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Sacred Heart Church, Milford Center, Union Co.
1899-2012

The village of Milford was laid out in 1816 on the banks of Big Darby Creek. It is in Union Township, the southwestern township of Union County, five miles from Marysville. For a short time in 1820, Milford was the first county seat. The post office there was named Milford Center by 1837 and the village, when incorporated, adopted that name. By 1882 there were about 500 inhabitants in the village and about 1,200 in the rest of Union Township. Milford Center had four churches: Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Christian. In those days Union County was part of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

There were Catholics in the vicinity as early as 1861, who were attended occasionally by Father James F. Kearney of Urbana. From 1869 to 1871 Rev. Matthew F. McGrath, a secularized Dominican priest, was the first resident pastor at Pleasant Valley (now Plain City), in southeastern Union County. He attended Milford Center, along with Marysville and,

in Champaign County, Woodstock, Mechanicsburg, North Lewisburg, and St. Paris.

The earliest Catholics of the Milford Center area, identified by the baptismal records printed below, were all Irish laborers, most of whom lived in the town. They worked on the railroads that intersected there—one line running from Cleveland to Cincinnati via Marysville and Springfield, the other from Columbus to Indianapolis via Plain City and Urbana. A small number of them were farm laborers. None of them owned property in the early days.

When St. Peter Church in Marysville received a pastor, Milford Center was regularly attended from that city. Many of the priests were young and were quickly reassigned but served in the archdiocese for considerable periods. Father Bernhard Engbers was at Marysville for a short time in 1871 but there is no evidence that he attended Milford Center.

Mission Church, 1899-1917

Father Venneman, who had just come to the archdiocese when appointed Pastor of Marysville in 1891, seems to have been an energetic man. He was pastor when it was decided to build a Catholic church in Milford Center. A lot on the south side of State Street and 125 1/2 feet east of the corner of London Street, measuring 74' 9" wide and 132' deep was purchased for $500 and put in Father Venneman's name on April 13, 1898. Father Veneman put the property in Archbishop Elder's name on March 23, 1899.[1] By that time the church was about complete.

Sacred Heart Church was dedicated on Tuesday, May 30, Memorial Day, 1899, in what was called the most elaborate ceremonies that had ever been rendered in Union County up to that time. V. Rev. J. C. Albrinck, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, officiated. Rev. Hugh Magevney of Memphis delivered an eloquent sermon. The seventeen-voice choir of St. Patrick Church, Columbus, provided the music. Thirteen other priests were in attendance, including V. Rev. F. X. Specht, then Administrator of the Diocese of Columbus, and Fathers Goldschmidt, Leyden, Mattes, Clarke, and Watterson of the Columbus diocese. A large number of Catholic laity from Marysville were in attendance, along with members of the Milford Center congregation, so many in all that the little church could not begin to accomodate them.[2]

The nave of the church was 27 by 42 feet with side walls some twenty feet in height and the sanctuary and sacristy extension was about 12 by 18 feet. The tower was eleven feet square at the lower level and originally measured about sixty feet to the top of the cross. The church was heated by stoves and was lit by candles. A second room was added in the rear in 1914 and electric lighting and a hot air furnace were installed.[3]

In 1904 Milford Center was removed from the care of Marysville's pastor and given to Father Santen of St. Joseph Parish in Plain City. Then in 1909 it was given to Urbana's pastor, Father George Hickey, who sent his assisants to attend it.

Parish, 1917-1980

In 1917 Rev. David P. Powers, a native o fUrbana, was sent to Sacred Heart as its first resident pastor, with Plain City as a mission and Woodstock as a station. From Milford Center he tried to develop a mission church at Woodstock, which was to have been named St. Hulbert's, but it is said that no church ever was built.[4] He remained at Sacred Heart until 1924. A forty-three-foot lot west of the church was purchased for $600 in 1919[5] and a rectory was built there in 1920. At that time Sacred Heart had over a hundred members. But despite these numbers and



Sacred Heart Rectory

Pastors of Sacred Heart Congregation

Pastors at Marysville St. Peter:
Rev. Henry Kiffmeyer 1872-1874
Rev. George Henry Paul 1874-1875
Rev. Johann Heinrich Menke 1875-1877
Rev. Peter Patrick Mazuret 1877-1880
Rev. Martin L. Murphy 1880-1881
Rev. John F. Brummer 1881
Rev. Alfred D. Dexter 1882-1889
Rev. John Francis Hickey 1889-1891
Rev. Patrick Joseph Shea 1891
Rev. John G. Venneman 1891-1903
Herman H. Rechtin 1903-1904

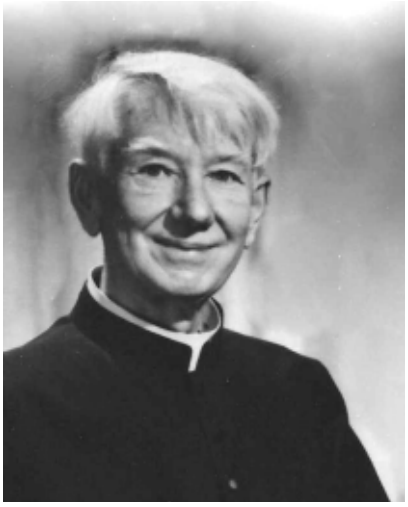
Pators at Plain City St. Joseph:
Herman N. Santen 1904-1907
Lawrence L. Denning 1907-1908
Frederic L. W. Prieshoff 1908-1909

Priests who attended from Urbana:
Rev. George F. Hickey 1909-1917, pastor, who sent these assistants to attend Milford Center:
Rev. Raphael J. Markham 1909-1910
Rev. John G. McGlinchy 1910-1911
Rev. John Frederic Lampe 1911-1913
Rev. William P. O'Connor 1913-1917

Resident Pastors:
Rev. David Powers 1917-1924
Rev. William J. Leaver 1924-1949
Rev. William Meyer, C.PP.S. 1949-1953
Rev. Robert L. Roster, C.PP.S. 1953-1956
Rev. Robert J. Beckman, C.PP.S. 1956-1958
Rev. Karl A. Wuest, C.PP.S. 1958-1971
Rev. Fred Falce, C.PP.S., admr. 1971
Rev. Richard Baird, C.PP.S. 1971-1972
Rev. Robert Roster, C.PP.S. 1972-1073
Rev. Karl A. Wuest, C.PP.S. 1973-1977
Rev. Stephen Metzger 1977-1981

Pastors at Plain City St. Joseph:
Rev. Raymond Carter 1981-1985
Rev. Homer Blubaugh 1985-1987
Rev. Charles Klinger 1987-1991
Rev. Kevin Lutz 1991-1997
Rev. Patrick Toner 1997-2015

the resident pastor, the parish was considered a mission in the sense that it needed assistance from the Archdiocese. The Cincinnati Archdiocesan Mission Society sent $25 to support the parish each month, from the early 1920s through 1944.[6]



Rev. William J. Leaver

Father William J. Leaver replaced Father Powers as resident pastor on Sept. 12, 1924. During his days, about 1932, Woodstock officially was removed from his responsibility. He was still at his post in January 1945, when the change in diocesan boundaries became effective and Milford Center and Plain City became part of the Diocese of Columbus. The congregation came to the diocese with a small surplus in its savings account. Father Leaver reported to Bishop Ready that there were only eleven families in the congregation. He had administered six baptisms in 1944; and he taught the few children their catechism every week.

Bishop Ready visited that summer of 1945. He noted that it would be difficult to keep a pastor for Milford Center and Plain City and thought perhaps the two could be attached to other parishes, but he took no action in that regard. In 1947 there were only 18 Catholic souls at Milford Center and 30 at Plain City.

On September 6, 1949, the Fathers of the Society of the Precious Blood, headquartered at Carthagena, Ohio, took over the pastorate, retaining the residence at Milford Center. Father William Meyer, the first pastor from this Society, had been pastor at La Rue in Marion County and then at Johnstown in Licking County. The Precious Blood Fathers also had charge of St. James the Less Parish in Columbus beginning in 1947.

Between the two churches at Milford Center and Plain City, the Precious Blood pastors usually received the full salary of $1,500 per year, the same as diocesan priests. However, by May of 1951 the Sacred Heart congregation was $2,000 in debt. It had used up its bank balance and had run through a donation of $1,113 received in 1950. Now becoming surrounded by farms owned by Amish people, Sacred Heart had only sixteen members. Father Meyer in 1952 visited St. Thomas parish in East Columbus to appeal for assistance.[7]

Other assistance was forthcoming. That summer three teenagers from Zanesville, members of the Catholic Students Mission Crusade at Rosecrans High School, were the first volunteers in the home mission program. This was a summer project initiated by Rev. James Kulp, diocesan director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, established to renovate churches in small parishes in the diocese. The three, namely Clarence Roberts, Alexander Martin, and Richard Bollinger, repaired and painted Sacred Heart Church.[8] Later in the 1950s a small group of Catholic high school students from Columbus, calling themselves the Indian Mission Society of Mary, spent many Saturdays at Sacred Heart doing helpful chores such as painting the interior of the church. The pastor obtained permission from Bishop Hettinger, dated Dec. 7, 1957, to erect the Stations of the Cross in Sacred Heart Church, with the usual indulgences and privileges.

Finances also were helped by the bequest of lot 10 in the town to the parish by Anna Dee of Milford Center, who died Dec. 23, 1953. Bishop Ready sold the lot a year later and the parish netted $4,785.[9] Gifts to the congregation from the Diocesan Mission Cooperative Plan and from general



Members of Sacred Heart and St. Joseph congregations with Father Fred Falce, at a picnic on Mr. and Mrs. Paul J. Ryan's Rynoka Farm near Irwin in 1971. (Courtesy of Catholic Times)

diocesan funds were made in the 1950s and 1960s. Depending on conditions, assistance also was sent to the mission at Plain City. The Milford Center congregation had financial surpluses in 1964 and 1965 but in the late 1960s again began running slightly in the red each year.

Father Robert Beckman died while pastor, on January 2, 1958, at the Union County Memorial Hospital in Marysville. Bishop Hettinger offered a funeral Mass for him at Sacred Heart. His replacment was Father Karl A. Wuest (rhymes with "beast"), another Precious Blood Father, who would serve two terms there, totaling seventeen years. Besides handling the two congregations as pastor, he was active in the Army Reserve. He also did much work around the churches himself, such as painting Sacred Heart in the summer of 1962. In April of 1960 he was happy to host Bishop Issenmann, who administered confirmation to one child and four adults at Sacred Heart on the 14th. Father Wuest left in 1971 but returned in 1973. By early 1977 his health was not good and rumors were spreading that he would leave. A petition to retain him was signed by members of the Ryan, Hush, Middleton, Poling, Russell, McCullough, and Trees families of Sacred Heart. But he had to retire and with his departure the presence of the Precious Blood Fathers in Milford Center and Plain City came to an end, as of February 1, 1977. They were replaced by diocesan priests.



Rev. Karl A. Wuest, C.PP.S.

"Quasi-parish"

In 1977 Rev. Stephen Metzger was sent to Milford Center, the first diocesan priest to serve as pastor since 1949. One of his first acts was to obtain permission from the bishop to repair Sacred Heart's bell tower, at a cost of $5,906, which the parish had on hand. The tower, which had deteriorated to the point that it swayed when the bell was rung, was lowered by removing the top section that housed the bell.

About the same time a study by secular authorities projected huge growth in housing at Plain City and the diocesan personnel board began to think that the priest's residence should be moved there to prepare for this eventuality. The center of population had been shifting continuously from Milford Center to Plain City. Numbers of souls reported in select Status Animarum reports were:

	Milford Ctr.	Plain City
1954	38	97
1961	44	157
1971	50	127
1981	25	350
1991	40	385

It took about two years to obtain a suitable house in Plain City to use as a rectory, but the move was made in 1980. On Aug. 6, 1981, Bishop Herrmann transferred the canonical title of Parish from Milford Center to Plain City. Sacred Heart became in effect a mission of Plain City, but canonically it became a quasi-parish.

In the 1960s there were two Sunday morning Masses, at 8 and 10 o'clock, alternating times between the two churches each week. But with the coming of vigil masses of obligation and the growing population at Plain City, by the early 1980s there was a Saturday vigil and Sunday morning Mass at each church, Sacred Heart having the later one on Saturday and the earlier one (8:30) on Sunday

morning. This was a heavy workload for the pastor and within a few years the vigil Mass at Sacred Heart was abolished.

In 1984 under Father Carter a study of Sacred Heart congregation found only 13 souls there and no hope of growth in the congregation; and it was only five miles from Marysville. There was an urgent need to redistribute priestly efforts. Father Carter wished to have a Sunday Mass at 8:30 a.m. at St. Joseph to unify and solidify that parish. But no major change was made at that time.

Two years later, in 1986 Bishop Griffin visited Sacred Heart. He was truly impressed by the fine job the people had done in renovating the interior of the church. He sent Father Blubaugh a gift to be used for cassocks and surplices for the servers and lectors.

In 1990 Father Klinger took on the unenviable task of broaching to the people the idea that the time was coming when it would be best for Sacred Heart Church to close. The building was not properly maintained; they had no true parish life, nothing but Mass once a week; a shortage of priests was looming; and an early Sunday morning Mass would soon be necessary at Plain City because of the numbers there, taking that time-slot from Sacred Heart. But no decision was made then, nor was one made for several years.

During Father Lutz's pastorate there was a mini-renaissance at Sacred Heart, with the October count peaking at 72 in 1996. The church interior was painted, it was made handicapped accessible, and a pipe organ was installed. But by 1999 the October count had dropped to 32.

Oratory

In January of 2000 rumors spread of the closing of Sacred Heart. Father Toner wanted to maintain the church as long as reasonable, with the status of "quasi-parish" removed, to facilitate forming a single parish community with Plain City. There were 40 adults and 15 children at Sacred Heart, with 35 of those regularly attending Mass. A plan to change the status to that of "oratory" with an early Sunday morning Mass each week was surfaced by the people. It was decided that this schedule could be



Interior of Sacred Heart Church

maintained as long as priests could be found to assist the pastor, which they were willing to do at that time. In November of 2000 the priests of the vicariate approved the plan. The diocesan priests' senate agreed on January 18, 2001.

A closing Mass for the quasi-parish was offered at Sacred Heart on Sept. 12, 2001. Effective that date Sacred Heart became an oratory, to be open for personal prayer and for special events. The rectory at Milford Center, having become an unnecessary burden, was sold in July, 2004.[10]

On Sept. 10, 2005, under the direction of Father Toner, Sacred Heart Church was rededicated as the Life and Mercy Center, a chapel for private prayer, honoring life from conception to natural death. The new use was coordianted by Tim McAndrew of northwestern Franklin County. The center was focused on images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Divine Mercy, which were brought from Holy Family Church in Columbus.[11]

On Sept. 16, 2011 one hundred twelve years, three months, and seventeen days after its dedication, Bishop Campbell relegated the oratory to profane use, in anticipation of its demolition. On Mar. 18, 2012, the building was razed. Some of the windows were saved and were installed in Carpenter Hall at St. Joseph Parish, Plain City, in 2013. The Guadalupe and Divine Mercy images are now in St. Joseph Church, Plain City. Other artifacts are stored at the Jubilee Museum. The little church had served its purpose, housing Our Lord and bringing his holy Sacrifice to the Catholics of the vicinity, but its time of usefulness had passed.

NOTES

In addition to the sources noted here, miscellaneous data were accumulated from various financial and status reports in the Archives, Diocese of Columbus. Fathers Steven Metzger, Kevin Lutz, and George Schlegel also provided information and the photograph of the church exterior is from the latter's collection.

1) Union County Deed Record 75/565: Elsie Laird and husband William for $500 sell to J. G. Venneman inlot 7 and the west half of inlot 6 in John A. Kennington's addition in the village of Milford Center, excepting sixteen feet off the east end of the west half of lot 6, and also excepting 43 feet off the west side of lot 7; 13 April, 1898. Deed Record 76/130.
2) *Union County Journal*, May 25 and 30, 1899. *Marysville Tribune*, May 29, 1899. *The Catholic Columbian*, June 3, 1899.
3) 1901 and 1921 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Curry, Col. W. L., *History of Union County, Ohio*; Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen & Co., 1915, p. 239.
4) St. Hulbert's appears in only the 1918 annual Catholic Directory. It also is listed under "mission churches in the archdiocese in 1920" on page 345 of Lamott's *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*.
5) Deed Record 120/365.
6) W. J. Leaver to Msgr. Casey, Chancellor, Feb. 5, 1945.
7) *The Columbus Register*, June 13, 1952.
8) *The Columbus Register*, July 25, 1952.
9) Deed Records 191/264, 191/331, and 191/492. Parish financial report, 1954.
10) Deed Record 191/264.
11) *Columbus Dispatch*, Sept. 9, 2005.

Sacred Heart Congregation Baptisms, 1869-1900

Recorded at St. Joseph Church, Plain City:

1869

Dec. 13 Eugene Mary, son of Eugene King and Jane Sheehan, born Dec. 10; spons. Daniel Clifford and Eleanor Green. Rev. M. F. McGrath

Same day Daniel, son of John Dee and Mary Halloran, born Dec. 11; spons. Richard Lyons and Bridget Lyons. Rev. M F. McGrath

1870

Feb. 8 [no place listed] John Mary, born Jan. 8, son of Daniel Clifford and Julia King; spons. Patrick King and Mary King. M. F. McGrath

Apr. 7 Dennis, son of Dennis Denine and Honora Clifford, born March 25; spons. Timothy

Clifford and Joanna King. MFM

Apr. 22 John, born April 2, son of James Lowney [?] and Winifred Lyons; spons. John Fitzgerald. MFM

May 22 Nicholas, born Jan. 28, 1869, son of John Diugnen and Catherine Moran; spons. Edward Doggett and Catherine Murphy. MFM

The following were Recorded at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Marysville. This is a very interesting old register, with baptisms regularly recorded for Marysville, Mechanicsburg, Liverpool (Rosedale), Woodstock, North Lewisburg, Milford Center, Irwin, and Richwood; a few were singular entries from Ashland, Johnstown in Licking County, Magnetic Springs, and Cable. The baptismal register begins in 1870 but places are not noted until 1875. The following were noted for Milford Center.

1875

Aug. 22 Mary, daughter of John Dee and Mary Hulleran, born Aug. 16; spons. Thomas Dorsey and Mary Dorsey. J. H. Menke

Oct. 10 Thomas son of John O'Dea and Jane Lally, born Oct. 8; spons. Thomas Kenney and Ellen Kenney JHM

1876

Oct. 22 Ellen daughter of Thomas Dorsey and Mary Dee, born Oct. 6; spons. John Dee and Mary A. Dorsey. JHM

1877

Apr. 19 Honora daughter of Denis Deneen and Nora Deneen, born March 13; spons. Patrick Welsh and Mary Dorsey. P. P. Mazuret

[From December of 1877 until December of 1881 no places are listed, but the following seven records contain Milford Center names.]

1878

May 6 Mary, daughter of Daniel Clifford and Julia King; spons. John Dee and Mary Holland, born May 29. PPM

May 6 Daniel, son of same, born same; spons. William Deneen and Honora Clifford. PPM

Oct. 6 James, son of Patrick Walsh and Catherine Dorsey, born Oct. 1, 1878; spons. Thomas Roach and Mary Ann Dorsey. PPM

1879

Mar. 22 Eugene Ed., son of Patrick Ing and Mary Gannon, born March 4; spons. Thomas Ganon and Margaret Ganon. PPM

May 4 Frank, son of Denis Deneen and Honora, born Apr. 17; spons. John Deneen and Ann Dee. PPM

Dec. 5 Mary, daughter of John Dee and Jane, born Dec. 5; spons. Thomas Dorsey and Ann Dee. PPM

Dec. 5 Catherine, daughter of same, born same; spons. Mike Dee and Mary Green. PPM

1881

Dec. 18 Thomas Patrick son of Patrick Clancey and Elizabeth Connor; spons. James Connor and Mary Clancey. J. F. Brummer

1882

Jan. 26 Thomas Lawrence son of Patrick King and Mary Goonen, born Jan. 24; spons. Thomas Goonan and Margaret Goonan. A. D. Dexter

Jan. 26 John Francis son of Patrick King and Mary Goonen, born Jan. 24; spons. John King and Johanna King. A. D. Dexter

Apr. 16 Mary, born Mar. 14, daughter of Patrick Welsh and Catherine Dorsey; spons. Thomas Dorsey and Honora Dee. ADD

1883

Apr. 28 Mary daughter of Thomas Dorsey and Mary Dee, born March 19; spons. Patrick Welsh and Honora Clifford. ADD

July 18 Mary, born July 3, daughter of John Connors and Mary Moloy; spons. Michael Egan and Margaret Moloy. ADD

July 29 Eugene, born June 29, son of Daniel Clifford and Julia King; spons. Eugene King and Mary King. ADD

(To be concluded)

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