

The history of St. James Parish. In 1905, there were 7 Catholic families totaling 34 members living in Amherst. The nearest Catholic Church was St. Patrick's of Lanark. Fr. John Rohlinger, pastor of St. Patrick's, celebrated Mass in family homes in Amherst.

On February 15, 1914, St. James was officially established as a mission church of St. Patrick's of Lanark, having nine charter member families. Land was purchased for \$250 and the old Lutheran Church was purchased for \$275 and moved to the site for \$60.75. The largest amount donated was \$500 from the Catholic Church Extension Society. The first Mass in the little white church was offered on Easter Sunday 1914.

In 1946 the Diocese of Madison was established. As part of realignment, Portage County became a part of the Diocese of La Crosse.

By 1949, when Fr. Disher was serving St. James, two Masses were held every Sunday. The parish had grown in numbers. People were standing on the church steps and looking in the windows. The little white church was too small.

Additional land was purchased and on June 2, 1949 digging began for the new church. The labor, in large part, was hired within the parish. Many of the parishioners donated their services, some coming after regular working hours. "These good people, knowing the great need of a church, and cognizant of the lack of funds, put their shoulders to the wheel and the difficult task was completed." After the new church was completed, the old white church was sold, moved, and remodeled into a home. On April 29, 1951 the new church was dedicated by Bishop John P. Treacy. The church was paid for by July 23, 1962.

In July 1966 Fr. Ernie Kaim was installed as the first resident pastor and St. James was established as a parish. Fr. Kaim moved into the new rectory in December, 1966. On February 18, 1976, Fr. Robert Pedretti became our pastor. On January 1, 2009, Fr. Bob retired from active service and took on the status of 'senior priest', having served meritoriously for more than 32 years.

By 2004, St. James had grown to a parish of 320 families. On October 18, 2004, construction began on a new parish center. The parish center includes classrooms for religious education, parish offices, a large dining hall and kitchen as well as providing handicap accessibility to the church and restrooms. It provides the space needed to facilitate the many parish ministries.

On June 19, 2005, Bishop Listecki celebrated Mass in the parish church and dedicated the new parish center. During this celebration Bishop Listecki declared "The Spirit of the Lord is truly alive in this parish." The love of God and desire to serve continues to be a characteristic of the members of St. James Parish.