

## History of Original Holy Family Church

1863 - 1963

In the summer of 1856, a German group calling itself Neuer Ansiedlungsverein formed in Chicago and devised a plan to establish a settlement “at some point in the great West. (*referred to as Eudora Homestead Association in legal land transactions*). The trio visited sites in Missouri and Kansas and reported back to the shareholders about land recently received by the Fish Tribe from the U.S. government in the May 10, 1854 treaty between the United States government and the United Tribe of Shawnee Indians that gave each “man” 200 acres and “the head of a family a quantity equal to 200 acres for each member of his or her family”. The area around Eudora was considered desirable because trails made it a heavily trafficked route between the East and California.

The Fish Tribe led by 50-year-old Paschal Fish Jr. had moved to this area in the early 1840's and he and his brother began operating a ferry across the Kansas River. The ferry was on the trail that the US. Army blazed from Ft. Leavenworth to Willow Springs to join the Santa Fe Trail. The Kansas Legislature licensed Fish to operate a ferry a mile up and down the Wakarusa. In 1854 he built a hewn log, thatched roof, tavern-hotel called The Fish House. The first stop on the Fremont trail which lead from Westport to Topeka, it is said that he never refused a weary traveler something to eat or a place to sleep.

Authorized by the Association, Louis Pfeifer and Charles Durr bought 774 ½ acres from Fish Jr. in February of 1857 for \$10,000. Fish Jr. bought back on the same day the odd numbered lots between the Kaw and Wakarusa River. On the return of the committee, it was decided to at once colonize the place. Sixteen members, who represented different trades and professions, were elected by the association and sent out under the leadership of Peter Hartig for that purpose. The party arrived on April 18, 1857. Fish Jr. requested the town be named Eudora after his 13-year-old daughter and was said to mean beautiful. Eudora, Kansas Territory was put on the map in the summer of 1857. Eudora was incorporated as a city, under Territorial laws, February 8, 1859.

According to local lore, the first building erected was an eighteen-by-twenty-foot log cabin, which housed the entire party.

Despite the challenges, the settlement proved to be successful and experienced a steady increase in its population. No separate records exist for 1857 and 1858, but the 1859 Kansas Territorial Census states that 111 people lived in Eudora Township in 1857 and 274 by 1859.

Following the original Townsiders to Eudora from Chicago, were several of the Catholic faith, among them Fred Faerber, (the first mayor of Eudora), Anton Gufler, and Leo Vitt. These early settlers, handiapped by dim trails from Eudora to Blue Jacket crossing over the Wakarusa river, then west through the Franklin Bottom, dodging Indians and raiders and finally landing in Lawrence to attend Mass. Vicar Apostolic, then located in St. Marys, Kansas asked for assistance, and shortly thereafter a Missionary began traveling to Eudora to say Mass once a month. The first Mass in Eudora was celebrated by Father Lewis Guenther from Shawnee Mission, Kansas. Mass was celebrated in a store building owned by two Jewish brothers, George and John Andreas. The counter was moved to one side and used as an altar. The store, later known as the Schroder building was destroyed by fire in 1932.

In 1861 there was an influx of several German and Irish families from Illinois and Missouri and by the fall of 1861, the Catholic population in and around Eudora numbered about 32 from 20 families. The place of worship was too small, so the families banded together and decided to start the erection of a small sandstone building, 20 x 48, which was to cost not to exceed \$3,000 and to bear the title of Holy Family Church. The Deed Book L. page 287, dated March 13, 1865, shows that its site on lots 1,2, and 3, in Block 204, was donated by Bernhard Herman Tegder and Anna Catharina Tegder and Peter Anton Hartig and Franciska Hartig to John B. Meige, Catholic bishop of Leavenworth.

According to the *History of Wyandotte County Kansas and its People*, Father Kuhls in Leavenworth oversaw the construction of Holy Family beginning in 1863. He visited the site monthly. Jacob Pabst, Mike Branagan, John Welch, and James Brazil used their teams to haul quarry rock donated by John Kellerman. Kellerman owned a quarry just outside the eastern city limits. Sand was hauled to the site from the Kansas River. The mason work was done by Casper Weber and Franz

Blechel. Joseph Herz, Peter Hartig and John Kellerman, expert cabinet makers built the window and door frames. After the exterior of the church was completed the initial \$3,000 was exhausted and it was decided to raise additional funds to complete the interior. This would take another year to complete.

The altar was made by John Kellerman, an expert cabinet maker. It is said he was the equal of any of the expert cabinet makers in the city of Chicago before he came to Eudora. It was a fine piece of hand work with a large round pillar on each side about ten feet high and in the center at the top was a cross which almost reached to the ceiling. The rear of the altar was used as a sacristy for years. Built-in cases and drawers were used for the Priests' and the altar boys' vestments. *Cutler's History of the State of Kansas* states that the church was officially organized as The German Church of the Holy Family on October 1, 1864 but this is the only source found to reference this name.

With the moving of the sawmill to Lawrence after Quantrill's Raid, the town no longer possessed a 'timepiece'. The townspeople, both Protestant and Catholic, joined together and donated funds for the purchase of a bell for the new church under the stipulation that it would be rung at seven, twelve, and six o'clock. In 1864 a bell was purchased in Kansas City, (the bell was cast in Paul Revere's own factory in 1852) installed and the workmen again could know when to start and quit work. The church had no tower in which to place the bell, so a frame rack was built beside the church from which the bell was suspended. In 1882, parish carpenters built a small cupola on the roof in the front of the church and the Priest rang the bell at the agreed times.

In 1891 membership had grown to 70 families. Father Gerlach had been appointed in 1886 and made several attempts at raising funds for a new church. Although the attempts failed, he did succeed in overseeing the addition of an 18 x 18 ft sacristy of sandstone to match the church. The work began on June 25, 1891. It consisted of one room and was built on the southeast corner of the church and the same height of the church. The addition was built at very small expense to the congregation as all the labor, quarrying rock and mason work were donated by members of the parish. Alois, George, and Stephen Hadl did the masonry work and Franz Blechel dressed and faced the rock.

After the sacristy was completed and ready for use, the altar was moved back to the wall at the south end of the church and more room was made available around the altar and communion rail.

A new Priest, Rev. Michael Simmer arrived in 1896 and in December of that year discussions were begun to build an addition to the church. The membership of the parish had increased to 200 in 1897 and in early April 1897 work on the addition began. A large sandstone quarry was on the Charles Willisdorf farm, three miles southwest of town, and the men of the parish quarried enough stone to complete a 26 x 20 ft addition, a 10 x 10 ft vestibule and a sixty-foot-high steeple with a 5 ft cross on top. Mrs. Valentine Anton purchased a new 610-pound bell and it arrived in June of 1897 and was placed in the steeple with the bell purchased in 1864. The plastering of the new addition was completed in July of 1897. The church was dedicated and blessed by Rev. Bishop Fink on August 11, 1897 and celebrated with a parish dinner and dance.



This is the only known photo of the original section of the church. This picture was taken in 1889 and shows Father Gerlach in the center, Kajeton Sommer is to his left.

In 1898 a neat, substantial wire fence was erected about the Catholic Church, and in 1901 the east and west walls were strengthened by running iron rods through them. In 1902 a vitrified brick walk was completed on the west side of the church. In 1905 the inside of the church was painted and a fresco artist, Mr. Miller, painted Biblical scenes on the walls. Also, in 1905, Theresa Hartig donated a statue of St. Anthony in memory of Peter Hartig. The statue remains in the church on the east wall.

Lightning struck the church steeple in 1911, and while a hole several inches in circumference was made and some of the shingles were ripped off, no other damage was apparent. The steeple and cross were repainted in 1922 and straightened – as they were leaning to the southwest.



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Holy Family Church c1922 showing the wire fence and sidewalk

The city of Eudora voted in 1916 to erect a transmission line to supply the city with electricity, but no record has been found when electricity was installed in the Church.

Father Joseph Reich became the pastor in 1922 and according to the April 4, 1922 Pastoral Council Minutes was given the “go ahead with his ‘new broom’”. The

interpretation was he was given the go ahead to begin repairs on the church. It was decided to put a roof on the church, fix the sagging church floor, and accomplish any other infrastructure projects depending upon money obtained.

Before 1922, the church was heated by a large wood burning stove. A room large enough to house a furnace was dug out from under the east side of the church with an outside entrance. This new furnace was originally wood burning, then converted to coal, and ultimately gas. Natural gas became available in Eudora in 1929.

Father Gerald Hart was appointed pastor in 1926 and he led the efforts to update the interior of the church. He asked Frank Sommer to build a new altar which he did in his basement at his home at 813 Maple. The white enameled altar is in the Roman style and was dedicated on Palm Sunday, April 10, 1927. The floor of the altar was also redone, and Fr. Hart purchased statues of the Sacred Heart and St. Theresa that remain in the church. In 1935 there were 52 families in the parish.

The original windows of the church were clear glass in gothic-arched frames. During this 1926-1927 interior remodel, Fr. Hart asked parishioner Joe Blechel (son of the original parishioner Franz Blechel who did the original masonry work) to paint the windows to resemble stained glass. Mr. Blechel did this and the windows remained until replaced with the current stained-glass windows 'after WW II' according to Parishioner Paul Sommer. The windows painted by Mr. Blechel were found in the crawl space under the church in 2009 and are on display in the church.

The exact date of the removal of the 60 ft. steeple cannot be pin pointed. According to an interview conducted in 2009 on the church's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, parishioner Jay Grosdider remembered that a tornado struck the steeple in the mid 1950's damaging the steeple. According to Grosdider the steeple was then removed and the 5 ft cross placed on top. The Lawrence Journal World states the steeple was cut down in 1959. Tom Pyle, a parishioner since 1950 stated that his brother in law Carrol Schopper tied a rope to the steeple and brought it down. The bells remained in the smaller steeple until 1965. At that time, the Verdi Company of Cincinnati removed the bells, sandblasted them, electrified them, and installed them in a 46' steel tower at the location of a new church built in

1963 where they remain today. The steel tower was donated by Zimmerman Steel.

Holy Family Parishioner John Gilroy repaired the smaller portion of the bell tower and placed a 5' cross on top in 1965

Other than nu-wood being installed in the interior of the church in 1946, the interior of the church remained virtually unchanged throughout the 1950's. However, the United States War Department made an announcement on March 25, 1942 that would have an enormous effect on the city of Eudora and Holy Family Parish. The Department announced that a 5 million ammunition plant would be built 4 miles east of Eudora and employ between 5 and 7 thousand workers. When the plant was completed one year later, the population of Eudora and Holy Family Parish began to explode. A General Campaign committee was formed, and it was decided to build a new school and a 'temporary church' on the lower level that would eventually become a cafeteria and gymnasium when a new church was built. The building was dedicated on July 21, 1963. The last Sunday Mass at the original Holy Family Church was on Sunday, July 14, 1963.

The stained-glass windows were boarded up, the door locked, and the building stood idle for almost 20 years. In early 1981 a small group of local businessmen formed the "Committee for Remedial Repair of Old Holy Family Church." By the end of 1981, private dollars had been raised and the restoration began. The boards were removed, and the stained-glass windows repaired, the masonry was tuckpointed, new guttering and trim boards were installed, the bell tower was shingled, frames of windows, trim boards, bell tower, doors received two coats of paint and a new front door was installed. A new sign, made from native stone and shingles to match the church, was installed, and the church was opened to the public for a Christmas Community Caroling Service. A annual tradition that continues.

In 2001, Fr. Ray Berger was appointed pastor of Holy Family and he took a renewed interest in the building. He had central air and heat installed, carpeting, and several pews were installed, although not those original to the church. A passcode lock was installed, and the church is now open for adoration at any time. Mass is held on the first Saturday of each month and the traditional Community Christmas Caroling continues on the first Sunday of December.



Original Holy Family Church - 2001