

# History of Immaculate Conception Church

In the spring of 1953, the Bishop of the Diocese of Buffalo decided to erect a church and form a parish in East Bethany, New York to care for the spiritual needs of the Catholics in that area. We were a missionary Apostolate Parish under Msgr. John Neylon of Delevan and received a newly ordained priest each year.

On June 18, 1953, an option to purchase 11 1/2 acres of land from Raymond T. and Ruby M. Estes was made. On May 4, 1954, ground was broken by Mr. & Mrs. Joseph C. Troidl of Eggertsville, New York who donated \$20,000 for a new church building in honor of Bishop Leo R. Smith and the Glory of God. The first organizational meeting was held with Msgr. Neylon at the home of parishioner Albert L. Mulcahy in May 1954 with a prospective membership of 50 families.

Rev. James R. McGrath, ordained on May 5, 1954, was appointed first administrator of this new Missionary Apostolate Parish and the first mass was held at the Bethany Town Hall on Sunday, May 30, 1954.

Work was started on the Church and Rectory in June 1954. In order to reduce expenses, much of the finished work was completed by the parishioners. Altar furnishings, windows, statues, vigil light stands, stations of the cross, vestments and altar linens were donated by parishioners and friends. Cost of the rectory was \$12,000 and paid off by the parish.

With much happiness and enthusiasm, on October 24, 1954, the first Mass was offered in the Church by Rev. McGrath. Father took up residence in the rectory at this time. On October 16, 1955, Bishop Leo R. Smith, Auxiliary Bishop of Buffalo, dedicated the church to the Blessed Mother.

As our beautiful little church grew, we were fortunate to be ministered by many wonderful priests. Reverend Philip S. Coyle replaced Rev. McGrath. He was responsible for the church landscaping and organized our first lawn fete.

On June 15, 1956, Rev. Robert J. Biesinger became our new priest. Many wonderful spiritual gains were made, especially among the youth, societies enlarged and a Jr. Choir was started. The garage was remodeled, bingo began and plans for the church hall was worked on.

On June 19, 1957, we welcomed Rev. James E. Staebell of the Missionary Apostolate. He oversaw the building of the church hall and began our very first Chicken Barbeque.

On June 10, 1958, Rev. Walter L. Matuzak arrived in East Bethany, a little town he had never even heard of. Summer school for the children began and our barbeques and lawn fetes continued to be a success.

June 1959 we welcomed Rev. James L. Breitnauer. Our Latin masses and hymns were brought to greater perfection. All parish societies grew and were very active.

In June of 1960, Rev. Nicholas A. Rossello of the Missionary Apostolate arrived. We all enjoyed the short time that Father "Nick" was with us. It was during this time we received word from the Bishop that our parish was ready to support a full time pastor.

September 4, 1960, Rev. John M. Duggan was appointed by Bishop McNulty as our very first pastor. We were a self-sustaining parish. John Colantonio and Norman Nichols were appointed as our first trustees.

In 1961 decrees of the Vatican II emphasized the importance of vernacular in the Liturgy and the participation of the people of God in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In 1961, confirmation was held with 38 parishioners receiving the Sacrament. Immaculate Conception Church continued to thrive and after nearly 5 years, Father Dugan returned to Buffalo for another assignment.

January 26, 1965, Rev. C. Leyden Ameely was appointed our pastor by Bishop McNulty. Father's Sunday sermons showed deep spirituality and zeal. He was a great inspiration to building Christ in the hearts of our youth. Sadly, Father was in poor health and was unable to stay with us for very long.

October 1967, Rev. Louis J. Gonter arrived. There were 128 families in the parish to greet him. All of the societies were active and some new groups were started. Roger Norton was appointed parish trustee to succeed the late John Colantonio in November 1971. In October of 1972 our new rectory was started. The old rectory was converted to offices. In May 1974, Father Gonter was honored for his 25th ordination anniversary. May of 1975 our first Parish Council was established and the 20th anniversary of our lawn fetes was celebrated. Father Gonter brought the inception of weekly CCD classes in our hall for students of Pavilion Central School.

1979 we celebrated our Silver Jubilee and published our first church yearbook. A children's room was donated to the church, in memory of Madeline Abdella by her family. Father Gonter never tired of working on the church or hall. A handyman, he kept the floors of the hall polished, did a lot of the painting and routine maintenance of the church and yard. His devotion to God and his parishioners was evident in everything he did. Father Gonter was able to call each parishioner by name, even after only one introduction. He remained our devoted priest until his retirement in 1991.

September 1, 1991, Rev. Thomas Kemp became our new pastor. Growing up in Leroy, Father was familiar with our area and the rewards and challenges faced by his new parishioners. A new barbeque pit was built at his suggestion with the help of many parishioners and the donations of others. The church interior was a major focus for Father Kemp. Repainting of the church interior, replacing the rugs, and central air were done under his direction. Replacing the church windows with stained glass ones became one of his special projects. With donations from the former St. Jerome Hospital chapel and memorials from some parishioners, all windows were replaced and dedicated. March 2004, Father Kemp retired after 13 years of service to our parish.

It was at this time that the Diocese of Buffalo was promoting its Journey in Faith program. Msgr. Paul Whitney was asked to oversee our parish until the Diocese could assign a new pastor or administrator. Father Eugene Slomba agreed to add our parish to his extensive duties at Sacred Heart Parish in Batavia and celebrated Mass every Saturday and Sunday with us at Immaculate Conception. The Diocese of Buffalo recruited Deacon John Ruh in the fall of 2004 to act as Administrator handling the day to day business of our parish. Despite traveling around 150 miles round trip from his home in East Aurora to our parish, Deacon John agreed to a one year assignment. Three years later and after giving up every weekend plus coming twice a week, Deacon John was able to return to his home parish of Queen of Heaven. Before leaving us, Deacon John walked us through the Journey in Faith Program where we would be linked to St. Mary's in Pavilion and eventually the two parishes would be merged into a newly formed parish with two worship sites.

In December of 2007, Reverend Richard Cilano was assigned as our new Priest for Immaculate Conception and for St. Mary's. It would be his mission to continue our Journey in Faith into a newly merged parish. Father Richard came to us a widowed father of four children and as a grandfather. As a recently ordained priest, his calling to the priesthood has become a blessing for his many parishioners. His unique situation has made it easier for him to relate to the needs of his congregation in every aspect of life. Father Richard has become the foundation upon which our newly formed parish will grow in spirit and in strength.

On September 1, 2010 Immaculate Conception of East Bethany and St. Mary's of Pavilion merged into a new parish called Mary Immaculate. We look forward to creating a new history together as one church joined by the grace of God.