

Faith Through the Ages: Celebrating 150 Years of Community and 100 Years of Architecture

By Ellie Malesiewski

Erie, Pa., January 23, 2025 - Amidst the timeless sounds of prayer and hymns, one Catholic church stands as the community's heart and a spiritual anchor, as well as a historical landmark. This year, St. Gregory's Catholic Church celebrates not one, but two milestones: 150 years since its congregation first gathered in faith, and 100 years since the architecture. This double anniversary invites reflection on the past and a new vision for the future. The church prepares to honor its legacy with inspiring community celebration.

The church has served the community for generations. It hosts weddings, baptisms, funerals, philanthropic events, and gatherings that are integral elements of local life. As the church marks its dual anniversaries, parish members reflect on its role as a spiritual and social foundation for the community.

"St. Gregory's has always been a helping hand to the community, especially when catastrophes hit. The church was recently collecting items for flood victims," said Kathy Malesiewski, a lifelong member of the church.



St. Gregory Catholic Church: The current church architecture, originally built in 1925.

(Photo courtesy of the parish website)

According to the church website, St. Gregory's was founded in 1865 by a small group of Irish immigrants who had settled in North East after fleeing the potato famine. They initially gathered in a home to hold Mass and with the support of the first Bishop of Erie, built their first wooden church in 1867. Over time, the church grew along with the community. In

1925, the current brick church was built to accommodate the growing congregation. Today, the church stands as a symbol of faith and community.

“When I think about our church celebrating this double anniversary, I get choked up. I think of my family’s history at this church as well as at the school. My parents, grandparents, myself, my children, and now my grandchildren receive all their sacraments at the same place. We are blessed to have such a terrific community of faith that has stood the test of time,” said Lori Helffrich, lifelong parish member.

To honor the double anniversary, the church is planning ongoing celebrations throughout the year. Celebrations intend to bring the community together in both reflection and joy.

“The plan is to accentuate what we stand for as a Parish Family including faith, service to the entire community, and simply gathering together to enjoy the good company of one another,” said Father Tom Brooks, the parish priest.

Events include the Anniversary Cash Bash, a fundraiser where games, raffles, food, and beverages will be available. Two televisions will be given away to two lucky parishioners, in honor of the two anniversaries being celebrated. The church is also planning to collect canned goods for the needy. The goal is 250 cans, a representation of the 150- and 100-year anniversaries. Celebrations will take place all year long to honor the dual anniversaries.

“During Lent, for example, we'll be having three consecutive evenings of recollection centered on thanking God for the gifts of the past, rejoicing in our present, and looking forward to the future,” said Father Tom Brooks.



St. Gregory's: St. Gregory's church interior decorated for the Easter season, in preparation for celebrations. *(Photo courtesy of the parish website)*

Over the years, St. Gregory's has navigated changes both big and small. Its doors have remained open to all who seek comfort, guidance, and connection. Its intricate stained-glass windows and lofty arches tell stories of strength and faith. Its programs and outreach efforts continue to evolve. Whether through organizing food drives, supporting local families in need, or offering a quiet place for reflection, St. Gregory's has always been more than a building. It is a lasting symbol of the strength and faith of the North East community.

"The faith of the people here is truly inspiring, and I always feel blessed to be assigned here. I would like to leave you with a quote I am using tomorrow from a lifelong senior parishioner. He wrote me about the Parish family saying: "We need to continue to let God shape our perspective and we will all be just fine,"" said Father Tom Brooks.

St. Gregory's Catholic Church marks a milestone in its history and its role in the community. From its simple beginnings in a small home to becoming a place where people gather for worship, celebration, and support, the church has always been a source of strength and connection in the community. These anniversaries honor its past while looking ahead to the future. Parishioners will come together to celebrate, give back, and continue its legacy of faith and service. St. Gregory's remains a cherished part of the community, as it has been for generations.

The church welcomes all who wish to visit, celebrate, or participate. In the heart of North East, it continues to serve the community in many ways. For more information about mass times, history, and upcoming events, visit the parish website or contact the church office.

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