

A parish history is so much more than dates and events; it is filled with people and relationships. We use dates to help place our lives into a framework that shows the progression a community makes as it grows, changes, gives birth, celebrates life, and prepares for eternal life. Here are the events of our history that have helped form our community of Faith – Ascension Parish.

In the early 1900's, St. Anthony Parish was formed in Centaur, Missouri to serve the Catholic community living near the Missouri River and working in the local industries: farming, lime quarry, lumber, etc. Masses were held in a lumber barn at first and later moved to a smaller building used as a school. As the population shifted towards Chesterfield, an attempt was made to establish a new parish closer to the area. It was not until 1921 with the donation of two acres of land by Theresa Reuther that a new parish was allowed. Organized on February 28, 1922, ground was broken on April 17, 1923 for Ascension Catholic Church. Still a "mission" of Centaur, growth of the parish was slow in its early years.

In 1940, Fr. John F. Godfrey was appointed Pastor of Ascension which was now recognized as an independent parish. While living at St. Monica's, Fr. Godfrey traveled to Ascension for Masses and parish ministry. A school was built in 1941, a two room building at which Sr. Mary Salome and Sr. Mary Ann Irene, members of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood taught. Rooms were added to the school as a convent, and a separate rectory was constructed in 1943 allowing for the pastor and teachers to live at the parish.

During World War II, Fr. Godfrey's duties expanded to include a camp near St. Albans training Military Police. There he cared for the Catholics and others seeking the services of a priest. Later in the war, prisoners-of-war housed in the area were served by Fr. Godfrey. During this time, the church was repainted by two Austrian prisoners.

As the population in the area began to grow, a parish hall was built in 1948 by the parishioners. At this time, Masses ceased at St. Anthony's and all activity was moved to Ascension. New property was purchased and in 1958, a larger school was opened on newly named Santa Maria Drive. As the school expanded, the need for more sisters to teach led the Sisters of Loretto to Ascension Parish. They began to care for the school in 1963 with Sr. Geraldine Fitzgerald as principal.

Rev. William Drennan was appointed pastor in 1972 and plans for a new church began thereafter. Dedicated on June 12, 1977, the new church still serves the parish community as our spiritual home. Additions were also made to the school over the next several years and in 1983, a larger Rectory was built.

A gymnasium was under construction when, in 1988, Rev. Joseph Pins was appointed Pastor. Recognizing the growing desire for a Preschool, Mary Ann Schweitzer and Erica Argue proposed, and then co-directed, the Early Childhood Center, fondly known as the Little School. Preschool classes began in 1995 in the original school building. Final additions to the elementary school were completed in 1998.

Msgr. Dennis Stehly was appointed pastor of Ascension in 2004 and served for 12 years. The parish had grown to over 2900 families and was reflected in the over 600 children in the parish school and comparable number in the Parish School of Religion. This increase in children began to moderate by 2012 and the school's population was at 300 in 2016. Also during this time, Fr.

Richard Nelke, who had served at Ascension since 1995 passed away, a dear loss to the parish. He is remembered for his generous care of the students in the school, his wry sense of humor, and devotion to our Blessed Mother reflected in his promotion of the *Memorare* prayer. The “Sorrowful Mother” garden was added in honor of his devotion to the Mother of Jesus.

Rev. Thomas Molini arrived at Ascension on July 4, 2016 as pastor. The picturesque campus that Ascension enjoys has had several changes to meet parish needs. The north field and hillside underwent a significant renovation. Trees have been added to replace several older trees. The original school and current preschool was renovated to serve as the parish office building. The preschool continues to serve the parish fully located in the school building.

The world was confronted by the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. On the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, Ascension had their final public Mass until we were permitted to open again in early June. To provide parishioners with access to Mass, at least virtually during this time, Ascension broadcast Mass over Facebook and YouTube. Additionally, schools were closed for the remainder of the year forcing educators to teach using electronic means of communication.

Ascension decided to re-open for classes in August 2020 with several “safe-practices” in place including the use of masks and spacing of desks in the classroom. With very few interruptions due to quarantines, the year ended successfully.

Much will be written about the pandemic. For Ascension it was a challenging time pastorally. People felt isolated at times and reluctant to share close spaces. Many chose not to return to Mass even when it was permitted due to the fear of infection. Many families lost loved ones to the virus, especially among our elderly members. It also offered a time of reflection on the necessary elements of parish life, and the importance of ongoing evangelization.

In 2022, Archbishop Mitchel Rozanski announce the start of the “All Things New” initiative addressing the restructuring of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, beginning with discussions about parish life, placement, and consolidation of resources. Parish data was shared widely and suggested “models” of parish mergers were offered followed with listening sessions in every parish and electronic responses were invited as well. New models were proposed and discussed. Pentecost of 2023 the new parish alignment was announced. Ascension remained as a “stand-alone” parish, but continues to look for ways to better evangelize and pursue our parish mission: Love God, Love Others, Make Disciples.

Pastors of St. Anthony, Centaur Station 1910 – 1941

1910-1913	Rev., Charles Keller
1913-1916	Rev. Aloysius Reh
1917 – 1921	Rev. Louis Schultz
1921-1941	Rev. Vincent McCartney

Pastors of Ascension Catholic Church 1924 to present

1924 – 1941	Rev. Vincent McCartney (administrator while Pastor of St. Anthony)
1941 – 1965	Rev. John J. Godfrey (First Pastor of Ascension)
1966 – 1968	Rev. Francis Matthews
1968 – 1973	Rev. William Regan
1973 – 1988	Rev. William Drennan
1988 – 2004	Rev. Msgr. Joseph Pins
2004 – 2016	Rev. Msgr. Dennis Stehley
2016 – present	Rev. Thomas M. Molini

Associates of Ascension Catholic Church

1966	Rev. John F. Daley
1978 – 1980	Rev. Gary Faust
1980 – 1983	Rev. Charles Diester
1984 – 1990	Rev. Gregory Mikesch
1987	Rev. Albert Kavarik
1985 – 1986	Rev. Harold Voelker
1990 – 1993	Rev. Patrick Hayden
1993 – 1995	Rev. Michael Oslance (Part-time with JF Kennedy High School)
1993 – 1997	* intentionally omitted
1995 – 1999	Rev. John Schwaig (Part-time with JF Kennedy High School)
1995 – 2008	Rev. Richard Nelke (Senior Priest, and later in residence)
1997 – 2000	Rev. Jeffrey Vomund
2000 – 2004	Rev. Christopher Holtman
2004 – 2006	Rev. Michael Boehm
2006 - 2008	Rev. Aaron Nord
2008 - 2012	Rev. Brian Hector
2008 - 2011	Rev. Matthew O’Toole
2012 – 2015	Fr. Fadi Auro
2012 - 2016	Fr. Matthew Cheruparambil
2015 - 2017	Fr. Michael Grosch
2016 – to present	Fr. Richard Bockskopf (Senior Priest to 2020, now in residence)
2017 – 2021	Rev. Michael Lampe
2020 – present	Rev. Stephen Schumacher
2021 – present	Rev. Kent Pollman

Permanent Deacons at Ascension Catholic Church

1986 – present	Deacon C. Frank Chauvin
1991 – 2002	Deacon William Wunderlich
1990 – 2004	Deacon Lawrence Hutti
1995 – 2000	Deacon Robert Brooks
1995 – present	Deacon Robert Keeney
2009 – present	Deacon John Marino

Transitional Deacons at Ascension over the years.

Gregory Mikesch (St. Louis)
Vincent Heier (St. Louis)
John Brennell (St. Louis)
Dermot J. Dunne (Omaha)
John Broheimer (Omaha)
Andrew Sohm (Omaha)
Eric Olsen (St. Louis)
Nick Winker (St. Louis)
Henry Purcell (St. Louis)
Chad Stramel
Gabriel Greer (Wichita)
Padraic Stack (Omaha)
George Staley (St. Louis)
Joseph Detwiler (St. Louis)
Logan Obrugewitch (Bismarck)

Principals of Elementary School

1941 – 1963 Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, O’Fallon, MO
Sr. Mary Salome
Sr. Mary Eustacia
Sr. Mary Aquinata
Sr. Mary Emerita McManus
Sr. Mary Jovita
Sr. Mary Kenneth Keeven

1963 saw the arrival of the Sisters of Loretto

1963 – 1979 Sr. Geraldine Fitzgerald
1979 – 1983 Sr. Bernadine Wiseman

1983 – 1999 Mr. Ken Weis
1999 – 2001 Mrs. Carol Flaherty
2001 – 2015 Mrs. Cathie Wayland
2015 – 2018 Ms Julie Smith
2018 – 2020 Mr. Joseph Kilmade
2020 – 2022 Ms Alex O’brecht
2022 - Mr. Joseph Kilmade