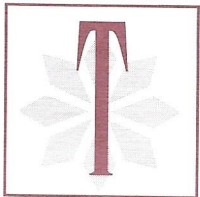
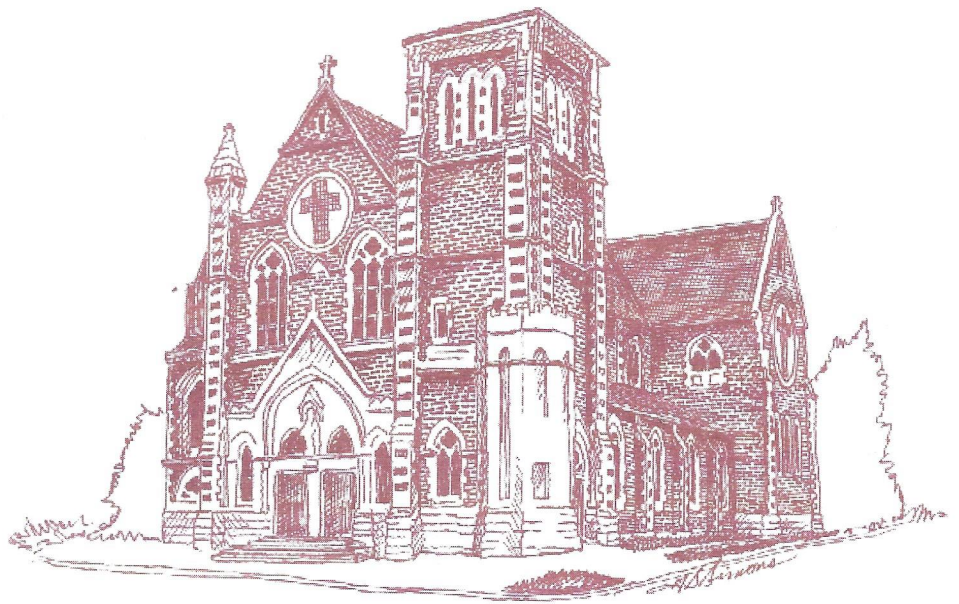


St. Mary's Catholic Church

Erected 1899
Victorian Gothic



Thanks to a \$700,000 restoration project nearing completion, the 101-year-old St. Mary's Church will continue into the 21st century as a vibrant place of worship.

But if it wasn't for the dedication and vision of parishioners, the massive church may have faded into oblivion as a gothic relic. The ancient heating system was beginning to fail and with no air-conditioning, temperatures frequently soared to more than 90 degrees in the sanctuary. The elderly and those with breathing problems began finding it difficult to sit through summer masses, recalled Father Thomas Dempsey of St. Mary's.

"It was very uncomfortable inside the church on warm summer days," said Father Dempsey. "We would open the doors and use exhaust fans to make it bearable, but if it was humid outside, it was even more warm and humid inside."

In honor of the church's 100th birthday, church leaders appropriated \$377,000 to replace the boiler and heating pipes and hook up central air-conditioning for the first time in church's history. Another \$325,000

was spent on redecorating and installing new statues and a state-of-the-art sound system.

Artisans spent months on scaffolding, hand-painting the intricate stenciling on the ceiling and faux stones on the walls. A six-foot-four-inch statue of St. Mary holding Jesus, as well as other symbols of the Holy Spirit coming down on the faithful were recently installed in the front of the church. A new crucifix is on order and a 25-year-old sound system will soon be replaced with speakers more centrally located in the sanctuary.

"Our parishioners love the way the church looks now," said Father Dempsey. "A lot of people have commented they think it looks like a Medieval European cathedral."

Designed by Chicago architect Martin Carr and constructed by L.E. Palm in 1898 and 1899, the massive 132-foot-long building is 72-feet wide and soars to 175 feet at the tower. The seating capacity is 810. Victorian Gothic features include the exaggerated roof shapes, a front buttress rising to a campanile form, stone detailing and towers. Among the most impressive features of the church are the narrow, pointed

Gothic windows containing German-influenced pictorial-style stained glass. Much of the color in the glass comes from the extensive use of paint used before the pieces were fired.

Nearly 200 members of the Art Institute of Chicago toured St. Mary's and its stained glass this past June as a part of a tour called Exploring the Fox River Valley: Part III.

The Roman Catholic Church has been located at the intersection of Fulton and Gifford streets since 1851. The first church was located on the southeast corner of Fulton and Gifford - the present-day site of St. Mary's Parochial School. Today, approximately 1,700 worshippers attend one of four weekend masses. A hospitality center added onto the west side of the church ten years ago houses adult education classes and other functions.

"As soon as the sound system is in, we'll really be done with our restoration," said Father Dempsey. "We hope we're set for another 30 years and our parishioners are proud of the church. They love it." *