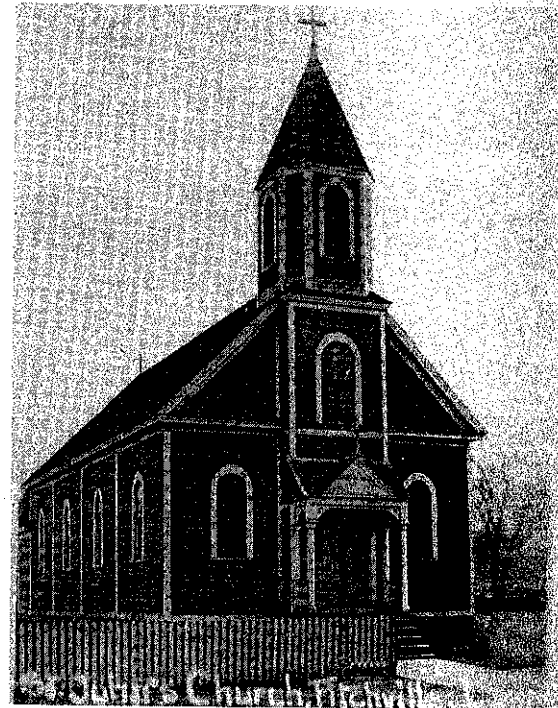




**We Celebrate**

**St. John Mission  
1893-1993**



Bozrah was well advanced in its first century as a town before Catholics appeared in appreciable numbers. The few who settled here before 1860, Irish immigrants for the most part, walked for Mass to

Norwich and the old St. Mary's parish (now St. Patrick's) if they lived in the eastern part of Fitchville. They traveled to Colchester and the mission church of St. Andrew if they lived in the western section of town. When the Colchester mission became a parish in 1860, the pastoral care of all Bozrah Catholics was entrusted to the new parish.

Another option for worship was attendance at services held by traveling priests, usually in a private home. The family would also take responsibility for the necessary arrangements and provide meals for the priest. For over 50 years, Mass was held at the home of Mrs. Ann Kingberger. When the number of Catholics became too large to be accommodated in a house, permission was given to hold services in Palmer Hall (currently the Town Hall). A priest came to the village at first once a month, later twice a month, and by 1895, Mass was held every Sunday.

In 1893, the Catholics of Fitchville bought land from Everett Stark on which to erect a church. The cornerstone was laid on October first of that year, an event celebrated with the parish by Rev. Michael Sullivan. On June 17, 1894, the church was dedicated as the Church of St. John by Bishop Tierney. Preacher of the Gospels was Rev. John

Winters and the High Mass was sung by Rev. John Cooney who supervised the \$4,000 building project. Mr. John J. Toomey was the builder for this project. The debt was cleared by 1909. Individuals or families volunteered to be responsible for paying for items such as statues, windows, linens, bells, candlesticks and mass books.

Early celebration of the sacraments included the baptism of Elizabeth Kingberger on February 6, 1895 and the April wedding vows of Charles Kingberger to Helen Ann Costello and John F. Burns to Catherine H. McManus.

*The History of the Diocese of Hartford* by Rev. James H. O'Donnell lists about 300 Catholics attending Mass in those early days and the names read like an Irish litany: Coughlin, Foley, Gribbins, Lynch, McCarthy, McManus, and Sullivan are but a few.

Their names on many of the windows remind us of this heritage. Maintenance and storage of many of the church items and upkeep of the altar were services generously donated by the Fields family who lived next to the church. This legacy of care has continued on through today with parish members still lovingly tending to the flowers, linens and other altar items.





There have been many changes to the original building over the last one hundred years. In 1944, the piece of land next to the church which now serves as parking was donated by Mr. Charles Brush. Since he was not a member of the parish, it was a generous gesture on his part. The white picket fence shown in the early photos has been replaced by shrubs. Like many of the large trees in town, the 1938 hurricane destroyed the maples which used to line the road in front of the building. An addition was built onto the back of the building in 1979 and is used for meetings, Bible classes, and social events. The steeple and new stained glass inserts in the doors were major renovations last year.

Although these are major differences, the inside of the church has seen many more changes and they are not as well represented in the photographs due to the technology of the times and the reverence which was accorded the services in the past. The tan interior with its beautiful stenciling around the windows and doors has been covered by a crisp and solid white. The angel faces on the ceiling over the altar were a favorite of children now grown old but today's youngsters look up at a beautiful sky blue. As decreed by the Vatican II, the Altar now faces the people and the large original altar has been dismantled. The communion rail has been removed, and a new confessional was built in the back of the church. The lectern is now used by both women and men who participate in the service, carpeting covers the floors and the new baptismal font was placed on the left side of the altar. A modern organ fills the church with hymns and several of the choir loft pews have been removed.

Completion of the stained glass window renovations and expansion of the area behind the hall are changes proposed for this anniversary year. These changes will continue a tradition of growth and improvement in this beautiful little church.



Stained glass window depicting the Virgin Mary and Christ Child, one of the windows expertly restored by the church.