

The History of St. Frances Cabrini Catholic Church - Lebanon, TN



Updated: 12/23/2014

Our Patron Saint

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini



Feast Day: November 13

St. Frances was born in the village of Sant' Angelo, on the outskirts of Lodi, about 20 miles from Milan, Italy in the pleasant, fertile Lombardi plain the thirteenth child of a farmer. She was so frail and tiny at birth that she was rushed to the church at once for fear of her dying before she could be baptized. Attending a school kept by the Daughters of the Sacred Heart, Frances earned a teacher's certificate and applied for admission to the covenant but, poor health stood in her way and she was denied. She helped her parents until their death, and then continued to work on the farm with her brothers and sisters.

In time, a priest asked her to teach in a girls' school where she stayed for six years. At the request of her Bishop, she founded the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart to care for poor children in schools and hospitals. Then at the urging of Pope Leo XIII she came to the United States with six nuns in 1889 to work among the Italian immigrants.

Filled with a deep trust in God and endowed with a wonderful administrative ability, this remarkable woman soon founded schools, hospitals, and orphanages in this strange land and saw them flourish in the aid of Italian immigrants and children. At the time of her death, at Chicago, Illinois on December 22, 1917, the institutes she founded numbered houses in England, France, Spain, the United States, and South America. In 1946, she became the first American citizen to be canonized when she was elevated to sainthood by Pope Pius XII.

The Early Catholic History of Lebanon



As far as can be ascertained, the first Mass was offered in Lebanon by Father John Cunningham around 1915 in the home of John J. Martin, Sr., a pioneer that moved to Lebanon in 1908 establishing the Cedar City Machine Shop.

The Martin family resided on West Spring Street. Cardinal Samuel Stritch, Archbishop of Chicago, said Mass several times in the Martin home around 1922. The vestments used by him and the other priests were kept in the Martin home. It is to be noted that during the fifteen years following 1915, Mass was offered very infrequently in Lebanon, usually by priests on their way between Nashville and Knoxville. On other occasions the Martins took their five boys by train to either Nashville or Murfreesboro area churches.

Places of Prayer

Around 1930 Father Harold DesChamps, who was stationed at the Cathedral in Nashville began to say Mass regularly in Lebanon. Other priests who were assigned to the Lebanon mission included Monsignor Albert Siener, Fathers: Christopher Murray, John Elliott, Leo Bingwald, Joseph Siener, Frank Reilley, William Barclay, Theren Walker, Edward Cleary, Frank Pack, Edgar Kelly, John Tierney, Joseph Tarp, Joseph Gresham, Joseph Julius and James Niedergeses. During these years Mass was said for the most part in the Seagraves Funeral Home. On some occasions a corpse would be on just the other side of the curtains. In fact, it was necessary one Sunday to change the portable altar from one end of the hall to the other in order to keep from having a corpse in the immediate vicinity of the altar.

Mass, May 1951,
Castle Heights

Mass was also offered in the Cumberland University Chapel and at Castle Heights Military Academy. At first, the study hall of Castle Heights that seated about 400 was used. During war maneuvers it was necessary to move outdoors in order to accommodate the crowd of townspeople and hundreds of Second Army soldiers some of which traveled fifty miles on Easter to attend. Later Mass was said in Macfadden Auditorium for the soldiers, cadets and townspeople. Usually two Masses, one by an army chaplain and one by the assigned priest were offered. More than 250,000 men were stationed in the

Lebanon area during the war. After World War II, Mass was offered in the Castle Heights Library which was better equipped for a temporary chapel. Father James Niedergeses installed a convertible alter and curtains in order to give the library a more church like appearance. Captain C.H. Hurd, the librarian at Castle Heights and a convert to the Catholic Church, assisted and was an efficient sacristan. Several years passed and the library became crowded

Let Us Build





In 1951 Lebanon was attached as a mission to Gallatin. Father George Rohling, who had been assigned to Gallatin in 1947, saw the need for a church in Lebanon. His first request was turned down by Bishop William Adrian. Father Rohling discovered that fifteen adults in Lebanon had not been confirmed. He instructed each individually and then invited the Bishop to come and confirm them at a Sunday Mass. The library at Castle Heights was filled to overflowing on that day and the Bishop took note of the crowding giving permission to search for property on which to build a new church. A crane erects sanctuary roof beams in 1952.

The present property was purchased from Cumberland University, one reason being, it was a close walk for the cadets of Castle Heights, many of which were of the Catholic Faith. Members of the community pooled their resources and built the church in 1952. The Catholic Extension Services of Chicago made a large donation in the name of Mrs. Frances Crowley. The church was named in honor of her and the first American to be canonized as a Saint of the Church, Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini. The first Mass of St. Frances Cabrini was celebrated a week before Christmas of 1952. The dedication of the church was held on April 19, 1953 with The Most Reverend Bishop

William L. Adrian officiating. The Very Reverend Monsignor Thomas J. Reed of the Catholic Extension Society gave the sermon along with congratulations to Father George Rohling and the people of Lebanon for their many accomplishments in the building of the church. The first Religious Vacation School (Vacation Bible School) was held that summer with some 30 children in attendance. The school lasted two weeks and was led by Sisters Louise Marie and Mary Adeinide from St. Cecilia's Covenant in Nashville. They were assisted by Frank Coulon, seminarian from St. John Vianney School in Gallatin.



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Let Us Grow

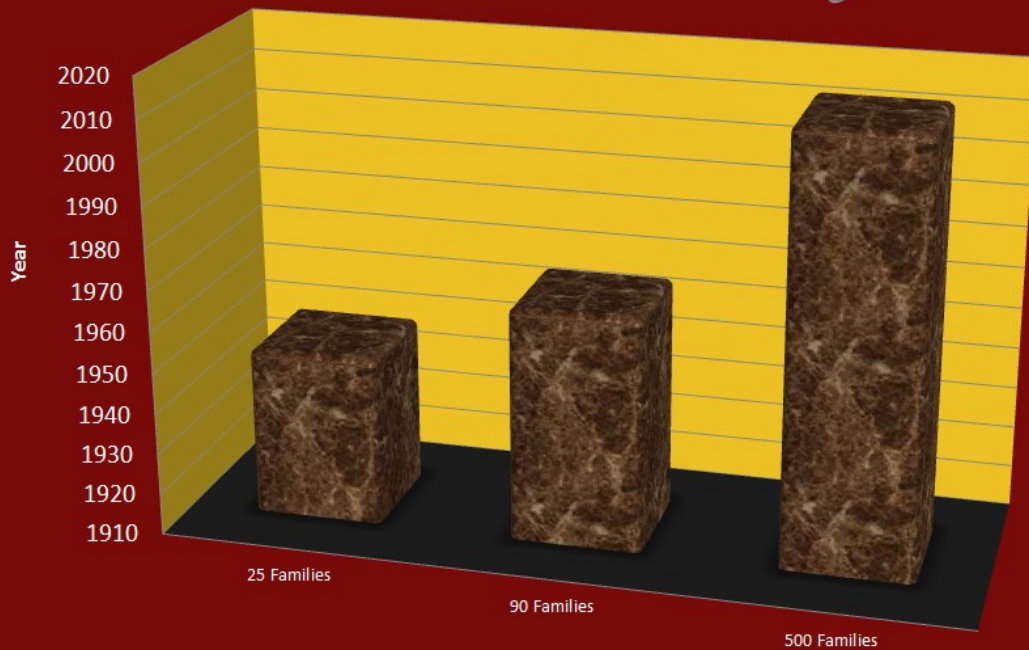
In 1964 the property just south of the church was purchased as a rectory. Father Edward M. Kelly was appointed the first resident pastor in 1967. The counties of Wilson, Trousdale, Smith and Macon were officially assigned to

the parish of St. Frances. Because of the increased size of religion classes, more space was needed so in 1974 it was decided to add to the church. The west area of the property fronting on Cleveland Street was sold and the proceeds used, in part to finance the new addition. In the spring of 1975, this addition was Page 4dedicated in honor of Porter Robinson, a member of the Parish Council, who lost his life in an accident while painting the church interior a few months before. Ten years passed and the need for more space resulted in another addition for classrooms. The old rectory was sold and moved and a new one built closer to the church. In 2002 the property north of the sanctuary was purchased and its buildings were demolished in 2008. In 2004 the Ashley House was purchased for office and meeting space. In 2008 property south of The Ashley House was purchased and refurbished. Plans are now in the making to expand the sanctuary and move the parking lot to the north or possibly sell the property and build anew. Our church continues to grow both physically and spiritually and our doors are open to all.

Current Growth

As of December 2014 our parish has over 500 families, consisting of over 1,300 individuals. Our thriving community consists of some 21 organizations including the Altar Society, Knights of Columbus, RCIA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the Giving Cabinet, Hispanic Charismatic Renewal, the Apostolate of Prayer, Religious Education, and ministries including Music, Extraordinary Ministries of the Eucharist, and Altar Servers. Lastly, our CCD classes consist of 250+ children and young adults.

St. Frances Cabrini Catholic Church Growth Chart



	25 Families	90 Families	500 Families
Year	1951	1967	2014

Our current worship space seats 210 and is situated on 6.75 acres with a freestanding office and rectory. The future worship space is designed with a seating capacity of 450 people, an enclosed Narthex where 200 people can gather before or after Mass to build fellowship, a covered portico to protect people from the elements, a large cry room, an expanded choir space, and a state of the art sound system.

The parish of St. Frances Cabrini actually began the exploration of a new campus wide building program that would have been a \$6.7 million dollar project back in 2006; however, those thoughts never gained traction and they more or less died a silent death.

It was in April of 2010 that four (4) listening sessions were held to ascertain the feelings of the parish toward exploring a new vision of parish expansion. Data was gathered from written responses to questionnaires' and based on that data, an

early report of our efforts were forwarded to the bishop in order to keep him informed of our progress.

Based on those data, we explored the sale of our existing property (6.75 acres w/ existing buildings) which was appraised as primarily residential property with an estimated value of \$1.1 million and moving to a site on the western portion of the city. We logically engaged in a conversation with Cumberland University to explore their interest in acquiring our property in December of 2010. We explored a “land swap” option with them in February 2011. In May 2011, another correspondence went out exploring their interest in our property, we received no reply. We waited for an answer until September of 2011 and sent a final inquiry soliciting their interest in our property, only silence was heard.

In August of 2011, we were given permission of the bishop to initially engage an architect to flesh out a church that would seat 400-450 people with the capacity to be expand to 600 seats a sometime in the future. By April 2012, various renderings had been produced and the first estimate of the expense involved in our project was estimated at \$2.2 million that price eventually rose to \$2.5 million.



As of May 2012, the parish had already raised \$480K in cash toward a goal of \$666.2K or 33 1/3 of the estimated cost of the proposed construction. The fund raising was broken into two (2) stages: 1). Raise the cash and 2) begin a formal pledge campaign. The parish was asked to raise the “cash” by January of 2013 at which time a request would be sent to the bishop to begin a formal pledge campaign. During this time a pledge committee was formed and trained in preparation for a formal launch of our pledge campaign.

A letter was sent to the bishop in February of 2013 requesting his permission to begin a formal pledge campaign. We waited. A second request went out in early April requesting a start date of 19 April 2013, which would mark the 60th anniversary of the dedication of our current worship space. On April 15th we received his approval and launch the pledge campaign.

As of December 2014, we now have in our control or pledged to us approximately \$2.0 million. We have also been able to come to an agreement with the bishop, general contractor, architect and civil engineer on an orientation for our new worship space along with additional parking and are awaiting a final “guaranteed maximum price” which we will take to the bishop and arrange for any financing for the funds that are not in our possession. A mortgage of \$500K to \$800K is most likely what we will need to secure in order to receive the bishop’s permission to begin construction; so, we continued down the pathway to completion.