

Reverend Father John Eisen

Nominated by the Knights of Columbus, Father John Eisen Council #1799.

Reverend Father John Eisen's ministry at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church lasted fifteen years, within a few years of the whole length of time he had been in this country. Over those years, he watched his church grow from a small and struggling congregation often differing among themselves, to a church firmly united and next to that of La Crosse, the largest congregation in the diocese.

During his fifteen years as pastor of St. John's church he labored earnestly and hard. The magnificent church building, together with the adjoining buildings, St. John's school and the priest's home, remain as monuments of his untiring energy and perseverance.

Father Eisen was appointed pastor of St. John Catholic Church in April 1892 by Rt. Rev. James Schwebach, bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, and arrived here on May 10, 1892. Two months later, his legacy as a builder began when the original church was moved thirty feet toward the east, to clear the space where the new church building would be built. That foundation was laid out September 29th.

On Pentecost Sunday, May 21, 1893, Bishop Schwebach blessed the cornerstone. Construction then continued and the new church was completed before the Christmas services of 1893. Dedication and blessing services of the completed new church were held on January 7, 1894. The church with furniture had cost about \$35,000 to build.

By the fall of 1894, the children of a growing congregation were overcrowding available school space. Additional classrooms were arranged in the basement of the winter chapel -- this of course gave only temporary relief.

During 1896, Father Eisen called a special meeting of the congregation, explaining the absolute need for more school rooms. Recognizing that necessity, the congregation supported building a new school. Under Father's watchful eye, the work was completed during 1897, providing St. John's congregation with not only a magnificent church but also a schoolhouse, modern in every detail of architecture and, at the time, the largest in the city.



In September 1901, under Father Eisen's direct supervision, extensive improvements were made at the Catholic cemetery. In the center of the grounds, he had placed a crucifix measuring twenty feet in height from the base of the foundation to the top of the large cross. After five years of service and exposure to the elements the wooden cross showed signs of rotting. Father then replaced the wooden emblem with a new one, much larger and made of iron. The new cross was set in a stone foundation..

Father Eisen left Marshfield on May 4, 1903, for a journey to his fatherland, Bavaria, Germany, which included a visit to Rome, where he had an audience with Pope Leo.

During his absence from Marshfield, exactly three months and one hour, the congregation built a handsome new parsonage for their pastor. At the time, it was one of the largest and most modern residences of its kind in the state, built of solid brick with stone trimmings, two stories in height. The inside was divided into twelve large well lighted rooms with wide hallways.

Just a few years later, the whole community was shocked on May 29, 1907, by the news of the sudden death of Rev. Fr. John Eisen. Since his return from the sanitarium the previous December, he seemed to have partially recovered his health. While his friends all knew that the valvular affection of his heart was incurable, it was their hope that freedom from the heaviest duties of his office and careful living might prolong his life.

Scarcely a day passed that he was not seen on the street and the morning of his death he had paid a visit to the hospital, one of the objects of his never-falling attention. The same morning, he had requested his housekeeper to prepare for him a dinner of his favorite Bavarian dishes, which seemed to appeal to him more as his health returned and bade her have a similar dinner once a week hereafter. He ate heartily and went to his room, as was his custom. His housekeeper happened to pass the door about twenty minutes later and saw him lying on the floor, unconscious. From all appearances, he had sat down in his chair and fallen from it when the attack came. Recovering from the shock she quickly carried the news to Rev. Peter Trierweiler, assistant priest, who delivered the last sacraments. Then, like fire, spread the news over the city, carried by telephone and messenger: "Father Eisen is dead." words that burned with sorrow and moistened the eye. It was the sudden ending of a most useful life, a life devoted to the service of God and to the welfare and betterment of humanity.

He was a man of magnetic personality and far reaching influence. In his fifty one years of life, he had attained a larger measure of success in his chosen work than comes to most men of greater age. This was in a remarkable degree a product of that geniality which made him popular with all classes of men, whether church members or not, and of his fearless and determined spirit.

His plain, honest life, his devotion to God and the church, his liberal views and kindness of heart, placed him above the average mortal. His mission on this earth was to soothe and comfort and make men and women better, and to do this he overlooked riches and worldly honors. Such men are few, and men like him are an honor to know. In priestly robe or citizen's

cloth, he was the same John Eisen. He made no distinction between rich and poor. The warmth of his handshake spoke the language of his heart. His personality acted as a magnet, and he drew men to him and made them better by exemplifying a true Christian life.

The Marshfield Knights of Columbus was organized in May 1915. Founding members named the council in honor of Father John Eisen, whose memories of this noble man were still dear to them.