HOLY FACE OF JESUS
PARISH

A History of Our Beginnings

In 1833, a Bavarian immigrant named John Ruppert purchased half of Section 22 in Pusheta Township, south of Wapakoneta, "and on this land [would be] erected the first church of Petersburg, which was dedicated in honor of the Apostles Peter and Paul."

Meanwhile, Father Wilhelm Horstman of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood had arrived in the United States in 1831, and immediately began to serve the German-Catholic settlers of west-central Ohio, beginning in Putnam County. A remarkably zealous missionary, Horstman regularly traveled across several counties. Father Horstman first visited the congregation at Petersburg on May 8, 1835. In a subsequent letter to Bishop Purcell, Father Horstman reports that he "stayed three days saying Mass, baptizing, etc. The Catholics there were fervent except a few, led by a certain Schimmel, who had been married by a civil magistrate. All the rest were zealous for divine service and planned the buying of a plot and erection of a church for the neighborhood, to be used also as a school. In a priest's absence they had prayers led by Joseph Klupfel. [The congregation] desires that stone, chalice, etc. be sent them."

On April 21st, 1836, for $90, John and Anna Mary Ruppert deeded land in Section 22 to John Joseph Klueppel, et al, "and their successors in office as trustees for the Roman [Catholic] Church in Pusheta Township." The same year a log church 40 x 30 feet (as well as a log residence for the pastor) was built at Petersburg and blessed by Father Horstman. When visiting Minster, Father Horstman would usually stop several days in Wapakoneta and Petersburg to minister there. This was common practice - a church is formally established before official recognition by the diocese.

On January 1st, 1840, the Sts. Peter and Paul Parish (72 families and 318 total members) was organized by Father Horstman. Since St. Joseph Parish had been established in Wapakoneta in 1839, the Petersburg church was intended as the central point for the German Catholics at (what would become) Fryburg, Botkins, and Rhine. But distance and mud roads that became virtually impossible during the winter and rainy seasons prompted the Catholics of the individual communities to found their own parishes.

In 1844, Father Martin Bobst became the first pastor to live at Petersburg. From here he also continued to minister to the parish in Wapakoneta, a practice that continued until 1849, when St. Joseph acquired its own priest and became independent of Sts. Peter and Paul.

St. John the Evangelist Parish was established in the village of Fryburg in 1850, drawing more parishioners away from Petersburg. Soon thereafter, the pastor at Petersburg moved his residence to Fryburg and began serving Sts. Peter and Paul as a mission.

In 1856, Catholics southeast of Petersburg established St. Lawrence Church at Rhine. Further damaging Sts. Peter and Paul was the 1865 establishment of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception in the fledgling village of Botkins, south and west of Petersburg along the new Dayton & Michigan railroad.

"This congregation was weakened considerably in 1868 by many members uniting with the Botkins congregation. This almost caused the abandonment of the Petersburg church, but the following year [a number of parishioners] resolved to build a brick church on the Sidney pike, near the county line. Accordingly, a building was erected 55 by 35 feet, for about $3,000, but no priest has charge, and so some of the members attend the services at Fryburg and others in Botkins."

Sts. Peter and Paul parishioners lobbied for decades for the continuation of their parish, but without success. The original log church at Petersburg was destroyed in a fire in 1884, and a monument to the church was erected on the site of the altar in 1892. The Petersburg congregation had completely disbanded before 1897, when the second church was dismantled and the responsibility of maintaining the cemetery turned over to St. Lawrence. St. John the Evangelist later assumed care of the cemetery.

In 1989, St. Lawrence Parish, Rhine, and Immaculate Conception Parish, Botkins, were joined under the administration of one pastor, Father James O'Connor. In July 2009, Father Patrick Sloneker, pastor of St. Lawrence and Immaculate Conception, also became the pastor of St. Joseph. Father Sloneker coined the term "Petersburg Parishes" for the new pastoral region, reflecting the origins of the congregations.

In July 2014, St. John the Evangelist, Fryburg, became the fourth parish of the Petersburg Pastoral Region, and the Petersburg Parishes were again one.

Over the next few years, the parishes worked together on many ministries, activities, and initiatives. The growing collaboration presented challenges and opportunities. In 2019, the pastoral staff began working out of the same office and collaborating on more ministries. The following year, the pastoral councils of the four parishes combined into a single council. On July 1, 2024, Archbishop Dennis Schnurr decreed that the four parishes would be merged into a single parish, the Holy Face of Jesus Parish. All four church buildings are utilized and keep their original name. Now, the buildings are church buildings of the Holy Face of Jesus Parish. We are one parish with four church buildings.

The name "Holy Face of Jesus Parish" is unique. To our knowledge, there is only one other parish in the country named after the Holy Face of Jesus (it is located in rural Maryland). Our name went through a multi-month process. We received suggestions from parishioners, had an open house to learn about nine different possibilities, and ended by voting during Eucharistic Adoration. After prayer and discernment, it seemed that this name and identity is part of God's plan for our parish. We are excited to see how God works in the next chapter of our story.