

**Most Reverend Francis Xavier Krautbauer  
(1875-1885)**

When Bishop Francis Xavier Krautbauer was consecrated as the second Bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay at St. John the Evangelist Cathedral in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on June 29, 1875, the fledgling diocese of only seven years had not yet been prospering. He realized that he had an extremely difficult task ahead of him. To prepare him for his Episcopal ministry, Bishop Krautbauer--- with his Vicar General Crosier Father Edward Daems---made visitations to most of the diocese during his first four months in office.

When he arrived in Green Bay on July 2, 1875, the construction of an adequate cathedral, in addition brick or stone churches, schools, and other religious institutions, were high priorities. Another challenge was the many ethnic groups needing priests who could speak their languages.. Another challenge was the aftermath of the historic October 8, 1871 Peshtigo Fire. This event caused the deaths of more than 1,000 people and destruction of thousands of acres of forests. Likewise, the homes of many more people were destroyed as well as churches and rectories in the area.

The Diocese of Green Bay was one-fourth larger than the country of Belgium. It desperately needed churches for the many immigrants from various European countries so that they would not lose their religion; money was also needed to pay debts and funds to build a cathedral and Catholic schools.

Francis Xavier Krautbauer (who became a citizen of the United States on September 27, 1856) was born to Francis Xavier Krautbauer and Ursula Wendl on January 12, 1824, at Mappach, near the city of Bruck in the Oberpfalz region within the Diocese of Regensburg, Bavaria, Germany. He began his studies for the priesthood in Amberg, Bavaria. After later attending the Gregorianum of the University of Munich, Francis concluded his studies at the seminary in Regensburg (Ratisbon). He was ordained to the priesthood on July 16, 1850 by Bishop Valentine Riedl. In October of that same year, Father Krautbauer was recruited to serve as a missionary priest by Bishop John Timon of Buffalo, New York who happened to be in Europe at the time.

With the permission of Bishop Timon, Father Krautbauer accepted the invitation to serve as a priest in America. He first served as assistant pastor at the cathedral parish in Buffalo, New York, then as pastor of a smaller parish in the same diocese and as pastor of St. Peter Parish in Rochester, New York. The last of these was a most difficult assignment. Through his consistent efforts, however, in dealing with reconciling groups—including trustees—he guided the parish to a flourishing condition.

In June 1858, tragedy struck Father Anton Urbanek, Chaplain of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was killed in the explosion of the river steamer “Pennsylvania” while on a visitation tour on route to St. Louis, Missouri with the Mother Superior of the religious congregation.

This religious congregation was a favorite of Bishop John Henni of Milwaukee and had been founded in Neunburg vorm Wald in Bavaria; it was only a short distance from Father Krautbauer's home village. During the summer of 1858, the Milwaukee Community of Sisters had selected Father Krautbauer, due to his prudence, judgment and experience, as their general spiritual director, chaplain and ecclesiastical superior; Bishop Timon, however, was not eager to release this priest whom he valued so highly.

Nevertheless, as circumstances evolved, Mother Caroline Gerhardinger continued to look for a way for Father Krautbauer to become their chaplain. Her good friend, Father Joseph Salzmann--- who had obtained for the Sisters the service earlier of Father Urbanek and was at the time collecting funds for the new Milwaukee St. Francis Seminary--- answered the pleas of the Religious Superior by urging Bishop Timon to release Father Krautbauer. Finally, against what he believed God told him to do, Bishop Timon allowed Father Krautbauer to accept the chaplaincy of the Sisters. The young priest had a strong inclination to accept and did so immediately..

Father Krautbauer frequently preached with untiring zeal in the Cathedral and churches in Milwaukee as well as in other cities across the country. His knowledge of mathematics, along with his intense interest in architecture, served him so well as he utilized these unique gifts in the construction of additions with a tower and cupola to the Notre Dame Motherhouse in Milwaukee between 1859 and 1875.

Fifteen years after coming to Milwaukee, Father Krautbauer had an unfortunate experience that resulted in the impairment of his health for the rest of his life. On his journey by boat (because he had missed the last train scheduled to leave Milwaukee that day to officiate at the funeral of his brother-in-law) a serious accident occurred on the water and the passengers were forced to resort to lifeboats for survival. Despite much struggle--- resulting in extreme exhaustion and weakness from the accident--- the Sisters' chaplain was saved from death.

Even though Father Krautbauer had been considered as a candidate to the bishopric for vacant dioceses earlier, on April 21, 1875, he was appointed the Second Bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay. At his installation on June 29 of that year he spoke about the obligations he had undertaken and of the spirit of humility with which he entered the great labor of the future.

Father Frederick Katzer, a young professor of theology at St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee at the time, became secretary to the new bishop, chancellor of the diocese, and rector of the Pro-Cathedral parish in Green Bay. He would later succeed Father Daems who died in February 1889 as the second Vicar General of the diocese. In 1885, Father Katzer would succeed his friend as the Third Bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay.

The first Diocese of Green Bay Synod, July 1876, demonstrated a key to Bishop Krautbauer's administrative success. It resolved some of the problems of ecclesiastical organization. Bishop Krautbauer's major achievements included the following:

- the planning and construction of the present St. Francis Xavier Cathedral from 1876-1889; it was modeled after the St. Louis Cathedral in Munich, Germany and solemnly consecrated on November 20, 1881;
- the choice of St. Francis Xavier as patron of the Cathedral and the Diocese of Green Bay in December 1878;
- the purchase of the former Ursuline Academy on Webster and Crooks Streets in Green Bay for conversion into an orphanage;
- provision for the spiritual care of the Menominee Indians on the Keshena Reservation through the services of the Franciscan Fathers of the St. Louis Province;
- the planning and construction of a chapel at Robinsonville.

During his episcopate, the Catholic population in the Diocese of Green Bay rose from about 60,000 to more than 70,000 and the number of diocesan priests increased from 63 to 81. He also established Catholic schools and had great concern for the sick and the elderly priests of the diocese, including providing for them in his own home. In one of his letters he wrote, “The lot of an old priest in America is pitiable. He is like the old postal horse in Germany—one good kick and out the door.”

From his first year as Ordinary, Bishop Krautbauer showed interest in civil as well as spiritual affairs. He not only approved of city improvements, for example, but contributed generously with his personal finances.

Bishop Krautbauer’s health in later years caused him great difficulties. Previous to his sudden death on December 17, 1885, he had made a trip to Europe in 1877 for his official papal visit and to visit his homeland in Bavaria. One reliable account described Bishop Krautbauer as “...a very noble personality, a crystal clear character of heart, a heart most lovable, a defender of truth and justice with faults converted into virtues.”

The body of Bishop Krautbauer is buried under the floor in the north transept of St. Francis Xavier Cathedral he so loved. The marble slab covering his grave is even with the floor, preserving his wish that penitents going to and from the sacrament of penance might pray for him as they walk over his remains. His memory lives on in part because he was the overseer for the construction of St. Francis Xavier Cathedral.

*Father James P. Massart*