

ST. ELIZABETH CHURCH HISTORY 1842-2016

Cambridge City History

- Plat recorded on October 26, 1836.
- Lands around the vicinity were occupied and settled as early as 1813.
- The first land grants were in the now historic town of Vandalia, laid out in 1824 and located just west of the present Lincoln High School gymnasium.
- “National Road” 1828 through eastern Indiana
- Places of business were opened in what is now East Cambridge as early as 1833, incorporation of the town in 1836, and canal building in the 1840’s.
- By 1850 its population was 1,217.
- Manufacturers of all kinds were fast being established; unrivaled location situated at the junction of the National Old Trails Road, the canal and the railroad projected to connect the capital at Indianapolis with eastern Indiana.
- Whitewater Canal was opened to Cambridge City in Oct., 1845. On July 28, 1842, an immense demonstration was held here for the groundbreaking ceremony. It is recorded that 10-12,000 people were here for the event.
- The Pan Handle Railroad was completed in 1853.
- These conditions naturally affected a rapid influx of the immigrants from Catholic European countries during the 1850’s and by the end of the Civil War, Cambridge City had a population of about 1,800.

The Dawn of Catholicism in Indiana

- First Catholics in Indiana, French Jesuit priests, came into the country of the Miami Indians about 1675.
- Catholicism established in Indiana at Vincennes.
- Holy Mass was offered at Vincennes for the first time in 1702.
- Control of this Northwest Territory changed hands and was delivered by General Hamilton to General Rogers Clark within the walls of the old Catholic church at Vincennes.
- Missionary work in Indiana was of a more or less sporadic character until 1834.
- Diocese of Vincennes, now Indianapolis, was established on May 6, 1834, with only four priests residing in the state.

Early Catholic Settlers in Cambridge City

- The First Catholic priest, Fr. Vincent Bacquelin, arrived during 1842.
- It was during this canal building period from 1841-47 that numerous Catholic men and their families, mostly Irish immigrants, following this public improvement as laborers, settled in our area.

Pioneer Priests in Cambridge City 1842-1848

- Ten years of intermittent visits by a priest to the Cambridge City Catholics, holding services in private homes. The wide sweep of territory made it impossible for them to come here more often than every two or three months. Besides Cambridge City, they visited Richmond, Indianapolis, Columbus and several other places where small groups of Catholic people had settled.
- Fr. Bacquelin visited Cambridge City for two years until his death in 1846.
- Fr. Michael O’Rourke replaced Fr. Bacquelin until 1848.
- Fr. John Ryan, first resident pastor of St. Andrew’s Church, Richmond, may be considered the first regular pastor in charge of the Catholics of Cambridge City.

Early Church Buildings

- 1848-52, Fr. William Doyle was an energetic man, priest of pioneer spirit, indefatigable and resourceful in his numerous undertakings.
- In 1852, he bought a lot immediately south of the elevated tracks of the Pennsylvania railroad and touching So. Green St. at its eastern boundary. This was the first real estate owned by the Catholic Church in Cambridge City. (Note: the tracks were elevated about 1910. Also the location of the first church in relation to 2007 would be just south of the former Dairy Corp.) He converted the little, one story, frame dwelling standing on this property and facing So. Green St., into a church, which measured sixteen by thirty feet.
- It is reasonably certain that Fr. Doyle conferred the paternal name of St. Elizabeth of Hungary on the new parish.
- 1853-63, Fr. Henry Peters from Connersville was assigned a new missionary's field of labor. It was carved out of the wide area formerly cared for by the Richmond pastors. It included a section twenty-six miles north to south, from Cambridge City to Laurel, and thirty-five miles east to west with Liberty to Rushville.
- The ungraded and primitive condition of most of the roads, through the woods of Union, Franklin, Rush and Wayne Counties as well as the slow horse-drawn means of travel, allow us to appreciate the extent of Fr. Peters amount of work.
- After the opening of the canal to Cambridge City, the towpath and highway paralleling it saw ever increasing traffic on fairly well maintained roadbeds.
- Some semblance of parish life was now begun, made possible by the priest making frequent and regular visits. It became necessary to secure more real estate as the church property already owned did not have wide enough yard room surrounding it to allow for future expansion.
- Fr. Peters purchased two lots on May 17, 1854, for the sum of \$385.00
- For several months, probably from Sept., 1863 to May, 1864, our parish was attached as a mission at St. Mary's Church, Richmond. Fr. J.M. Villars was St. Mary's pastor then. Fr. Villars at once commenced to erect a new brick church.

Early Pastors

- May, 1864 to Aug, 1869, Fr. Joseph O'Reilly was the first resident pastor.
- Because of the Civil War and due to the unrest and advanced cost of building, no further steps were taken towards the actual building of the new church until the year following the end of the war.
- Bishop de St. Palais dedicated first brick church in 1866.
- The new church building was about the same size as the present church and had a small cupola over the roof just above the front entrance where the church bell hung. The roof was wood-shingled. The windows were plain window glass. The seats were of a conventional pew type. The inside walls and ceiling were plastered but never painted. A small vestibule was entered from the front door and a large altar stood in the middle of the sanctuary.
- About 1865, Fr. O'Reilly opened a parish school in the small frame church in use since Father Doyle's purchase of it.
- The parish school was in use from Oct. 31, 1869-Apr., 1871.
- 1869 – 71, Fr. Vincent deVilas became the second resident pastor.
- Fr. Denis J. McMullen visited Cambridge City once a month during July, Aug., Sept. and Oct., 1871.

Father Alerding's Pastorate 1871-1874

- Rev. Herman Alerding gave a new direction to the course of the parish life by taking the first steps toward changing the location of the parish buildings in 1871.
- At this time, Cambridge City was experiencing its first real setback commercially. A short time prior to the coming of the new pastor, 350 men had been thrown out of the employment by the financial difficulties of the Car Works. A large order of freight cars, which the company manufactured, had been delivered. It was found when settlement was due that the receiving railroad could not pay for the cars. As a result of not securing the lien against the company when the contract was entered into, the local concern sustained a loss of about \$60,000. This resulted in the closing of the plant.
- Panic of '73 began.
- When Father Alerding arrived here he found very many of his parishioners out of work and that many were moving out the Cambridge City area.
- There was a cash balance on hand of \$4.08 and an indebtedness carried on since the construction of the brick church amounting to almost \$2,000.00.
- It was a serious situation for the youthful pastor to face, but with characteristic determination and prudence, the parish problems were soon set on their way toward solution.
- In the year 1873, the last of the parish's financial obligations on the first brick church were paid in full.
- Father Alerding's efforts to stabilize the finance of the parish had progressed well; his energies were turned to the problem of relocating the group of parish buildings. For several years following the building of the new church in 1866, it became evident that the church being surrounded by railroads was intolerable.
- When Father Doyle bought the first property in 1852, no railroads were running through Cambridge City. The first railroad went through Cambridge City where the elevated Pennsylvania runs. It was completed directly in front of the first frame church and regular trains began to run past the church on Sept. 19, 1853. As time passed, a situation confronted the members of the parish as they found themselves enmeshed by railroad tracks on all four sides and added to this the fact that the church buildings were standing between the passenger depot on the west and the freight depot to the east.
- The noise, smoke and depreciation of property alongside their right-of-way would be a big concern after several years.
- Father Alerding's forward looking and practical mind saw that this condition must be changed. As soon as he had paid off the mortgages on the existing church, he at once looked to purchase ground for a new church location.
- Aug. 4, 1873, for the sum of \$1,400, the piece of real estate where the church buildings have stood for more than 130 years was bought.
- During the three years that Fr. Alerding was here, a vast amount of work was done by him in Cambridge City, but likewise at the missions of Hagerstown, New Castle and Knightstown.
- Besides these material accomplishments, this enterprising priest also did much spiritually. His promotion of temperance societies was an outstanding work. His oratorical ability lent itself to good work here and in other nearby parishes.

Father Kelly Erects the New Buildings

1874-1881

- Still feeling the effect of the Panic of '73, Fr. Kelly did nothing immediately about the building of the new church and rectory. He did encourage efforts to promote temperance among his parishioners, stimulated ethnic pride and Americanism amongst his foreign born congregation, and promoted social and dramatic clubs
- Fri., Sept. 3, 1880 – DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH BUILDING was held.

- February 10, 1881 was the completion of the new rectory.

To the End of the Century

- 1881- 85, Fr. Andrew Oster was successful in the face of a congregation dwindling in numbers.
- He purchased the first furnace; new Stations of the Cross, organ, and pews.
- Aug. 1883, a parish cemetery of two acres of ground, 1 mile northwest of Cambridge City on the west Hagerstown Road.
- 1885-1905, Fr. Edward J. Spelman, during his pastorate experienced economic hard times. The parish had reduced to fifty-two families, the note due for the purchase of the Cemetery was canceled. In 1899, a section of the church property was sold.
- Fr. Edward J. Spelman was pastor of the local parish for twenty years.

Early Decades of the 20th Century

- 1905-10, Fr. James A. Coulter raised funds for the complete renovation and redecoration of the church.
- 1910, Father James Shea
- 1913-21, Fr. Michael J. Gorman, due to able management, money matters were placed on a sound basis with a nucleus on hand to provide well for future improvements and maintenance.
- In 1915, all bodies from the cemetery were transferred and the property was sold in 1919, since it was located in clay soil and was unsuitable for burial purposes.
- July 1921-24, Fr. John Schenk, guided the parish during the period of unrest following World War I and the discord created by the Klu Klux Klan.
- 1924-28, Fr. John Rodutsky
- 1928-32, Fr. Charles F. Walsh, during this time the rectory was entirely renovated. An addition being built to the rear of the rectory.
- At Manlove Park on Aug. 11, 1929, the 50th Anniversary of the cornerstone lying of the present church was celebrated. A large crowd attended and at least a thousand were served at the dinner and evening meal. Proceeds from the meal were used to rearrange and decorate the church interior in 1929.
- 1932-34, Fr. Francis Kull.
- Other pastors in order through 1968:
Fr. Albert Shad, Fr. William Davis,
Fr. James Moore, Fr. Jerome Bennett (12-yrs), Fr. Bernard Shea,
Fr. Francis Reeves, Fr. Donald Coakley, Fr. William O'Brien, and Fr. John Herold.

Late 20th Century Priests

- 1968-73, Fr. Paul English contracted J. S. Sweet Co. to build the 4980 sq ft space known as the Parish Center. It was opened in 1972. This air-conditioned space contained a modern kitchen and sliding floor-to-ceiling partitions in the dining/meeting area.
- Second Vatican Council of the Church urged that each parish establish a Parish Council.
- 1973-76, Fr. Robert Wilhelm.
- 1976-77, Fr. Harold Knueven, of St. Gabriel's in Connersville, served as administrator,
- 1977-80, Fr. Henry Brown continued church and rectory improvements for the 100th Anniversary celebration.
- 1980 – 2001, Fr. John Luerman, in his 21-yr tenure, made many interior and exterior improvements to the church. This includes Lexan installed over the stained glass windows, replaced the shingles, new church furnace, and had a new kitchen, upstairs bathroom and carpeting installed throughout the rectory. Other renovations included repainting of the entire interior of the church, carpeting, sanctuary lighting, public address system, and air-conditioning. A majestic figure of the Risen Christ with the cross background was mounted in the sanctuary, a

magnificent sounding nine ranks, 474 pipe organ crafted by W. Zimmer and Sons of Charlotte, North Carolina, in consultation with Michael Rathke, was installed.

- In 1991, he established the “St. Elizabeth Catholic Church Endowment Fund”.
- From 1986- 95, the remaining parts of the entire city block (the original property of 1873) were purchased.
- 1995 an asphalt parking lot was constructed.
- 1996, an addition to the Center provided more classrooms, restrooms, a bridal room and office. It was dedicated as the “Father John H. Luerman Learning Center
- In 1998, the outside of the church was completely re-landscaped.
- Property immediately south of the church was purchased with the intention of providing parking in front of the church.
- Retired as pastor on July 2, 2001, after 21- years making his pastorate the longest in our history.
- In 2002, the sacramental responsibilities of St. Anne’s in New Castle and St. Rose in Knightstown were assigned to our parish.
- 2001-05, Fr. William Ehalt, during his pastorate, the part-time positions for a parish secretary and Director of Religious Education (DRE) were established.
- Due to the decline of men going into the priesthood, some parishes have been closed, have been assigned Parish Life Coordinators, or a priest may be responsible for more than once church.
- 2002, 150th Anniversary of our parish was celebrated. From 2003 – 05, the following renovations took place: reroofing of the 3 towers on the church and the 3 crosses were reclad in copper, new windows and gutters were installed in the rectory, stain glass windows were restored, Diedem Decorating Co. was hired to repaint the church walls after applying canvas to help prevent future cracking. They also painted the Stations of the Cross and other statues. In addition, new carpet with tile at the entrances was installed.
- Parish Council was renewed and members were elected.
- 2005 – 2016, Fr. Joseph Rautenberg was our pastor while retaining his position as Archdiocesan consultant on ethics/bioethics.
- In 2005, a position of Director of Music Ministries was added.
- 2006, rectory renovation of a downstairs bed and bathroom were completed.
- 2007, our parish participated in the Archdiocesan wide Capital Campaign Program.
- In 2011, a new translation of the Mass was established with the beginning of the liturgical calendar.
- In 2014, a Core Team was organized to participate in the Archdiocesan "Connected in the Spirit" process for the Connersville Deanery.
- In 2015, a new storage/garage facility in the northern portion of the church property was constructed.
The secretary's office in the center was renovated/reorganized.
- In 2016, our parish became linked with St. Anne in New Castle. St. Rose church in Knightstown was merged with St. Anne. Each church will maintain a worship site. A new Mass and Holyday schedule was coordinated between the three worship sites.
- 2016 - Present: Pastor John Hall was appointed to the newly linked and merged parishes. A joint Pastoral Council was formed with St. Anne/St. Rose and St. Elizabeth to advise the pastor on decisions affecting all of the communities.
- A committee has been formed to renovate a portion of the rectory.