

The New Haven Story

This is the New Haven Story. It might also be called the story of St. Catherine Parish, since the town of New Haven with its 550 inhabitants is 95% Catholic.

Although this parish had its first resident pastor in 1844, for our purpose we will begin with 1926. In that year Father Ben Wight, then pastor, established what I believe was the first parish supported Catholic Parochial High School in what now comprises the Archdiocese of Louisville and the Diocese of Owensboro. Father Wight was roundly criticized for his bold venture. A parochial high school? "Impossible," they said. But today the good people of New Haven hold him in blessed memory and pray for the repose of his courageous soul. I mention this first parochial high school because it was housed in what was the first permanent church at New Haven. This building provided comfortable quarters for the little school then, but it was soon to become wholly inadequate.

In 1928 the beautiful church of St. Catherine burned to the ground. A new church had to be built. This was done in the pastorate of Rt. Rev. Msgr. James H. Willett, now pastor of St. Joseph's, Bardstown, Kentucky. It was a great undertaking, but the new St. Catherine's Church was completed in 1929. If built today it would cost well near \$300,000.00. It has a seating capacity of over 700, and is an inspiring monument to the Glory of God and to the courage and generosity of our brave people.

By 1938 the high school had outgrown its quarters, and the old frame grade school was bursting at the seams. A new school had to be built. It had to be large enough to house both grade and high school. This also was undertaken under the pastorate of the Rt. Rev. James H. Willett. It was completed in 1939. It is large and commodious, and modern in every appointment; and if built today it would cost well over \$200,000.00. It did not cost that much then, but for this parish of 350 families it was a tremendous undertaking.

In 1944 the consolidation of all the country public schools in Nelson and LaRue Counties was begun. At that time St. Catherine's Parish had Catholic children in 13 of these little country schools. Again something had to be done. Either we would have to buy busses to bring those children in to New Haven or they would be taken to some consolidated public school outside the com-

munity. We bought the busses and brought the children in.

By 1951 we had 100 pupils enrolled in the high school and 326 in the grades. The school building was so full of children that they were almost literally hanging on the walls and sticking out the windows. We either had to build a new high school or give our high school up altogether. There was not even a public high school in the community where they might go.

On May 13, 1951, the Most Reverend Archbishop gave his kind permission to build a new high school. Within 21 days a drive in the parish had been made and \$52,000.00 had been raised. A few days later the plans for the high school were completed and we had our first and only bid from a contractor, which was for \$205,000.00. A staggering sum for us, but the work went on. In order to cut down the cost the foundation and part of the basement were dug by the grade school boys of the parish, 65 of them, at 15 cents per hour. They swarmed like ants over the job until it was completed, and they went back to school.

Now all of this was quite enough, but there is still more. When the new high school was started a year ago most of the people of the parish were working at the seven distilleries that dot the countryside. We had no sooner than started when those distilleries began to cease production. Today all but one is closed down. Many of our people work in Louisville, more than fifty miles away, and at Fort Knox, forty miles distant, driving back and forth every day. Many are out of work and we are finishing the new building with plenty of debt.

The new St. Catherine's High School will be ready for use in September. The people of this parish are strong and courageous, but just the running expense of such a plant as ours will be in itself a heavy burden on them. The Sisters' salaries alone amount to \$780.00 every month, and this is not even a beginning of the over-all parish expense.

This is why I am asking you to join our \$1000.00 a month club for a few months. Come in. The water's fine.

Father Fred J. Gettelfinger
Pastor