

## **St. Wenceslaus Parish History**

The Bohemian parish and school of St. Wenceslaus, named in honor of the 10<sup>th</sup> century King of Bohemia, were founded in 1895 as “offspring” of St. John Nepomuk Parish, the first Czech parish in the United States, which had outgrown its capacity. Father Charles Pekar was appointed temporary pastor in 1895, followed by the appointment of Father B.H. Faitlik as the first permanent pastor in March 1896.

The school opened September 3, 1895 with two School Sisters of Notre Dame and 76 students. By 1896, the school had grown to 100 students and four teaching sisters. In June of 1896, the sisters moved into their own convent, the former priest’s house, while the pastor moved into a rented building.

On June 11, 1897, Father Charles August Bleha was appointed pastor and served here until he became pastor of St. John Nepomuk on May 15, 1900. He initiated work on the new priest’s residence which was completed on August 21, 1898. This building still serves as the rectory today.

He was succeeded by Father John Nekula who was pastor from 1900 until his death in 1922. Under his guidance, the congregation increased significantly, resulting in a need to enlarge the facilities to accommodate parishioners and students. The church building was enlarged and re-blessed on September 2, 1906. The sisters moved into a renovated building across the alley in April 1914, enabling the convent to be converted into extra classrooms for more students.

Following his ordination on June 11, 1915, Father William Hamtil, a former student of St. Wenceslaus School, was appointed assistant pastor until August 1919 when he became assistant pastor at St. John Nepomuk. In June 1922, after the death of Father Nekula, Father Hamtil was appointed pastor at St. Wenceslaus.

Continued growth resulted in the ground-breaking for a new church on August 7, 1925. The cornerstone was laid on October 11, 1925, and the completed church was dedicated on May 31, 1926. This is the church building used today. The sacristy was added in 1939. The old church was converted into classrooms in 1930, as enrollment reached 185. In June 1933, the janitor’s living quarters were converted into a single large classroom. In this same year, the first kindergarten class opened with 36 students, while the attic of the convent was remodeled to house additional sisters.

By September 1935, school enrollment was 302. Consequently, on May 13, 1936, a new, ten-room, fireproof school with adjoining convent for ten sisters was begun. It was dedicated on October 18, 1936.

In 1945, Father Joseph Pelly, M.S.F. was the first Missionaries of the Holy Family to assist Father Hamtil by celebrating some of the Masses at St. Wenceslaus.

By 1948, the school was overcrowded again with 525 students, nine sisters and two lay teachers. On February 10, 1954, ground was broken for the addition of several classrooms and a cafeteria which were completed on December 5, 1954.

On December 10, 1960, Father Hamtil died and his weekend assistant, Father Joseph Pelley, M.S.F. was appointed administrator until Archbishop Joseph Ritter announced on December 28, 1960 that care of the parish would be given to the Missionaries of the Holy Family. Father Herman Berg, M.S.F. was appointed pastor with Father Ed Matthews, M.S.F. as his assistant. In 1965, Father Berg was transferred and Father Pelley was appointed pastor, but he died the same day he was to assume duties; Father Peter Roebrocks, M.S.F. was then named pastor.

In the 1960's, the number of parishioners and school children began to decline as people moved to the suburbs, resulting in the closing of St. Wenceslaus School in May 1972. It re-opened in the fall as a consolidated school of St. Agatha, St. Agnes, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Wenceslaus parishes. Educating grades 6 - 8, it was renamed Notre Dame Elementary West after the School Sisters of Notre Dame who staffed it. The St. Francis de Sales school building became Notre Dame Elementary East for children in grades 1-5. Enrollment for the combined schools was 566 students.

In 1974, as further consolidation was needed, the school moved into the former St. Frances de Sales high school building. In September 1981, the St. Wenceslaus school building became Monsignor Behrmann's Learning Disability Center. This center operated as an ungraded educational system for 96 students until the spring of 1995 when it moved to St. John the Baptist Parish. During the summer of 1995, Notre Dame Elementary School moved back into the St. Wenceslaus school building with 154 students and a staff of 12.

On January 21, 1976, when Father Roebrocks died, his associate, Father Edward Zaborowski, M.S.F. was appointed pastor. He was assisted by Brother Joseph Roelke, M.S.F. who was eventually ordained a priest in August 1981 and celebrated his First Mass at St. Wenceslaus. Father Roelke succeeded Father Zaborowski by being appointed administrator in January 1988 and subsequently became pastor in August 1988.

On May 27, 1989, Bishop Edward O'Donnell ordained Mr. Fred Brown, a parish deacon, in St. Wenceslaus Church as a priest of the Missionaries of the Holy Family.

Mr. George Miller, the first parishioner from St. Wenceslaus to become a permanent deacon, was ordained on June 8, 1991 by Archbishop John L. May, who subsequently appointed Deacon Miller to serve at St. Wenceslaus where he continues to minister today. Furthermore, Deacon Miller served as Director of the Permanent Diaconate for the St. Louis Archdiocese from Jan. 1, 1998 to June 30, 2005 while simultaneously serving as the parish deacon at St. Wenceslaus Church.

In July 2000, Father John Lombardi, M.S.F. was appointed associate pastor.

Brother John Griffin, M.S.F. was assigned to St. Wenceslaus in October 2001 to assist in the care and ministries of the parish.

On June 1, 2001, Father Joe Roelke became Provincial Superior of the Missionaries of the Holy Family's North American Province. Consequently, Father James Wuerth, M.S.F. was appointed pastor on September 1, 2001.

In 2002, St. Pius V Parish closed its school and joined the parishes supporting Notre Dame Elementary in the St. Wenceslaus school building. As a result of this merger, the name of the school was changed to St. Frances Cabrini Academy.

In 2005, under the leadership of Archbishop Raymond L. Burke (now Cardinal Burke in Rome), final decisions for restructuring the South City Deanery were made in which ten parishes were suppressed, either becoming chapels, an oratory, or the church buildings were sold. In spite of their assignment to other parishes by the Archdiocese, most people were shopping for a parish that suited them. In addition, a number of parishes became personal parishes, i.e., parishes without boundaries, dedicated to a particular spirituality or ministry. At this time, St. Wenceslaus was designated to be a Personal Parish for those drawn to the mission and spirituality of the Missionaries of the Holy Family. A number of families from the neighboring suppressed parishes became members of St. Wenceslaus in the following years.

In November, 2009, Father John Lombardi, M.S.F. retired to the Little Sisters of the Poor Nursing Home in St. Louis. In March 2011, Brother John Griffin, M.S.F. retired to Padua Place Nursing Home in San Antonio, Texas.

Throughout the years, St. Wenceslaus Parish has adapted to changes in its neighborhood and congregation. The parish still has some parishioners of Bohemian heritage, but welcomes, and is actively involved with, many people of diverse backgrounds from the neighborhood and larger community.

**Missionaries of the Holy Family** [www.MSF-America.org](http://www.MSF-America.org)

The Missionaries of the Holy Family (MSF) is a worldwide Roman Catholic religious order of over 900 priests and brothers serving in 22 countries. St. Wenceslaus Catholic Parish in St. Louis has been staffed by the Missionaries of the Holy Family since 1960.

The Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Family was founded in Holland by Servant of God Father John Berthier, a French La Salette priest, on September 28, 1895.

Coincidentally, the feast day of St. Wenceslaus, Duke and King of Bohemia, is September 28, and St. Wenceslaus Parish was founded in St. Louis on September 28, 1895.

**The Missionaries of the Holy Family have a three-fold charism:**

- 1) First, they are missionaries, i.e., they bring the Gospel to those who are far away, which includes people who live on other continents as well as those who live nearby but are spiritually distant from God.
- 2) The second charism of the congregation is the promotion of vocations, especially late vocations. The Missionaries of the Holy Family continue to be blessed with the charism of fostering late vocations for the Church.
- 3) The third charism is the pastoral care of families. The Missionaries hold as their model the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in their mutual love, unity, peace, prayer, and obedience to the will of God. The Holy Family priests and brothers strive to inspire all families entrusted to their care with the desire to imitate the Holy Family.

### **Friends of the Missionaries of the Holy Family**

Friends of the Missionaries of the Holy Family is a lay organization of men and women supporting the work of the congregation, primarily through prayer. This prayer association meets quarterly for an evening Mass, followed by a social gathering where new information is shared. Call Maurice Prater for more details at (314) 577-6300.

### **Perpetual Masses**

For any occasion, give the gift of prayer by enrolling loved ones in the Perpetual Mass Association. Since 1933, a daily Mass is celebrated by the Provincial Superior of the Missionaries of the Holy Family for everyone enrolled in the association, living and deceased. To receive a Perpetual Mass Enrollment Kit, please call Mary Martin or Maurice Prater at (314) 577-6300.

### **Mass Schedule at St. Wenceslaus Parish**

#### Sunday Obligation

Saturday 4:00 PM  
Sunday 8:00 AM and 10:00 AM

#### Weekdays

Monday through Saturday:  
7:45 AM in the Annex Chapel (in the school building)

#### Holy Days

Evening before the Holy Day 6:00 PM  
Holy Day 8:00 AM

#### Confessions

Saturdays 3:00 PM – 3:30 PM  
Other times by appointment.

Pastoral Staff

Rev. James E. Wuerth, M.S.F., Pastor  
Deacon George Miller  
Mr. Paul Jolly, Business Manager

Contact Information

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