

SAINT HEDWIG

Founded: 1877 | Present church built: 1881-1883 | Dedicated: April 8, 1883

Patron Profile:

Saint Hedwig

(circa 1174 - 1243)

Feast Day: October 16

Hedwig of Silesia was born into a noble family in the historic Duchy of Bavaria, now part of Germany. By 1188, she had married Henry, heir to the Duke of Silesia, which is a historic region in southwestern Poland. Upon Henry's inheritance of the title in 1201, Hedwig became the Duchess of Silesia. She and Henry had seven children.

A devout woman, Hedwig is noted for her charity and support of the Church. Using her wealth and influence, she established many monasteries and religious communities for men and women. In addition, she founded several hospitals, including one for lepers.

Following her husband's death in 1238, Hedwig moved to the Cistercian convent at Trebnitz, which she and Henry founded in 1202. It is also where Henry is buried. At the time she took up residence at the abbey, her daughter, Gertrude, was the abbess. While she did not formally become a religious sister, she wore the habit and participated in the life of the community. She ultimately donated her fortune to the Church and spent her last years serving the poor. She died in 1243 and is buried in the church of Trebnitz abbey.

In 1267, Pope Clement IV canonized Hedwig. She is venerated as the patron of several regions, cities, and dioceses in both Poland and Germany.



PARISH HISTORY

Founded in 1877, Saint Hedwig is considered the Mother Church of the Polish Catholic community in South Bend. Immigrants from Poland began arriving in South Bend during the 1870s, and they found work in area factories, such as the Oliver Chilled Plow Works, the Singer Sewing Machine Company, and the Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company. They settled on the West side of South Bend, which put them in proximity to Saint Patrick Church. Although it was an immigrant parish, the community was predominantly Irish and German.

Desiring a parish that would better accommodate their needs and traditions, the Polish community formed Saint Hedwig. From its earliest days it was not only a house of worship, but it was also a hub of institutions designed to enhance the lives of its members. The most prominent of these endeavors were the parish's schools: in 1877, the parish established an elementary school and then, in 1928, it created a high school, which was eventually incorporated into the present Saint Joseph High School. In addition to addressing the educational needs of its children, the parish sponsored many vibrant organizations—e.g. societies, fraternities, and prayer groups—to support and enrich the lives of the adults and families in the parish.

Priests of the Congregation of Holy Cross served at Saint Hedwig from its founding until 1964; since then, priests of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend have ministered at the parish. Saint Hedwig merged with the neighboring Saint Patrick Parish in 2001 and Father Cyril Fernandes is the current pastor.



ART AND ARCHITECTURE

The parish of Saint Hedwig built its first church soon after its founding in 1877. It was a wood frame structure on Monroe Street that was destroyed in a windstorm in 1879. Construction on the present brick church began in 1881 at the corner of Scott and Napier Streets. Built in the Romanesque style and dedicated on April 8, 1883, the new church could accommodate more than 900 congregants. Through the years the church has been renovated and refurbished, most recently in 1998.

The plan of the church draws on the tradition of ancient Roman basilicas, which were originally civic buildings used as law courts or assembly halls and later adopted as a form for churches. Key characteristics of this building type include the rectangular central nave terminating in a semicircular vaulted apse along with side aisles that are separated from the nave by colonnades. The nave is capped with a barrel vault while the ceilings in the aisles employ groin vaults.

One of the artistic highlights of Saint Hedwig are its magnificent stained glass windows. Along the nave they depict scenes from the lives of Jesus and Mary found in Scripture and Catholic Tradition, beginning with the Annunciation, continuing through Jesus' public ministry and Resurrection, to Pentecost and Mary's Assumption. In the apse, the three windows in the middle feature favorite saints of the parish, while the two windows on either side are scenes that foreshadow the Eucharist: the Multiplication of the Loaves in the Gospels and Melchizedek, a priest and king who appeared in the Book of Genesis. In the vestibule, the windows honor two notable Polish saints: Saint Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr, and Saint John Kanty (Cantius) of Krakow, a fifteenth-century priest and professor.

Paintings throughout the church also contribute to its beautiful environment. The mural in the vault of the apse shows Mary's coronation by the Holy Trinity as Mother of the Church and Queen of Heaven and Earth. The ceiling of the nave is decorated with a series of paintings depicting the Annunciation, Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. A portrait of Saint Hedwig hangs in the choir loft above the main entrance.

NOTABLE PARISH COLLECTIONS

Cabinets at the rear of the church display important relics and artifacts from the history of the parish. The parish's collection contains relics of the True Cross, as well as Saints Hedwig, Phillip, and Thomas Aquinas. Especially significant among the historical liturgical vessels is a monstrance donated to Saint Hedwig by Father Edward Sorin, C.S.C., founder of the University of Notre Dame.

Architectural Glossary

- **Barrel Vault:** A roof or ceiling in the form of a semi-circular arch or a series of arches, typical of churches and other large, formal buildings.
- **Colonnade:** A row of columns supporting a roof or arcade.
- **Groin Vault:** A groin vault is produced by the intersection at right angles of two barrel vaults. The word "groin" refers to the edge between the intersecting vaults.

Photography: Bartholomew J. Timm
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Sources: "St. Hedwig," *Saint of the Day*, www.americancatholic.org; Wikimedia Foundation, "Hedwig of Silesia," en.wikipedia.org; Saint Patrick and Saint Hedwig Parish, "Welcome to Saint Hedwig Parish," www.sspatrickhedwig.org; John Palmer, *South Bend: Crossroads of Commerce*, Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2003.