

## **Saint Katharine Drexel Parish**

### **A Legacy of Catholicism in Springfield, Illinois**

By Janice Petterchak

Saint Katharine Drexel Parish, the newest Catholic congregation in Springfield, Illinois, developed in the early twenty-first century from the deep, historic roots of two venerable parishes. The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, established in 1884 as a German house of worship, is today second only to St. Joseph as the city's oldest continuing parish. The Church of St. Patrick, a mile southeast of Sacred Heart, was formed in 1905 for the growing community of Irish immigrants. Then, after a century and more of similar working-class ministries, in 2001 the two revered churches merged as St. Katharine Drexel Parish. In these ensuing years St. Katharine Drexel has unified as an ethnically and racially diverse congregation—honoring its shared history while remaining relevant in the present—its liturgy and pastoral activities sustaining and strengthening the Catholic faith in southeast Springfield and beyond.

## **The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus**

The Catholic Church in the United States began in 1789, when Pope Pius VI designated Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore, Maryland, as leader of the faithful. During the following decades, Bishop Carroll and succeeding prelates fostered an increasingly strong Catholic presence in the new nation. Illinois Country priests officiated at Cahokia and Kaskaskia before extending their mission westward across the Mississippi River to St. Louis, Missouri, and northward to Chicago.

In Springfield, Catholics formed the city's first parish community, St. John the Baptist, in 1839. Within nine years they accumulated funds for a small frame church, on Adams between Eighth and Ninth streets, just east of downtown. In 1853 the Vatican founded the Diocese of Quincy, Illinois, and four years later moved the seat to Alton. Bishop Henry Damian Juncker presided over most of the southern half of the state—from Beardstown to Cairo, from Quincy to the Indiana border. By 1859, members of St. John the Baptist parish, renamed St. Mary, moved from their frame building to a more substantial structure at Seventh and Monroe streets, which became known as the "English" Catholic church and eventual school.<sup>1</sup>

Springfield in that era comprised a growing number of immigrant families. By the late 1860s, Bishop Juncker established a new parish, Sts. Peter and Paul, at Sixth and Reynolds streets for near-northside German Catholics. As the number of parishioners grew steadily at both the church and school, in the mid-1870s, the Bishop formed a third parish, St. Joseph, at North Fifth and Eastman for Catholics in northern Springfield.

When in the early 1880s, Sts. Peter and Paul's pastor sought to build a new school and enlarge the church for his burgeoning parish, German Catholics in southeastern Springfield petitioned instead for a separate church and school to serve their area. Eventually, Bishop Peter Joseph Baltes approved a parish for the approximately one hundred German families residing south of Cook Street and east of the Tenth Street railroad tracks. In early 1884, he chose Sts. Peter and Paul's assistant pastor Rev. Charles Krekenberg to lead the new Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Born in 1859 in Westphalia, Germany, Father Krekenberg earned a classical education in Warendorf, Germany, then studied for the North America missions at American College of the Immaculate Conception seminary in Leuven, Belgium. Ordained in 1883, Father Krekenberg served only briefly at Sts. Peter and Paul's Parish before beginning his Sacred Heart pastorate.

Thus, in Springfield in 1884—one hundred years after Catholicism came to America—twenty-five-year-old Father Krekenberg assumed responsibility for the city's fourth parish. Church representatives purchased a large building site between Twelfth and Thirteenth and Cook and Douglas (renamed Lawrence in 1900) streets. The property comprised twelve lots, including stables and a small house that would serve as Father Krekenberg's temporary rectory. Parishioner pledges along with a three-month interest-free loan from B. H. Ferguson, president of Springfield Marine Bank, covered the \$4,100 cost of a two-story brick building.

Construction began on June 1, 1884. Three weeks later, Catholic

clergy, members of other faith organizations, and local dignitaries paraded from Sts. Peter and Paul church for the cornerstone laying. Rev. Maurice Klostermann, O.S.F., of Quincy represented Bishop Baltes at the impressive ceremony, with sermons in both German and English.<sup>3</sup>

The second floor of the building would house a temporary church, with the main floor as classrooms for an expected one hundred students. For the church, Father Krekenberg purchased statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart, hand carved by August Schiemenn from Krekenberg's home town of Westphalia, Germany.<sup>4</sup> Women of the newly formed Altar Society and other parishioners donated funds for a monstrance, chalice, candelabra, sanctuary lamps, priedieu bells, altar cross, missal, altar cloths, communion cloth, and candlesticks, as well as cassocks and surplices. On September 8, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a formal dedication service preceded Father Krekenberg's first Mass in the Sacred Heart church/school.

Although Germans comprised the majority of Sacred Heart parishioners, some Dutch, Hungarian, Croatian, and Slovenian immigrants and their families also became members. Many of the men worked for the railroads or in coal mines south and east of the city. "Everyone had to walk to church," recalled H. W. Mischler, one of the first parishioners. "The sidewalks were made of boards and the streets were terrible."<sup>5</sup>

Members organized the St. Vincent de Paul, St. Boniface, and Young Men's and Young Ladies' societies. They donated funds to purchase Stations of the Cross and an organ, and organist Joseph Winkelmann, one of the

school's first teachers, formed a choir. The church filled to overflowing when twenty students made their First Holy Communion, Bishop James Ryan praising the congregation's "fervor."

Parishioners sponsored fund-raising events for a two-story rectory at 722 South Twelfth, completed in December, 1886. The next spring the School Sisters of the Order of St. Francis assigned two nuns from the Joliet, Illinois, Motherhouse to staff Sacred Heart school. Sister Salesia and Sister Scholastica moved into Father Krekenberg's former rectory.<sup>6</sup>

By 1894, ten years after its formation, Sacred Heart parishioners had not only paid the debt on the church/school and rectory but also accumulated more than \$5,000 toward a permanent church, to be constructed on the northeast corner of Twelfth Street and Lawrence Avenue. Father Krekenberg and parish leaders signed a nearly \$20,000 contract with local builder Otto Miller to construct the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus—designed as a 185'x58' Gothic building with stone foundation, brick superstructure, 150' steeple, and an interior 650-seat capacity "audience room," divided by two rows of Gothic columns.

In spring, 1885, Very Rev. John F. Mohr of New Berlin, dean of the Springfield Deanery, officiated at the cornerstone-laying ceremony. Rev. A. J. Pennartz of Sts. Peter and Paul parish addressed the congregation in German, with an English sermon by Rev. Hugolinus Storff, rector of St. Joseph's College in Teutopolis. Springfield's *Illinois State Register* described the building as "A Monument to [the] Pastor's and Congregation's Devotion."<sup>7</sup> On December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Bishop Ryan

blessed and dedicated the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

From the *Illinois State Register*:

Many valuable and beautiful donations were made to the new church, both by individual members of the parish and by different societies and also by benefactors outside of the congregation. Among these gifts are all the stained glass windows in the church, the three altars, the communion railing, baptismal font, confessional, all the statuary in the church, the chalice, remonstrance, the sanctuary lamp, church vestments, the clock in the tower and the cross on the steeple of the church, a chime of four bells, a Christmas crib, a carpet for the sanctuary, a canopy, and lately again four fine statues in the sanctuary and two highly artistic and beautiful windows in the sanctuary on both sides of the high altar, a new ostensorium, chandeliers for the electric lights in the church, candlesticks and artificial flowers for the altars and many more beautiful articles.<sup>9</sup>

Benefactor Heinrich Elshoff funded the tower clock, made by A. J. Pellhans Company of St. Louis. Mr. and Mrs. Anton Dirksen donated a Pieta sculpture—the Sorrowful Mother with the body of Christ, and an imported statue of St. Anthony. Then a \$2,000 convent, partially paid by bequests, at 711 South Thirteenth replaced the Sisters' rectory residence. In 1904 the Altar Society provided funds for an ornate \$1,000 "high altar" and several additional statues.<sup>10</sup>

Both Father Krekenberg and his church celebrated silver anniversaries in 1909, which the *State Register* described as "one of the foremost parishes of the diocese." In 1911, about fifty primarily Slovenian families transferred from the burgeoning Sacred Heart to the new St. Barbara's church and school, Fifteenth and Laurel streets, southwest of their former parish. Also that year, contractor Frank Flesch supervised construction of an eight-room \$18,000 Sacred Heart school at 1225 East Lawrence. "School was taught in German until 1918," recalled Margaret Antenan, a former Sacred Heart student, teacher, and principal. "In 1918 they were teaching half a day in German and half a day in English. They stopped teaching in German because of World War I." The original church/school building became a hall for various organizations.<sup>11</sup>

In 1920, after serving the parish for thirty-six years, an ailing Father Krekenberg left his pastorate to become chaplain at St. Vincent's Home for the Aged in Quincy. In announcing the reassignment, Bishop Ryan wrote that Sacred Heart Parish would "always be a monument of your splendid work, zeal and ability." Rev. John W. Merscher succeeded Father Krekenberg, leading the parish for seven years. A native of Aviston, Illinois, Father Merscher studied for the priesthood at St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Ordained at Alton in 1876, he served in several central Illinois towns before pastoring for twenty-two years at St. Mary's in Taylorville. At Sacred Heart, Father Merscher arranged for the installation of a \$4,000 pipe organ to replace the original one.<sup>12</sup>

In 1924, when the diocesan seat was moved from Alton to Springfield,

James A. Griffin became the first Bishop of the twenty-nine-county Diocese. Father Merscher celebrated his priesthood golden jubilee in 1926, and the following year resigned from Sacred Heart due to ill health. Bishop Griffin assigned Rev. George Faller, chaplain at St. John's Hospital, to administer Sacred Heart Parish for a few weeks until appointment of the "popular and amiable" Rev. William Quatman later in 1927.<sup>13</sup>

The son of German-Irish parents, Father Quatman was ordained in 1903 at Mount St. Mary's of the West Seminary. He served as an assistant pastor in Effingham, Decatur, and Pana, then pastored in Tuscola, Villa Grove, and Sigel. He would lead Sacred Heart for fourteen years—always with a special interest in the parish school, making daily classroom visits to keep "the students in close touch with God." The 1935 closing of neighboring St. Barbara's school increased Sacred Heart's still expanding enrollment.<sup>14</sup>

Anna Mae Fitzgerald graduated from Sacred Heart in 1938. "Father Quatman often visited parishioners in their homes," she recently recalled, "and knew all of their circumstances. He was reserved, but very nice." The "strict" nuns, she added, who had a good rapport with the parents, walked their students to Mass every morning. "After First Friday Mass, we would go to Kraus Bakery on the corner of Cook Street and buy milk and a roll for ten cents."

On Fridays the boys and girls competed for the most money donated to Catholic missions. And sometimes, Anna Mae remembered, a nun would threaten "to open" the head of an obstinate boy "and put the lesson in there." Annual performances at the downtown Knights of Columbus hall and

end-of-school-year Washington Park picnics were highlights of the student activities. "We loved those Franciscan nuns."

Pastoring Sacred Heart through the Great Depression and the beginning of World War II, Father Quatman died in 1942 at the age of sixty-five. "So strong was his habit of praising the children for their accomplishments," remembered one parishioner, "that, after his funeral, each Sister in the house felt that she expected him to walk in with words of praise for the choir for their beautiful singing."<sup>15</sup>

Rev. John J. Goff, a Beardstown native, succeeded Father Quatman. Father Goff studied for the priesthood at Quincy College, then at Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis.

He had been pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Benld, following an assistant pastorate at St. John's Church, Quincy. His Sacred Heart parishioners participated in such organizations as the Holy Name Society, Altar and Rosary Society, Young Ladies Sodality, and the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization).<sup>16</sup>

By 1944, the parish's sixtieth anniversary, its congregation numbered 1,400, with 130 serving in the wartime armed services.<sup>17</sup> Father Krekenberg returned to celebrate the anniversary Mass, with Father Goff and other area priests assisting the founding pastor. Later that year the parish purchased a large home at 725 South Twelfth for the seven Franciscan Sisters, and their former Thirteenth Street convent became the caretaker's house. By then, school enrollment exceeded 200 students, with more than 1,500 graduates.

Then in 1945, after Father Goff transferred to St. Anthony's Parish in

Effingham, Bishop Griffin assigned Rev. John S. Brockmeier to Sacred Heart. Born in Covington, Kentucky of German ancestry, Father Brockmeier worked as a printer and then as a reporter for newspapers in Covington, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Chicago before studying for the priesthood at Kenrick Seminary. Ordained by Bishop Griffin in 1925, he served pastorates in Venice and Mt. Olive, as chaplain of the Illinois Soldiers and Sailors Home in Quincy and at Springfield Junior College, then became pastor of St. Barbara's parish in Springfield. In addition, he edited the diocesan weekly newspaper, *Western Catholic*.

As a young woman, Anna Mae Fitzgerald participated in the parish's St. Theresa Society and Altar and Rosary Society. In 1948 Father Brockmeier officiated at her marriage ceremony to Robert Ford. For many years he ushered at Sunday Mass and was active in the Holy Name Society. The couple and many other parishioners volunteered at the summer ice cream socials and similar fundraising events. And although she moved to Springfield's west side several years ago, she remains a Sacred Heart parishioner.

By 1949, Sacred Heart, with 750 families, had become the largest Catholic congregation in Springfield. Their activist pastor enlisted several members to help organize the Sacred Heart Credit Union. "I had called a meeting one night for the parishioners," he recalled years later, "and I think about fifteen showed up. . . . We started out with just a little cubby hole and a table for the officers to check the dues, and so on. And then eventually we put our own building up," a brick structure at Fourteenth and Lawrence

streets. "It's been one of the biggest boons to the working people of this area," he added. "There is a tie-in between labor unions and credit unions—both tend to improve the standard of living in the working class."<sup>18</sup> Today that financial institution, renamed Heartland Credit Union, serves 27,000 central-Illinois Catholic as well as non-Catholic members.

Among the earliest investors in Sacred Heart Credit Union, Peter and Mary Bono, remain parishioners, now both in their 90s. In addition to his career at the Springfield plant of Allis Chalmers/Fiat-Allis, Peter also served as the parish photographer, called on for group pictures of kindergarten, First Holy Communion, and eighth grade classes.

Neighborhood residents Walter and Rita Phelps converted from Methodism in 1955, after helping their daughter, a Sacred Heart student, prepare for her First Communion. The couple received instructions from Father Brockmeier, who Rita remembers as a "very nice priest; everybody liked him." Still a parishioner, she served for many years as a greeter before Sunday Masses.

As parish growth continued in the 1950s, Father Brockmeier supervised church improvements and repairs, including new pews, confessionals, and flooring. By 1958 the postwar baby boom increased school enrollment to a high of 600, staffed by twelve Sisters and four lay teachers.<sup>19</sup> To complete ownership of the entire block—Cook Street on the north, Lawrence on the South, Twelfth on the west, and Thirteenth on the east—Father Brockmeier purchased the vacant Montgomery Roofing building (former Kraus Bakery) on the southeast corner of Cook and Twelfth for use

as a parish hall.

One of Father Brockmeier's assistant pastors, Rev. Bernard Meyer, helped implement local programs in the 1960s national "war on poverty." He and other Operation Head Start volunteers provided a variety of educational experiences, as well as medical and dental services, to about 250 pre-school children of low-income families, including a number from Sacred Heart. "We were indebted to parishes on the west side," he recently recalled, particularly Blessed Sacrament. "Their young parishioners held rummage sales and other fundraising events, to build a bridge with Sacred Heart," a relationship that continues today.<sup>20</sup>

In 1970, after twenty-five years, Father Brockmeier retired, moving from the rectory to a small house at 929 South Thirteenth, two blocks south of the church. "It is furnished with Spartan simplicity, but it suits his needs," according to a local reporter. "In the living room, over in the corner behind his desk is a little confessional. The dining room is his chapel. There he says Mass every morning at 5:30 a.m., after sleeping off and on through the night on a small wooden armchair in the kitchen near his beloved typewriter."<sup>21</sup> On Sundays he offered the 11:30 Mass in Latin and remained a popular guest at parish events.<sup>22</sup>

His successor, Rev. Stanley G. Milewski, had served as Father Brockmeier's assistant from 1952 to 1955. Born in Calumet City, Illinois, Father Milewski studied for the priesthood at St. Bonaventure Seminary in Wisconsin, St. Francis Seminary in Wisconsin, and St. John's Home Mission Seminary in Arkansas. Ordained by Bishop William O'Connor in 1952, Father

Milewski became assistant pastor at St. Rose of Lima in Quincy and transferred to Sacred Heart parish in Granite City in 1955. In 1959 he entered the U.S. Army and was commissioned a chaplain at Fort Knox, Tennessee, then in Korea and in Miami Beach, Florida during the Cuban missile crisis. Returning to the Diocese, he served as assistant pastor of Our Savior's in Jacksonville, then pastor of St. Michael Church, Greenfield, and St. Catherine Church, Haganan.<sup>23</sup>

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council of the early 1960s decreed several significant changes in Catholic liturgy. The most notable revisions in Mass worship included the celebrant facing the congregation, choice of vernacular language rather than Latin, and changes to the Eucharistic Prayer. At Sacred Heart, Father Brockmeier had continued the tradition of Latin Mass facing the main altar, but Father Milewski began implementing the Vatican II changes, while also overseeing renovations to the aging structure. More than two hundred parishioners and others pledged \$157,000 for repairs to the steeple and clock, as well as installation of electronic bell chimes and a free-standing altar facing the congregation. Church-restoration artist Max Autenrieb repainted the interior; other workers refurbished the side altars, Stations of the Cross, stained glass windows, statues, communion rail, vestibule, and sacristy.<sup>24</sup>

With a decline in religious vocations that began in the 1970s, the Franciscan Sisters Superior General informed Father Milewski that her order would withdraw from the school at the end of the 1980-1981 year. Thus, their ninety-four years of service to Sacred Heart came to a close, "leaving

behind," Father Milewski recalled, "a legacy of thousands schooled in the Catholic faith, and the memory of a community of self-sacrificing women who always had at heart the best interests of those entrusted to their care."<sup>25</sup>

In anticipation of the parish's centennial, parishioners responded to Father Milewski's fundraising appeal to renovate both the 1884 church/school building and the permanent school, installing fire escapes and adding kindergarten classrooms and meeting spaces. And with the departure of the Franciscan Sisters, the school returned to a lay faculty, as it had upon opening in 1884.

But gradually in the 1980s, as the parish neighborhood changed and student enrollment declined steeply, increasing numbers of non-Catholic children began attending the school. "We are now 80 percent non-Catholic and 78 percent black," Principal Margaret Antenan told a reporter in 1987. "Our mission has completely changed. Instead of educating Catholic children in the Catholic faith, we have an evangelizing mission. We are educating non-Catholics about the Catholic faith." In addition, Sacred Heart's weekly collections, tuition, and fundraisers could no longer keep pace with expenses. "We basically have people on fixed incomes," Antenan explained. "Costs have gone up and incomes have stayed the same. In the last 10 years, it's cost \$150,000 a year to run the school."<sup>26</sup>

In 1987, a diocesan steering committee cited increasing operational costs, declining enrollment, and population shifts to the city's west side in recommending the closure of Sacred Heart School. Bishop Ryan accepted the recommendation, effective at the end of the 1986-1987 school year. "All

students in the Sacred Heart Parish will be actively encouraged to attend either St. Patrick or the Cathedral Schools,” reported the Diocesan Office of Catholic Education.<sup>27</sup> The committee studied alternate uses for the Sacred Heart facility, and for a time both school buildings housed the local Head Start program.

Father Milewski died in 1994, amid decreasing numbers of parishioners and increasing maintenance issues. Rev. Hugh Cassidy and then Msgr. Thomas Holinga, each of whom served as pastor only briefly, faced rumors that diocesan officials planned to close the church. Bishop Ryan quelled that anxiety by announcing the continuation of Sacred Heart but the suppression of the north side Sts. Peter and Paul Parish. After that church and school were demolished, Sacred Heart became the oldest Catholic church in the city.

### **The Church of St. Patrick**

By the turn of the twentieth century, Springfield Catholics worshipped in several parishes, including St. Agnes, established in 1888 at West Capitol and College streets. In 1905 Bishop James Ryan established Springfield’s Irish–Catholic parish, the Church of St. Patrick. At an approximate cost of \$12,000, the Diocese constructed a brick church and then a rectory at Cedar Street and Wheeler Avenue, about a mile from the German-Catholic Sacred Heart Parish. Initially led by Very Rev. Timothy Hickey, pastor of the Church of the Immaculate Conception (before it became a Cathedral), in 1908 Rev. Thomas Fennessy became the first permanent pastor. A native of County Tipperary, Ireland, Father Fennessy had served as secretary to Bishop Ryan

in Alton before transferring to Springfield to lead the new parish.

Many of the men among the initial seventy Irish families worked in the coal mines in and near Springfield, and soon the growing number of members "made St. Patrick's the social, religious, and education center of the Irish enclave in the city."<sup>28</sup>

Within a few years the parish acquired a larger plot of land, at 1728 East South Grand Avenue (now the southeast corner of Martin Luther King Drive), and erected an \$11,000 two-story, six-room school, completed in 1911. Three Dominican Sisters opened the school, while residing at their Motherhouse on the west side of Springfield. Sister Mary Magdalena later recalled their first year at St. Patrick:

Sister Agnes had grades 7 and 8; Sister Mary Lucy, 4, 5, and 6; and I had 1, 2, and 3. I do not remember how many each Sister had, but mine were one hundred nineteen in number. I didn't have seats for nearly that many. Those that I could not crowd in somewhere stood up by the wall until recess time, when ten of the third graders were sent to Sister Mary Lucy's room. My class remained one hundred and nine for the year.

The children had a reader and a slate. Work books were unknown. The blackboard came in handy for busy work.<sup>29</sup>

With permission from Bishop Ryan, Father Fennessy in 1912 hired Crowe Brothers of Chicago to move the church and rectory six blocks from

their original locations to 1712 East South Grand Avenue, directly west of the school. "While the Church was being moved Masses were offered in the school," according to a parish history. "It was necessary to bring the Church across the railroad track, and a sizeable sum would have been exacted by the railroad had it been necessary to stop a train during the process. The story runs that the school children watched the operation from the second floor, praying all the while that no train would come along. Be that as it may, the Church was transplanted to its present location by a team of horses—quite a notable feat in those days—and with no damage at all to the walls or plaster."<sup>30</sup>

Parishioners formed such societies as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, an Irish fraternal organization. Women, including parishioner Marcella McKennedy's aunt Frances McKennedy "even went down into the mines to sell tickets" for their annual fundraising bazaar, held at the St. Patrick "State Fair Dining Hall" tent at the fairgrounds. Then the parish purchased a fairgrounds building, serving meals for firemen and Sunday chicken dinners until the 1940s.<sup>31</sup>

Father Fennessy pastored St. Patrick for twenty-five years, then in 1933 returned to Ireland. By then parish membership had grown to 250 families, mostly of Irish descent, along with some Germans, Italians, and other nationalities. Father Fennessey's successor, Rev. Joseph A. O'Brien, served through the remainder of the 1930s, when Bishop James A. Griffin transferred him to St. Maurice in Morrisonville, and that pastor, Rev. Peter P. McGuinness, came to St. Patrick. An Ireland native, Father McGuinness led

the parish until 1942, when the Bishop appointed Msgr. David L. Scully. Another Irish emigrant, Msgr. Scully had been pastor of St. Mary's in Madison, as well as diocesan director of the Propagation of the Faith, Council of Catholic Women, Holy Name Society, and Catholic Charities.

Each St. Patrick's Day the parish hosted a large celebration, beginning with a Solemn High Mass and sermon on the history of Irish Catholicism. The evening entertainment combined talent "thoroughly reminiscent of Ireland," according to a local reporter. Later popular fundraising events included student performances at the downtown Knights of Columbus and an Irish Open Golf Tournament and Sweepstakes Festival, with a trip to Ireland among the prizes.<sup>32</sup>

In 1944 the parish purchased and furnished a house for the Sisters at 1815 South Grand Avenue East. "The early morning bus rides through town came to an end, and the Sisters 'belonged' to the parish." Also that year Msgr. Scully hosted parish leaders at the Leland Hotel to celebrate their final debt payment. "It was a happy and enthusiastic group of 30 men who sat down to the victory dinner," the newspaper reported.<sup>33</sup>

Two years later, after Msgr. Scully died, Bishop William O'Connor appointed Rev. Joseph McDonald as temporary administrator until Rev. James J. Haggerty became pastor later in 1946. Born in 1907, Father Haggerty was ordained for the Springfield Diocese in 1933, became an assistant at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, then served as a U.S. military chaplain and in Springfield at St. Joseph's Home for the elderly. He was also diocesan CYO director and field director for the Council of

Catholic Women and Legion of Mary.

In 1947 St. Barbara's Parish, established in 1911 on East Laurel, became a mission church of the continually growing St. Patrick's. Then in early 1953 the Diocese approved a \$100,000 renovation and addition to St. Patrick's forty-year-old church, to be completed by 1955, the parish's fiftieth anniversary. Work began in May, 1953, under supervision of Hadley & Worthington, architects, and Elmer J. Bretz Construction Company. "For weeks before the actual remodeling began," wrote one observer, "the men of the parish worked nights cleaning and painting the basement, moving the old pews from the church, building a Communion rail, and, in general, converting the basement into a chapel which was both a lovely and fitting abode for the King of Kings."

The Gothic stone and brick addition north of the main entrance would extend the building 32 feet, increase the seating capacity, relocate the choir loft to the rear of its former location, and create space for a new vestibule, baptistry, restrooms, and stairways to the entrance and choir loft.<sup>34</sup> Among parishioner volunteers, Dale Curry helped move the altar to the basement and performed carpentry work. Upon completion of the project, his wife, Mary Louise Curry, remembered, the "very kind" Father Haggerty hosted a thank-you dinner for his volunteers.

With more than 125 clergy attending from throughout the Diocese, Bishop O'Connor and Father Haggerty dedicated the "new" church on March 17, 1955, the feast of their patron. "Although St. Patrick parish no longer is the strictly Irish congregation it once was," Bishop O'Connor said in his

dedicatory remarks, "St. Patrick would be proud because it is a truly Catholic group, embracing all nationalities and races who work together harmoniously for the greater honor and glory of God. It is the kind of parish God wants all parishes to be."<sup>35</sup>

"Everyone in the parish was elated at the wonderful change," wrote a reporter. "The new liturgical altars, new pews, choir loft crowned with a new rose window, new confessionals, and simple but beautiful decorations filled every heart with a feeling of satisfaction and a job well done. St. Patrick's Church became a show place of Springfield with people flocking in from all over the diocese to view the beautiful edifice."<sup>36</sup>

Two years later Father Haggerty announced construction of an addition to the school and a chapel annex to the convent. Eighth-grader Stephen Melton, whose family resided directly behind the school and who served daily Mass and did yard work and other chores for the nuns, helped parishioner Bernie Kulavic build the chapel addition. During summers of his grade school years, Melton and other students cleaned the two-story fire escape. "Our thrill of the summer—going up and down the cylinder with a towel, like it was a big curved sliding board."

The increasing numbers of St. Patrick parishioners crowded in for Sunday services, especially the 9:00 Children's Mass. School growth also continued, with students attending daily Mass and making monthly Confessions. "We had sharp, good nuns throughout the school," remembered Marcella McKennedy. "Sister Ruth, our seventh and eighth grade teacher, especially understood the poor kids," said McKennedy; "their parents did the

best they could to send them to St. Patrick.”

St. Patrick parishioners participated in such organizations as the Holy Name Society, St. Vincent de Paul Society, CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine), Young Ladies’ Sodality, Altar Society, and Sacred Heart League, along with CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) and student Scout troops. Mary Louise Curry recalled the CCD meetings: weekly get-togethers of four to six couples, gathering in homes in the spring and fall to study and discuss issues of the Catholic faith.

In 1961 Rev. Dominic F. Lydon succeeded Father Haggerty as pastor. Born in County Mayo, Ireland, Father Lydon was ordained in 1920 at Dublin’s All Hallows Ecclesiastical College. Arriving in the Springfield Diocese the following year, Father Lydon served churches in Illiopolis and Mt. Sterling, then attended the Catholic University of America for a year. Returning to Illinois, he was briefly dean of Routt College in Jacksonville, before being named pastor in Kincaid, then in Murrayville.

For nearly ten years Father Lydon pastored St. Patrick, implementing the liturgical revisions of the Second Vatican Council and overseeing replacement of the original school building with a modern one-story structure. On his retirement in 1970, Rev. George N. Nelis came to St. Patrick. A Chicago native, Father Nelis graduated from DePaul University before studying at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein and Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis. Ordained in 1950, Father Nelis was an assistant pastor in Pana, Collinsville, and at St. Patrick in Springfield, then became a pastor in Greenup and Casey.

As with nearby Sacred Heart Parish, during the mid- to late-1970s, St. Patrick witnessed a somewhat rapid change in parish demographics. When Rev. Victor Kaltenbach succeeded Father Nelis in 1979, he confronted financial challenges, particularly regarding the school. "It was a terrible time," he recalled. "There were no funds. School was ready to open. The bank was empty." He implemented a tuition plan, the first for Springfield's Catholic schools. "Everybody agreed to the tuition, but all the Catholics quit putting in their (Sunday) envelopes." By then, many of the long-time parishioners had moved from the area, replaced by generally poorer African-Americans and other minorities. "People said you can't close the school," Father Kaltenbach remembered. "The school is a special thing. It's still a kind of oasis. It's a safe place, like a little island."<sup>37</sup>

The motorcycle-riding Father Kaltenbach, "a German shepherd of an Irish flock," in his fond description, explained that pastoring St. Patrick gave him the chance to apply the meaning of his faith. "If Jesus came to Earth," he said, "one of the first parishes he would want to come to would be St. Pat's." The fun-loving priest's all-green St. Patrick's Day Parade clothing and shoes rivaled the all-red Cardinals outfit he wore during baseball season. "I think since Father Vic has been here the parish became more like a family," said parishioner Beverly Weitzel.<sup>38</sup>

When Charles Weishaupt joined the parish in the late 1970s, he began assisting Father Kaltenbach as his Mass server. At that time, Weishaupt explained, "Father had no altar boys; he was doing the readings and everything by himself." Their pastor enjoyed the parish summer chicken

dinners and Irish food booths at the annual Ethnic Festival weekend, held at the State Fairgrounds. "For days, we would prepare the Irish stew vegetables, baked goods, and corned beef sandwiches," remembered Mary Louise Curry and Marcella McKennedy of the popular fundraiser.

But as economic struggles increased on the city's southeast side, St. Patrick felt the results. Beginning in about 1980, the neighborhood population fell 20 to 40 percent. "We are smaller than in far gone times," Father Kaltenbach reported in 1985, "but some believe we are mightier. I believe this, for we are doing twice as much with one fourth the numbers."<sup>39</sup> By the late 1980s, the number of parish families declined to 250; many older Irish members commuted to the parish for Sunday Mass but resided elsewhere in town. Other whites and many blacks also began moving from the neighborhood, leaving behind abandoned homes as well as commercial buildings. To help alleviate the financial situation, for several years the Dominican Sisters taught St. Patrick students without charge to the parish.

Even with declining membership, the remaining parishioners continued their strong support of St. Patrick. Since the 1955 church addition had not included an interior stairway to the basement, Charles Carter led the Men's Club in raising funds to construct a set of stairs from the vestibule. He asked each member to donate up to \$100 for the purchase of materials as well as equipment rental to cut through the concrete wall. "We took what we could get," Weishaupt remembered of the donations. "We also remodeled the basement at that time, purchasing appliances for a full kitchen and adding a bar to serve beer." On completion, Men's Club and Altar and Rosary Society

members, along with other parishioners, began hosting fish-fry lunches and dinner on Fridays during Lent, a popular fundraiser even today. "For a time, we were the only place in town serving Friday fish lunches," Weishaupt explained. "The basement would be packed for both meals—including city officials, lawyers, and other dignitaries. And our funeral lunches were almost a feast."

Despite those ongoing parish efforts, in 1993, Father Kaltenbach invoked its lengthy heritage in addressing the serious fiscal challenges. "Thousands of people have passed through the doors of St. Patrick's," he wrote. "It has weathered wars, depressions, riots, storms, great thrusts of crowds and empty pews due to changing times and demographics. We have kept a history of St. Patrick's from its humble beginnings, to the bustling biggest Parish and School in Springfield, to the smallest. It has struggled through many crises and survived. This life and spirit will continue."<sup>40</sup>

A long-range planning committee studied the school's status: 10 percent of the 98 students were Catholic, 66 percent non-Catholic, 75 percent African-American. The \$700 annual tuition for Catholics and \$800 for non-Catholics was vastly insufficient for the estimated \$2,800 per-student cost. Fundraising activities, including the Ethnic Festival booths at the State Fairgrounds and a monthly midnight Bingo provided funds for needed items and helped reduce the deficit, but Father Kaltenbach admitted the shortfall remained massive. "If it weren't for the fund-raisers, we'd be way behind," he said. "Now we can't even cover salaries" for the lay teachers and other staff.<sup>41</sup>

After rather contentious meetings at which some parishioners stated that they would no longer contribute for school expenditures, Father Kaltenbach and Bishop Daniel J. Ryan announced major financial assistance from the Diocese and other Springfield parishes. "The parish is willing to support the school, but not to the present extent," Father Kaltenbach explained. "It's not a negative message. It's just that for so long, the parish has neglected other items (physical repairs to the church and school property) just to continue the school. It's become an over-burden."<sup>42</sup>

In 1995, amid renewed rumors of parish closures, Father Kaltenbach transferred to St. Lawrence Church in Greenville. St. Patrick's parishioners, as well as those at Sacred Heart, welcomed Bishop Ryan's decision that both of their churches would remain open. The Diocese did caution, however, that with a continuing shortage of priests, "some parishes—such as St. Patrick's and Sacred Heart—might face some form of consolidation under one priest or altered schedules of services."<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, Springfield-native Rev. John Eck, CSV (Clerics of St. Viator), became pastor of both St. Patrick and Sacred Heart parishes. Father Eck earned degrees from Loyola University and Western Illinois University, then studied for the CSV order. Ordained in 1963, he taught and counseled at Viatorian high schools in Illinois and pastored St. Barbara Parish in Springfield. From 1990 to 1993 he served as parochial vicar at the city's St. Joseph Parish and then as St. John's Hospital chaplain.

Father Eck described his St. Patrick/Sacred Heart assignment "as a real opportunity for the church to continue a presence where evangelization

and service to people in the community are really missing. Often our (Viatorian) community is called to be with those least important members of society."<sup>44</sup> He pastored the parishes for five years, through increasing financial challenges.

Then in 1998, Msgr. John Ossola succeeded Father Eck for a few months before the appointment of Rev. Kevin Laughery. A central Illinois native, Father Laughery studied for the priesthood at the Diocesan Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Springfield and in Rome. He served in several area parishes, including Girard and Farmersville, before returning to Springfield. As St. Patrick and Sacred Heart pastor, he is remembered for removing the Sacred Heart communion rail, one of the last city parishes still with a communion rail. "It was time," he explained. "The new look brings an openness to the approach to the altar, and a sense of inclusiveness for the congregation in the celebration of the Mass."<sup>45</sup> The parish also discontinued its participation in the Ethnic Festival, Father Laughery citing sharply declining revenue from the once highly successful fundraising event.

### **St. Katharine Drexel Parish**

After several years of continuing decreases in the number of parishioners and fewer pastoral services at both Sacred Heart and St. Patrick, Bishop Ryan's successor, Bishop George J. Lucas, announced a January 1, 2001, merger of the two congregations as St. Katharine Drexel Parish. "Last September the two parishes' pastoral councils recommended that their parishes be united," explained diocesan representative Very Rev. John A. Renken, and that the

new parish bear the name of recently canonized St. Katharine Drexel. An American heiress who devoted her life to the underprivileged, by her death in 1955 she had contributed an estimated \$23 million to organizations serving the poor and underprivileged. Renken said the parishioners “trust that the name of the new parish will bespeak the intention of the Catholic Church to continue the work of Jesus Christ in the same spirit which motivated America’s newest saint.”<sup>46</sup>

The new St. Katharine Drexel parish began with 671 members representing 435 households, co-pastored initially by Very Rev. Renken and Very Rev. Kenneth C. Steffen. Both fluent in Spanish, they began offering a weekly Sunday Mass in Spanish, drawing Hispanics from throughout the community. In addition, parishioners and friends began a popular summer Fiesta, now called the “The Taste of St. Katharine Drexel,” featuring foods and activities reflecting Hispanic as well as Filipino and other ethnic traditions. After-Mass breakfasts and other social gatherings have added to parish camaraderie.

Following the reassignment of Fathers Renken and Steffen, a succession of priests from the nearby Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception—Msgr. Ossola, Rev. Christopher House, Rev. Peter Harman, and Rev. John Nolan (a Sacred Heart grade school alumnus)—served as priest moderator and sacramental priest. In addition to restructuring the two churches into one congregation, the Diocese arranged the demolition of the St. Patrick rectory and designated St. Patrick School as a not-for-profit corporation. Amid many financial and enrollment challenges, the diocesan

school has remained open, serving low-income students in southeast Springfield.

In 2006 Bishop Lucas named Sister Mary Jean Traeger, O.P., as St. Katharine Drexel's parish life coordinator, another commitment by the Springfield Dominicans to local parishes. With a degree in pastoral studies and a certificate in preaching, Sister Mary Jean had served two terms as Prioress General of the Springfield Dominicans. At St. Katharine Drexel, she coordinated the various liturgical and social events and supervised administrative tasks, while the Cathedral priests continued offering Mass and the Sacraments.

She and the St. Katharine Drexel Parish Council studied the challenge of supporting two churches and other buildings before offering a controversial recommendation to close St. Patrick. In evaluating the report, Bishop Lucas counseled the congregation to discern "the kind of parish they were called to be," then in 2008 approved their final document, "A Future Full of Hope," which supported the continuation of both churches "as a Catholic presence and an active partner in the neighborhood."<sup>47</sup>

On Sundays, diocesan priest Rev. Paul Habing offered the Sacred Heart Spanish Mass, continuing to draw Hispanic Catholics from throughout the area. Construction projects included replacing the Sacred Heart roof and sidewalks and installing an elevator at St. Patrick for disabled accessibility. A generous bequest helped fund a major interior restoration of Sacred Heart church, with painting by the Autenrieb firm that had performed the 1970s work.

Then in 2015, Bishop Thomas John Paprocki, successor to Bishop Lucas, announced the transfer of Sister Mary Jean to St. Cabrini Parish in Springfield, and the assignment of three priests from the Chicago-based Canons Regular of St. John Cantius (Society of St. John Cantius) to serve St. Katharine Drexel Parish. Bishop Paprocki had become acquainted with priests from the conservative order, formed in 1998, while serving as chancellor and auxiliary bishop in the Chicago Archdiocese. In a blighted neighborhood near downtown Chicago, Canons Regular priests revitalized St. John Cantius Parish, which had been founded by Polish immigrants in the nineteenth century.<sup>48</sup>

“Canons” refers to living, working, and praying together in a religious community; “Canons Regular” denotes that its members follow the poverty, chastity, and obedience rule of St. Augustine and the humility and charity of St. John Cantius, a Polish priest known as the patron of professors, teachers, students, priests, and pilgrims. Canons Regular priests and brothers treasure the Latin Mass traditions and devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary, as well as sacred art and music in their liturgies.

In Springfield, Bishop Paprocki said, the Canons Regular laity could inject “new energy and new direction” at St. Katharine Drexel, while respecting the different racial and ethnic entities that comprise the parish family. “I think it’s going to be a new experience for all of us,” said Parish Council chairwoman Johnetta Jordan after meeting with the priests prior to their official assignment. “I didn’t get the sense they’ve worked with such a diverse group before.” Ana Manriquez, also on the Parish Council, offered her

positive assessment of the new leadership. "I like change," she said, "and I like the idea of their tradition and values."<sup>49</sup>

Pastor Rev. James Isaacson, ordained in 2004, had previously been administrator of another vibrant Canons Regular parish, St. Peter in Volo, Illinois. Parochial vicars Rev. Scott Thelander, ordained in 2012, and Rev. Kevin Mann, ordained in 2014, both served at Chicago's St. John Cantius Parish. "Every aspect of our lives revolves around the Sacred Liturgy," explained Father Mann, "whether it be our meals, or work, our recreation, our studies, or most importantly, our prayer life; thus, our life is truly centered on Christ."<sup>50</sup>

While continuing the English and Spanish worship services, the three priests added Latin Masses and devotions, with incense and Gregorian chant. Latin Mass, the standard form until the 1960s Second Vatican Council and also known as the Extraordinary Form, has been in resurgence in recent years. Bishop Paprocki said that "a lot of people place high value on the Extraordinary Form." And Father Thelander described "a poetic flow and a transcendent quality people like about the Extraordinary Form. You're entering a sacred space, and a different language accentuates that (looking to God)."<sup>51</sup> In 2017 Father Thelander became pastor of St. Cabrini parish on Springfield's north side, while retaining residence with Canons Regular priests and brothers at the St. Katharine Drexel rectory.

Fathers Isaacson and Mann, in addition to their regularly scheduled Masses and other liturgies, participate in parish social activities while also performing ministerial functions within the Diocese. They celebrate Mass as

needed at other parishes, visit patients at Springfield hospitals and nursing homes, and assist with two neighborhood ministries—the diocesan St. Patrick Catholic School and the St. Martin de Porres Center, a former Hardee’s restaurant across South Grand East from St. Patrick Church, where volunteers provide food, clothing, and household items to area residents.

“God has been very good to St. Katharine Drexel Parish,” Father Isaacson recently told parishioners. “We are once again beginning to become a viable parish. Our Mass attendance has increased. Our collections are rising. The Diocese’s debt forgiveness during the Year of Mercy has allowed St. Katharine Drexel to become debt free for the first time in her history. We have many reasons to thank Our Lord.

“There are still challenges ahead of us. Most important to remember is that the Eucharistic is the source and summit of our faith and when we keep our focus on the Eucharistic in both our parish and personal life, Our Lord will continue to bless and unite us.”

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<sup>1</sup> Sr. Karina Dickey, O.P., *Come to the Water, The Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, 1853-2003, A Sesquicentennial History*, Springfield: Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Charles Krekenberg, "Historical Notes of The Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish of Springfield," [1920], Archives and Records, Diocese of Springfield in Illinois; *State Journal-Register* [Springfield], Sept. 1, 1984; *Illinois State Journal* [Springfield], Nov. 8, 1931.

<sup>3</sup> Krekenberg.

<sup>4</sup> Krekenberg.

<sup>5</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, March 17, 1944.

<sup>6</sup> Krekenberg.

<sup>7</sup> *Illinois State Register* [Springfield], May 10, 1895.

<sup>8</sup> Krekenberg.

<sup>9</sup> *Illinois State Register*, Oct. 4, 1909.

<sup>10</sup> Krekenberg.

<sup>11</sup> Krekenberg; *State Journal-Register*, March 8, 1897.

<sup>12</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, Dec. 12, 1936.

<sup>13</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, June 13, 1926; Joseph J. Thompson, comp. and ed., *Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, Diamond Jubilee History*, Springfield: Hartman Printing Co., 1927; *Illinois State Register*, March 16, 1944.

<sup>14</sup> Rev. Stanley Milewski, *Sacred Heart Church, Celebrating Our One Hundredth Year, 1884-1984*, Sangamon Valley Collection, Lincoln Library, Springfield.

<sup>15</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, March 23, 1942; Milewski.

<sup>16</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, Feb. 28, 1943.

<sup>17</sup> *Illinois State Register*, March 14, 1944.

<sup>18</sup> *State Journal-Register*, June 2, 1975; Rev. John S. Brockmeier memoir, 1974, Brookens Library, University of Illinois/Springfield.

<sup>19</sup> *State Journal-Register*, March 8, 1987.

<sup>20</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, March 25, May 20, 1966.

<sup>21</sup> *State Journal-Register*, June 2, 1975.

<sup>22</sup> Milewski, pp. 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> *State Journal-Register*, May 27, 1977.

<sup>24</sup> *State Journal-Register*, Dec. 25, 1979.

<sup>25</sup> Milewski.

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- <sup>26</sup> *State Journal-Register*, March 8, 1987.
- <sup>27</sup> *State Journal-Register*, Feb. 19, March 8, 1987; *Catholic Times* [Springfield], Feb. 2, 1987.
- <sup>28</sup> *Illinois Times*, Sept. 7-13, 1989.
- <sup>29</sup> "St. Patrick's Church, Golden Jubilee, 1905-1955," commemorative booklet, Sangamon Valley Collection.
- <sup>30</sup> "St. Patrick's Parish, Springfield, 1905-1955," parish file, Sangamon Valley Collection.
- <sup>31</sup> Undated newspaper clipping, parish file, Sangamon Valley Collection; *Illinois State Journal*, Sept, 28, 1924, Sept. 16, 1932.
- <sup>32</sup> *State Journal-Register*, Oct. 7, 1974.
- <sup>33</sup> "St. Patrick's Through the Years," parish file, Sangamon Valley Collection.
- <sup>34</sup> "St. Patrick's Church, Golden Jubilee."
- <sup>35</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, March 18, 1955.
- <sup>36</sup> "St. Patrick's Parish, Springfield, 1905-1955."
- <sup>37</sup> *Catholic Times*, Feb. 6, 1994.
- <sup>38</sup> *Illinois Times*, Sept. 7, 1995.
- <sup>39</sup> *Saint Patrick's, Springfield, Ill., 1985* (parish directory).
- <sup>40</sup> *St. Patrick's Church, Springfield, Illinois* [1993] (parish directory).
- <sup>41</sup> *Catholic Times*, Nov. 28, 1993.
- <sup>42</sup> *Catholic Times*, Feb. 6, 1994.
- <sup>43</sup> *State Journal-Register*, June 17, 1995.
- <sup>44</sup> *Catholic Times*, June 12, 1994.
- <sup>45</sup> *The Roman Catholic Faithful* press release, Aug. 27, 1999.
- <sup>46</sup> Undated (2000) *Catholic Times* article, Sangamon Valley Collection.
- <sup>47</sup> "St. Katharine Drexel Parish Plan for *A Future Full of Hope*," Archives and Records, Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.
- <sup>48</sup> *Catholic New World*, June 17, 2012.
- <sup>49</sup> *State Journal-Register*, April 12, 2015.
- <sup>50</sup> "Stewardship and Discipleship," 2015-2016 Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, Diocesan Pastoral Directory; <http://fundforvocations.org/BrKM.sjc.vs>.
- <sup>51</sup> *State Journal-Register*, April 12, 2015.

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