

Church Bells

The church bells have been a part of Saint Boniface since 1887. They were cast by the Henry Stuckstede and Company bell foundry in Saint Louis, Missouri. This company was founded in 1855 by Johann Gerhard Stuckstede and became the largest American producer of bells west of Cincinnati. This company went through various name changes and different Stuckstede family ownership through 1961 and is now closed.

When the bells were cast at the bell foundry in Saint Louis, each one was given a name. The largest bell, weighing 1000 pounds, was named "Ava Maria", the middle sized bell, weighing 595 pounds, was named "Saint Joseph", and the smallest bell, weighing 360 pounds, was named "Saint Boniface". These inscriptions are highly visible on each bell. All three bells are made up of 80% copper and 20% tin.

The bells, installed in the first church in 1887, were moved to the new church in 1939. They were originally rung by pulling on ropes that were attached to them. These ropes extended down from the attic to the first floor. Bell ringers, usually altar boys, would stand in the hallway behind the altar, and pull on the ropes. Many stories have been shared by past altar servers who were responsible for ringing these bells. Some remember hanging on to the ropes while the bells rang and being lifted off the floor, while others remember having to climb into the attic to retrieve ropes that had flipped up through the ceiling onto the attic floor.

In February, 1973, The Verdin Company from Cincinnati, Ohio, removed the ropes and installed a new automatic bell ringing system. Three swingers were installed to electrically swing the bells. (This replaced the ropes). Three new bell wheels were also installed. These wheels were steel fabricated pieces that were bolted to the yokes that allowed the bells to swing. (This replaced the boys pulling the ropes.) An electric striker was also installed to toll for funerals and to ring the Angelus.

This new equipment was set up to be operated manually from toggle switches and from an analog program clock. This programmable system allowed for various combinations of ringing tones at different times during the day, seven days a week. The cost of this system was \$5,535.89, which included preliminary electrical work that was done months in advance to prepare for the installation.

It should be noted that at that time, the balance of the bells hardware was original and as old as the bells themselves. The cast iron "A" frame that supports them, and the iron yokes positioned on the tops of the bells that allow them to swing, are also originals, and still being used today.

In 2008, extensive repair was required. The Verdin Company replaced the solenoid on the toll motor. They fabricated new headpieces, clappers, and clapper springs, as the originals were damaged and deteriorating. The mechanical operational clock was failing and was replaced with a new digital electronic system. The cost for repairs was \$23,190.

With the new electric control system, the bells are able to strike the hour and toll for funerals. This system also provides all three bells to peal (ring at the same time) for Mass call, Angelus, weddings, and High Feast days. A new wireless remote was provided for the organist to operate the bells from the choir loft.

The history of church bells show they were originally rung for monastic purposes. It was customary for Catholics to recite the "Angelus" (Latin for angel), at 6 a.m., 12 noon, and again at 6 p.m. The church bells were rung at these times as a reminder to say this prayer, which was a devotion in memory of the Incarnation. Saint Boniface still follows this tradition, and the "Angelus" can also be heard three times a day. The sound for this is a triple strike repeated three times with a pause in between each set. Currently, the bells are set to toll on the hour, every hour, and ring five minutes before the 4 p.m. Mass on Saturday, and the 8 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Masses on Sunday.

The church has a contract with The Verdin Company for a yearly maintenance program to guarantee that the bells are kept in good working order. When you hear the Saint Boniface bells ring, let them be a reminder of their rich history and their invaluable addition to the parish.



Ava Maria



Saint Joseph



Saint Boniface

