

History of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church

Fordyce, Nebraska

In the mid 1800's, when Northern Nebraska and Cedar County were practically a virgin territory, a group of pioneers settled either as homesteaders or bought land at a small cost, in which today contains the Parish of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Fordyce, Nebraska. Most of these people were of German descent and came from the Province of Westphalia in Germany. These settlers were mostly Catholic, and had brought with them from Germany a strong faith in God and a similarly strong belief in Catholic Education and to worship God. The first settlers drove to St. Helena to attend Mass. Later a church was built at Menominee and the arduous task of fulfilling their religious duties became lighter. When St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Constance, was built and when Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Bow Valley and Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Hartington, were built, settlers transferred to these various parishes depending upon the distance of travel. Constance was established as early as 1868.

With this thought of travel in mind, Holy Cross Chapel was established in 1887. It was built in the territory commonly known as the Lammers Ranch. A district school was in close proximity to the farm of Frank Lammers, where the Chapel was also located. In its infancy, mass was celebrated once a week by the pastor of Constance, with instruction of children taking place after Mass. For a period Mass celebrated either every Sunday or every other Sunday, with the purpose of the chapel being the opportunity to instruct the children in the doctrines of the Catholic Faith.

As the territory became more populated, the tracks for the Chicago, St. Paul and Minneapolis and Omaha railroad were laid from Emerson to Crofton in 1906. In 1907 the town site of Fordyce was established, receiving its name from a train dispatcher, William B. Fordyce. Havekost and Chase owned the first store. With the advent of the railroad, the territory grew quickly and people established more business places.

Early in the spring of 1908, a group of men from the territory went to Omaha to call on Bishop Richard Scannell, the Bishop of Omaha, requesting permission to build a church in Fordyce. After permission had been granted, the property for the building of a church was quickly obtained from J. M. Talcott and D.A. Matthews. Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

& 6, in block 13 in the First Addition were obtained on April 15, 1908. Shortly after, a contract was made with Henry Stuckenhoff of Hartington to build a church 100 ft. by 40 ft. and 18 ft. high. The tower was to be 75 ft. high. At the time, Fr. Adam Brass was the pastor of Constance, and the work proceeded under his supervision. Fr. Pieper, who was pastor when the cornerstone was laid in August 1908, succeeded him. Fr. Mueller, who presided at St. Helena and the Dean, laid the cornerstone. Other priests present were: Fr. Pieper, Fr. Brass, and Fr. Biernbach.

The first trustees of the new parish were John Wuebben and Herman Wiebelhaus. They certainly deserve a word of praise for their wonderful work, physically and also for the ability shown in getting the small handful of people to work as an efficient unity, in the gathering of funds, and the furnishing of labor. Both worked diligently at the church day after day. Mr. Wuebben even hired a man for the summer so he could spend more time at the church.

This young parish began with a meager thirty families. These families made great sacrifices to complete the structure for approximately \$8,000.00 and then furnished it at a total cost of \$10,760.00. This work and dedication was a labor of love and the church they built 100 years ago, still stands today and serves the people of the community. It was well built, a job well done. The altars were ordered from the Dubuque Altar Mfg. Co., at a cost of \$1,791.50. The bells were obtained from St. Louis. John Buschelman and John Tigges donated \$250.00 to pay for these bells, which still hang in the church tower and call the

people to worship. During the construction of the church a question arose, which caused great concern, amongst the parishioners. What will the name of the new parish be? We must have a patron to guard and protect us, in the parish infancy and as it grew to maturity. One group wished to call it Sacred Heart Parish. Another was interested in calling it St. John the Baptist. Finally, the latter won the battle. Of the thirty original members, nine bore the name John and so St. John the Baptist was chosen to guide and to guard the destiny of the church and its members.

During the fall and part of the winter of 1908, the interior work was completed. Finally on February 18, 1909, Fr. Mueller of St. Helena blessed the church. Fr. Pieper, the pastor of Constance, who was chosen to minister to the parishioners spiritually, celebrated the Mass of dedication. The priests of the neighborhood attended; even the Retired Rev. Bernard Sinne attended from Omaha.

An intense interest existed in this small, new parish and thus we find that already at this early age a choir had been formed. Even local altar boys were found in Martin Buschelman and Louis Wiebelhaus.

During the construction, new members joined the small handful of 30 families. Among those founders we find the names, Albers, Buschelman, Becker, Lammers, Suing, Thoman, Wuebben, Tigges, Pieper, Juergens, Lange, Sudbeck, Thoene, Reiner, Felber, Kuehn, Koch, Wiebelhaus, Holzbauer, Stevens, Bert, Prinz, Schwaller, Schaeffer and Hochstein. Notably today many of these same family names are prominent in the records of the Parish.

In the beginning, it was impossible to have a resident pastor. Instead, Fr. Pieper administered the parish from Constance, who also took care of Holy Cross Chapel. In June of 1909, Fr. Francis Korte became pastor of Constance and second spiritual Father of the people of St. John's.

The people of St. John's were not content to be a mission of Constance, so they again went to Bishop Scannell asking for a resident pastor. The trustees returned from Omaha with the good news that as soon as a residence could be furnished, a pastor would be appointed. Thus, they purchased the Frank Suing residence for the sum of \$4,150.00, aided by a loan of \$3,000.00. And so, in October of 1909, the Rev. Bernard Teves became the first resident pastor of St. John the Baptist Catholic Parish. The parish had been officially incorporated on August 23, 1909.

The new pastor worked energetically with his people to meet the educational needs of their children. On May 22, 1911, the parish and pastor decided to hire the School Sisters of St. Francis from Milwaukee, Wisconsin to teach in the local public school. The Peter Becker home across from the church was rented for the Sisters. Today the Becker home is the residence of Joseph and Amanda Potts. In September of 1911 Sr. Carola, Sr. Donata, and Sr. Raphael, O.S.F. began their teaching duties and continued until June of 1919.

Father Teves was a fine organizer of the parish activities. He was active in civic affairs. Being an accomplished musician, he published and had copyrighted twelve compositions under the pen name of Roy Milton. Besides this volume entitled "Songs by the Fireside," Father also composed some church music.

In May 1912, the remainder of the debt on the church was paid. Only four short years after the beginning of construction, the parish was happy to be debt-free.

In October 1912, Father Teves was sent to Europe to further his studies on the Social Question. During his absence Father Herman Stahl, who was stationed at Beaver Creek, came to Fordyce as Administrator. Although he was here only nine months, he left a lasting impression on the parishioners. Father Teves returned in July of 1913. The people rejoiced at his return, but were also saddened to see Fr. Stahl return to Beaver Creek.

In the fall of 1913, Fr. Victor End was appointed pastor. For twenty-one years he was to labor tirelessly for this fast-growing parish, taking an active interest in the people of the community. Under his leadership, St. John the Baptist School was built. The estimated cost was \$26,000.00. After a number of interruptions due to the war and labor strikes, it was finished at a total cost of

\$42,030.45, a substantial increase over the estimated cost. It was dedicated on September 29, 1920, at which time the School Sisters of St. Francis returned to teach. Those returning were Sr. M. Kostka, Sr. Irwina, Sr. Hertula, Sr. Secunda, and Sr. Maronia.

For many years Father End had been plagued with ill health. In June 1934, Father Bernard Westermann was sent to take care of the pastoral duties while Father End convalesced in a hospital in Jonesboro, Arkansas. On December 13, 1934, Father End died in Jonesboro. As quoted in the local paper at the time: "When word reached Cedar County of the death of Fr. End, a deep and earnest feeling of sadness descended over hundreds of people – parishioners and friends- for Father End was a splendid, pious priest of God, a kind friend, a man with malice toward no man, but with a friendly attitude toward all."

On the day of the funeral, the church was much too small. More than fifty priests attended the funeral with Bishop Joseph Rummel singing the Pontifical Requiem Mass. He was laid to rest in St. John the Baptist Cemetery.

After the death of Fr. End, Fr. Bernard Wetermann remained as administrator until the appointment of a new pastor, Fr. Bernard was particularly noted for his work with young people. It was under his administration that the Ladies' Guild was organized and the Christian Mothers became a strictly spiritual organization.

Fr. Daniel Reifenrath came to Fordyce on March 22, 1935. Many knew him since his home was in the Brookey Bottom area north of St. James. At the time of his arrival, he was also serving as Director of the Omaha Diocesan Rural Life Bureau and Vice President of the National Rural Life Conference. Fr. Reifenrath was recognized for his ability as a public speaker and was often called to speak at civic functions. He instilled in the parishioners a great devotion to the Eucharist, causing his successor, Fr. Vanderlaan to often remark about the devotion of the people. Being solicitous not only for the spiritual but also the material well being of the parish, he made many needed repairs on the grounds and buildings. Although drought and the Depression had ravaged the finances, St. John's people worked with Fr. Reifenrath to remodel the parish house, replaster the church, cut down the side altars, remove a hill west of the church and school to provide a better playground area, and build a community baseball diamond which is still used by the town baseball and softball teams today. On June 26, 1942, Father Reifenrath was transferred to St. Aloysius Parish, Aloys, Nebraska.

Coming to St. John's from Ewing, Nebraska, was Father Peter Vanderlaan. He had a great concern for the spiritual and material welfare of the whole parish. Both clergy and laity for his priestly deportment and congenial personality revered him, and he worked quietly and humbly for his people. The remainder of the parish debt was finally paid off, a reserve fund was established, altars, and sanctuary were redecorated and asphalt tile was laid in the aisles and sanctuary. A new Wurlitzer organ was also purchased for \$4,000.00.

Blessed with a revered pastor, the people were to celebrate during Fr. Vanderlaan's pastorate, the First Mass of Fr. Jerome Dickes. Fr. Jerome, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Dickes of St. John's, was the first of two vocations to the priesthood from the parish. His First Mass was on June 3, 1948.

In August of 1950, Fr. Vanderlaan suffered a heart attack, but returned to work after several months. In November of 1951, he was again stricken, so Rev. Liborius Morgenschweis, a Benedictine monk from Schuyler, Nebraska, was sent to care for the parish. After Fr. Vanderlaan's return, Rev. Joseph Lane came in June of 1952 to assist him during his illness. His condition only worsened, however, and in August of 1952 he offered his resignation, knowing it was for the good of the parish. His death came near the patronal feast of the parish, on June 25, 1953. On June 29, Fr. Vanderlaan was buried beside Fr. End in the St. John the Baptist Cemetery.

On September 11, 1952, Rev. Conrad Kaup was appointed pastor of St. John's. The people were to

show him the same wholehearted support they had shown to previous pastors. The church was insulated, windows were weather-stripped, the school was re-shingled and the Sister's living quarters were improved.

In the fall of 1953, permission was obtained from Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan to build a new rectory. In February of 1954, a contract was made to begin construction of the present one-story, ranch-style home. Total cost was \$35,000.00, which included the architectural fee, grading, construction, landscaping, and furnishings. After the rectory was built the church was again renovated and repairs were made to prepare for the Golden Jubilee of the parish.

On March 1, in the Golden Jubilee Year of 1959, the last payment was made on the new rectory, leaving the parish debt-free. In 1959, there were ninety-six families in the parish, four hundred forty souls. All the children of grade-school age attended St. John the Baptist School, and nearly all of the high school aged students attended either Holy Trinity High School in Hartington or Mount Marty High School in Yankton, South Dakota.

The Golden Jubilee was formally celebrated on June 24, 1959, with a Solemn High Mass celebrated by Fr. Bernard Westerman. Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan presided, with Fr. Jerome Dickes preaching the Jubilee sermon. Following Mass, the Fordyce Town Hall was filled to capacity (Estimated six hundred people, including fifty priests and forty sisters) for a formal dinner.

At the dinner, Archbishop Bergan said: *"When we think of the privations of the pioneers as they sacrificed to build this church, we have a feeling not only of gratitude, but also one of challenge to continue their good works. There is no better Catholicity anywhere in the Archdiocese than in Fordyce. In a time when vocations to the religious life are so direly needed, it is gratifying, indeed, to consider the example of Fordyce, where so many vocations have come from a relatively few families."*

As was obvious from the highly complementary remarks of Archbishop Bergan at the Golden Jubilee celebration, the first half century of St. John the Baptist Parish had seen it grow and mature as a Christian community. This strong foundation in faith and commitment to Catholic education would provide the basis for adapting to the many changes that would come in society and in the Church in the next twenty-five years. The Second Vatican Council had been called, and St. John's waited with the rest of the world for the bishops of the church to map out the road to renewal. At the end of the next 25 years, the faithful of St. John's would come to perceive their parish as a "Family: Loving and Sharing."

May of 1963 brought further blessing to St. John's when it proudly celebrated with its native son, Fr. Ralph Lammers, his First Solemn Mass following his ordination to the priesthood two days earlier. Fr. Ralph became the second vocation to the priesthood from St. John's.

The year of Fr. Werner's arrival as pastor saw the birth of Cedar Catholic High School in Hartington, Nebraska of which St. John's became an integral part, along with nine other area parishes. Plans were made in that year for an addition to the former Holy Trinity High School. St. John's assessment for the project was \$40,000.00. With typical optimism and trust in the Lord, St. John's sacrificed to meet its share of the cost. In later years, pastors of St. John's would join other area priests in helping to staff the new Central Catholic High School.

Fr. Werner's tenure at St. John's saw further changes in the structure of our Catholic schools. Vocations to the religious life were dwindling. The smaller number of Sisters along with the rising costs put great burdens on the Catholic grade schools of the area. So in 1968, after much prayer, evaluation, and planning, St. John the Baptist Grade School merged with St. Joseph's of Constance and St. Boniface, of Menominee to establish West Catholic Elementary school, with two school locations being at Fordyce and at Menominee. Sr. Mary Ruth Wageman, O.S.F. was the first principal of West Catholic. At the same time, the parish grade schools of Ss. Peter and Paul, (Bow Valley), Immaculate Conception, (St. Helena), and Ss. Phillip and James, (St. James), merged to form East Catholic Elementary school. These

mergers made it possible to have Sisters serving the children of these six parishes along with the competent lay teachers.

In 1969, while Fr. Werner was still pastor, the CYO of St. John's was recognized as the most active CYO in the archdiocese for the year. Officers Judy Lammers and Jane Becker, along with Fr. Werner, accepted the "parish point trophy." St John's had accumulated eight hundred eighty eight activity points, compared to five hundred eighty nine points for its nearest rival. The CYO had been active since the years when Fr. C. J. Kaup was pastor, and continued until 1972.

Having led St. John's through the dramatic changes in the structures of our Catholic schools, Fr. Werner was transferred on September 19, 1969 to Holy Trinity Parish, Hartington. The people he had served so well bade him loving farewell.

Fr. Francis Kubart, an Atkinson, Nebraska, native came to St. John's on September 18, 1969. This amiable, ever-smiling, and friendly priest took to his duties immediately, teaching both at West Catholic (in the Menominee building) in the mornings, and also teaching Latin classes at Cedar Catholic in the afternoons. Although his stay at Fordyce was short, he was here long enough to learn of the goodness of the people of St. John's and was sorry to leave when the Archbishop requested that he become pastor of the St. Richard's and Holy Angels parishes in Omaha.

On July 24, 1970, Fr. John Connealy became the shepherd of St. John's parish family. This fatherly priest gave loving service to his people, teaching at Cedar Catholic and in the elementary school, frequently visiting the sick of the parish, especially those hospitalized, and being a true father to his flock. During his pastorate, the west and south sides of the church were re-shingled, and the Sisters, who had until then lived in the basement of the school, found another home on the east end of town. This was due to a fuller enrollment; a result of the merger and establishment of West Catholic, room was needed in the school building.

When Archbishop Sheehan asked this kind person to be pastor of his own home parish at Emerson, Nebraska, true to form, he acquiesced. On June 12, 1975 he left Fordyce, thanking the people for their kindness, cooperation and deep faith. Fr. Jerome Spenner followed on June 12, 1975. In the three years of his pastorate at St. John's, he was untiring in his efforts to bring spiritual renewal to the Parish Council and the entire parish. He helped initiate a Movement for a Better World Retreat in Constance, involving the three parishes of St. John's, St. Joseph's and St. Boniface, Menominee. He formed two Awareness Groups. Along with Father Spenner's other priestly duties, he remained Director of the Search Program for the Archdiocese, and St. John's became the Search Center. He continued to work with the Cursillo Movement as a speaker and photographer, and also became a certified Teenage Marriage Counselor for the Rural North Central Deanery. He continued the usual pastoral activities in the school and sacramental life of the parish.

In 1978, the decline in the number of priests serving the Archdiocese necessitated the decision that St. John's and St. Joseph's of Constance be served by only one priest. The decision as to where the pastor of the two parishes would reside was a painful one. Because of the larger number of families, the closer proximately to a greater number of elderly parishioners, and the location of the lower grades of West Catholic in Fordyce, the decision was made that the pastor would reside in Fordyce.

Subsequently on June 15, 1978, Fr. Spenner left to become pastor of St. Mary's, (Laurel) and St. Anne's, (Dixon), and Fr. Kevin Kraft became pastor of St. John's and St. Joseph's.

When Fr. Kraft arrived, it had been twenty-five years or more since the church had been repainted or renovated substantially, so this became a challenge to Fr. Kraft's energetic and artistic spirit. And so, late summer saw the start of a series of renovations and additions to the parish plant.

In the church, the room known as the north sacristy had been made into a reconciliation room by Fr. Spenner. Now the remainder of this redecoration, accomplished through volunteer labor and private

donations, was completed for use by September 17, 1978. Also in the fall of 1978, Fr. Kraft began to organize committees and crews to help with more extensive renovation of the church. With men of the parish building scaffolds and wielding paintbrushes, the entire outside of the church was painted—even the steeple. Re-shingling of the north side of the roof in only three days followed this.

Inside, the sanctuary and aisles were carpeted; the old confessionals were taken out, leaving two niches for individual shrines to the Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph. The two side altars were removed, and one of them converted to the altar of celebration. The sanctuary was extended so the altar could be moved nearer the people. Wood from the other gold-trimmed white altars was used to make a pulpit as well as an altar canopy, with inset soft spotlights, which was set to illuminate the presider's chair, the pulpit, the baptistery, and the altar. A new tabernacle was positioned on the altar of repose to the south of the altar of celebration and the baptismal font was placed to the north. A new speaker system was installed, and the walls and ceiling were painted with a fresh, neutral color, complete with delicate trim.

With the exception of the new red carpeting, the tabernacle, and sanctuary chairs, most of the “antique” decorations in the church were retained and restored to maintain memories and ties to the past.

On April 23, 1980, following a special liturgy celebrated by Archbishop Daniel E Sheehan, St. John's parishioners witnessed groundbreaking ceremonies for a new parish center. This was something the parish had needed for a long time, and, thanks to the efforts of Fr. Kraft and building committee members, the construction was about to begin.

Actual work began on the parish center in June of 1980. It was completed in October of the same year. The structure is a fifty-foot by eighty foot steel building, having a seating capacity for two hundred forty people. This major project was completed through a great deal of volunteer effort by many parishioners, who did such things as site preparation, erection of inside walls, and the finishing of the interior. Archbishop Sheehan officially dedicated it on August 16, 1981. It is used now for meetings, parish social functions, wedding receptions, as well as the hot lunch program for West Catholic Elementary School. And, in the winter of 1983-84, it was also used for daily Mass in order to conserve on energy costs in heating the church.

One of the finishing touches to the Parish Center came when noted wood-carver, Hugo Wuebben presented the parish with a hand-made, wood-inlay cross. Hugo, a former Fordyce lad and well known in later years for his intricate originals, presented the cross as a gift to the parish in special ceremonies in the fall of 1981.

The “Parish-Family Cross” which hangs in the St. John's Parish Center is a piece of walnut from the Schramm Saw Mill in Ponca, Nebraska, as a backing for the cross. On the walnut backing was inlaid in 3/8” recessed cuts the one hundred seventeen pieces of wood contributed by St. John's Parishioners. These strips of eighteen different varieties of wood were 1/2” wide and 5” long. They were fit on a slant and secured in place each by three small nails. The nails, reminding us of those which held Christ to the cross, symbolize the bond that joins each family of the parish together in the cross of our Lord. These strips were arranged with the darker woods in the center, blending down to a near white towards the ends. In the square center section of the cross is a smaller cross with the monogram IHS, the first letters in Greek of the name Jesus. This small cross and the two doves were carved from a piece of wood taken from a maple tree planted by Hugo's parents, Bernard Wuebbens. Boiled linseed oil and a final coat of wax were used to preserve and enhance the beauty of the cross.

As regards the Parish Center, we cannot fail to mention the one man in particular who became its unofficial “guardian angel.” Fred Uhing, a retired farmer, dedicated his considerable talents and immense generosity to the care and maintenance of the Parish Center since it's beginning.

Highly thought of for his leadership in the extensive remodeling and building, Fr. Kraft left to become pastor of St. Anne's parish in Omaha in June of 1982.

On June 17, 1982, Fr. Donald Cleary, the second Atkinson native to serve St. John's, became pastor of St. John's and St. Joseph's (Constance). At the time of his arrival, the school and rectory roofs were being re-shingled due to storm damage. The windows of both buildings were being re-puttied, the trim

repainted, and the cement trim on the school was being sandblasted.

Like Fr. Kraft and Fr. Connealy before him, Fr. Cleary taught at Cedar Catholic High School as the Archbishop had requested, and was an active member of its School Board. And, like Fr. Spenner, Fr. Cleary was a certified Teenage Marriage Counselor for the Rural North Central Deanery. In addition, he was active in the Northeast Nebraska Catholic Engaged Encounter.

In his first two years he completed the organizing of a parish Finance Committee that Fr. Kraft had begun to organize and he helped establish a Family Ministry Team for St. Joseph's and St. John's. And, looking to

The observance of St. John's 75th Jubilee, Fr.

Cleary organized a Jubilee Committee in February of 1983. Electing Jerome Thoene and Colette (Mrs. Jerry) Koch as co-chairpersons, the committee met monthly to plan for the major parish celebration on June 24, 1984 as well as to coordinate other activities leading up to this celebration.

June 24 is ordinarily the feast of the parish patron, St. John the Baptist. In The Jubilee year, however, the Solemnity of Corpus Christi took precedence and the Church celebrated the Solemnity of the Birth of John the Baptist on June 25. So, on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, St. John the Baptist parish celebrated with a mass at 2:00 pm presided over by Archbishop Daniel E. Sheehan. A formal dinner was held in the Parish Center with Fr. Ralph Lammers as the toastmaster. In the early evening, a parade was held with many entries from the local area and surrounding communities. Games and refreshment booths, souvenir stands and refreshing old memories held the interest of those gathered until a sudden and violent thunderstorm broke loose. Heavy rain and strong winds cleared ninety percent of the crowd in a matter of minutes leaving a handful of parishioners holding down the fort.

In the Jubilee year of 1984, St. John's Parish had one hundred sixteen households. A debt of \$5,000.00 remained to be paid on a loan taken to build the Parish Center. With the successful parish jubilee behind, Fr. Donald Cleary continued to meet the needs of the parish, by adding the handicap ramp to the church and the removal and replacement of the driveway up to the rectory since it settled over the years leaving water seep into the basement. Fr. Cleary and the Parish Council were working on the final plans for a parish mission when the sudden and unexpected death of Fr. James F. Buschelman, pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church, (Wayne), resulted in a call from the Archbishop for Fr. Donald Cleary to become the pastor of St. Mary's. Fr. Cleary left the parishes of St. John's and St. Joseph's in September of 1986 after serving both parishes for four years and four months.

In September of 1986, having ties to the community, the parishioners of St. John's and St. Joseph's parishes, which he would serve, welcomed Fr. Gerald A. Leise, Jr.

The Catholic Order of Foresters started a fund in 1985 to replace the Wurlitzer organ used in the church for nearly 40 years. Shortly after Fr. Leise's arrival, with the assistance of parish choir director and organist, Rosemary Lammers, a new organ was purchased for \$7000.00. This organ has and will continue to lead the parish in songs of worship.

The cold December and January of Father Leise's first few months showed the need for a new heating system in the church. Originally, the church had been heated with a wood and coal furnace, it was then replaced in the late 1940's or early 1950's with stove fuel. This nearly forty-year-old system was not only becoming inefficient, but also age and years of use had made it unsafe for the church. In January, Father Leise asked the Catholic Order of Foresters to begin a church furnace replacement fund, which the Parish Council approved.

The Archbishop's Capital Campaign was next on the list for Father Leise to present to the parish council. The goal of the campaign was to raise \$10,000,000.00 from the parishes in the Archdiocese of Omaha and an additional

\$2,500,000.00 from corporations and foundations in Omaha. The 12.5 million dollar campaign would be used for retired priest and sisters, education in catholic grade and high schools and other religious help

programs.

In the summer of 1987, a committee was formed to look into the residing of the church. With Fr. Leise's leadership, over the next few years, the church would be insulated, new steel siding replaced the original wood siding, a new heating system was installed and air conditioning was added to the church. Fr. Leise left St. John's parish in June of 1991, serving as pastor for nearly 5 years. In these five years, Fr. Leise improved the parish plant and moved the parishioners into leadership roles to take responsibility for their parish.

With Fr. Leise leaving the parish in June of 1991, it would be a time of uncertainty for the parishioners of St. John's. The rectory would stand empty for one year while Fr. Frank Baumert, pastor of St. Boniface, (Menominee), would serve the parishioners of both St. Boniface and St. John's for one year. The parishioners of St. Joseph's parish (Constance) would join with St. Rose (Crofton).

The arrival of Fr. Christopher Grimmond in June of 1992 brought major changes for the three parishes again. Fr. Baumert would serve as pastor of St. Boniface and Fr. Grimmond would serve as pastor of St. John's and St. Joseph's in Constance. This would only be the beginning of change. In June of 1993, Fr. Frank Baumert would leave St. Boniface, Fr. Chris Grimmond would take on the duties of St. Boniface and St. John's and St. Joseph's in Constance would again join with St. Rose in Crofton. This realignment would stay in place for the next fifteen years.

For over four years, Fr. Chris Grimmond was pastor of St. John's. The original heating system in the rectory was replaced and air conditioning was added. To improve the efficiency of the new system the rectory received additional insulation and plans for the replacement of the original windows was discussed. Fr. Grimmond, seeing the needs of the elderly, oversaw the construction of concrete handicap parking on the north side of the church. New sidewalks around the school were added at the same time.

With the declining enrollment in our Cedar County Catholic School System some major changes needed to take place. Cedar Catholic would add the 7th and 8th grades and become Cedar Catholic Jr. and Sr. High. This left West Catholic with grades 1st through 6th and a painful decision at hand. Needing only one building, a decision was made to close the Catholic school building in Menominee and use the Catholic school Building in Fordyce.

At the December of 1996 joint St. Boniface/St. John the Baptist Pastoral Council meeting, Fr. Grimmond addressed the Pastoral Council of his departure as pastor and of a new pastor being assigned as of January 1, 1997.

With the mid-year departure of Fr. Chris Grimmond, Archbishop Elden Curtiss sent the associate pastor of Holy Ghost Parish in Omaha to serve and lead the people in Fordyce and Menominee parishes. Fr. Gregory Benkowski arrived in the cold and snow of winter the first week of January 1997. It didn't take long before the people, both young and old, would realize that Fr. Benkowski was here to serve the needs of his parishioners. Fr. Greg Benkowski soon became known as Fr. Greg, not only in our parish, but in the surrounding area as well. Father Greg took to being a pastor quite easily and was very tactful in bringing to the attention of the Parish Council the need for replacements, improvements and changes.

New windows in the parish rectory were first on the list of improvements, followed with a new white fence around the cemetery, which was donated in memory of Joseph Sudbeck. These were all completed by summers end in Fr. Greg's first year at St. John's. That same year our parish dinner was moved to June and has been a successful fund- raiser known as St. John's Prime Rib Dinner. The following year the Lenten Fish Fry was held with a report of it being a huge success. Much of the year was spent in determining if the movement of the Hot Lunch Program to Fordyce would be possible and feasible.

In 1999, St. John's Parish Center received a fresh coat of paint by the Ladies Guild, new carpet and the Catholic Order of Foresters donated tile floor, and it was rewired for the movement of the Hot Lunch Program to Fordyce. The sacristy was re-shingled along with the removal of the old chimney on the

church. In September, after Riverboat Days, Ron and Tammie Eskens donated their equipment, tent and spot to the parish as a yearly fundraiser. Two couples, Gene and Sue Dickes and Doug and Joni Stevens stepped forward and headed up the crew for Riverboat Days in 2000. In this booth, we sold brats, prime rib sandwiches, soft drinks, fruit salad and our world-renowned super nachos. Having done a great job and continuing to find members of the parish to volunteer help, Gene and Sue Dickes have continued on chairing this event.

After just four years with the people of Menominee and Fordyce, Fr. Greg was called upon again by Archbishop Curtiss, this time to return to Holy Ghost Parish in Omaha in June of 2001. Fr. Greg lived a life of service to the people of God in the area in his short time here and continues to do the same for Holy Ghost Parish, being reassigned for an additional six years as their pastor in June of 2008.

Fr. Michael Schmitz arrived in June of 2001, to find the Parish Council in the planning stages of painting the interior of the church. As the estimates were submitted, the cost of painting would be much less if the pews were removed. When the pews were removed it would be an easy job to replace the floor covering. Before long, a fullscale renovation project of the church was on the table. Next a timetable, fundraising, people responsible for different projects and help, both hired and volunteer, needed to be established. With these in place, Fr. Mike Schmitz and the Parish Council set January 6, 2003 as the start date and a completion date of March 5, 2003

After Sunday Mass on January 5, 2003, the Parish Council and fellow parishioners started a day early and by nightfall the renovation project was well underway. What began with repainting the interior became a total restoration - an update of our church. Pews were removed- stripped- repaired and refinished; altars - statues - stations of the cross were restored and repainted; flooring was removed and replaced; electrical panels and fixtures were updated or replaced; central vacuuming system was installed; and structural maintenance was completed. Many men, women and youth of the parish completed the renovation in a few months of hard work providing what time, talent or treasure they could. To name names would include most of the parishioners, but we need to thank the dedication of the members of the Parish Council, Dianne Becker, Diane Dickes, Kenny Eickhoff, Bob Kneifl, Lyle Lammers, Marlen Schieffer and Linda Wuebben, who worked in the planning and day to day hands on activity to get this monumental project completed.

Archbishop Elden Curtiss blessed the newly remodeled church on June 24, 2003 and joined us at our annual prime rib dinner.

After the renovation was complete, one of the children of a charter member remarked, "Mom and Dad would be proud of this". Yes we are proud of our St. John the Baptist Church!!

Fr. Mike would continue to keep on top of maintenance of the parish grounds and buildings. This included the residing of the north side of church and re-shingling of the church, school and rectory following a severe hail storm in 2000. The rectory had repairs and replacement of soffits and gable ends, and a new main bathroom was installed. Landscaping around the grounds included the removal of the coal bin from the school building, new steps east of the church and trees and bushes following the removal of aged trees. Fr. Mike left St. John's and St. Boniface in June of 2008, but remains a familiar face moving only a few miles to become pastor of St. Rose (Crofton) and St. Andrews (Bloomfield).

Fr. David Fulton arrived in June of 2008, as pastor of St. John's, St. Boniface and St. Joseph's parishes. This followed the reconfiguration of parishes in the deanery following the recommendations of the Transitions Committee. With the parish centennial planning in full swing, teaching duties at both West Catholic and Cedar Catholic and the needs of three parishes, Fr. David Fulton has had little free time.

As the books were closed on December 31, 2008, St. John the Baptist Parish has a membership of one hundred twenty two families and all current bills paid with no long-term debt. Its assets, in addition

to the rich heritage of faith and the precious human resources include a church, school, parish center, rectory, cemetery, ball field and adjoining property.