= Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (Celina , Ohio) =

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church is a parish of the Roman Catholic Church in Celina , Ohio , United States . Founded later than many other Catholic parishes in the heavily Catholic region of western Ohio , it owns a complex of buildings constructed in the early 20th century that have been designated historic sites because of their architecture . Leading among them is its massive church , built in the Romanesque Revival style just 43 years after the first Catholic moved into the city : it has been called northwestern Ohio 's grandest church building .

= = Parish history = =

Catholics were active in southern Mercer County by the 1830s ; St. John the Baptist parish in Maria Stein and St. Rose parish in St. Rose were established in 1837 , and St. Henry parish in St. Henry and St. Joseph parish in St. Joe were also founded before 1840 . Despite the growing Catholic presence to the south , the county seat was strongly Protestant in its early history : when it was platted in 1834 , the proprietors donated lots for the use of congregations of the Baptist , Methodist , and Presbyterian faiths , and not a single Catholic was resident in the village for more than a quarter of a century . Beginning with Owen Gallagher in 1860 , Catholics began to migrate into Celina , and starting in 1864 , Mass was celebrated biweekly in a factory owned by one of the members . At this time , no priest lived in Celina ; the celebrant was typically Joseph Gregory Dwenger , then the pastor of Holy Rosary parish in nearby St. Marys . A parish was formally erected in Celina in 1864 and dedicated to the Immaculate Conception .

With the creation of the parish , more Catholics were attracted to Celina ; the parish grew to the point that a church building was needed , and the Archbishop of Cincinnati , John Baptist Purcell , came to Celina to lay the cornerstone on August 3 , 1864 . Members subscribed to the building fund throughout that year and the following ; it was completed in November 1865 , and Joseph Dwenger dedicated it on December 8 , 1865 . This building was a brick structure , measuring approximately 40 feet (12 m) by 60 feet (18 m) ; it cost $ 7 @,@ 000 to build . However , the parish continued to grow , and a building fund for a new edifice was started in 1899 . Construction of the replacement church building began in the following year , and it was dedicated in 1903 at a cost of $ 52 @,@ 000 . In the early twentieth century , it was widely considered the finest church building in all of northwestern Ohio , and decades later , its architecture still dominates all of downtown Celina .

Since the parish 's earliest years , members of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood have provided pastoral care for the members ; Dwenger was a member of this society , as were the other five priests who served there in its first decade . The first priest to live in Celina was Theopistus Wittmer , who arrived in 1876 ; the members acquired a small frame house to use as a rectory . Soon after Wittmer 's arrival , the parish constructed a building for their parochial school . The structure built for this school was two stories tall and measured approximately 40 feet (12 m) by 36 feet (11 m) ; it replaced a frame building in which the school had started in 1871 . A convent was built in 1879 to house the first of the Sisters of the Precious Blood , who came in that year to teach at the parish school ; it was replaced by a larger structure in 1949 , located northeast of the rest of the buildings related to the parish .

Today , Immaculate Conception continues to be an active parish in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati . It is clustered with Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Montezuma and St. Theresa , Little Flower of Jesus parish in Rockford ; all three churches are part of the St. Marys Deanery .

= = Buildings = =

= = = Church = = =

The church itself is a large brick building constructed in the shape of a Greek cross ; it was designed by Andrew DeCurtins of Lima and built under the supervision of John Burkhart of Kenton .

A Romanesque Revival structure erected in 1903 , it is centered on a large bronze dome . Worshippers may enter the building through its eastern end ; the facade is pierced by three large doorways and a massive rose window . Capping the facade are two square towers ; each one includes an octagonal belfry and is topped with a smaller bronze dome . Inside , the church is heavily decorated ; many of the walls feature paintings , and the altar is distinctly Romanesque in its style . The entire building rests on a stone foundation with a basement .

Architectural historians have grouped the Precious Blood @-@ related churches of far western Ohio into four different generations : the first , composed primarily of small log buildings from the first years of settlement until 1865 ; the second , composed of moderately sized brick churches built between 1865 and 1885 ; the third , composed mostly of large High Gothic Revival churches with massive towers constructed from 1885 to 1905 ; and the fourth , composed of churches built between 1905 and 1925 in a wide range of styles . Immaculate Conception 's place at the end of the third generation is significant : its Romanesque Revival style is atypical of that period and much more common in the fourth generation that would soon arise , putting it in somewhat of a transitional place between the third and fourth generations .

= = = Rectory = = =

Located immediately west of the church , the Immaculate Conception rectory is a large square three @-@ story brick house . It is the third residence to serve as the parish 's rectory : members bought a frame house near the church in 1876 , and after a new school building was completed in 1889 , the priest moved into the old school . In 1908 , the parish spent $ 2 @,@ 000 to buy land from John Schlosser immediately west of the church ; on this land they built the present rectory for $ 10 @,@ 000 . Divided into three bays on the front and six bays on each side , it sits on a foundation of cut stone with a stone water table and a basement . Individuals may enter through a large entryway on the southern front of the house or through a smaller doorway on the rear of the eastern side of the house .

Dominating the appearance of the house from the street is a large verandah @-@ style porch , supported by large stone columns , on the southern @-@ facing front of the house ; an enclosed porch , smaller but two stories high and supported by wooden pillars , is located on the rear portion of the house 's east side . Projecting from the front of the house , above the porch , is a small wing with a gable , semicircular window , and elaborate cornice . The house is built in a combination of styles ; it includes many Italianate details , but its design appears to have been influenced by the architecture of the Sears Modern Homes .

= = = Elementary school = = =

Sitting immediately north of the church is the Immaculate Conception Elementary School , which was erected in 1918 at a cost of $ 70 @,@ 000 . Two stories tall and built of brick with a flat asphalt roof , it is divided into sixteen bays on each of its two sides . Among its leading architectural features are a central projection on its eastern front , the arched doorway in that projection , and ornamental panels around the entrance . The school occupies the site of an earlier school that was built in 1889 ; the present building was constructed because the previous structure had become too small . In its early years , the present building housed both the elementary school and the high school , which was only a three @-@ year course for its first ten years . Because of continued growth in the high school , a new building was constructed specifically for it on the opposite side of the street . The architect for the elementary school was an unknown member of the DeCurtins family , who was related to the designer of the church building , Andrew DeCurtins . Unlike the newer building , the old elementary school remains a functioning school building . Due to falling enrollment and increasing expenses , the school was losing significant amounts of money by the late 2000s . Operating the school cost $ 874 @,@ 243 in the 2008 @-@ 2009 school year , while income was only $ 375 @,@ 459 . In 2010 , the church announced that it would close the school at the end of the 2010 @-@ 2011 school year unless finances improved markedly .

High school

Located on the eastern side of Walnut Street across from the other buildings of the church complex , the former Immaculate Conception High School was built in 1933 under the supervision of William and Joseph Forsthoff . The building was designed by Fred DeCurtins , a relative of the architect who designed the church building , and the nephew of the architect who designed the elementary school . Members of the DeCurtins family , who lived primarily in the community of Carthagena , designed many churches and other religious buildings in Mercer County and the surrounding region , including the area 's first church built with a tall tower , St. Aloysius ' Church in Carthagena . Although Fred DeCurtins designed the church building constructed in 1937 for the new parish in the northern Mercer County village of Rockford , architectural historians believe that Immaculate Conception High School was the last building designed by the DeCurtins family for an entity connected to the Missionaries of the Precious Blood . The school closed at the end of the 1972 school year , and by the late 1970s , the parish no longer needed its high school building ; although it remained in church ownership , it was leased for use by the Celina City School District for use as a ninth @-@ grade academy .

Three stories tall , the high school is a brick and stone building constructed on a concrete foundation with a basement and topped with a flat composite roof . Its overall shape is that of a square , divided into thirteen bays on the front and sixteen bays on the sides . The first floor of its west @-@ facing main facade is pierced by the large main entrance , which features an arched entrance with a cross @-@ tipped stone gable at the top . A similar entrance is present on the building 's southern side . Among its most prominent architectural features are eight stone columns on the main facade , which bracket groups of five windows on each story . These columns rise to different heights , creating a distinctive vertical effect . Such a style is common among more conservative modernist architects , who wish to combine older designs with current trends : historic elements are simplified and given a modernist style .

Recognition

In 1977 , the church , rectory , and schools were recorded by a historic preservation program run by the Ohio Historical Society , known as the Ohio Historic Inventory . This survey found the church in excellent condition , the elementary school in fair condition , and the high school and rectory in good condition . Although no historic preservation program was in effect , no threats to historic integrity were identified for any of the buildings , except for the elementary school , which was deemed to be in danger from being outdated .

Two years later , the complex was listed on the National Register of Historic Places because of the well @-@ preserved and historically significant architecture of its buildings . At the same time , the same designation was given to more than thirty other churches and other buildings in far western Ohio that were related to the Missionaries of the Precious Blood , using the multiple property submission process . Centered on the community of Maria Stein , the location of the Convent of Mary , Help of Christians , this predominately Catholic region is dotted with many large Romanesque Revival or Gothic Revival churches whose tall spires rise above tiny communities and can be seen from miles around . Because of the way that these churches dominate the region , the area has become known as the " Land of the Cross @-@ Tipped Churches . "