

ST. ELIZABETH PARISH HISTORY

The history of St. Elizabeth parish is intertwined with that of St. Monica, the first Black Catholic Church in Chicago. In 1924 they were consolidated, and St. Elizabeth became the center of Chicago Black Catholic community.

ST. ELIZABETH'S HISTORY

1881 St. Elizabeth Church was organized to serve Irish Catholics who settled in the area. On Nov. 19, 1881 - the feast day of St. Elizabeth of Hungary - a frame structure which had served for many years as St. Anne Church was moved to a site on Dearborn near Root St.

1882 The frame church was enlarged.

1883 Property at the northeast corner of 41 St. & State was purchased for a brick combination building, the cornerstone of which was laid in June of 1884 for a church & school. The new church was dedicated on Nov. 2, 1884.

1885 The Sister of Mercy opened the parish school with an enrollment of 250 students.

1886 The old frame church was moved next to the combination building and fitted up for the older boys in the parish.

1889 A larger rectory was built at 4039 S. Wabash and St. Elizabeth neighborhood was incorporated into the City of Chicago.

1890 The Mercy Sister's opened a high school, and 469 girls were enrolled.

1891 The cornerstone of a new church was laid, and the magnificent structure was dedicated on June 19, 1892.

1896 A new brick rectory was completed at 4049 S. Wabash.

1903 St. Elizabeth Church became the second Catholic edifice in Chicago to be consecrated, a ceremony performed only after the entire debt on a Catholic Church is liquidated.

1906 The silver jubilee of the founding of the parish was celebrated on Nov. 25. At the time,

726 children were enrolled in the grade school.

1913 St. Elizabeth Hall, at a cost of \$48,000, was opened on June 5. The three-story high school, at 4052 S. Wabash, was nearing completion. This structure was built at a cost of \$115,000.

1920 The neighborhood in which St. Elizabeth was located had undergone considerable racial change. Blacks lived in 13 of the city's 35 wards. The highest concentration of blacks was in the 2nd and 3rd wards. The black population of Chicago continued to increase from the South where job was available. Between 1910 and 1920, the black population of Chicago increased from 44,103 to 109,458. In 1930 it increased to 233,903.

1922 A dual system of education existed at St. Elizabeth. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament

1925 conducted classes for the black children in the main school at 4052 S. Wabash. The Mercy Sisters operated an academy for white girls in the Sheridan club at 4100 S. Michigan.

1924 St. Monica was consolidated with St. Elizabeth on Dec. 6 and soon became the center of Chicago's black Catholic community.

ST. MONICA'S HISTORY

The origins of St. Monica Church date back to the 1880s when black Catholic's worshipped in the basement of the Old St. Mary Church, which was located at 9th and Wabash Ave.

1882 Members of the St. Augustine Society sponsored a bazaar in St. Mary Church in order to raise funds for a church of their own.

1889 Rev. John Augustine Tolton, the first black priest to be ordained for the U.S., was appointed to organize the black Catholics of Chicago. Born a slave in Brush Creek, MO as a youth he was baptized a Catholic. He grew up in Quincy, IL where he attended school. Denied permission to enter a U. S. Catholic seminary he pursued his studies at the Sacred College of the Propaganda in Rome, where he was ordained in 1886.

On Sept. 13, 1891, the Chicago Times reported that:

In Chicago the colored Catholic population is small, and their needs are amply ministered to by Father Tolton (colored), in the basement of St. Mary's church on Wabash Ave. It was by their own wish to be formed into a

congregation by themselves, but if prevented from attending their own mass they were always made welcome at any of the other churches. In this way there has been no cause for friction, and white and colored lived in "perfect harmony" with the other.

1882 Father Tolton met with a group of prominent Catholics to make plans for a new church at 36th and Dearborn. A donation of \$10,000 was made on conditions that a like sum be raised by friends of the new parish for a new church.

1883 The foundation of St. Monica Church was laid and when completed, the structure would be 62 feet wide by 100 feet in length, of Romanesque design, with twin towers.

1894 St. Monica Church was dedicated on Jan 14, by Rev. Maximilian Neumann, OSF. Father Riordan of St. Elizabeth Church also took part in the dedication.

1895 Father Tolton had to go on leave of absence to regain his health and St. Monica was cared for by the priests of St. Elizabeth. In June, Father Riordan wrote a letter "An Appeal on Behalf of the Black Catholics." The letter published in the New World stated in part:

As the colored Catholics are few in number, it was not expected that they would be able of to meet the large expense necessary for the building of their church.... the church, though only partially built, is burdened with a very large debt, and I find myself greatly embarrassed in trying to meet even the current expenses. During a whole year I have practiced the most rigid economy, and am now obliged, through reluctantly, to appeal to the public for assistance.

1897 Father Tolton continued his work among Chicago's black's Catholics until his sudden death, from sunstroke, on July 9. Father Riordan of St. Elizabeth took charge of St. Monica.

1909 In December, Rev. John S. Morris was named pastor. One of his first projects was to organize the readings, lectures, and a social club.

1912 Father Morris began to raise funds for a parish school. He purchased the former barracks of the 8th Regiment located at 37 & Wabash, which was composed of black soldiers, who had fought in the Spanish American War.

1913 The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament took up residence in the rectory at 3669 S. Wabash Ave. According to the New World the black Catholic population of Chicago had increased from 50 families in 1889 to more than 400 families in 1913. Still black Catholics were a minority among the 50,000 blacks in the city.

1917 The women from Corpus Christi and St. Mel parishes sponsored a benefit for St. Monica. The goal was to raise \$15,000, the amount due on the school and convent. The school, which operated free of charge, had 250 children enrolled. Father Morris was appointed to St. Ailbe Church and St. Monica was entrusted to the Divine Word Missionaries of Techny, IL.

1918 The Archbishop's letter which was published in The New World on Nov. 2, stated in part:

Until now practically anyone who so desired could affiliate himself with St. Monica's, attend the services and receive the Sacraments there. But now I desire St. Monica's to be reserved entirely for the colored Catholics of Chicago, and particularly of the South Side; all other Catholics of whatever race or color are to be requested not to intrude. It is, of course, understood that I have no intention of excluding colored Catholics from any of the other churches in the diocese, and particularly if they live in another part of the city, but simply excluding from St. Monica's all but the colored Catholics.

1917 Rev. Reismann, SVD served until 1921, when Rev. Eckert, SVD was appointed pastor.

1922 On April 28, The New World reported that more than 1200 persons attended Easter Mass in St. Monica Church.

1924 St. Monica consolidated with St. Elizabeth on December 6, and Father Eckert became pastor of St. Elizabeth. Between 1925 and 1928, enrollment in the parish grade school increased from 505 to 1,016 pupils. A building at 4117 S. Michigan Ave. was fitted up as a convent.

1928 On April 27, The New World reported that Father Eckert had been placed in charge of preliminary plans for a hospital to be constructed in close proximity to St. Elizabeth Church. With the onset of the Depression, however, plans for Pentecost hospital were abandoned.

1930 On Jan. 3, St. Elizabeth Church was destroyed in a 4-11 alarm fire which raged for hours in subzero temperatures. The assembly hall of the St. Elizabeth

parish at 24 E. 41st street was remodeled and the pews from the old church were installed. Two murals were painted which reflected the heritage of black Catholics: the subjects - St. Peter Claver and the Ugandan Martyrs.

1931 Feb. 1 the newly refurbished church was dedicated. At the time 920 children were enrolled in the grammar school and 70 students were enrolled in the high school.

1932 Between 1921 - 1932 Ft. Eckert baptized 1782 adults at St. Monica & St. Elizabeth.

1933 Father Eckert became pastor of St. Anselm, and Rev. L. A. Pawlowski, SVD succeeded him.

1936 Regina House was established in the former John G. Shedd mansion at 3812 S. Michigan. This residence for women was sponsored by the Triple Sodality of St. Elizabeth, Corpus Christi, and St. Anselm parishes.

1937 A Catholic center for black families was opened at 2643 W. Fulton. This center was under the direction of the priest and nuns of St. Elizabeth Church.

1938 Friendship House, a national movement of lay men and women, was established at 4233 S. Indiana. This group, worked on breaking down racial barriers.

1944 St. Elizabeth high school was relocated to the former LaSalle University building at 4062 S. Michigan.

1950's St. Elizabeth Basketball team dominated high school basketball in Chicago!

1962 With the opening of Hales, St. Elizabeth became an all-girls school.

1967 St. Elizabeth high school, the first black Catholic high school was closed.

1969 Rev. Dominic Carmen, SVD was named pastor of St. Elizabeth. He is the first black Divine Word priest to head a Chicago parish.

1977 Operation SWAT (Spreading the Word around Robert Taylor was inaugurated).

1979 A new rectory and adjoining hall was built.

1984 Bishop Carmeo was appointed to pastor Our Lady of the Garden Church and Father Donald Ehr was appointed pastor. Sister Maureen T. Carroll joined St.

Elizabeth as the new principal. One of their goals was to increase enrollment in the school.

1988 On Ascension Thursday ground was broken for a new church on the site of the old high school.

1989 On November 19, the new church was dedicated by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin. The old church was remodeled and through the ministry of Debra Jones it services the community with Job Training, open gym, -----

1992 Ms. Jeanette Terry a black lay women becomes the principal of St. Elizabeth School.

1993 Brother Gary Burr is assigned to St. Elizabeth and dedicates himself to the Mother Katherine Dixel Center.

1996 The first floor of the convent was remodeled to become a preschool under the direction of Sister Beulah Martin.

1998 Current enrollment at St. E - preschool and K-8 was 436 children.