

**Most Reverend Joseph John Fox  
(1904-1914)**

Paul and Catherine (Bartell) Fox came to America in 1840 and were among the first German settlers in Green Bay. They were two of the most energetic and persistent 19th Catholics of northern Wisconsin, helping to found St. Mary Parish (Green Bay). (St. Mary would become St. Francis Xavier Cathedral.)

Joseph Fox, their third child, became the fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay and the only native son to be an ordinary of the diocese. He had an older sister, Cecilia, who became the prioress of the Dominican convent in Racine, Wisconsin. He completed his elementary education at the pro-cathedral (old St. Mary) before enrolling in the classics at St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee. He studied philosophy in Bastogne, Belgium, where he became proficient in French. He studied theology at the American College at the University of Louvain, Belgium. On June 7, 1879, Joseph Fox was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Green Bay.

His first assignment was as pastor of St. Kilian Parish, New Franken. In May 1880, he was called back to Green Bay to be the secretary to Bishop Krautbauer and pastor of St. John Parish, Green Bay. He served for three years. Highlights of this pastorate included construction of the St. John Rectory, opening of St. John School, and reducing a troublesome parish debt. For the next 11 years--- beginning on August 31, 1883--- Father Fox served as pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Marinette, where he served with a large number of French Canadian people. Again, he helped to turn a parish which was somewhat negligent and indifferent into one of the most steadfast and progressive parishes in the Diocese of Green Bay. He oversaw construction of a new school, major additions to the church building, and the purchase of a large and first-class pipe organ. Despite the very difficult issues he faced during his pastorate, both Catholics and Protestants respected him.

In 1894, Bishop Messmer selected Father Fox as Vicar General for the diocese. With this major diocesan appointment, he lived in the Bishop's House until the bishop was appointed the Archbishop of Milwaukee. As Vicar General, Father Fox supervised the construction of St. Joseph Orphan Asylum—later known as St. Joseph Home for Children—from May 1895 to March 1896. Father Fox was also given the honor of being named a Domestic Prelate by Pope Leo XIII with the title of Monsignor in 1898; apparently he was the first priest of the diocese to have received this honor. It is interesting to note that in 1899 when Bishop Vertin of the Diocese of Marquette, Michigan died, Monsignor Fox was erroneously publicly mentioned as his successor.

Following Bishop Messmer's appointment as Archbishop of Milwaukee, Monsignor Fox was named the Administrator of the Diocese of Green Bay. He himself was appointed the fifth Bishop of Green Bay by Pope Leo XIII on May 27, 1904. On July 25, 1904---at the age of 48--- Monsignor Joseph Fox was consecrated Bishop of Green Bay in St. Francis Xavier Cathedral. About 800 people—attended the historic event.

United States Senator Isaac Stephenson, a personal Protestant friend from the time Bishop Fox was a Marinette pastor, came to Green Bay in his 90 foot yacht with a captain, cook and crew to attend the consecration of the new Bishop. Then he left the boat and crew in Green Bay and returned by train to Marinette. The boat was at the service of Bishop Fox to entertain the visiting bishops for several days.

During Bishop Fox's ten years as Ordinary, the Catholic population grew from about 130,000 to about 147,000 and the number of diocesan priests rose from 141 to 172. It is said that he took delight in telling others that he had good priests and the clergy felt the same about him. An early source stated that Bishop Fox ruled as a scholar, saint and father, conscientiously fulfilling his commission to feed the lambs and feed the sheep.

Monsignor Joseph Marx--- later Diocesan Vicar General and longtime historian--- wrote that Bishop Fox had a Buick which he never drove and stated further, "*...I had to meet him at the depot, often at night, and had to light the five lights, open the light, turn on gas tank on running board and strike match, many of them when windy went out.*"

Bishop Fox enjoyed hunting, boating and roaming through the northern woods. His vacations usually were spent in a hunters' lodge on Sand Lake in Oneida County. He had the first motor boat on the Fox River, was a 16 foot open boat called *Quo Vadis*. Being a good marksman, Bishop Fox's companions spoke of his success when deer hunting. His private study was even decorated with trophies of the hunt.

The Chancery Office was housed in what would later become the Cathedral rectory. Bishop Fox took the streetcar from his residence in the bungalow on the campus of the orphanage to the chancery every day. His residence was destroyed by fire in 1908 and rebuilt in 1909.

Very early in his episcopacy, he asked Monsignor Marx to oversee the construction of a new Chancery just east of the orphanage. The building was also the Bishop's residence until 1976, when a new house was constructed for the bishop. . Senator Stephenson paid for the earlier Bishop's residence at a cost of \$34,000.00.

Monsignor Marx said that he was expected to stay home and pump the piano for the Bishop since he enjoyed listening to music. He also enjoyed playing solitaire.

When some of the counties were transferred to neighboring dioceses in the redistricting of the Wisconsin area around 1905, Monsignor Marx suspected that Bishop Fox engineered the placement of some more difficult priests in another diocese. When the diocesan boundary lines were altered on May 3, 1905, the motherhouse of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Manitowoc, became part of the Diocese of Green Bay. In his tenure as Bishop, 15 new parishes were opened in the diocese and nine were staffed by sisters.

Bishop Fox resigned for health reasons on December 4, 1914. On March 14, 1915, Bishop Fox died and was interred in the Fox Mausoleum which he had built in the Allouez Cemetery.

The Bishop's last will directed that a sacristy be added to St. Francis Xavier Cathedral and that his estate be used to defray the cost. A marble tablet in the sacristy records this generous gift in loving memory of his departed parents, Paul and Catherine Fox.

*Father James P. Massart*