

Saint James the Greater

O Glorious St. James,
because of your fervor and
generosity, Jesus chose you to
witness His glory on the Mount
and His agony in the garden.
Obtain for us strength and
consolation in the upending
struggles of this life. Help us to
follow Christ constantly and
generously, to be victors over
all our difficulties, and to
receive the crown of glory in heaven.
Amen.



Welcome to
St James Catholic Church
5149 Dowling
Montague, Michigan



The Catholic faith at St. James Parish has deeply imbedded roots in the Montague area. In a document prepared in 1951 by Bishop Francis Haas for deposit in the cornerstone to the addition to St James church, he stated that "the Grace of the Holy Spirit has hovered over these shores since the days of the Indian." It appears that Fr. James Marquette was here and that the saintly priest, Frederick Baraga, too, in the 1830's raised the missionary's cross above the first native Americans who dwelt here." The document continues, "So that when Fr. Charles DeCunnick came from the parish center at Grand Rapids to Whitehall in 1875 to build the first church, it was not as a stranger, for the seed of Faith had long since been planted here and nourished by pioneers who brought with them the Grace of the Waters of Baptism."

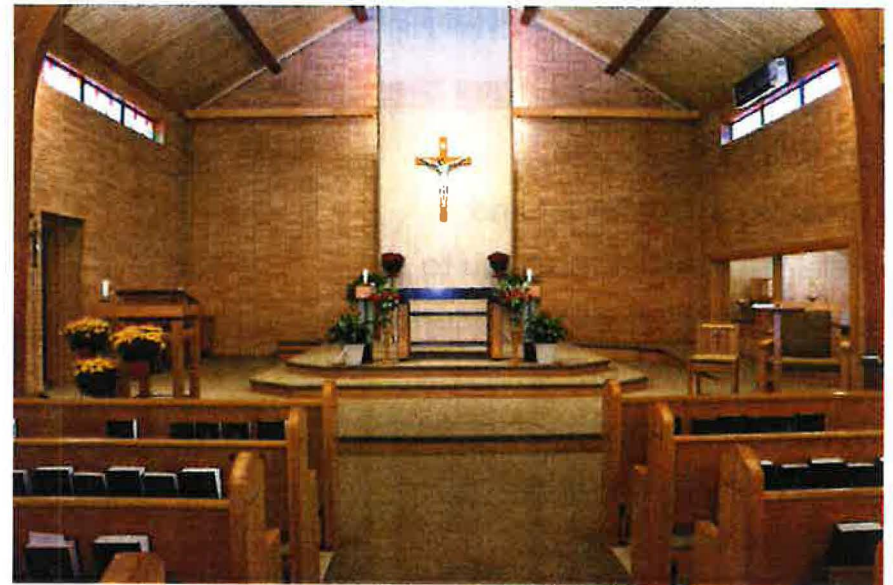
St James Parish began as the dream of a handful of pioneers almost 142 years ago in July of 1875. The early immigrants built their church on the corner of Slocum and Baldwin Streets in Whitehall at of cost of \$3000. The building was completed and dedicated in October, 1876. The church's finishing touches were barely completed when it was discovered that many of the original parishioners had moved to the Montague area and that many of the newly located families in Montague were Catholic. It was agreed that the building would be moved and the people of Montague would donate the land on which to locate the church and build a home for the priest.



During the winter of 1876, skids were placed under the church building and teams of draft horses pulled it across the frozen White Lake and up the steep banks of the lake's west shore. The horse's shoes had to be especially caulked so they could travel on the slippery ice and an exploring crew preceded the caravan of movers checking for air holes and thin ice.



1973-1980	Fr. Joseph Godzisz
1980-1984	Fr. David E. LeBlanc
1984-1989	Fr. Joseph J. Pettit
1989-1990	Fr. Joseph Malewitz
1990-1999	Fr. Thomas J. Schiller
1999-2007	Fr. Chris Rouech
2007-2013	Fr. Donn Tufts
2013-Present	Fr. Peter Omogo



A TIME TO REMEMBER . . .

Many priests have had the care of St. James parish.

We gratefully and humbly acknowledge and thank them for their service.

1875-1882	Fr. C.L. DeCunnick & Fr. Michael J. Dempsey
1882-1884	Fr. Louis Baroux (first resident priest)
1884-1886	Fr. Edward LaFevre
1886-1887	Fr. John Wyss
1887-1891	Fr. M.P. Milligan
1891-1895	Fr. Frederick L. Ruessmann
1895-1909	Fr. John Baptist Theis
1909-1911	Msgr. Daniel Hyland
1911-1927	Fr. Joseph Drew
1927-1928	Fr. Vincent J. Heaphy
1928-1929	Fr. James S. Kenny
1929-1931	Fr. Francis Mclauglin
1931-1945	Fr. Russell W. Passeno
1945-1950	Fr. Julian A. Moleski
1950-1953	Fr. Joseph C. Dunphy
1953-1955	Fr. Louis B. LaPres
1955-1962	Fr. Julius J. Amman
1962-1968	Fr. Max J. Ostrowski
1968-1973	Fr. Albert L. Watson
1973-1980	Fr. Max J. Ostrowski

Once across the lake, the church was skidded up the big hill to a location in a triangle bounded by Sheridan, Williams and Hancock streets where it served the parish for the next 82 years. The parish consisted of about 30 families at that time and Fr. Louis Baroux served as both priest and janitor.



The original historic St. James Catholic Church building that had been part of two separate towns was torn down in 1970, with the exception of an addition that had been added in the early 50's.



In 1958, the cornerstone of the present church was laid and the parish built a new church and school complex on its current site, a 26-acre campus on Dowling Street. Construction of the church and school was completed in 1960. The cost of the new church building was approximately \$200,000.00. Fr. Julius Ammon had the care of the parish during this time.



For a short time, the school was rented to the Montague Public School system, but in September of 1962, school officially opened to parish children in grades one through four, and was later open to grades one through sixth. The school was staffed by Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help from St. Louis, MO until 1987. Dedicated lay staff and generous volunteers continued the school's operation until its closing in 2007.

When the school opened, the building also housed living quarters for the nuns. In 1970, a new convent was completed and the rooms in the school were renovated into the school/parish office, the school principal's office and the school library. In 1989, the convent was converted to the priest's rectory with a parish meeting room in the basement. The offices of the Religious Education and the parish video/book library moved into the old rectory.

With the emergence of the twenty first century, St. James has completed several major upgrades. A new parish hall, narthex and church internal renovations were completed



in the spring of 2006. A final wide scale renovation of the original convent building was completed in the spring of 2009 and now serves full-time as the parish rectory. Finally, completed in 2015 were the Administration / Faith Formation building additions added to the west side of the church building.

St. James has truly been a "mother parish" since its beginnings in 1875. At one time, as many as seven mission churches were served by the priests at St. James. Presently, St. James is home to over 500 families and is clustered now with Our Lady of the Assumption Parish, Rothbury and St. John the Baptist Mission, Claybanks Township. St. James continues to provide a stable Catholic presence on both sides of White Lake as it has done for the past 147 years. With new families being lured by the area's natural resources and the rejuvenation of industry in the twin cities of Whitehall and Montague, the parish is excited about the opportunities for continued growth and outreach for the church.



Many thanks to
all the people
who, throughout
the years, have
been part of our
bell's journey
back to St. James
where it once
again rings out
for all to hear!

Father Peter Omogo



**ST. JAMES
CATHOLIC
CHURCH BELL
TOWER
DEDICATION**

October 3rd, 2021



The History of the St. James Bell

Almost 136 years ago, on June 20, 1885 the Reverend E. Laferve ordered a 900-pound bell to be made for Saint James Catholic Church located in Montague, MI on Sheridan Street. Just over a month later, on July 30, 1885, a solid bronze bell weighing 934 pounds was shipped by way of Starline Rail Road to Montague, MI where the bell was housed in a tower at the church on Sheridan Street. The cost for the finished bell was 18 cents. The Mountings cost 40 cents.

In 1958, the church building and rectory were sold to the Don Burrell family who were members of the parish. The Burrell family lived there raising their ten children and the bell remained in the tower on the property for a few more years. The children could even remember ringing the bell.

In 1960, Don Burrell removed the bell and gave it to Ken Owens. At the time, Ken was the president of the "Town Criers" the booster club for Whitehall High School.

The bell was housed on a wooden cart and pulled to parades and used as a spirit bell. The bell was used in this fashion for several years, until the cart came into disrepair. It then sat in the Whitehall High School courtyard located on Slocum Street. It was used as a back drop for homecoming photos and the like.

In 2004, Whitehall built a new high school located on White Lake Drive. Because the old school was remodeled to be used for offices, the bell was moved to the junior high parking lot where it sat for one year. Unbelievably, the bell was not damaged by snow plows. It must have been protected by angels.

In the summer of 2005, parishioner Paula Martin, the class advisor for the Whitehall class of 2007, thought that it would be a great idea to refurbish the spirit bell and place it in the front of the new high school as a gift from the class of 2007. Paula brought the bell to Spec Abrasive and Finishing on West Southern Avenue in Muskegon where the president of the company, Mr. Jim Perreault became intrigued by the bell and went to work stripping off the old red and white paint. Jim was surprised when he found that the bell was solid bronze and that there was printing on the bell that said Henry McShane & Co., Baltimore, MD, 1885. There was also the number 934 on the bell.

Jim became more intrigued and got to work looking into the Henry McShane & Co. in Baltimore, MD at which time, he discovered that the McShane Bell Company was still in existence. He called the company and spoke with Bill Parker who had been at the company for many

years. Bill informed Jim that for a small fee, the company would send a history of the bell.

Upon Jim sharing what he had learned, Paula Martin immediately requested the bells history from the company. After many weeks and numerous phone calls, the history remained a mystery as no bell registered for Whitehall, MI in 1885 could be found. Mr. Parker had even personally gone through the very fragile original ledger that had miraculously survived a fire.

Mr. Parker then suggested that he could identify the bell by the number 934 as they would make one bell with that weight. He found that the bell had not been ordered from Whitehall, but questioned if the town Montague sounded familiar? This is when it became known that the bell was ordered by the Reverend E. Leferve in 1885 for Saint James Catholic Church.

Jim Perreault graciously refurbished the bell to its original beauty. He also soldered the original cradle and asked Mr. Mike Thompson, plant manager of Cadillac Casting in Cadillac, MI, to recast the cradle. All of the work and materials were donated by the kindness of these two men.

There is no doubt that there was divine intervention in the return of our beloved bell. The beautiful bronze bell sat in the parish hall and was rung on special occasions for many years until 2020. In 2020, a gracious St. James' parishioner family decided to start the process of erecting a beautiful bell tower on the St. James' grounds for the original bell to be properly utilized to once again ring out for all to hear. In July of 2021, that bell tower was completed, leading to this wonderful day in which we have all gathered in celebration of the dedication of this glorious gift that the Lord has bestowed upon our parish.