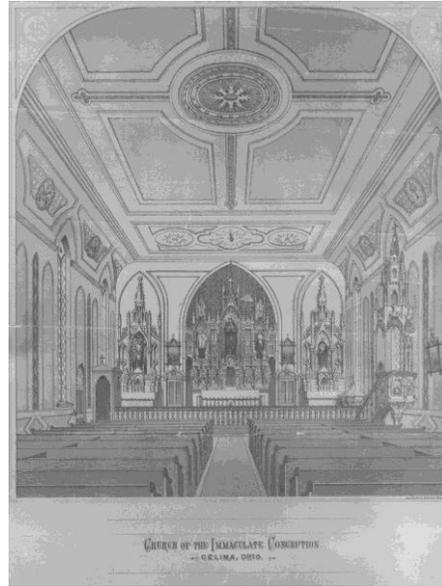
The formation of a new parish at Celina was the wish of Cincinnati Archbishop John Purcell. The work of organizing the new congregation was entrusted to Rev. Joseph Dwenger, C.P.P.S. of St. Marys, Ohio. Fr. Dwenger was a Missionary of the Precious Blood (C.P.P.S.), a religious society that served Immaculate Conception throughout its history. Fr. Dwenger later became bishop of the Ft. Wayne, IN Diocese. In 1864 Fr. Dwenger called the handful of Celina's Catholic pioneers to a meeting. He presented to them the object of the meeting – to plan for the erection of a church. A subscription fund was promptly organized and then carried out in 1864 and 1865. Under the guidance of Fr. John Van den Broeck, C.P.P.S., the new parishioners responded generously, donating over \$1,700. Original families contributing both the funds and the labor involved in the erection of the church were Christopher Schunck, C. Desch, Henry Bohrer, Peter Schunck, John Hein, John Heckler, Franz Jos. Hummer, Joseph Metzner, Frederick Meyer, Joseph Reithard, John Hess, George Schaefer, Jacob Schunck, Adam Schunck, Conrad Wright and Joseph Zender. Fr. Dwenger was able to help by collecting \$200 in Cincinnati.

## CELINA'S FIRST CATHOLIC CHURCH

Two lots, one on the southwest corner of Livingston and Sugar Streets, and the lot adjoining it on the west, were purchased on June 13, 1863. The property was deeded to Archbishop Purcell and was to be the site of the parish church. However, it was decided that the corner of Walnut and Anthony would be a better location for the parish. On June 23, 1864, a lot was bought there from John B. Hohne and here the parish church was built. In 1866, the property on Livingston Street was deeded back to the original owners.



**Line drawing of first church**



**Interior of first church building**

The first church was built on the northwest corner of Anthony and Walnut Streets and faced West Anthony Street. Stones for the foundation were shipped from Piqua on the Miami-Erie Canal. Archbishop Purcell laid the cornerstone of the church on August 31, 1865. Just over four months later on December 8, 1865, the new church was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, in honor of the dogma of her Immaculate Conception defined by Pope Pius X, December 8, 1854. The dedication ceremony was performed by Fr. Dwenger and was followed by Solemn High Mass. The completion of the small church had been a big task for the few Catholics at that time. The church, built of brick, was 40 x 60 feet and cost \$7,000. However, when furnished, plastered and painted, the entire cost was \$11,000. The seating capacity was for 112 parishioners in its 28 pews. Pews #1 and #2 were set aside for the three Sisters and the children. The church did have a bell, for it is noted that on January 2, 1870 the congregation owed to Jacob Schunck \$85 for bell. Early in 1871 he was paid \$55, and on February 8, 1871 an entry noted, "Bell is paid in its entirety".

During these early years, several firsts occurred for the parish. The first baptism was performed by Fr. Dickman when he baptized August Hacker on July 24, 1865. On October 16, 1865, Fr. Dwenger officiated at the parish's first marriage, that of Michael

Hein and Mary Matuch. In February 1866, Fr. Dwenger purchased for \$100 two acres of land to be used as a cemetery. A year later the cemetery was expanded when an additional acre of ground was purchased. The first parishioner buried in the new cemetery was Helen Hein on March 9, 1866. Although the number of parishioners mounted steadily, Immaculate Conception continued as a mission parish. Other Precious Blood priests serving the parish between the years of 1864 and 1876 were Mathias Kenk, Michael Graf, Thomas Eisenring and Ignatius Selb.

From the summer of 1873 through late winter of 1882, the parish continued purchasing property and eventually held the title to the eastern half of the block between West Anthony and West Wayne Streets, bordered on the east by Walnut St.

### **THE PARISH'S FIRST SCHOOL**

As the parish grew, the pastor and parishioners saw a need to establish religious education for the children of the parish. According to the account of Fr. Andrew Geitl, C.P.P.S., pastor of Immaculate Conception from 1886 till 1890, a frame building near the church was the first one-room school. Mr. Henry Bohning was listed as the only teacher. His term as teacher and organist lasted from 1871 to 1876. John Houck, who taught from 1876 to 1878, succeeded him.

### **FIRST RESIDENT PASTOR**

Fr. Theopistus Wittmer, C.P.P.S., who had also served the Celina parish as a mission pastor in 1872 and 1873, returned to Immaculate Conception Church in 1876 as its first resident pastor. A small frame house that set near the church was his rectory. During his pastorate a period of activity began. Additions and renovations, both to the church and school, were needed, and being close to the scene he could center his whole effort to the needs of his growing flock. He secured added room for the congregation by extending the length of the church from 60 to 90 feet in 1878. The addition to the church was made onto the north end, and two galleries, joining to the choir loft, were added to the east and west sides of the church. The added length to the church provided room for 81 pews (seating for 324 parishioners) in the main body of the church with additional space in the galleries. This meant a larger income for the parish for it is stated in the 1875 revised Rules of St. Marys Congregation, "The salary of the priest shall be collected (as long as the members or the majority of votes do not appoint another method on account of important reasons) by renting the pews. Every person of the congregation shall take part in this. Payment was to be made every quarter of the year." Pews were added when needed. In 1884, 84 pews are listed and in 1886, 88 pews.

## NEW SCHOOL IS CONSTRUCTED

With the help of a building committee, composed of Jacob Kreuzsch, Joseph Reithard and Jacob Schunck, Fr. Wittmer then supervised the erection of Celina's first two-story brick parochial school. This building was on the corner of Wayne and Walnut Streets, facing Walnut Street.

When completed at a cost of \$1,200, the new school, measuring 35 by 40 feet, comfortably accommodated ninety pupils. When the doors of the new school opened in the fall of 1878, the Sisters of the Precious Blood were there to greet the children for the first time in the parish. For years the parish school was popularly, if not officially, known as St. Mary's School. The first Sisters of the Precious Blood to teach in Celina were Sisters Mary Missler, Angelica Lochtefeld, and Lucy Ellerbrock. By January 1881 the school had enrolled 93 students, 48 boys and 45 girls.

By the end of Fr. Wittmer's pastorate (1883) the number of families in the parish neared 150. Of these, only about twenty-five were English speaking. The predominately German parish then became the charge of Fr. Godfrey Schlachter, C.P.P.S. He served as pastor for three years and then was replaced in 1886 by Fr. Andrew Gietl, C.P.P.S., who promptly turned his main attention to the school enrollment. The number of young scholars had already doubled in the past decade, and within a short time Fr. Gietl began a drive to raise funds for a new school, his most remembered achievement. The building committee was composed of H.H. Pulskamp, C.D. Hierholzer, and William. Maehlman. A total of \$3,311 was collected from 197 individuals. The donations ranged from \$1 to \$150 with the majority being \$5 and \$10.

By doing much of the construction work themselves, the parishioners were able to keep the contract cost, exclusive of fixtures and equipment, to only \$5,300. This second school was built on Wayne Street, west of the first school and was 46 x 76 feet. According to parishioners who attended this school, there were four classrooms on the first floor and a large classroom and auditorium on the second floor. With a larger enrollment and larger school, the teaching staff also increased. In September 1890 five additional Sisters were assigned to Immaculate Conception.

Up to this time the different pastors had resided in a small frame house situated in the center of the church property, but in 1889 Fr. Gietl had the interior of the old schoolhouse entirely remodeled into a comfortable rectory.

Several organizations working within the framework of the parish helped the priests in many ways from the time the parish was formed. Fr. Gietl listed these organizations as being a part of the parish during his pastorate: Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood, Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ and the Passionist Scapular, Third Order of St. Francis, Poor Souls Sodality, Sodality of the Holy Infant, Scapular of Mount Carmel, Apostolate of Prayer and Archconfraternity of the Sacred Heart, Rosary Sodality and the Altar Sodality.

From 1897 until 1925 the high school curriculum had only three years of study. Students who wished for a four year diploma transferred to Celina High School for the final year. The high school classes used the large second-floor classroom.

## FR. GEORGE HINDELANG PLANS NEW CHURCH BUILDING

On July 17, 1899, Fr. George Hindelang, C.PP. S., took over the leadership of the Celina parish. His progressiveness was soon felt in the parish. At the end of the summer he asked the parishioners to meet in the church to discuss with them the prospects of building a new church. It was agreed that the original church, now thirty-four years old, was clearly inadequate for the parish's present needs, much less its future needs. Consequently, a building committee was appointed to make a general survey of the costs involved and to plan a campaign to provide the necessary funds. This committee included J.A. Romer, John B. Pulskamp, Christopher Schunck, C.D. Hierholzer, Henry Lennartz, John Desch, Henry Knapke and John Pax. After a successful launch, the campaign proceeded as planned. The money pledged was to be paid in two installments, the first at the time contacted and the other within six months. With the assurance of these funds, work began.



Rev. George Hindelang, C.PP.S.

Building Committee minutes record many interesting details:

**Nov. 26, 1899-** 19 loads of sand were hauled. An engineer had been engaged to survey and ascertain whether there was enough fall for drainage to build a basement.

**Dec. 10, 1899-** 2 architects have been contacted through a letter and a third written to an architect at Anderson, Indiana for sketches for new church to be built similar in style, etc. to the St. Benedict Church in Terre Haute, Indiana. Architects were asked to furnish sketches provided they do so gratis. Also an advertisement was to be placed in the newspapers for sealed bids for furnishing about one million bricks.

**Jan. 8, 1900-** The question whether to build the church facing south or east was discussed. Mr. Schunck offered to sell his lot west of church for \$500 and J.B. Pulskamp was appointed to contact the Riley heirs to try to obtain a quit claim deed for the alley (laid to west side of the church, opening onto Anthony Street).

**Jan. 12, 1900-** The Riley heirs offered to sell the alley for \$50. C. Schunck lot #339 was purchased for \$500 and Hierholzer lot #338 for \$800. DeCurtins Bros., Lima, Ohio was awarded the contract to draw up plans and specifications for the church.

**June 12, 1900-** Permission was received from the Archdiocesan Chancellor, Most Reverend Henry Moeller, to build the church, but cost "shall not exceed \$42,800 and when finished there shall not be a debt of more than \$10,000."

**July 10, 1900-** A contract was awarded to John Burkhart, Kenton, Ohio, as contractor.

**July 15, 1900-** Blue Bedford Stone was used for range work.

By the spring of 1901 the construction work was far enough along for the laying of the cornerstone. As reported in the May 9 edition of the *Mercer County Standard*, the parish plans for a grand celebration to celebrate this occasion included four masses, with the 9:30 being a Solemn High Mass, and the fourth, at 11:30, a low mass “for the accommodation of strangers.” Vespers and benediction followed at 2:00 PM, with the actual laying of the cornerstone at 2:30. “Noted orator, Rev. Bernard Dickmann, C.P.P.S., pastor of Ft. Recovery” delivered an address after the laying of the cornerstone.

The work continued for two years, and time and again it was necessary for Fr. Hindelang to ask the parishioners for additional financial help. In 1902, three subscription lists show the willingness of the people to help with obtaining the pews. Another subscription list dated April 22, 1903 was for furnishing inlaid linoleum in the aisles of the church.



**An early photo of the present church**

The church was finally completed and dedicated on June 9, 1903, with the Most Rev. Henry Moeller, Coadjutor Archbishop of Cincinnati, officiating. The Romanesque-style church dominated the Celina skyline. Built of red brick set off with white Bedford stone, the edifice had a seating capacity of nine hundred. The interior walls and ceiling featured a number of beautiful paintings by artist Joseph Vittur of Chicago. The famous artisans F. & H. Schroeder Company of Cincinnati fashioned the altars, the communion rails, the pulpit and the frames for the stations. The cabinetry in the sacristies was handmade by Mike Schlegel, St. Henry.

There was an immense concourse of people present at the dedication representing all sections of the western part of Ohio. Rev. Bernard Dickmann and Rev. Andrew Gietl, former pastors, were deacon and subdeacon at the Solemn Mass. In the evening at 7

o'clock, vespers were sung and before the Benediction the Bishop addressed the congregation, complimenting them on their new church. After Benediction, the Bishop confirmed 250 candidates. Four members of the original founders of the parish were present for the church's dedication, Christopher Schunck, Adam Schunck, Peter Schunck, and John Hess.

Fr. Henry Drees, C.P.P.S., had earlier been given the honor of blessing the three church bells. The McShane Bell Foundry of Baltimore, Md. manufactured the bronze bells. In the north tower, one bell bears the raised inscription

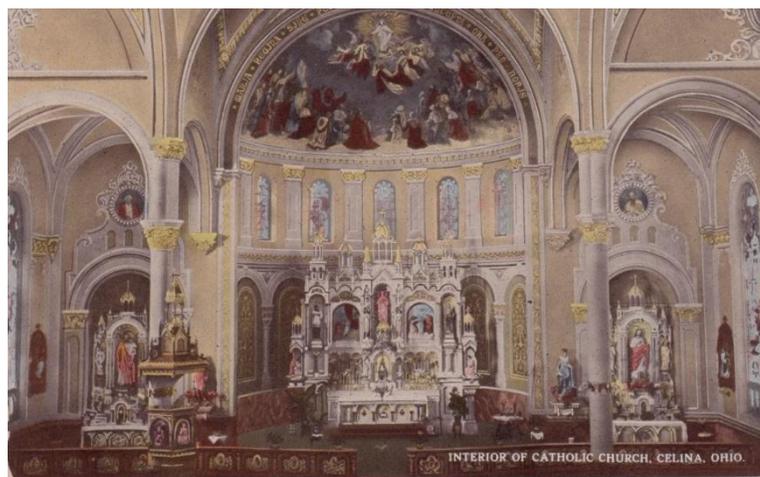
Gift of  
Bernard Johnsman  
Born April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1834  
Herzebrock in Westphalia

On the other side of the bell also in raised letters is

McShane Bell Foundry  
Baltimore, Md.  
1902

The bell is 36 inches high and has a diameter of 46 ½ inches with a clapper that is four inches in diameter. In the south tower there are two smaller bells, both bearing the name of the foundry and the 1902 date. All three bells are three inches thick.

So well had the people cooperated with their pastor in this building effort, that when the church stood completed, only \$44,900 of the total cost still remained to be paid. The cost of the entire structure with furnishings was \$85,000. It is not known how these figures were justified to the Archdiocesan Chancellor who stipulated that the entire cost not exceed \$42,800 or the debt to exceed \$10,000.



A colorized picture of the early interior

On the Wednesday following the dedication, Fr. Hindelang solemnized a double wedding ceremony, that of Anna Herdering and Joseph Wolf and Lizzie Herdering and Edward Reussenzehn. The ladies were the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Herdering of this parish. The men were from Dayton.

To provide music for church services, Fr. Hindelang contracted with the Henry Pilcher's Sons of Louisville, KY to build a pipe organ meeting the following specifications: "The organ shall be built of the best materials and in the most thorough and workman-like manner. The case shall be of white oak wood, quarter sawn, hard oil finish, and the design is to be in harmony with the architecture of the building. The cost is to be \$2,000."

When first installed, the organ required pumping by hand. Mr. Henry Tebben was paid \$15.00 twice a year from 1909 to 1916 to "pump" the organ. There are no records of others being paid to perform this work.

### **FIRST ASSISTANT PASTOR ARRIVES**

As the parish grew and the duties of the pastor multiplied, the assistance of another priest was realized on August 14, 1906 with arrival of Rev. Ernest Hefele, C.P.P.S., the parish's first assistant pastor.

On February 9, 1909 Fr. Hindelang called the congregation together once again to consider the need of a new parish rectory. After a thorough discussion, it was moved to purchase a lot on the northeast corner of Anthony & Sugar Streets from John M. Schlosser for \$2,000. Andrew DeCurtins of Lima, and formerly of Carthagen, drew the plans and specifications for the new rectory. The wardens of the church spearheaded the subscription of the parish and raised \$7,000. The large brick residence was erected at a cost of \$13,000 and four church organizations contributed to help the pastor – Young Ladies Sodality, Altar Society, Children of Mary Sodality, and the St. Joseph's Society.

### **NEW SCHOOL IS BUILT**

By 1917 the school again was found inadequate to meet the needs of the students. For one year the students crowded into the old parsonage (reconverted to a school) while the school building was razed and the new school was erected. It was ready for use in September 1918, and formally dedicated on October 5, 1919. The cost of the building was \$67,000.00.

In 1924 the eyes of the parish were again focused on the church. The dome needed attention. While the roof was being placed on the church in 1902, the building committee several times informed the contractor that the work was unsatisfactory. Some of the slate was defective and had to be replaced. After 20 years the galvanized metal covering had to be removed, and a new covering was specified "to cover the entire

curved portion of the dome as indicated, with Edward's 14 oz. Roman copper shingles, securely nailed with copper nails." The firm of DeCurtins & Rawson, Lima, was hired to supervise the work performed by the National Cornice Co. The cost was approximately \$6,500.

## **HIGH SCHOOL RECEIVES CHARTER**

In September 1925, the high school course was lengthened to four years. On April 12, 1926 Immaculate Conception High School received its charter from the Ohio State Department of Education. The first graduating class included Ambrose Forsthoefel, Daniel Knapke, Henry Knapke, Beatrice Howick and Mary Catherine Spieler.

In September 1928, the elementary school enrollment stood at 228, and the high school had an enrollment of 98. The high school faculty was made up of Sisters Holda, Helena, Redempta, Hilaria, and Rev. George Spaeth. The elementary faculty included Sisters Ludmilla, Salesia, Leonilla, Protasia, Eurosia, and Consolata. Sister Redempta was principal.

Increases in enrollment as well as demands for better facilities led to the construction of a separate building for the high school. Property at the northeast corner of Wayne and Anthony Streets was purchased from the Hamburger family. The school as originally planned was to have only classrooms. However, before construction began a gymnasium-auditorium was included. The cost of the building was \$72,000.00.



**Immaculate Conception High School**

In September 1933, one hundred fourteen students and a faculty of five began classes in the new building. The dedication took place on Thanksgiving Day, November 30, 1933. Taking part in the dedication ceremonies was the school band, resplendent in new blue uniforms with gold lined capes. The band was first formed in 1930 and included students in grades 6 through 12. Mr. Myron Pearce was band director. Band mothers raised funds to purchase the uniforms through sponsorship of lunch stands at the county fair, card parties, and raffles.

At the jubilee dinner, June 21, 1943, which followed the Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving celebrating his golden jubilee in the priesthood, Fr. George announced that he would retire and leave Celina the following week. He had spent all but six of his fifty priestly years in the Celina parish. He retired to St. Charles Seminary and two years later, died on October 15, 1945 following surgery.



May Crowning, 1946

The new pastor, Fr. Albert Gerhardstein, C.P.P.S., a former assistant at Celina under Fr. Hindelang, and his successor as pastor, Fr. Marcellus Fortman, C.P.P.S., embarked on a series of maintenance and refurbishing projects for the parish. Under Fr. Gerhartstein's administration, the interiors of both schools were redecorated; the roof of the church repaired; the exterior of the church and rectory painted; and in 1949 the grade school was rewired and new lighting fixtures installed.

When Fr. Fortman became pastor in August 1953, he soon noted that the magnificent church edifice was beginning to show its age – a half century. The slate roof of the church had to be replaced. By 1955 it was accomplished, and the church was again securely capped with heavy asphalt shingles at an outlay of \$20,000. The Associated Church Art Company was then called in to refurbish the church's interior, which still dimly showed the artistic work of its original decoration. The three main paintings – “The Sermon on the Mount” and the “Wedding Feast of Cana” on the west walls of the two transepts and the “Assumption” adorning the apse over the high altar – were preserved in their original forms but retouched and brightened again with vivid color. The other sections of the walls and the ceiling were completely redecorated. The total cost was \$32,000.

### **SCHOOL ADDITION AND REMODELING IS ACCOMPLISHED**

In May 1957 the parish purchased the Schlosser property on the corner of Sugar and Wayne Streets for \$7,000 and thereby extended its ownership to the full city block. Earlier, in 1953, in anticipation of future growth the parish had acquired the Lennartz home. The Fortman property, at the corner of Wayne and Walnut, was also promised to the parish. Growth came quickly, for in 1957 the I.C. grade school was crowded with an overflowing enrollment of 560 pupils.

As elementary enrollment increased, the clubrooms in the basement of the grade school were converted to classrooms, the auditorium was divided and used for classes, and some elementary classes were even moved to the high school. In 1959, the first grade had already been transferred to the public school because of lack of space.

To prepare for the construction of additional space in the grade school, Fr. Fortman named a building committee, consisting of Ralph Klosterman, Harry J. Winkeljohn, and John Zumberge. He then issued an appeal for unity in announcing the

start of a fund raising campaign to expand the I. C. Elementary School and convent. A goal of \$450,000 was set to complete the construction of the 15-room addition to the grade school and the construction of an 8-room convent. The theme of the campaign was "Pray, Work, Give." Parishioner John Hinders served as the campaign chairman, and with a team of nearly 230 workers, the solicitation of funds was successfully accomplished. In a campaign editorial dated November 1, 1959, it was noted, "Our campaign will become an outstanding success because of the sacrifice of the parish. It will stand as a monument to these sacrifices and will be respected and revered as such by future generations who will benefit by our labors."

The new school addition, completed in 1961 at a total cost of \$230,000, contained 17 classrooms, offices, health room, storage rooms, and boiler room. The gymnasium in the older section of the school was converted into a cafeteria and multi-purpose room, at an additional cost of \$64,000. Upon completion of the new construction, the elementary school once again included the first grade, which had attended Celina Public Schools since 1959. With the continued growth of the schools, a school board of lay advisors was formed to assist the parish's educational program in the early 1960's.

Fr. Fortman inaugurated many parish functions that still serve as important aspects of the parish. He proposed the first parish festival in 1959 and the same year reorganized the cemetery board, as directed by the archbishop.

In June 1963 Fr. Fortman was replaced by Fr. Charles Bricker, C.P.P.S. as pastor of I.C. parish. His tenure saw many changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council, changes that were felt from the largest cathedral to the smallest mission church. The priest, who had always offered the Mass with his back to the people, would now face the people. This one change caused a major renovation to the sanctuary of the Immaculate Conception Church. The communion railing was lowered, and the sanctuary was extended into the body of the church. A portable altar was made and donated by Mersman Bros. Corp. and placed on the sanctuary extension. Red carpeting was installed in the sanctuary.

Fr. Bricker wanted the people to participate and have a better knowledge of the workings of the parish. To this end, a parish council was formed in August 1966. It was made up of six parish men: Les Brandewie, Ray Grothause, John Hinders, William Maehlman, Carl Mescher, and James Scheuerman. Dennis Gebele served as secretary. The council worked directly under the pastor. The archdiocesan guidelines for parish councils also stipulated that the following individuals also had voting rights on the council: school administrator, president of the school board, and a representative of the finance committee. The council selects someone other than a member to serve as secretary. As finances proved to be a point of discussion at each monthly meeting, a finance committee was formed in 1968. This committee was to advise the council on the financial condition of the parish, and, if possible, propose means to raise additional revenue.

## **THE HIGH SCHOOL CLOSES**

Over the years the cost of maintaining and conducting the schools increased. The state inspector reports show that the high school consistently received satisfactory ratings. The business and science departments were found to be above average. The school's strongest point was the excellent student-faculty relationship. However, the faculty and school board still found difficulties in meeting the increased demands of state accreditation for the high school. During the 1971-1972 school year, the parish regrettably decided to cease operation of the high school. On May 21, 1972 the last class of 42 seniors was graduated. From 1926 to 1972, 1,276 students graduated from Immaculate Conception High School.

Since the high school had been closed, a decision had to be made regarding the building's future use. The parish used the building for the CCD program during the 1972-73 school year. Various organizations, businesses, and individuals were contacted, and a leasing agreement was set up. The Celina Public School System leased the high school building for the school years from 1973 through 1976 for all Celina freshman students. The parish also faced the problem of an unneeded convent since the closing of the high school meant fewer Sisters were serving IC as teachers. It was sold in July 1973 to Bob Case, who converted it into private apartments.

## **LAITY ASSUMES GREATER ROLE IN PARISH LIFE**

Fr. Louis Osterhage, C.P.P.S., who had been an assistant pastor at I.C. from 1959 to 1968, returned in July 1973 as pastor. Shortly after his arrival, Fr. Osterhage inaugurated the use of lay distributors at Mass, thus putting into practice another innovation of the Second Vatican Council that more laity be involved in the liturgy. The inclusion of a lector reading the epistle had been started in the parish in 1964.

Finances are always a problem involved with economics and growth. For additional parish income, Fr. Osterhage proposed to members of the parish council a weekly bingo with the proceeds to be used for the CCD program and the grade school necessities. The council members gave the suggestion immediate approval. In the fall of 1973, bingo was scheduled on Tuesday evenings at the Knights of Columbus Hall with Ray Grothouse and Albert Heckler in charge of the activity.

Further updating and remodeling continued under Fr. Osterhage's leadership. In 1974, attention was given to the rectory, which was in great need of renovation. By the fall of 1975, the remodeling and redecorating had been completed, and an open house was held for the parishioners. A fire escape was installed on the north side of the elementary school building for emergency exit from the third floor to comply with Ohio State Building Code, and a ramp was installed on the north side of church to provide easier access. Early in 1977, a permanent altar was presented to the church in memory of

the Albert Metzner Family. The altar was handmade by Phil Hawkey and fashioned in the same style as the original altars.

## **GROWTH AND CHANGE CONTINUE**

During the first year of his pastorate, Fr. Gregory Moorman, C.P.P.S., who succeeded Fr. Osterhage as pastor in 1977, directed the CCD religious education program, but he quickly realized it would need a full time director. Mr. Dennis Koenigsnecht was hired in July 1978 to be the parish's first Director of Religious Education. Fr. Moorman's tenure saw several other innovations including construction of a new 3-car garage in 1978, establishment of the "Christ Renews His Parish" program at Immaculate Conception, and the renovation of the old high school building so it could be leased to the Celina Insurance Group.

Also, after much negotiation, the Beare property on the corner of Main and Wayne Streets was purchased in December 1979 to provide a residence for the Sisters. While no major building projects occurred, the ensuing years saw several personnel changes and many innovations in the parish.

In 1981, the sanctuary of the church was enlarged and remodeled, and new carpet was installed. A new portable baptismal font was also constructed to replace the original. The next year, the Parish Council was renamed the "Parish Coordinating Council." In July 1985, Director of Religious Education Dennis Koenigsnecht left after serving the parish for seven years. That same summer, the old grade school roof was replaced after tops of the walls were removed and new caps installed. The following May, Rose Commodore was hired as new Director of Religious Education. Also that year, new boilers are installed in grade school at a cost of \$68,000.



**Repair work to the church dome after wind damage**

In June 1986, the church and high school building suffered wind damages due to a tornado. Insurance paid \$80,000 to repair the church, and \$42,000 to repair the high school. In 1989, new carpet was installed in the church and the statues were repainted.

The decade of the 1990's saw several maintenance projects completed: repair of the church bell towers, reroofing the church with slate shingles, replacing the rectory roof, new restrooms in the church, repair of church bells and their housings, repair of the church organ, and renovation of the rectory.

During these same years the parish was under the leadership of four pastors. Fr. Richard Riedel, C.P.P.S. succeeded Fr. Moorman in 1982 and served until 1987, when he was replaced by Fr. James McCabe, C.P.P.S., who served until 1992. Fr. William Hoyng, C.P.P.S. served from 1992 to 1996 and was followed by Fr. James Seibert, C.P.P.S. in

1996. In 1999 the parish of St. Teresa in Rockford was clustered with Immaculate Conception and was served by the same priests from Celina.

## **MAJOR CHURCH RENOVATION UNDERTAKEN**

In August 2000, Fr. Thomas Brenberger, C.P.P.S. was named pastor. Fr. Brenberger was instrumental in helping the congregation come to a consensus on renovating the church. In March 2002, I.C. Parish officially began the fundraising campaign for the church renovation in 2003. The goal was \$3.1 million, and the campaign was under the direction of Michael Madigan, with McCarthy & Associates from Southfield, Michigan. Plans were to have the renovation complete by the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building's construction.

Immediately after the twelve o'clock Easter Mass on April 20, 2003 the \$2.5 million dollar renovation project began at Immaculate Conception Church. Sanctuary and liturgical items, as well as hymnals and missalettes, were removed and placed in the gym located in the Parish Activity Center (the old high school building). The gym became the temporary church for I.C. parishioners.



**Scaffolding used during the church renovation**

The objective of the renovation was to restore and repair the church structure, preserving and restoring original artwork, decoration, and fixtures. Pew removal and demolition began the following day. One hundred and fifty thousand pounds of scaffolding was installed in the church. Walls were repaired and repainted. The painting scheme was developed with careful consideration of the architectural and liturgical significance of the interior. Wiring and lighting were updated, with a control and dimming system added to enhance the lighting. A new sound system was installed. The steam heating system was replaced with a high efficiency hot water boiler system with fan coil units replacing the old steam radiators. The 52 stained glass windows were preserved and refurbished. Broken or bowed glass was replaced, re-leaded, and regouted. The old lexan protective coverings on the outside were replaced with plate glass, in order to allow the natural light to shine through. The lower section of the windows were replaced with manually operated venting units. The construction of a

handicapped-accessible ramp from the nave level to the sanctuary level provided easy accessibility to the sanctuary. The north side entrance was updated by adding an automatic opener to the door. New carpet was installed throughout the church, and tile was installed in the vestibules and around the new baptismal font.

Another goal was to improve the placement of the liturgical furnishings consistent with the purposes and rule of Catholic worship. A new, permanent baptismal font was added. A new permanent altar was designed and placed in a position where it was more visible from the seats in the nave. A new ambo was designed to harmonize with the altar and other sanctuary furniture. The fronts of the old confessionals were reused as façades for the new reconciliation rooms, which are located in the same space. The refurbished pews were reinstalled and rearranged to increase seating capacity and visibility

Outside, the brick and limestone surfaces were cleaned and repaired as needed. Additionally, new cement steps were installed in front of the church, as well as on the south side. Better illumination of the entrances was also added.

The construction project was completed in time for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8. On Sunday, December 7, 2003 at Noon, Archbishop Daniel Pilarczk celebrated the solemn liturgy of the Dedication, blessing the newly refurbished church building, consecrating the new altar, and celebrating the first mass. Parishioners gathered after the Mass for a reception to celebrate the completed renovation.

However, the church renovation was not the only thing going on in the parish. At the same time the Religious Education Program was reorganized. After serving as Director of Religious Education since April 1993, Ruth Mary Meier died July 16, 1999. Until July 2000, Linda Schoen coordinated the program. Sister Brigid Danaher, a Sister of Mercy, held the position of DRE until July 2001, when Charlene Huff assumed the leadership role and changed the name to Parish School of Religion. Also, after serving as parish secretary and later business manager for 31 years, Ruth Rhodes announced her retirement. She was replaced by Sandy Sielschott as business manager.

## **NEW LAY MINISTRIES AND COMMISSIONS FORMED**

In September 2001 the Parish Council approved the formation of a Youth Ministry Ad Hoc Commission, and the Parish Life Commission was organized.

Introduced to the parish in October 2001, the St. Marys Deanery Ministry 2010 Plan proposed to cluster parishes to address the continued shortage of priests. According to the plan, Immaculate Conception would be part of the Celina Cluster, along with St. Teresa, Rockford, and Our Lady of Guadalupe, Montezuma. The plan called for the clusters to be formed as needed, depending on the availability of priests.

In the winter of 2001 the Parish Council gave I.C. School final approval to initiate a preschool program. The first preschool classes started in the fall of 2002.

Parish volunteers renovated the parish activity center. Through their efforts, the PAC was much improved for meetings, religious education, and other activities.

The following years saw many changes in the organization and structure of parish commissions. In April 2009, Strategic Leadership Associates of Beavercreek, OH. were hired to conduct a study of Immaculate Conception School and to determine the feasibility of its continuation. A school advisory board and fundraising and marketing committees were established. The Fundraising Committee was given an annual goal of raising \$200,000.00 for the school, and the Marketing Committee's goal was to increase student enrollment by five students each year. TADS, a consulting firm, was contracted for needs assessment, grant management and tuition management services.

Fr. Ken Schnipke, C.P.P.S. replaced Fr. Brenberger as pastor in July 2010 and continued the innovations. Over the next few years, the IC School Advisory Board began to carry out the IC School business and educational plan and to continue oversight of the school. In February 2011 a youth ministry summit was held and ICY (Immaculate Conception Youth) was formed, filling a need to serve the youth of the parish by involving them in parish life.

During the summer of 2011 an organizational audit was conducted by the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators to offer recommendations for effective organization, operating procedures, and staffing in the parish. Also, that summer the IC Stewardship Commission was formed to develop stewardship as "a life-long process that encourages parishioners to identify their God-given gifts, be grateful for them, cultivate and use them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, return them back to God with increase." (*Stewardship, A Disciple's Response*, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1993.)

Personnel changes included the hiring of Joyce Johnson as the Coordinator of Religious Education and Charlie Salway as Associate Youth Minister.

In May 2012 the Immaculate Conception Mission Commission was formed. Its purpose is to support the work of missionaries throughout the world through prayer, fundraising, and missionary visits. Immaculate Conception Parish continues to work to strengthen faith formation at home as well. In November 2011, the parish hosted several discussion groups regarding the implementation of the revised Roman Missal, and in the fall of 2012 it participated in the Catholics Come Home and Advent and Christmas Evangelization project sponsored by the Archdiocese.

Through the generosity of the parishioners of IC, several maintenance and repair projects were carried out. Tuckpointing and repairs included all four sides of the church, the old grade school and the parish activity center. Two boilers in the old grade school and the new grade school were replaced at a reduced cost thanks to the generous assistance of parishioners.



**Fr. Schnipke recognizing the Sisters of the Precious Blood for their years of service to IC Parish, upon the retirement of Sr. Nancy Wolf, C.P.P.S. (right). Sr. Joyce Lehman, C.P.P.S. (center) President of the Sisters, accepts the plaque.**

In August 2013 Sr. Nancy Wolf, C.P.P.S. celebrated both her 50<sup>th</sup> Golden Jubilee as a Sister of the Precious Blood and her retirement from Immaculate Conception School. The retirement marked the end of a 132-year history of Sisters of the Precious Blood serving at Immaculate Conception School. In January 2014 Sandy Sielschott resigned as business manager, and Lindsey Lutz was hired in her place.

The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Immaculate Conception Parish began with a 12 noon Mass on June 22, 2014. A parish picnic followed. The

celebration continues through the summer and fall with church tours offered to the public, an Ecumenical Thanksgiving Prayer service at Immaculate Conception Church in November, and concludes with a 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass on December 7, 2014 with Bishop Joseph Binzer presiding. A reception follows the Mass.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Thus the history of Celina's Immaculate Conception Parish is brought into the present. But the history of a parish, or any organization, can tell only so much. What is important is the effect that parish has had on the present. By looking back, we can see the impact a small group of Catholics meeting for mass in 1863 has had. The flame that started as a flicker of faith among a handful of families 150 years ago has burned brighter and brighter, so that Immaculate Conception now stands as a beacon of our Catholic Church, guiding the faithful to Jesus Christ. We ask God for the guidance and the wisdom to allow our actions today to have such an impact on those who will follow us in the future.