

= Michael Francis Egan =

Michael Francis Egan , O.F.M. ( September 29 , 1761 ? July 22 , 1814 ) was an Irish , later American prelate of the Roman Catholic Church . Born in Ireland in 1761 , he joined the Franciscan Order at a young age . He served as a priest in Rome , Ireland , and Pennsylvania and became known as a gifted preacher . In 1808 , Egan was appointed the first Bishop of Philadelphia , holding that position until his death in 1814 . Egan 's tenure as bishop saw the construction of new churches and the expansion of the Catholic Church membership in his diocese , but much of his time was consumed by disputes with the lay trustees of his pro @-@ cathedral , St. Mary 's Church in Philadelphia . He died in Philadelphia , probably of tuberculosis , in 1814 .

= = Early life and priesthood = =

Michael Francis Egan was born in Ireland on September 29 , 1761 . The exact location of his birth is uncertain . Early biographers believed Egan was possibly born in Galway , though more recent scholarship suggests it was actually Limerick . He joined the Order of Friars Minor ( commonly known as the Franciscans ) and studied at the Old University of Leuven and Charles University in Prague . Egan received minor orders , subdiaconate , and diaconate at Mechelen , in modern @-@ day Belgium . He was ordained a priest , probably in Prague , in 1785 or 1786 . While studying on the continent , Egan became fluent in German .

Egan advanced rapidly to positions of responsibility in the Franciscan order . He was appointed custos ( " guardian " ) of the province of Munster in Ireland in March 1787 . Later that year , he was also appointed custos of the Pontifical College at Sant ? Isidoro a Capo le Case , the home of Irish Franciscans in Rome . Egan remained there until 1790 , when he returned to his native Ireland and was appointed custos of Ennis . He remained in Ireland until 1787 or 1788 , when he may have made a visit to the United States . After several more years as a missionary in Ireland , Egan came ( or returned ) to the United States in 1802 .

= = Priest in Pennsylvania = =

Accepting an invitation from the Catholics near Lancaster , Pennsylvania , Egan arrived in the United States in January 1802 to serve as assistant pastor to Louis de Barth at Conewago Chapel in Adams County . When the state legislature sat in Lancaster that year , word of Egan 's preaching abilities traveled back to Philadelphia , and soon the parishioners of that city 's St. Mary 's Church petitioned Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore to send Egan to them . ( At that time , the Bishop of Baltimore had jurisdiction over the entire Catholic Church in the United States . )

The following year , 1803 , Egan became one of the pastors of St. Mary 's Church at Philadelphia . The move coincided with a yellow fever outbreak in Philadelphia . Though less virulent than Philadelphia 's famous 1793 outbreak of the disease , there were nonetheless many deaths , and Egan presided over many funerals that year ? St Mary 's had 77 interments between June and November 1803 . In 1804 , Egan received permission to establish a province of Franciscans in the United States for the first time , independent of the Irish Franciscans who were then supervising the American mission . Two years later , a parishioner willed Egan some land along the Yellow Creek in Indiana County , for the establishment of a Franciscan church . Because of the Order 's vows of poverty , Egan asked Carroll to hold the land in his name . Egan 's dream was never realized , as he was unable to attract Franciscans from Europe to establish the planned church .

Egan and the trustees of St. Mary 's established a singing school in 1804 , with the goal of improving the quality of the choir there . The following year was consumed by another yellow fever outbreak , and Egan joined John Rossiter , the pastor of another of Philadelphia 's four Catholic churches , St. Joseph 's , in ministering to the sick . In 1806 , they worked with the parishioners of a third church , Holy Trinity , to found an orphanage , as the problem of orphaned children had been made worse by the yellow fever deaths .

= = Bishop of Philadelphia = =

= = = Ordination = = =

The Catholic population in the United States was growing , and Bishop Carroll had for some time wished for his vast diocese to be divided into more manageable territories . On April 8 , 1808 , Pope Pius VII granted Carroll 's request , erecting four new sees in the United States and elevating Baltimore to an archdiocese . Among the new sees was the Diocese of Philadelphia , which included the states of Pennsylvania and Delaware as well as the western and southern parts of New Jersey . Even before the diocese was created , Carroll had determined to recommend Egan for the post , writing to Rome that Egan " was truly pious , learned , religious , remarkable for his great humility , but deficient , perhaps , in firmness and without great experience in the direction of affairs " .

Because of disruptions caused by the Napoleonic Wars , the papal bull nominating Egan did not reach the United States until 1810 . When it arrived , Egan traveled to St. Peter 's Pro @-@ cathedral in Baltimore , where he was ordained bishop by Archbishop Carroll , assisted by Benedict Joseph Flaget and Jean @-@ Louis de Cheverus , who had been appointed to bishoprics but had not yet been consecrated . Egan chose St. Mary 's to serve as his pro @-@ cathedral in Philadelphia . Even before Egan 's installation , Philadelphia Catholics began to raise funds to expand the church in accordance with its new prominence in the diocese . After their ordinations , the new bishops planned a council of the American church leadership for the near future ; in fact , they did not meet until 1829 , long after Egan 's death .

= = = Trusteeism dispute = = =

Egan 's elevation to the episcopate worsened an existing conflict in the American church : the dispute over trusteeism . In Europe , the Church owned property and directly controlled its parishes through the clergy . In the United States , however , early Catholic churches were typically founded by laymen who purchased the property , erected the church buildings . The laypeople accordingly demanded some control over the administration of the parish , even after the arrival of clergy from Europe who , like Egan , held the traditional view of parish organization . The dispute also had nationalist elements to it , as the heavily German parish of Holy Trinity resented the imposition of an Irish bishop instead of one of their own . When Holy Trinity 's pastor left for a new assignment in Maryland in 1811 , the trustees there were perturbed at Egan 's temporary appointment of an Irish priest , Patrick Kenny , to lead the parish , until a German priest could be found ( a German priest , Francis Roloff , was assigned the following year ) .

Egan 's own research into the issue showed that the trustees had conveyed St. Mary 's Church to the previous pastor , Father Robert Harding , and then to his heirs , but the trustees did not consider that property transfer to have extinguished their role in the church 's leadership . By 1811 , Egan 's worsening health caused him to accept the assistance of two priests at St. Mary 's , James Harold and his nephew , William Vincent Harold . Egan and the trustees became further embroiled in a dispute about clerical salaries , a situation possibly made worse by the decline in shipping income in the port city caused by the outbreak of the War of 1812 . Egan also came to believe the Harolds were making the situation worse by taking pro @-@ clergy positions that were more extreme than Egan 's own and by the younger Harold 's scheming to be named Egan 's coadjutor bishop . He appealed to the trustees for compromise , and offered to bring his cousin ( also a priest ) over from Ireland to replace the elder Harold . By 1813 , Egan and the trustees had reconciled and together resolved to remove the Harolds , who agreed to resign later that year and relocate to England .

= = = Death and burial = = =

Although the main complaints between bishop and trustees were resolved , some salary disputes lingered into 1813 . The conditions at St. Mary 's worsened in 1814 with the election of new trustees

who were more in conflict with Egan than the previous ones . Elsewhere in the diocese , Egan was more successful . In about 1811 , he made his most extensive visitation of his diocese , travelling as far west as Pittsburgh after stopping in Lancaster and Conewago . He continued to raise funds for the Catholic orphanage and opened a new parish , Sacred Heart , in Trenton , New Jersey , in 1813 , bringing the total number of churches in the diocese to sixteen .

Egan 's health continued to decline , and he died on July 22 , 1814 . While 19th @-@ century chroniclers suggest that it " may be said in all truth that Bishop Egan died of a broken heart " , modern biographers believe his health troubles more closely resembled tuberculosis . Egan was buried in St. Mary 's churchyard . In 1869 , after the construction of the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul on Logan Square , his remains were removed there and reburied in a crypt along with those of his successor , Bishop Henry Conwell .