

**Most Reverend Frederick Katzer
(1886-1891)**

Frederick Katzer left his native Austria in May 1864 at the urging of Father Francis Pierz who was visiting the seminary to appeal for volunteers to offer missionary services in America. At the time a group of 15 seminarians had accepted the challenge. During Frederick's formative years of study in Austria under the Jesuit Fathers, he seriously considered joining the Jesuits after his arrival in America.

However, in America, Frederick discovered--- to his surprise--- that Bishop Thomas Grace had more seminarians than he needed. In a similar way to that of Francis Xavier Krautbauer, who had come to Milwaukee in part at the urging of Father Joseph Salzmann at St. Francis Seminary, Frederick Katzer completed his studies at this seminary.

Bishop John Henni—later to be appointed the first Archbishop of Milwaukee on June 3, 1871—ordained Frederick Katzer to the diocesan priesthood on December 21, 1866. Not quite 23 years old, he celebrated his First Mass at Hartford, Wisconsin. As a German immigrant (born on February 7, 1844 at Ebensee in upper Austria, son of Charles Katzer and Barbara Reinhardtgruber), this brilliant and studious young priest was assigned as a mathematics instructor and later as a philosophy and dogmatic theology professor and Chair of the Department at the ten year old St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee.

Father Katzer's mother and father had moved to America with him and resided with their son as duties called him from place to place. He was known for his deep devotion to his parents.

Following Father Katzer's visit to Europe with one of his faculty colleagues, he instituted the *Albetus Verein* to stimulate the student appetite for German literature. During this fruitful period in his life, Father Katzer wrote *Der Kampf der Gegenwart* (The Combat of the Present Age) as an allegorical drama in five acts. His poetic and dramatic ability—particularly in this religious drama—portrayed the struggle of the Church against its enemies.

At the same time that Father Katzer was teaching at the seminary, then Father Krautbauer--- as Chaplain for the Notre Dame Sisters and widely traveled preacher--- was very aware of the work of this young professor. As a result, Bishop Krautbauer's appointment to the Green Bay See in 1875 also involved Father Katzer who accepted the invitation to accompany the new bishop to Green Bay as his secretary.

In something of rapid progression, Father Katzer was appointed Rector of the Cathedral and Vicar General of the Diocese of Green Bay on the death of Father Edward Daems who had served as the first Vicar General of the diocese. The new Vicar General assisted Bishop Krautbauer in the construction of the new Cathedral closely modeled after the famous St. Louis Cathedral in Bavaria, Germany.

In 1882, Father Katzer oversaw the very moving "World Drama of Redemption by Jesus Christ" mural painted by Johann Schmitt, an artist from Covington, Kentucky, which is

displayed prominently on the back wall in the Cathedral sanctuary. In 1884, the Vicar General also oversaw the construction of a new school.

With the sudden unexpected death of Bishop Krautbauer on December 17, 1885, the Vicar General became the administrator of the diocese. In this capacity Father Katzer attended the First Provincial Council of Milwaukee which began on May 23, 1886.

Sources differ as to the exact day of Father Katzer's appointment as the Third Bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay, but the *Official Catholic Directory* lists May 30, 1886 as the day. At the age of 42, he was the first to be raised to the bishopric in the new St. Francis Xavier Cathedral by Archbishop Michael Heiss of Milwaukee on September 21, 1886.

One of Bishop Katzer's first official acts in his short episcopate in Green Bay was to try to fulfill an obligation given to bishops at the Council of Baltimore: to plan for the indigent priests. Therefore, on December 13, 1887, he founded the Leo Benevolent Society to assist in the care of aged and ill priests. To this day the Society operates and includes all the priests of the diocese as members.

As a strong outspoken opponent of the so-called Bennett Law prohibiting the use of anything but the English language in teaching reading, writing, arithmetic and United States History, Bishop Katzer was influential in the repeal of this unfair legislation even though it had passed earlier in the legislature. Such a law would have discriminated against German immigrants and others as well as the entire Catholic School System at the time.

Bishop Katzer made his first ad limina visit to Rome in 1888 and in 1889 he convened the Second Synod of the Diocese of Green Bay. On January 30, 1891, he was appointed Archbishop of Milwaukee where he served until he died in 1903. Bishop Katzer was buried in the cemetery of his alma mater in Milwaukee the same day that Pope Leo XIII died.

Because Bishop Katzer struggled with the English language, he avoided formal speeches as much as possible. In fact, one author stated that although he could be somewhat sharp and curt at times in his formal dealings with others, a kind and considerate personality was hidden behind the official façade.

Father James P. Massart