

The History of the St. Matthew Community

On May 5, 1922, a meeting under the direction of Bishop Paul Rhode was held which resulted in the incorporation of a new parish, which would come to be known as "St. Matthew Catholic Congregation of the Town of Allouez." The fixed boundaries assigned for the new parish were: East - the East River; West - the Fox River; South - the DePere city limits; North - the tracks of the C&NW Railroad. Father Ambrose Grill was appointed to be the first pastor of St. Matthew's Parish. The McCormick Home was the parish's first headquarters until a church could be built. Ground was broken in October, 1924, for a combination church and school building to cost approximately \$35,000. In May, 1925, Bishop Rhode dedicated the new building, and the first Mass was celebrated in the new structure.. The first floor of the new building was the church and had a seating capacity of 450. For the first time St. Matthew's could hold services at which all members of the parish could attend at once.

On September 8, 1925, St. Matthew School opened for the first time on the second floor above the church, staffed by two Franciscan Sisters of Bay Settlement. The total enrollment was 71 students.

In 1933 a parish rectory was built and furnished for just under \$16,000. The parish continued to grow and along with it the parish school. A house was rented for the sisters to live in since there was no longer room for them to live at the McCormick Home. The parish celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1947.

In 1948 Father Rank was named pastor and began an extensive building and expansion program to meet the needs of the rapidly growing congregation. The parish consisted of 248 families and 1,236 members. Ground was broken for the new church in December 1950, and it was completed in time for Christmas Midnight Mass in 1951.

By July, 1955, parish membership had expanded to 494 families and 2,067 members. It became obvious that a new school was needed. Ground was broken in April, 1956 and the school opened in the fall of 1957 with an enrollment of 507 students. In 1966 a new convent was built for the sisters. (Currently Encompass Day Care rents this facility from the parish.) As St. Matthew's neared its first half-century of existence, the old school building/original church was torn down in the fall of 1971. In May, 1972, the parish celebrated its golden jubilee along with the retirement of Fr. Rank who had spent twenty-five years as our pastor.

St. Matthew's continued to grow and expand especially in the area of lay involvement by parishioners. The Parish Council was established along with its standing committees. . Bingo was a popular school fundraiser with profits going toward school supplies and playground equipment. The Christain.Women's Society, Mission Workers, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Older Adults Group (OAKS), and Men's Club gave parish members an opportunity to become more involved in parish ministries. Parish members also accepted roles as Eucharistic ministers,

lectors, greeters, ushers, altar servers, musicians, song leaders, choir members, and Worship committee members.

St. Matthew Parish celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1997. Parishioners joined in a number of activities celebrating our rich history culminating in a 75th Anniversary Mass concelebrated by . Bishop Robert Banks and Fr. David Baeten, pastor.

St. Matthew Parish continues its faith journey. Additional opportunities for parishioners to become actively involved include: Stephen Ministry, Prayer Tree, Perpetual Help Devotions, Meals Ministry, Parish Library, Elizabeth Ministry, RCIA, Religious Education teachers, Vacation Bible School, Parish Newsletter, Development Committee Alumni Committee, and Scrip.

The new millennium brought a vision for Project Matthew, a three-pronged development program to help St. Matthew provide for the needs of its people today and into the future. A capital campaign secured funds to build a new worship facility, transform the old church into a multi-purpose center and gym facility, make the school/church complex handicapped accessible, and begin an endowment for service and outreach projects.

Work began on the new worship facility in the summer of 2002. The first liturgy in the new Church was held on May 3, 2003, presided by Bishop Robert Banks and former pastor Fr. Larry Seidl.