

Parish Timeline

This timeline of our parish history has its origin in the work of St. Michael's Archives Committee. Without the committee's work, this would not be possible. Please e-mail any additional dates or information to jtollafield@costm.org.

1849-53	Pioneers search for a place to worship in the St. Croix Valley. Mass is said in private homes by visiting priests Msgr. Augustin Ravoux, Fr. Payeragrosse and Bishop Cretin.
1852	The parish celebrates its first recorded marriage on Sept. 7, 1852. The couple married is John Sullivan and Catherine Donahoe.
1853	Home Masses are bursting at the seams. The parish decides to build the first church on North Fourth Street by the present-day Stillwater Library. Fr. Daniel J. Fisher is appointed as first resident pastor. The first recorded baptism is on January 9, 1853. The first child to be baptized is Margaret Burns.
1856	Because of his failing health, Fr. Fisher returns east to become the second president of Seton Hall College in New Jersey. Fr. Thomas Murray replaces him as pastor. and helps enlarge the church, build a rectory and start a parish school.
1870	Fr. Murray dies and is buried in the parish cemetery. The next pastor is Fr. Maurice E. Murphy, a man of vision, who senses the need for a new church on a new site. The present location at Third and Walnut Streets is selected.
1871	The first recorded confirmation is Edward Michael Barrett in 1871. He was confirmed by Bishop Thomas Grace.
1872	In November, the Father Matthew Total Abstinence Society is formed in Stillwater, with the goal of encouraging total abstinence from intoxicating drinks. Construction is begun on the new South Hill church.
1873	The cornerstone of the new church is laid, with a large procession and much celebration. Catherine Harrigan, the mother of Bing Crosby, is baptized at St. Michael's. Her family moves to St. Paul in 1881. Whether Crosby ever visited Stillwater is disputed.
1875	On August 15, 1875, Bishop Thomas L. Grace dedicates the church, which is finally completed on September 29, 1875, the Feast of St. Michael. The church is 140 by 180 feet and built of native stone with Kasota stone trimmings. Its spire soars 190 high. The press of the day acclaims it to be "the finest church in the state". St. Joseph Convent, a home for the Sisters of St. Joseph who served the parish, is also completed during this year.
1881	The parish is reported to be the largest church congregation in Stillwater.
1882	The Articles of Incorporation of St. Michael's Church are signed. The officers of the corporation are then, and are today, the pastor, the bishop, the diocese's vicar general and two lay trustees. The bishop and vicar general typically voted by proxy on matters concerning the corporation.

1883	<p>Thirty years after the first recorded baptism, the parish holds its first recorded burial. John Day is buried in October 1883 at the Bayport cemetery. Unrecorded burials were held before this time at the North Hill Burying Ground at Second and Laurel streets.</p> <p>The parish becomes the proud owner of the first set of chimes in this part of the country. The 10 bells are dedicated in a July 1883 ceremony in which they were individually "baptized," complete with sponsors.</p> <p>The bells were then installed in the north tower. Each contributor to the bell fund was allowed to strike the large bell once with a wooden hammer. The bell rang continuously for five hours. The bells would be heard in the valley until 1963, when they would fall silent in disrepair.</p>
1888	<p>A convent is completed at Third and Willard streets on June 13. It was financed by the Sisters of St. Joseph and used until 1959.</p> <p>A new pipe organ is installed in the south end of the church balcony. Contributors made donations of around \$5 or \$10 to the organ fund. The organ remains in use until 1983, when it was replaced.</p>
1890	<p>Barney Casey, later the Venerable Fr. Solanus Casey, is confirmed at the Church of St. Michael. Casey is a candidate for canonization (becoming a saint).</p>
1891	<p>Fr. Murphy leaves unexpectedly. Archbishop Ireland appoints as "temporary" pastor Fr. Charles E. Corcoran, who serves the church for the next fifty years.</p> <p>Corcoran inherits a parish that is barely available to maintain its school. In October 1891, Corcoran enters an agreement with the Stillwater school board in which the school district leases the school for \$1 per year. The school is operated as a public school, with the nuns retained as teachers and religion taught after school hours. The arrangement, also in place at Faribault, becomes known as the "Faribault-Stillwater School Plan."</p> <p>The arrangement immediately draws criticism from Protestants and conservative Catholics alike. Protestants across the country fear that Catholics are trying to take over the public school system. Catholics fear that John Ireland, Archbishop of St. Paul, is abandoning the parochial schools. The conflict stirs intense debate among Catholics in this country and across Europe. Finally, Ireland is called to testify before the pope and a gathering of cardinals in Rome. The cardinals return a verdict of "tolerari potest" ("it can be tolerated") in April 1892.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the program has crumbled in Stillwater. Under increased pressure from the community, the Stillwater school district does not renew the agreement, nor does the parish request to renew it. The school returns to a private status the following year.</p>
1898	<p>A new rectory is constructed next to the church, replacing one that had most likely been built at the same time as the church. The new rectory is used until 1956.</p>
1913	<p>Maurice Clancy, a parishoner, makes a donation to pay for a new school. It is named Clancy School in his honor.</p>
1925	<p>The parish celebrates the Golden Anniversary of its new church.</p>

1936	<p>The main altar, made of marble, is imported from Italy. Fr. Corcoran pays for the \$25,000 altar as a personal gift to the parish. Corcoran promises the altar to the parish if they pay off the parish's debt from building the church. The former altar was wooden and resembled a larger version of the present-day side altars.</p> <p>In September 1937, the altar is consecrated by Archbishop Murray and 50 visiting priests. They process around the exterior of the church three times before blessing the interior of the church and the altar. Deacon of Honor was Msgr. James C. Byrne, who participated in the cornerstone-laying ceremonies in 1873.</p> <p>The sacristy is also enlarged in 1936.</p>
1943	<p>After 52 years of service to the parish, Fr. Charles Corcoran dies. He is buried in St. Michael's Cemetary in Bayport. Fr. Daniel J. MacCarthy became the new pastor while assistant pastor Fr. Francis Miller is transfered to Bayport to start a new parish, St. Charles.</p>
1955	<p>Fr. MacCarthy dies. Fr. Francis J. Miller, who was assistant pastor under Fr. Corcoran, was appointed pastor. Miller is also a chaplain at the Stillwater Prison. During his time there, he began a successful campaign to build a new chapel at the prison. The chapel today displays a portrait of Fr. Miller in his honor.</p> <p>Fr. Miller's enduring legacy at St. Michael's, however, is the building projects he oversees in the next few years.</p>
1957	<p>A new rectory is built. It is used by the parish's priests until August 1997, when it is converted into the Parish Offices. At a cost of more than \$100,000, it is the most expensive dwelling ever built in Stillwater.</p>
1959	<p>Fr. Miller spearheads a drive to build a new 12-room addition to the school and a new convent. A new gymnasium/auditorium, originally planned for the school, is not constructed. The parish raises \$400,000 to erect the buildings, including a \$100,000 contribution from Stillwater native I.A. O'Shaughnessy to build the convent, named the "St. John and Mary Convent" in honor of his parents, John and Mary O'Shaughnessy.</p>
1962	<p>The bells of St. Michael are silenced after chimer Ray Stieger is hit by falling equipment.</p>
1968	<p>The inside of the church is redecorated and simplified.</p> <p>Fr. Francis Miller dies. He becomes, at the request of the inmates, the first person to lie in state at the Minnesota Prison, in recognition of his 40 years of service as chaplain.</p>
1969	<p>Fr. Richard V. Berg becomes pastor. Under his leadership, the hall in the basement of the church is given a new look and named Corcoran Hall, in honor of Fr. Corcoran.</p> <p>The bells of the St. Michael's tower are restored due to the efforts of long time chimer Ray Stieger. They are now controlled and played electronically. A Mass of rededication is held January 29, 1970.</p>
1970	<p>St. Croix Catholic School begins operation as a tri-parish school. Students come from St. Michael's and St. Mary's in Stillwater, and St. Charles' in Bayport.</p>
1971	<p>The St. Croix Valley Religious Education Program, known as "Religious Ed," is started and housed in the former St. Mary's school building. Students are released from their public schools for one day a month to learn about their Catholic faith. The innovative program is later hailed as a national model.</p>
1974	<p>The 1959 convent enters a new phase of its life as it becomes the House of Prayer. The House of Prayer is staffed by six Sisters of St. Joseph. It offers retreats for individuals, directed by the sisters. The House of Prayer remains in operation until 1988.</p>

1975	St. Michael's Parish celebrates the centennial of the dedication of the present church. A parish directory, including a history of the church, is published in honor of the event. At the time, the church had 1,100 families.
1977	Fr. Berg leaves St. Michael's. His assistant, Fr. Thomas Fitzgerald, becomes the eighth pastor. Over the years, he is assisted by three different associate pastors: Fr. Gerard Rowan, Fr. John Bussman and Fr. Michael Monogue.
1982	Roger Carlson, a long-time member of the parish, is ordained as permanent deacon on September 25, 1982.
1983	St. Michael's builds a new Dobson pipe organ and completes a renovation of the choir loft to support it. The new organ is designed to match the architecture of the church. It has an impressive 1,700 pipes, divided into 36 ranks. It is dedicated on June 25. The church receives a new roof and new carpeting. A restroom and office are constructed in the arcade.
1987	The three year RENEW program begins. The parish now has approximately 1,600 families. A new directory is published. Fr. Fitzgerald leaves the parish and is replaced by Fr. Leo Huber as interim pastor for six months. In November, Fr. Robert Patterson is named pastor. During his time at St. Michael's, the church is tuckpointed, and historical renovation is initiated.
1988	The convent built in 1959 goes through yet another change as the parish faces growing space needs. The House of Prayer is closed, and the building becomes the Parish Center, where parish offices are housed.
1989	Fr. Patterson leaves St. Michael's.
1990	Fr. John Szarke becomes the 10th pastor, with Fr. Charles Lachowitz serving as associate. Fr. Szarke is credited for much of the effort that went into the historical renovation of the church. Also under him, a parish mission statement was formulated. The Spirit of Christian Youth (SCY) program is started for high school youth at St. Michael's and St. Mary's. The youth go on their first mission trip in 1991. Eventually, the program is expanded to include junior high students.
1991	During the spring of 1991, the church undergoes a historical renovation. Masses are held in the Stillwater High School auditorium (Marsh St. campus) and Miller Hall (the SCCS cafeteria). Masses are again held at the church, starting Palm Sunday 1991. At that time, there is no carpet in the church, and people sit on folding chairs. The renovation is completed that summer. The original sacristy becomes a cry room for parents with young children. The sacristy is moved to the office in the arcade. The church is rededicated by Archbishop John Roach on September 29, 1991. Fr. Szarke leaves the parish.
1992	Fr. Michael Skluzacek arrives at St. Michael's as pastor.
1995	The parish institutes a Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration chapel in the former sacristy.
1997	The exterior of the church undergoes major repairs, including restoration of the deteriorating steeple. The priests move out of the 1957 rectory and into an off-campus house. The former rectory becomes the Parish Office, but the Parish Center (former convent) still holds Central Accounting offices, Youth Ministry and meeting space.
1998	As the archdiocese has fewer and fewer available priests, some parishes begin to go without. Fr. Skluzacek, pastor of St. Michael's, becomes pastor of St. Mary's, as well as moderator of St. Michael's, St. Mary's and St. Charles. Without a resident priest, St. Mary's offers the use of their rectory to the St. Michael's priests.