

Parish Profile: Blessing, Iowa
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Parish Profile #119



Immaculate Conception Parish, Blessing



By Rev. Msgr. Edgar Kurt

In southern Black Hawk County, the early Catholic settlers of Lincoln Township were visited by pastors of distant parishes. Among them was Father Scallan, pastor of Saint Joseph's in Waterloo in the late 1870s and early 1880s.

Father Scallan directed the building of a church, probably in 1880. Patrick and Bridget Farrell deeded four acres of their farm to the Diocese of Dubuque on May 25, 1880, a year after they had purchased it.

The Centennial History of the Archdiocese states that Father Kelly celebrated Mass in Anthony and Martin Cummings' homes, but no further reference to Father Kelly can be found in the Archives.

Before it was called the Blessing Church, it was known as the Hudson or Lincoln Church, according to old directories. Blessing appears to have been named for James Blessington Dunn, a storekeeper and postmaster. The church was dedicated to its beginning to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Among the early family names are these: Cranny, Cummings, Dunn, Farrell, Hayes, Kelly, Kimball, McDermott, Murphy, Thornton, and Tierney. After the turn of the century, Czech and German names appear in the records.

While Father Thomas F. O'Brien was pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish at Eagle Center, he took over the care of the Blessing parish. That was probably in late 1880 when Father Scallan became too ill to continue that work. Father O'Brien would go to Blessing on Saturday morning and give religious instruction to the children, stay overnight, and celebrate Mass early Sunday morning before returning to Eagle Center.

Father John Sheehy was the first resident pastor, coming in December 1892. He also served the Catholics of Grundy Center and Traer. He stayed until October 1901. The second pastor was Father Patrick J. Flynn, who served the parish from October 1902.

There is no record for those intervening twelve months.

Father Daniel J. Lenihan was the third pastor, coming in 1905 and serving until 1912. In his first year the church, rectory, and records were destroyed by fire. The parish immediately set to rebuilding. Mass was celebrated in the Thomas Thornton home until the present church was finished in 1906. The rectory was built about the same time.

The next three pastors served short periods. Father Cornelius Sampson served from January 1912 to the summer of 1915. In his first year he began the construction of Saint Paul Church at Traer and continued to care for it as a mission from Blessing. Succeeding Blessing pastors continued to care for the Traer parish until it had its own resident pastor.

Father Patrick J. Behan cared for the parish from the fall of 1915 until entering military service as a chaplain in August 1918. Father Maurice E. Nolan served from then until June 1920.

Father John H. Richard was pastor for a long time, from 1920 to April 1944, when he retired and died on February 26, 1945. Annual religious vacation schools began in the 1920s, conducted by the Sisters of Charity B.V.M. The three Thornton Sisters frequently were the teachers.

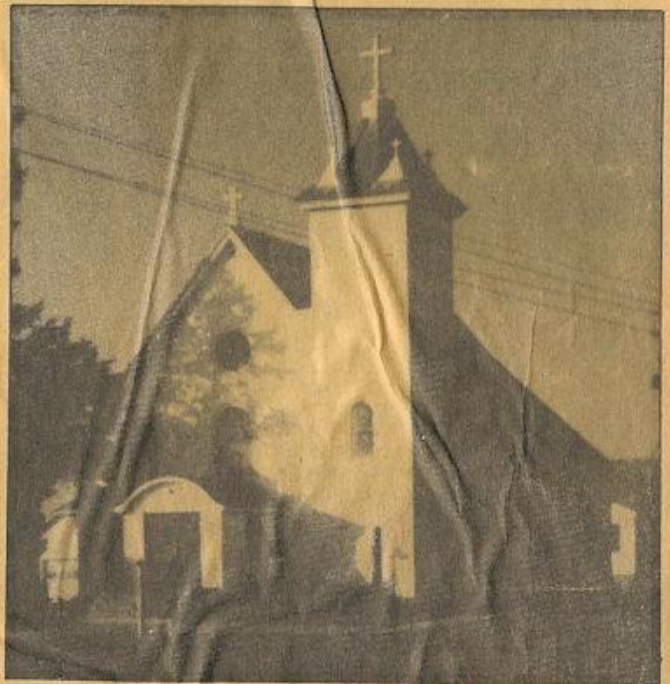
Father Joseph Schemmel gave the Blessing parish ten years of priestly service, from 1944 to 1954. He was followed by Father John E. Graham from the fall of 1954 to June 1958. The Traer parish received its own pastor, and Reinbeck became a mission of Blessing.

During the pastorate of Father Paul J. Grace, a school building in Hudson was purchased and moved to the church grounds to be remodeled into the present church hall. It is used for religious instruction classes and parish social events. Father Grace served both the Blessing and Reinbeck parishes from 1958 to 1966.

For three years Father LaVerne H. Gerleman served the two parishes, from 1966 to 1969. He was followed by Father Thomas W. Purtell, from July 1969 to July 1973.

In July 1973, Father Robert P. Rahe, pastor of the Eagle Center parish, began to serve the Blessing parish.

Father Robert V. Swift became pastor of both parishes in July 1974 and served them until his death on August 20, 1980. He was followed by Msgr. Ken-



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neth M. Ryan for two years, until he retired in October 1982.

Father Lawrence J. Guter is the present pastor of both parishes. There are 181 parish members in 69 households. Joan Haack is director of religious education for the six teachers and

sixty students. The parish is participating in the RENEW program.

Ten women of the parish entered various religious communities. Father Frank A. Geintz, an orphan who had worked in the parish, was ordained for the Diocese of Leavenworth, Kansas, in the early 1900s.

Seminars open for Cath. evangelizers

CLEVELAND (NC) — The National Council for Catholic Evangelization has developed two seminars for dioceses to use to train Catholics to be evangelizers.

The first three-day seminar, "Catching the Evangelizing Spirit: First Steps," gives a general introduction to the document and the implications of carrying out its suggestions for bringing the Gospel message to the world.

The second seminar, "Evangelization Teams: Continuing the Journey,"

focuses on the qualities of an effective evangelizer, the development of teams, and the needed skills and resources for evangelization.

The seminars were developed by council president, Father John L. Surprenant, pastor of Holy Family Parish in Hebron, Conn., and Carol Gura, council vice president.

For more information about the seminars, write to: NCCCE National Training Office, 354 Claymore Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio 44143.