

There are many angles through which we could examine the history of St. Mary's Parish. A thorough overview of the history of the parish reveals two key elements, which have shaped the history of St. Mary's. First, St. Mary's has been intricately connected to Catholic schools in Waukesha, not only in its foundation, but also throughout its entire existence. Second, St. Mary's has been willing to assess its present circumstances and to be innovative in response to present circumstances. It is this spirit of innovation that guides St. Mary's into the future, closely connected with the Catholic schools, which surround it.

It is fitting that we begin our journey in the halls of the first Catholic high school in the city of Waukesha, namely, St. Mary's "neighbors across the valley," i.e. Catholic Memorial High School. Under the leadership of Msgr. Rodenkirch, efforts took place to found Catholic Memorial High School (CMH).¹ In 1949, CMH served as the first Catholic high school in the city of Waukesha.² With Archbishop Kiley having founded St. Mary's in 1950, the parishioners of St. Mary's needed a place for their children to attend Catholic school.³ CMH served this purpose until 1953. With CMH expanding to a four-year high school, the children of St. Mary's needed to find another building in which to take classes.

With the expansion of CMH, the history of St. Mary's, thus, followed the path of another school, namely, its own, being completed in 1953, at the time a ten-room school house.⁴ With increased enrollment, the school saw two additions to the school, one coming in 1960 (a six-classroom addition) and the other in 1965 (a four-classroom addition). Interestingly enough, this growth took place, by and large, before the actual construction of the current church in 1965.

¹ Unnamed source from archdiocesan archives, cf. 1940s. This source, found within the archdiocesan archives, contains neither author nor date of composition. Nevertheless, it provides helpful information in constructing the history of St. Mary's Parish.

² Bill Kurtz. "St. Mary Parish grew as did Waukesha." *The Catholic Herald*, 1999/2000. Accessed April 4, 2017, in archdiocesan archives.

³ Unnamed source from archdiocesan archives, cf. 1940s.

⁴ Kurtz, "St. Mary parish grew as did Waukesha."

It clearly was evident that the parish school played an important role not only in the early days of St. Mary's, but also in its growth. In the meanwhile, without a parish church, the sacramental life of the parish also was dependent upon these academic institutions. An October 23, 1949, bulletin from St. Joseph's Parish promoted Masses being celebrated in the St. Mary's Chapel at CMH, its presider being then-principal of CMH, Fr. John Voelker, who went on to be the first pastor of St. Mary's.⁵

With the founding of the parish in 1950, Masses for the newly-established St. Mary's Parish took place in the Our Lady of Fatima Chapel at CMH.⁶ Masses continued at CMH for eleven years, until 1961.⁷ In 1961, with CMH's completion of its own gym, St. Mary's began using its own gym for Masses, having outgrown the Our Lady of Fatima Chapel. Thus, a four-year span of worship (and many other events) began at St. Mary's gym.

As much as St. Mary's parishioners were used to being dependent upon their neighboring academic institutions for places of worship, a March 6, 1963, letter from Fr. Enders to Archbishop Cousins in the archdiocesan archives revealed discontent growing among parishioners over not having an actual church in which to have Mass.⁸ While some parishioners, he said, were ready to move Mass into an actual church, other parents were concerned that their children would struggle to grasp Divine Presence, if Mass were to continue being held in the school gym.

⁵ Bulletin article accessed April 5, 2017, in St. Joseph's Parish archives; unnamed source from archdiocesan archives, cf. 1940s.

⁶ Unnamed source from archdiocesan archives, cf. 1940s.

⁷ St. Mary's Parish. *St. Mary's Church*. 1965 Parish Church Dedication Book. Accessed April 4, 2017, in archdiocesan archives.

⁸ Accessed April 4, 2017, in archdiocesan archives.

Nine months later, construction began on the current St. Mary's church building.⁹ With the groundbreaking ceremony of December 8, 1963, official construction on the parish church finally had begun. The project took a little under one year. By September 20, 1964, the cornerstone of the church had been laid, and dedication of the church officially followed on January 24, 1965. With that, a new era in the history of St. Mary's Parish had begun.

Not only had a new era in the history of St. Mary's begun, but also in the life of the Archdiocese, as well as in the universal Church. We find evidence of this in the design of the church. Brian Gunn, son of St. Mary's church architect, George Gunn, said that St. Mary's was one of the first churches in the archdiocese to be built with a free-standing altar, which allowed the priest to face the people while saying the Mass.¹⁰ Fr. Enders wanted a church built with the congregation in mind, thus anticipating the effect liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) had on the Church at large.¹¹

With its new church complete, a new chapter in the history of St. Mary's commenced. According to archdiocesan archival records, St. Mary's continued to grow over the 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s.¹² Membership rose from 3,362 people in 1960, to 4,413 people in 1970, all the way to 6,200 people in 1980. Number of households peaked around 2,100 in the early 1980s.

⁹ 1965 Parish Church Dedication Book from archdiocesan archives.

¹⁰ E-mail messages and conversation with author, Feb. 9, Mar. 26, and Apr. 3 2017.

¹¹ 1965 Parish Church Dedication Book from archdiocesan archives. A second reason for the uniqueness of the design of St. Mary's was the way that it was laid out geographically. Anyone who has set foot within the church at St. Mary's knows that it rests on a rather noticeable hill. According to correspondences and conversation with Brian Gunn, initial designs had the church running west-to-east on Newhall Avenue, with the main entrance being on Hartwell Avenue. People quickly realized that this would pose difficulties for those who struggled walking. Thus, as Brian Gunn and the 1965 Parish Church Dedication Book say, the main entrance to the church switched from Hartwell Avenue to Newhall Avenue, as well as the design of the church switching from a long rectangular design to its current semi-circle shape.

¹² St. Mary's Parish statistical records from archdiocesan archives. Accessed April 4, 2017, in archdiocesan archives.

After the creation of St. John Neumann parish on the southwest side of Waukesha in the 1980s, St. Mary's household number dropped and leveled to around 1,450 by the end of the 1980s.¹³

The educational life of the parish remained strong over the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Archdiocesan archival records reveal that in 1960, St. Mary's School enrolled 714 students, 596 by 1970 and 580 by 1980. Similar records reveal a sharp increase in the number of students in the parish's religious education program during that time. The parish religious education program enrolled only 164 students in 1960, but it enrolled 778 students by 1970. That number stayed the same through the decade, dropping only to 740 by 1980.

By the end of the 1980s, the Catholic parishes in Waukesha faced a dilemma, the result of which offered a model for the parishes to follow in the future. By the end of the 1980s, each St. William's, St. Mary's, and St. Joseph's all ran their own parish schools.¹⁴ While each was able to do so, the three schools noticed an enrollment decrease, most notably in their sixth, seventh, and eighth grade classes. Desiring to remain competitive academically, the four parishes of Waukesha knew that something had to change.

What resulted was the creation of the Waukesha Catholic School System, a collaborative effort between St. Joseph's, St. Mary's, St. William's, and St. John Neumann Parishes.¹⁵ Rather than each parish sporting its own school, 4K-grade 5 were offered at St. Mary's School and St. William's School. Grades 6-8 took classes at St. Joseph's School. While there was some resistance at the time, most eventually agreed to the change. By fall of 1990, the new school system was up and running.

¹³ Kurtz, "St. Mary parish grew as did Waukesha."

¹⁴ Maryann Bouche. "Waukesha Catholic School System marks 20th year." *The Catholic Herald*, February 2011. Accessed April 4, 2017, in Archdiocesan Archives.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Some students admitted that it felt weird to be at a different school initially, but the students quickly adjusted to the change.¹⁶ The numerical gains desired by the parishes came to fruition even within a decade. Enrollment in the 1990-1991 school year for the system was 722 students. By the 2000-2001 school year, enrollment at the system had reached 837 students. Enrollment numbers changed over the following decade; however, the desired changes in quality of education were achieved.

Waukesha Catholic only is one example of St. Mary's being a parish willing to try something new. Going back to its founding, St. Mary's was on the cutting edge of serving Catholics as Waukesha grew following the Second World War.¹⁷ As mentioned above, the design of the church at St. Mary's was quite innovative for its time. St. Mary's even served as the site of the first Mass then-Archbishop William Cousins celebrated in English in the Archdiocese. This took place at the Dedication Mass for the church in 1965.

Innovative changes occurred at St. Mary's in the years following the Second Vatican Council.¹⁸ For example, in addition to starting a parish council, the parish established one of the first school boards in the archdiocese to serve the needs of the school. One of the first permanent deacons of the Archdiocese, Deacon Larry Pettey, came from St. Mary's. Also, by the 1980s, under the guidance of Fr. John Twomey, St. Mary's experimented with a team of pastors, rather than associate pastors serving under one pastor.

Innovation also involved gender roles at the parish. St. Mary's strove to find ways to find leadership roles for women at the parish¹⁹. One example of this was the creation of the parish associate position, now known as the pastoral associate position. This position allowed women

¹⁶ Bouche, "Waukesha Catholic School System marks 20th year."

¹⁷ Brian Gunn, e-mail messages and conversation with author, Feb. 9, Mar. 26, and Apr. 3 2017.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

to serve in a ministerial way, not previously possible. Some of these changes were not always without controversy.²⁰ The late 1980s found tension arise at the parish over the role of the pastoral associate in liturgies.

By the late 1990s, St. Mary's was willing to try something new with regards to the design of the campus. To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the parish, efforts were undertaken for a three-level building expansion. The top level served as a small chapel and large gathering space, connecting St. Mary's School to the parish church. An elevator now took people from the church level down two floors to the parking lot. In addition, a new community room, with seating capacity for over 400 people, was added, making a new space for large gatherings and multi-parish meetings.

By the end of the 2000s, St. Mary's embarked on another innovative venture, learning about where its future was heading by looking back to where St. Mary's School headed in the early 1990s. Acknowledging rising costs and decreased Mass attendance, the four parishes explored the possibilities of collaboration between the four parishes.²¹ The venture, known as "Better Together," sought ways that the four parishes of Waukesha could better work together to provide for the needs of not only their own parish, but also the entire Catholic Community of Waukesha.

The "Better Together" project began in 2011.²² Over the course of the following six years, a number of informative and planning meetings were held to deliberate how to proceed. One result of the collaborative process was the creation of the Catholic Community of Waukesha Pastoral Council. Rather than each parish having its own parish council, each parish now discerned and elected three representatives to serve on the city pastoral council. Not neglecting

²⁰ Mary Beth Murphy. Newspaper Article. *Sentinel*, April 14, 1988. Accessed April 4, 2017, in Archdiocesan Archives

²¹ Rev. Howard Haase, conversations with author, 2015-2017.

²² *Ibid.*

the needs of their own parishes, the representatives on the pastoral council were to be mindful of the needs of all Catholics in Waukesha.

With the Catholic Community of Waukesha ready to implement the pastoral plan for the four-parish collaboration on July 1, 2017, St. Mary's Parish innovatively presses forward toward the future.²³ It does so following and learning from the example of schools, which have been by their side throughout their history. As Catholic Memorial High School was founded to educate the growing number of Catholic youth in Waukesha, St. Mary's was founded to serve the growing number of Catholics in Waukesha. As Waukesha Catholic was created to adapt to the changing circumstances of Catholic education in Waukesha, St. Mary's, while maintaining its own identity, joins forces with the other parishes in Waukesha to adapt to the changing circumstances of Catholic life in Waukesha, always learning how best to serve the people of God.

This history of St. Mary's Parish was completed by Deacon Peter Kieffer, deacon of the Diocese of La Crosse and seminarian at St. Mary's Parish from 2015-2017. The history, entitled St. Mary's Parish: Innovatively Embracing Its Future alongside the Catholic Schools of Waukesha, was completed May 4, 2017, as part of a course entitled The Roman Catholic Church in the United States and the Americas, taught by Paul G. Monson, Ph.D., at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology.

²³ Rev. Howard Haase, conversations with author, 2015-2017.