

History of the St. Paul Catholic Chapel

Dedicated on July 27, 1941

St. Paul's Catholic Chapel at Clear Lake is an outstation of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Parish in Angola. As such, St. Paul's Chapel has no territory - to be a member, you just need to register. We are happy to serve a community drawn from the tri-state region of Indiana, Ohio and Michigan.

Things got started like this: the Conventual Franciscan Friars arrived in Steuben County in 1929, just before the Great Depression started, with the task of gathering and organizing the scattered Catholics of the area. Their staging area was St. Rita's Parish in Angola - a parish with no buildings!

The friars convinced the bishop to name the entire county the territory of "St. Anthony of Padua Parish", in honor of the great Franciscan saint. The people and the priests began celebrating Masses around the county - in rented rooms, in people's homes, and out in lakeside cabins. The Depression slowed the economic development, but the number of faithful kept increasing. Friar Leonard Wren was the chaplain for the outstations.

In 1941, the friars and the people had just finished building a new church in Angola - the first St. Anthony's. Friars Leonard Wren, Ignatius Hanley, Andrew Maas and the rest were convinced that the United States would be drawn into the new World War now raging on four continents. If the U.S. went to war, there would be gas rationing, and in that case, the Franciscan priests would be forced to cancel the Masses at the various outstations around the county at the very time when the people could no longer afford to come to Angola.

A small group of Catholic families in the north of the county, in and around Clear Lake Township, were determined to do something about it. Frank Federspiel, Robin Federspiel, Ben Pohlius, Frank Carroll and Mrs. Joseph Reide purchased the closed Sand Schoolhouse (Clear Lake Schoolhouse 2) at auction from the township trustees for \$169.

These Catholic families transformed the schoolhouse into a chapel, doing much of the work by hand. On July 27, 1941, the bishop came from Fort Wayne and dedicated the new community as a Public Chapel with permission to have a permanent presence of the Holy Eucharist and to celebrate all the sacraments, not just Mass. Fr. Ignatius Hanley, as pastor of St. Anthony's, became the canonical pastor and Fr. Leonard Wren became the chaplain.

After WWII, the community quickly outgrew the old schoolhouse. For some decades, Mass was celebrated here only in the summer, as a service to the many vacationers in the area. But by the 1960s, there was a basis for (and need for) year-round sacraments.

Friars Conrad Schweibold and Earl Zajdel worked with the people to expand the chapel. In 1964, the surrounding plot of land was purchased from W.E. Esterline. The old schoolhouse was replaced by the present chapel, built in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. A bell tower was built. St. Paul's Chapel was now a year-round community. The community room was added in 1981, built in such a way that it could be used for extra seating during Mass in the summer (our rated capacity is now 375). In 1991, a new center was built with classrooms and a chaplain's office. In 2016, as part of the 75th anniversary celebrations of the chapel, the Chapel Gardens were renewed, and a statue of St. Paul installed.

Starting in the 1970s, when Friar Wilfrid Logsdon was chaplain (the first time), volunteer catechists began teaching catechism to the children. There were weddings, baptisms, First Communions, funerals and all the other events of parish life. Different parish clubs were formed - the Women's Group, the Men's Group, the Chapel Boosters and more. St. Paul's Chapel had truly become the "quasi-parish" that it is today. In the summer, it is not unusual for there to be 700 or 800 people at Mass over the weekend.

History from the Clear Lake Catholic Chapel web site stpaulcatholicchapel.org/our-parish