

## History of St. Patrick's Church

### Fayetteville, Ohio

Bishop John B. Purcell succeeded our first prelate, Bishop Edward D. Fenwick, in 1833. Bishop Purcell's dream was to establish a Catholic Community on land in Brown County granted to the church by General William Lytle in 1823. In 1840, Bishop Purcell directed a seminary for training priests to be located and built in St. Martin. His second directive was to establish a Catholic parish in the area. Tradition has it that the Bishop travelled by horseback to explore the surrounding wilderness for a spot to build. The village of Fayetteville, located at the intersection of two major highways, one north/south (U.S. 68) and the other west/east (U.S. 50), was selected. Fayetteville was centrally located and the two highways made it accessible to a large surrounding area. This is where the Bishop decided to build his church. He called it St. Patrick Church because the settlers in the community were predominately of Irish extraction.

An acre of land atop a hill overlooking the East Fork of the Little Miami River was purchased from Mr. Cornelius McGroarty to build the church. Bishop Purcell and Fr. Martin Kundig laid the cornerstone for the new church on August 24, 1837. The brick Church was laid out facing east ( toward the Eternal City). It measured 70 X 40 square feet with four tall windows on each side with pews to accommodate 375 parishioners. A small apartment was attached behind the altar to provide living quarters for the pastor. The church had a simple main entrance without a bell tower. October 3, 1841, was picked for the dedication ceremony which was a grand affair. Bishop Purcell presided, accompanied by 10 priest and the students from the St. Martin Seminary. Many dignitaries attended. A full orchestra from Cincinnati greatly added to the solemnities.

Bishop Purcell was committed to promoting St. Patrick Parish. Many immigrants were coming down the Ohio River to Cincinnati where they were searching for a place to settle. A large number came from Ireland, Germany and France and were of the Catholic faith. The Bishop encouraged them to move to the Fayetteville area where they could buy good land for a low price, with assurance they would have a Catholic Church to attend. A great number took his advice and the number of Catholics in the Fayetteville area increased rapidly. Within 15 years, St. Patrick's was splitting at the seams. To address the overcrowding, a new church called Holy Ghost, was established in nearby Vera Cruz in 1858. Holy Ghost was predominately attended by French speaking parishioners. St. Patrick's continued to thrive fed by a continuing stream of new emigrants from Bishop Purcell.

By 1885 there were 1500 parishioners attending Mass weekly. An expansion of the church was in desperate need. A project enlarged St. Patrick by adding a balcony, a new entrance with a beautiful Gothic façade and a 90-foot steeple with a golden crucifix on top (the 6-foot bell in the belfry was manufactured by the Buckeye Bell Foundry of Cincinnati). This increased additional space for an extra 100 parishioners. The parish continued to expand. In 1906, there were 50 baptisms and in the month of May, 80 First Communicants. The church was expanded once again to increase seating capacity to 500. To facilitate this expansion the priest apartment behind the altar was raised and the length of the building extended 40 feet to the west. Since that time structurally the church has remained the same. Interestingly it was enhanced with a new ceiling and additional windows and externally the red brick was covered with stucco. Shortly thereafter

a Rectory for St. Patrick was constructed next to the church providing a parish office and residential space for three priests.

Religious education at St. Patrick's from the earliest days was provided by the Ursuline Sisters and the Sisters of Charity. Anticipating the need for religious education for our youth, Bishop Purcell invited the Ursulines of Boulogne-Sur-Mer, France, to embark on a missionary effort to teach here in his new Catholic Community. Agreement was reached and eleven Ursuline nuns led by Sr. Julia (Chatfield) of the Assumption, came in 1845 and established a school for girls (ages 6-18) housed in the abandoned St. Martin Seminary. The School was incorporated as "Ursula's Literary Institute" but eventually was known as the School of the Brown County Ursulines. Numerous girls from St. Patrick Parish were enrolled over the years. The vision to teach girls was extended to include boys in 1974. The school closed in 1981 after 135 years of service to St. Patrick and to young people near and far.

The need for religious education at the parish level was filled by the Sisters of Charity from Cincinnati starting in 1860. Encouraged by Bishop Purcell, Fr. Cornelius Daly, the pastor, contacted and invited the sisters to come to Fayetteville and establish a parish school. The arrangements were made and in September, 1860, St. Patrick's Academy and Boarding School opened its doors. For the next 70+ years, the Sisters of Charity taught the parish children. The parish school closed in 1931 for financial reasons.

Starting in 1934, the Ursuline Sisters taught grammar school in the Fayetteville-Perry Public School System. Religious education was provided for the Catholic children before and after regular school hours. Pressure from without brought the religious instruction to an end. Fr. Alexander Koenig, the current pastor, explored the possibility of re-activating a parish school. In 1957 a new Parish hall (Daly Hall), was added to the parish behind the church. The solution was the building of classrooms to the rear of the hall. This addition gave the parish a possibility of 10 classrooms which have very adequately served the parish. A grade and high school PSR(CCD) program were established in 1960 and continues to this day.

St. Patrick has two cemeteries. In 1837, Patrick O'Connor donated ground behind the church for a cemetery. The size of the cemetery was limited by the space between the church and the banks of the East Fork River and could not be expanded. In 1889, the parish purchased 15 acres on Anderson State Road east of the village as a second cemetery (many foot stones have dates prior to 1889). An addition 5-acre parcel was added in 1939. These grounds have always been referred to as the New St. Patrick Cemetery. Burials in the two cemeteries overlapped. Parish records indicate burials in the cemetery behind St. Patrick's as late as 1896 and burials in the "new" cemetery as early as 1845. The "new" cemetery faced to the south with interior roadways laid out symmetrically. In the middle, a plot was reserved for deceased priests of the parish. Interestingly, the parish maintained a small herd of sheep to graze down the grass in both cemeteries. A "new" cemetery gate was erected arching over the main entrance with the inscription "St. Patrick Cemetery 1900". In time the gate rusted out and fell down in the early 2000's. A beautiful replacement gate was designed, fabricated and donated by parishioner Greg Boler and erected in 2024.

The seed of a Religious Vocation is implanted by Almighty God, it is fostered, nourished and cultivated by many natural circumstances: a fervent and vibrant faith of the community, a local religious atmosphere, the encouragement and good example from home life and parents and the influence of the local parish and religion. In the history of St. Patrick, many young people

responded and accepted the invitation of Christ "Come, follow me". We are proud of those who so answered the call of the Lord and committed themselves to the service of the church: 17 Sisters, 8 Priests and 1 Brother.

During the 1950's and 60's, a priest shortage developed in the Archdiocese as more priests were retiring than were ordained. Anticipating a time when Mass would not be available in some Catholic churches because of the shortage, the Archdiocese merged St. Patrick's with Holy Name Church in Blanchester and St. Martin Church in St. Martin. This grouping was named St. Angela Merici Parish with each church designated as a Chapel, e.g., St. Patrick Chapel. This reorganization allowed fewer priests to cover the three locations. The merger arrangement addressed the shortage for 19 years. The priest shortage continued. In 2022, the archdiocese initiated the Beacons of Light Project. The goal was to merge 208 parishes in the Archdiocese to 57 Parish Families by 2027. Currently, St. Patrick Chapel is a member of the Sacred Heart Parish Family.

Over 188 years of parish history, the young and old have formed many associations, fundraisers and outreach programs for the benefit of our church and the community around us. These include: Adult Bible Study, Men's Prayer Group, Women of St. Angela, 40 Hours Devotion, St. Ann's Rosary-Altar Sodality, Women of Grace, Catholic Youth Organization, Homecoming Festival, Bingo, Knights of Columbus, Ancient Order of Hibernians, Al-Anon and St. Vincent de Paul.

Archbishop John B. Purcell died July 4, 1883. He is buried in the midst of his Catholic Community at the Ursuline Convent Cemetery in St. Martin.