



Diocese of Erie
ROMAN CATHOLIC

A Legacy of Faith, Courage and Community

BLACK CATHOLIC HISTORY IN THE DIOCESE OF ERIE



A community's determination to find a spiritual home

The history of Black Catholics in the Diocese of Erie is a story of faith, perseverance and a deep desire to belong.

In the 1940s, Black Catholics in Erie sought a place where they could worship, raise their families in the faith and build a community of their own. Among those who helped make that vision a reality was Henri Ellman, a Black Catholic layman who worked as a redcap at Erie's Union Station.

In 1942, Ellman approached Father Paul Obenrader about establishing a Catholic parish for Erie's Black community. His efforts helped begin a journey that would leave a lasting mark on the local Church.

Three milestones in Erie's Black Catholic history



1942

A VISION TAKES SHAPE

Henri Ellman advocates for a Catholic community where Black families in Erie can gather in faith.



DECEMBER 8, 1946

**A COMMUNITY GATHERS
FOR MASS**

Mass is celebrated at the Lake City Dwellings social center, marking an important milestone in the development of the community.



MAY 26, 1948

**A SPIRITUAL HOME
IS ESTABLISHED**

Immaculate Conception Church is completed on East 16th Street in Erie. For generations, the parish becomes a place of worship, fellowship, family life and belonging.

A legacy that lives on

Immaculate Conception was more than a church building. It was a community built through the faith and determination of people who sought to make a home for themselves and future generations within the Catholic Church.

Although the parish later merged with St. Mary Parish in 2009, its history remains an important part of the story of the Diocese of Erie.

During Black Catholic History Month, we remember those who helped build this community, give thanks for their witness and celebrate the many ways Black Catholics have enriched the life of our local Church.

FAITH • HISTORY • WITNESS

Their faith helped build a community. Their legacy remains part of our story.



Learn more about Black Catholic History Month and the Sainly Seven on the path to sainthood.

Visit www.eriercd.org/bchm.html or scan the QR code.

