

FACTS ABOUT IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH



Roman Catholic Church, Clarksville, Tenn.

- A "great fire" roared through Clarksville in April 1878. It destroyed most downtown buildings which were made of timber, and burned very quickly. It took three days to put the fire out. More than 15 acres were destroyed, and more than 100 people were displaced.
- Immaculate Conception Church is styled after French Gothic architecture. The altar area has a fleur-de-lis on it.
- The old St. Aloysius School site was sold in 1880. The school was moved across the street and was not part of the sale.
- The final cost to build Immaculate Conception was \$15,000. Proceeds from the sale of the old church building went toward the debt reduction. The old church was sold to the Methodist Church North in 1881.
- In 1887, the Dominican Sisters arrived to take charge of St. Aloysius School and remained throughout the history of the school.
- The large crucifix in the choir loft used to be at St. Michael's Mission in Cedar Hill. Father George Murphy received permission to move it to Immaculate Conception.
- Father Joseph Buecler authored an "Official Guidebook of Immaculate Conception" in 1902 on proper conduct while in Mass. Many local merchants took out ads to defray printing costs.
- Father John Alphonse Nolan is the longest serving priest assigned to Immaculate Conception. He served 15 years. Father Nolan built and hand carved the intricate altar in the church. In addition, he built a rectory and a new school building, and raised the funds for both. He worked tirelessly and was never known to take a vacation.
- In 1907, a stucco veneer was applied over the bricking on the church to preserve it.

- In 1918, Immaculate Conception welcomed its first African-American Family - the Lewises. Mr. Lewis was very active in the Knights of Columbus.
- The original stained glass windows cost \$500 each and depict a religious event in the Catholic church.
- In 1940, a chapel was added to the school and convent. Other church improvements included a new hardwood floor and renovation of the sanctuary. Father Harold Des Champs died of an apparent heart attack before he was able to celebrate Mass in the newly renovated church.
- 33,000 acres were purchased by the U.S. government in 1941. Construction of Fort Campbell began. By 1944, more than 100,000 men and women were stationed there. Four Masses were said on Sundays.
- 1944 marked the 100-year celebration for the first Catholic church in Clarksville (St. Mary).
- Renovations to St. Mary's School began in 1955. They included a new basketball court, auditorium, kitchen and meeting rooms.
- The Second Vatican Council adopted changes to the liturgy in 1965. Prior to that time, changes had not taken place for 108 years. Sadly, that same year marked the closing of St. Mary's School. It closed its doors due to lack of enrollment and financial trouble.
- St. Mary's Center was dedicated in 1975. It was a new educational activity center. A deceased parishioner left funds for the project.
- 1980 marked the Centennial Celebration for Immaculate Conception Church. Planning began many months in advance. The highlights included a Nationalities Night that featured food from various ethnicities. It also included a request for parishioners to dress up in costumes that depicted the 1880s era.
- St. Mary's Center was rededicated to Immaculate Conception Church in June 1987 and currently serves as the worship center.
- 2000 marked the Jubilee Year with the return of St. Mary's School. Grades kindergarten through eighth welcomed their students. In 2011, the name was changed to Immaculate Conception to better identify with the parish.
- In December 2012 Bishop David R. Choby, celebrates a Mass of Thanksgiving in conjunction with the Diocese of Nashville's 175th anniversary.



PRIESTS OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION



Rev. Patrick
Gleeson
1873-1875



Rev. Anthony
Vaghi
1885-1886



Rev. Henry Japes
1898-1898



Rev. George
Murphy
1889-1901



Rev. Joseph
J. Buecler
1901-1903



Rev. John
A. Nolan
1903-1918



Rev. James
T. Lorigan
1918-1920



Rev. John
F. M. Hardeman
1920-1925



Rev. Cerwin
P. Wasseem
1926-1934



Rev. Emmanuel
F. Callahan
1934-1937



Rev. Harold
DesChamps
1937-1940



Rev. J. W. Wiley
1940-1941



Rev. Leon Englert
1941-1943



Rev. Francis
P. Pack
1943-1948



Rev. William
E. Barclay
1948-1956



Rev. John Tierney
1956-1967



Rev. Joseph
E. Wesley
1967-1968



Rev. Paul
Caldwell
1968-1969



Rev. Aloysius
Hayden
1969-1970



Rev. William E.
Morgan
1970-1980



Rev. Edmund
Halsey
1977-1980



Msgr. William
S. Bevington
1980-1982



Rev. Robert
J. Roeser
1982-1992



Rev. Eric
L. Fowlkes
1992-2003



Rev. Edward
F. Steiner
2003-2007



Rev. David Gaffny
2007-Present

MISSIONARY PRIESTS

Rev. Ivo Schact
Rev. Louis Hoste
Rev. Aloysius Orengo, O.P.
Rev. James A. Marshall, O.P.
Rev. J.W. Brammer
Rev. Abram J. Ryan
Rev. Wencelaus J. Repis
Rev. Cornelius Thoma
Rev. James Malloy
Rev. Patrick Ryan
Rev. Patrick O'Brien
Rev. J.T. Jarboe



IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CATHOLIC CHURCH



CLARKSVILLE, TENNESSEE
ESTABLISHED 1845

HISTORY

Clarksville, Tenn., is rich in history as well as fertile soil. Demand for tobacco both on the European and domestic markets brought farmers and merchants to the area. Clothiers, blacksmiths, coachmakers and other purveyors of fine goods moved to Clarksville.

The earliest known Catholic priest to visit Clarksville was Father Joseph Alemany in 1830, who later became the first Archbishop of San Francisco. By 1839, reports indicate there were several Catholic families living in the Clarksville area. Masses were held at private homes by missionary priests traveling by horseback throughout Tennessee. They conducted Masses once per month as they made their rounds, often performing baptisms, marriages and other sacraments.

Bishop Richard Pius Miles, the first Bishop of Nashville, purchased land from John H. Poston to build a church. The property was located on Washington (now College), east of Fourth Street. Father Ivo Schact was the first resident priest in Clarksville. He laid the cornerstone on June 11, 1844.

As Clarksville continued to grow, so did the Catholic church. The *Clarksville Chronicle* dated Dec. 3, 1844, ran a story about the dedication of the new church. Bishop Miles was the presider. The article indicated it would be built in a convenient part of town and be built with brick. At that time, there were very few brick structures in Clarksville. Most were made of timber.

The new Catholic church was dedicated as St. Mary's. It shared a Sunday schedule with other outlying churches. Masses were said the first Sunday of every month.

The 1860s were a turbulent time for Tennessee and particularly Clarksville. The town was a railroad hub for moving troops and supplies throughout the South. There was talk at the time whether Tennessee should secede from the Union. After the fall of Fort Sumter, the state declared its independence from the Union. On June 17, 1861, it officially

became a state of the Confederacy.

The 14th Tennessee Regiment was composed of 11 companies. It began its organization in Clarksville in May of 1861. Many of these men supplied their own firearms. The local foundry produced cannons, balls and shot for the war effort. The coach company supplied carriages to transport the guns. Most of the households had a relative fighting. By the end of February 1862, Clarksville was occupied by Federal troops and surrendered its Confederate flag. The residents were frightened and turned to their church leaders.

Right, originally called St. Mary's Center, the building was rededicated to Immaculate Conception Church in 1987 and currently serves as the worship center. Below, Immaculate Conception Church and the early St. Mary's School between 1878-1880. At bottom, St. Mary's School in 1943.



Interior of the old church still similar to the early years.

Father Louis Hoste was assigned to St. Mary's at that time. It was a turbulent time for the church as well. No coal was available to heat the church and most supplies were scarce. Because Father Hoste had

very little to supply his parishioners with in the physical sense, he supplied them with hope and prayer.

Father Abram Ryan also came to Clarksville near the end of the war. He is best known for being the Poet Priest of the South, having penned the famous "The Conquered Banner." It has been suggested that he wrote the poem while in Clarksville. He stayed only a short time before being transferred to Knoxville. The war years took an enormous toll on him emotionally, and he never fully recovered from the changes the war brought. He entered a Franciscan monastery where he stayed until his death.

The end of the Civil War brought many changes to Clarksville and the Diocese of Nashville. Bishop Patrick Feehan was assigned as the third Bishop of Nashville replacing Bishop James Whelan who resigned and returned to his native Ohio. Bishop Feehan wasted little time

in tending to his flock. Under his tenure, the diocese grew, more churches were built, and more priests were ordained. Tragically, the yellow fever epidemic took nine priests and 13 sisters.

Gradually, new businesses opened and began to prosper. Toll bridge construction also brought more families to the area. Schools that had been closed previously reopened. It took many years, but things eventually returned to normal.

St. Mary's continued to grow and prosper. In March 1870, a lot was purchased on Franklin Street to erect a school for the growing number of families. It was named

St. Aloysius School in honor of the patron saint of youth and purity. Father J.T. Jarboe arrived during that time, but he was not assigned permanently, and St. Mary's became a mission church.

Early church records reflect a name change from St. Mary to Immaculate Conception on May 30, 1875, but there is no mention as to why the name change took place. The brick church continued to serve the people of Clarksville until 1878 when funds were raised to build a larger church to serve the growing needs of the parishioners.

In 1876, land was purchased on the southeast corner of Seventh and Franklin streets from Mr. and Mrs. C.E. Atkins. The property included a house, which the Sisters of Charity moved into. They were from Nazareth, Ky., and assumed teaching duties at St. Aloysius School.

Soon after, in June of 1879, the property next to the Sisters' house was offered at auction. Many bidders showed up, but Father Patrick Gleeson, pastor at the time, was able to purchase it for the sum of \$2,038.40 in cash, along with a note for almost \$1,000 payable in 12 months. The property contained a fine house and a small orchard. The decision was made to erect a new church building on this new property. A cornerstone ceremony was held on Aug. 20, 1880.

The church exterior was completed in 1880; however, the interior was not completed until 1886. This was due to economic depression and "the great fire" that had devastated Clarksville a short time earlier. Fundraising efforts were very successful and piece by piece the church began to come together.

