

# TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Serving the Diocese of Fort Wayne - South Bend



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## St. Patrick: The heart of Christ open to everyone



Located in downtown Fort Wayne, St. Patrick Church has become one of the most diverse parishes in the area since its founding in 1889. Now 128 years old, the faith community began as the only Irish parish in town. It now has trilingual Masses and parishioners from 30 countries, according to parishioner Donna Brooke.

Father Thomas O'Leary, the first pastor, made plans for the building of the church, which was completed in 1891 after his death. The high altar and sanctuary, made of Italian marble, were donated and installed in 1912.

According to parish history, in 1913 Bishop Herman J. Alerding bestowed upon the church the honor of consecration. It was the first church in Fort Wayne to receive this privilege, a visible sign of which is 12 crosses affixed to the walls. “Above the crosses were placed sconces, each one holding a blessed candle, states information provided by Brooke.

The 12 candles are to burn annually on the anniversary of the parish feast of consecration. Each cross and candle marks the sacred spot anointed with Holy Chrism by the bishop. This custom calls to mind the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, on whose foundations were inscribed “the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb, (Rv 21:14).”

The pride of the parish for many years, a 40-rank pedal Wicks Organ was installed in 1937 and attracted organists to the city to play. It is still used today.

Over the years, St. Patrick has been involved in the education of local children. St. Patrick School started in 1886, before the parish was established, and continued to move to new buildings as it grew. The school building that is currently on the church campus was completed in 1918 and had 639 students in grades one through eight that year. In the '90s, St.

Patrick school combined with other local schools to become the Benoit Academy and the school building began to be used for other parish activities.



The St. Patrick Vietnamese community is pictured on the occasion of the installation and blessing of the image of Our Lady of La Vang.

Msgr. Joseph Delaney, the second pastor of St. Patrick, built St. Catherine's Academy, a high school for girls in the parish and the area. It was open from 1901 until 1938, when Central Catholic became co-educational.

The Sisters of Providence ran both the school and the academy and were present in the parish for over 70 years. Eventually, a convent was built on the church campus in 1929 and remained there until 1995.

In 2003, St. Patrick merged with St. Paul, a parish with a large Hispanic population, which led to the vibrant Hispanic community that is present now. Today, education continues at St. Patrick, through religious education for about 425 students in both Spanish and English.

The parish is still one of the bigger parishes in the city, with 813 families, which totals about 3,075 people. Every weekend there are Masses in English, Spanish and Vietnamese, and on special celebrations like Easter the parish celebrates trilingual Masses.

"It is really a multicultural parish," Father Andrew Thu Pham, pastor, said. "I like to see people to be able to come together to work, to all cooperate, to pray and to socialize together. And I like to see them, you know, mix and talk to each other."

"You come in here, and you're not going to judge anybody in this church, you're just going to be here to venerate God, and everybody's welcome," Brooke, an exceptionally active parishioner, said.

Since the people who attend the parish come from a wide variety of places and do not always speak the same language, the parish works hard to bring everyone together for special events.

“We’re just a big family and all the priests are so friendly and we all hang out together and its wonderful,” she noted.

Although it is no longer the city’s “Irish parish,” the St. Patrick’s Day celebration is still a popular event that brings the different communities within the parish together. People bring their own traditional food, in addition to standard Irish dishes, to connect the past to the present.

The parish also holds special celebrations for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Lunar New Year to incorporate other special days for the different communities in the parish.

“We try to create different environments, different social settings, different activities, like fundraisers, parish fest, things like that so people can come together,” Father Thu Pham said.

In addition to feast days and other celebrations, the parish also has regular services and groups that both serve the community and bring people together. St. Patrick has a food bank, works with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, holds AA meetings and runs the Clinica Madre de Dios, a free clinic for those who are uninsured and make less than 20 percent of the poverty level.

One ministry that has grown exponentially over the past decade is the Tuesday night prayer group. Huberto Vasquez helped to start the group in 2006, at first leading only a few people in a rosary, music and charismatic prayer in Spanish. Today, the group attracts hundreds of people every week, averaging about 200 each time.

“Most of it is to help enrich our faith, Catholic faith, to grow in love and charity to others,” Vasquez said. “From my own experience and from the testimony of a lot of us, it brings our faith alive and our involvement to the parish, to the different ministries within the parish, within the church activities. We bring more life to the parish.”

It is people like Vasquez and Brooke who keep the parish operating. “Without them, I cannot do everything in the parish,” Father Thu Pham said.

St. Patrick has a place in its heart for immigrants and welcomes anyone with open arms.

“Our parish doesn’t have a lot of money but it has a lot of spirit, it has a lot of faith, you know, it just feels like they know that things will work out for them,” Brooke said. “When Father Jim Koons was here, he embraced everybody to feel free to come here: There’s a plaque in the back of the church that says ‘Check your prejudice at this door.’ He also coined this phrase (to describe the parish): ‘Where the people are more beautiful than our historical church.’”

“St. Patrick — I see it as a mother, because they get us together, join us together, they feed us in our faith, in our sacraments,” Vasquez said. “St. Patrick is, for me, it’s a great love. For me it’s like heaven. This is always the heart of Christ, open for everyone.”

St.Patrick

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Mass Times:

Saturday: 4:30 p.m. (English); 6 p.m. (Spanish)

Sunday: 9 a.m. (E); 12:30 p.m. (S); 10:30 (Vietnamese)

Holy Day: 9 a.m. (E)

Weekday: M, W 5 p.m. (E);

T, Th, F 6 p.m. (S)

Adoration: Th. 8:30-10 a.m.; 6:45-8 p.m.

Reconciliation: Saturday – 3:30-4:15 p.m. (E); Sunday – 8-8:45 a.m. (E),  
10 a.m. (V); Thurs. 7-8 p.m. (S); weekdays by appointment.

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