

# The Windows of St. Michael's

*A brief history about those who donated the stained glass windows of St. Michael's, or in whose memory they were given.*

## Window Symbol: Alpha

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet. The symbol is a reference to a passage in the Book of Revelation: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty." Rev. 1:8

## Inscription in Bottom Panel: Gift of Rev. Ambrose Briscoe

*There are two windows dedicated to Rev. Ambrose Briscoe: this large one in the front of the church and a smaller one in the transept of the church. The story below discusses Father Briscoe's pastorate; the other story introduces Father Briscoe and his family.*

It's fitting that the symbol for this window is *Alpha*, which represents "the beginning," because Rev. Ambrose Briscoe was responsible for "the beginning" of the stained glass windows in the church of St. Michael the Archangel. All of the windows in the nave (older section) appear to have been installed during his pastorate. St. Michael Church owes much to Father Briscoe for the beauty of its windows, and it's fitting that his contribution and memory are honored.

Sometime around 1875 Ambrose Briscoe was ordained to the priesthood in Ireland. He may have been recruited to serve in the Hartford diocese, because when he emigrated to America in 1877 he went straight to the diocese. His first assignment was as curate to Rev. Jeremiah Fitzpatrick in St. Patrick's parish, New Haven. Father Fitzpatrick had been pastor of St. Michael parish before going to New Haven, and he and Father Briscoe probably had many discussions about the Pawcatuck parish. By 1884, only six years after his arrival in the diocese, Father Briscoe was elevated to a pastorate. His assignment... St. Michael the Archangel, Father Fitzpatrick's old parish.

Father Briscoe arrived at St. Michael's on January 19, 1884. One of his first acts after arriving in the parish was to preside over the negotiations with Bishop Thomas Hendricken of the Diocese of Providence to transfer the Westerly Catholics from St. Michael's, where they had worshiped for 25 years, to the Providence diocese and, therefore, to a parish of their own.

Father Briscoe was an interesting man. He was what some would call a bit of a "wheeler and dealer." A man of considerable vision, he had a significant impact on St. Michael's during the eighteen years that he was the pastor. He was a shrewd and financially successful man. While in the parish, he wiped out the debt and then went on to build a school, purchase more properties, cast the school bell, open a new cemetery, and inspire his parishioners to finance and dedicate the beautiful stained glass windows to the memory of themselves and their families.

Father Briscoe's service as pastor of St. Michael's spanned three decades, from 1884 into the 1900s. In 1902 he retired after having served in only two parishes during his career in the priesthood: St. Patrick's in New Haven, where he was a curate, and St. Michael's in Pawcatuck, his only pastorate. Father Briscoe spent the final years of his pastorate in declining health and was aided by other priests who served as parish administrators.

