

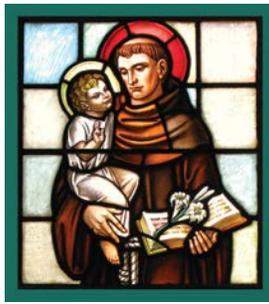
St. Anthony Catholic Church History

St. Anthony's Catholic Church dates back to 1905 when the first Mass took place south of Artesia for eight people. One year later, a church building was erected just south of the existing building used for the church office and Catechism classes. Mass was celebrated once-a-month for a growing congregation. During the initial year of its foundation, the mission was officially named St. Anthony of Padua with a statue being donated in the patron saint's honor. By 1907, the Stations of the Cross pictures were hung on the walls of the church, High Mass, complete with choir, was celebrated, and the first wedding was performed. By 1910, the south half of the block had been donated, bi-weekly Mass had been instituted, and the Bishop of Tucson presided over the first Confirmation at the parish. During the late 1920's oil boom, the church had become so well established that the traveling Roswell priest included Dayton into the Artesia mission. While the economy was doing well, the church was beautified with the addition of a new roof, vestibule, vitrophane windows, sidewalks, and 24 elm trees—St. Anthony's definitely was becoming much more than a mission church!

As the parish grew, Brown Franciscan priests were traveling from Carlsbad and Roswell by train or motorcycle and would usually sleep in the back of the church; however, by 1943, Artesia became the home of Fr. Francis Geary, St. Anthony's first resident pastor. Parishioners started saving up money for a rectory by holding Bingo fundraisers, bake sales, and auctions. Money saved by parishioners efforts in combination with salvaged material from the old Dayton church that was torn down, allowed a new rectory to be built on church property.

Under the direction of Fr. Richard Arlt (1957-1966), St. Anthony's consolidated the property owned by the church to encompass an entire city block, and the size of the church was lengthened by the additions of a sanctuary and sacristy. He encouraged parishioners to use the building fund for a parish hall claiming that "a hall is the road to a new church." The parish hall was erected in 1962. With money collected from Bingo fundraisers conducted by the Knights of Columbus, the debt for the hall was paid, and a sizable account was set up for the eventual construction of a new church. An annual spaghetti dinner was organized by the parishioners of St. Anthony's at this time. For ten years, about 1500 residents of Artesia enjoyed a meal that was cooked and prepared by the church.

A very memorable priest of St. Anthony's church was Fr. Charles Zengel. In his 13 years as pastor of St. Anthony's, he began a time of fellowship between the Masses with a Sunday morning coffee break. During his time as pastor, the church received new pews and narrower, more energy efficient windows. In 1987, the Franciscans relinquished administration of the parish to diocesan control. It would be the first time in St. Anthony's history that Jesuit priests served the church. The two Jesuit priests, Fr. Jack Capelle and Fr. Joseph Johnson, served back-to-back from the late 1980's to-the-late 1990's. It is almost inconceivable that at the turn of the new millennium, the parishioners of St. Anthony's were still looking forward to having a new church built. Due to both the building fund that was started in the 1950s and a large donation given by the local Knights of Columbus order, the goal came to fruition.

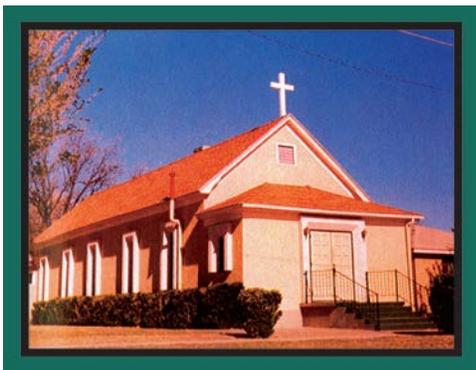


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The wait was finally over! In 2003, St. Anthony's parishioners celebrated the opening of the new church. The congregation began to grow as many new parishioners joined. The old church was converted into a set of apartments that can be found just northwest of the new church on Missouri Street. Shortly after the completion of the building, priests from the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary began administering to the church. They served the church until 2014. First, there was Fr. Benedict Folger, then Fr. Chris Santangelo, and finally Fr. Paul Murtagh and Fr. Brian Guerrini. St. Anthony's parishioners had the honor of experiencing Brother Brian growing spiritually and eventually becoming a priest. We were also blessed to have one of our own, Tony Torrez, complete the Diaconate in 2011, and he now serves as deacon of St. Anthony's. After Fr. Paul and Fr. Brian moved away from Artesia, the diocese sent Fr. Martin Cornejo and Fr. Francis Lazer to serve the parishes in the Pecos Valley. Fr. Francis is our current parish priest, with Deacon Tony serving under him. We are happy to have them and we hope that they serve our faith community for a very long time.

As you can see, St. Anthony's Church has had quite a past. Through the foundation of Jesus Christ, the parishioners have built a strong, long-standing tradition of faith, hope, and love. We need all parishioners to share in their time, talents, and treasure. At the time of this writing, a building committee has been formed for the goal of constructing a new parish hall. It is an exciting time to be part of St. Anthony's church!

-- revised and edited by Jeremy Hall 2015



Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)



St. Anthony Catholic Church Priests (listed in chronological order)

Priests:

Fr. Frederic Hartung, O.F.M.
Fr. Fabian M. Kernan, O.M.C.
Fr. Francis Geary, O.M.C.
Fr. Gabriel Eilers, O.F.M. Conv.
Fr. Marcellus Lell, O.F.M. Conv.
Fr. Richard J. Arlt, O.F.M. Conv.
Fr. Edward Collet, O.F.M. Conv.
Fr. Jerome Bayer, O.F.M. Conv.
Fr. Charles Zengal, O.F.M. Conv.
Fr. Jack Capelle, S.J.
Fr. Joseph Johnson, S.J.
Fr. Dennis Fountain
Fr. Benedict Folger, SS.CC.
Fr. Chris Santangelo SS.CC.
Fr. Paul Murtagh, SS.CC.
Fr. Brian Guerrini, SS.CC.
Fr. Martin Cornejo, O.F.M.
Fr. Francis Lazer

Religious Order Abbreviations:

O.F.M. = Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans)
O.F.M. Conv. = Order of Friars Minor Conventual (Conventual Franciscans)
O.M.C. = Order of Merciful Christ
S.J. = Society of Jesus (Jesuits)
SS.CC. = Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (Picpus Fathers)

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