

# FOR ALL GENERATIONS: A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF ST. MARY PARISH, MENOMONEE FALLS, WI

by: Kevin Abing

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## SING A NEW CHURCH

Thursday, November 30, 1905, was one of those cold, raw days that can sweep across southeastern Wisconsin in the early winter season. Morning temperatures hovered in the teens, and snow flurries danced in the brisk wind that chilled any brave soul that ventured outside. Though their bones shivered from the cold, the hearts and spirits of the Catholics in Menomonee Falls were aflame. Not only were they celebrating Thanksgiving Day, but they were also dedicating a new place of worship—St. Mary Church.

Catholics from the surrounding area streamed into the village and filled the new church to its capacity. Fr. John Theisen presided at the High Mass, and, adding to the joyous occasion, Archbishop Sebastian Messmer officiated at the dedication. According to the *Waukesha Freeman*, Messmer spoke in a “very pleasing way” to the congregation. He praised the parishioners’ industrious efforts for completing the structure in less than a year and also for securing the vestments, chalices, and other furnishings. The Archbishop “heartily” extended his blessing on the congregation’s labor and on its future growth.

Archbishop Messmer could not have foreseen just how extensive that growth would be over the next 100 years. From a modest 45 charter families, St. Mary Parish has blossomed to 1,500 families, one of the largest parishes in the

Milwaukee Archdiocese. But the Archbishop could see the devotion and dedication of those founding families. Undoubtedly, he realized that St. Mary would flourish as long as the parishioners maintained that sense of purpose to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. The strength of the heart and spirit of those early members—not just the bricks and mortar—forged a sense of community that has endured for the past century. Over the years, St. Mary Parish has become a focal point of peoples’ lives—a place where Catholics have come together to worship and thank God for their many blessings, to celebrate new life for infants or newlyweds, and to grieve and seek comfort for the loss of a loved one. This centennial history will explore the founding and growth of the parish and its place in the wider community. The bricks and mortar have changed and will continue to change, but the true foundation of St. Mary is its people. Their commitment, built upon the foundation of their predecessors, will insure that the parish will flourish for many years to come.

## *O LITTLE TOWN... MENOMONEE FALLS IN THE EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY*

In April 1905, a *Waukesha Freeman* headline proclaimed the "Falls Will Boom." The accompanying article noted that contractors were set to build 17 new homes, among other projects, in the **Village of Menomonee Falls** and that 1905 would be a "banner year" for the community. The local boosting aside, Menomonee Falls was typical of thousands of small villages that dotted the American landscape in the early twentieth century. It numbered approximately 900 people and included the usual areas of hustle and bustle. For Menomonee Falls, the two focal points included the "four corners" where Main Street and Fond du Lac Avenue (now Appleton Ave.) intersect and the area on the village's northern fringe near the railroad depot.

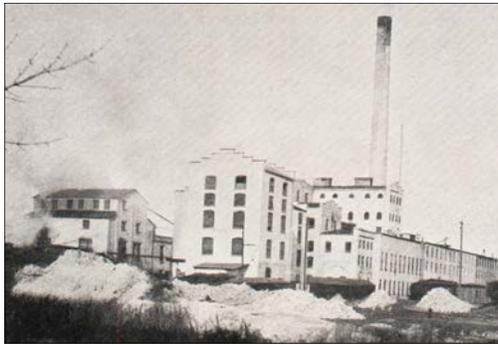
The village offered the usual array of businesses designed to serve the local population. It featured a bank, the *Menomonee Falls News* (a weekly newspaper), telephone service, and three hotels (the Monitor House, the Hotel Gettleman, and the Menomonee Falls Hotel). And the village's shops provided life's necessities. In fall 1905, for example, Held & Gumm Company advertised women's all-wool underwear for \$1.00 per garment and heavy fleeced-lined garments for 50 cents. M. A. Schmoysers sold men's overcoats for as little as \$10.00. And the Menomonee Falls Roller Mills offered "Minehaha" flour for \$3.00 per 100 pounds. In addition to consumer goods, rail service was readily available. The first tracks reached Menomonee Falls in 1890 and by 1905, the

Chicago, Milwaukee, & St. Paul, the Wisconsin Central, and the Chicago & Northwestern rail lines had stops at the train depot approximately every 45 minutes.



The abundant rail service established the Falls as a vital hub for the surrounding agricultural community. Indeed, the village's prosperity was un-deniably intertwined with that of local farmers. This bond was best expressed in a

*Menomonee Falls News* article of 1920: "The farmers and town folk are learning that they are yoke fellows and must pull together before either can make the progress they should." Local shops did their part by supplying staple goods to area farmers as well as village residents. Several businesses geared their efforts specifically toward agricultural needs, such as the two flour mills, the two grain elevators, the five blacksmiths, the two farm implement dealers, and, above all, the Wisconsin Sugar Company. This **sugar beet factory** opened in the 1890s and immediately became one of the village's



largest employers. Each year, the factory "campaign" began in early October when farmers harvested their sugar beets and continued for the next three months, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Long-time St. Mary's parishioner, Helen Thompson, relates that temporary workers at the factory filled her family's hotel to capacity; they slept in shifts so that the beds were never cold. The factory was an extremely productive operation for the owners as well as the farmers. In 1905, the factory processed 40 million pounds of sugar,

while Granville farmer H. W. Schultz hauled in a record five-ton load of sugar beets using a team of three horses. *The Menomonee Falls News* described mountain-high piles of beets that blocked trains from view as they passed through to the sheds. But nothing brought home the link between the Falls and area farmers more than “Fair Day.” On the third Thursday of the month, local farmers lined the village streets with their wagons stocked with goods. People could buy produce, pigs, poultry, cows and horses. True to the news paper headlines, Menomonee Falls was a “booming” community.

Despite all it offered, the village lacked things that are commonplace today. Paved streets were non-existent. There was never a good season for the roads. Winter ruts could rattle jaws and realign spines as well as snap wagon wheels and/or axles. Rains transformed otherwise dusty roads into impassable quagmires. A March 1904 blurb in the *Waukesha Freeman* best expressed the villagers’ springtime woes: “The signs of gentle spring up to date in [Menomonee Falls] are few in number and not over-inspiring, a few robins, some showers of rain, and so much water on the streets that a boat is necessary for crossings.” Similar to decent roads, automobiles were scarce. Given the state of

village roads, perhaps this was a blessing. However, these new-fangled contraptions soon made their presence felt. In 1910, Fred Leuth, one of the Falls’ “progressive” farmers, bought a Reo automobile because he believed cars would be “of practical use on the farm.” By 1912, there were 12 cars registered in the village. Along with the dearth of good roads and cars, there were few sidewalks to speak of. Those that existed were a patch-work quilt of concrete, wood or cinder trails. And municipal services, such as streetlights and the public library, were only in their infancy in 1905.

There was one other vital service that was noticeably absent for a bustling community—a Catholic Church. As of 1905, Menomonee Falls counted three churches: St. Paul’s Evangelical, Emmanuel Evangelical and Methodist Episcopal. Village Catholics, however, had to travel to neighboring parishes—St. Anthony in Fussville, St. James in Lannon, St. Boniface in Goldendale or St. Catherine in Granville. Poor roads and inclement weather inflicted a heavy burden upon the faithful who walked or took a horse and buggy to celebrate the Mass; the burden was enough that some Catholics strayed from the practice of their faith. There was a deeply felt need for a Catholic church in Menomonee Falls.

### *IN THE LAND THERE IS A HUNGER*

Local Catholics took matters into their own hands. **Marie (Umhoefer) Martin** insists that



her father, Henry, and other men of the village gathered at a spot where men usually go to make decisions of great import—the local tavern—to discuss their desire for their own church. As far as the written record is concerned, however, the seed took root in

January 1904 when a mass meeting was held to discuss the subject of establishing a new church in the Falls. The attendees clearly demonstrated their determination by pledging nearly \$5,000 for the project. In late February, nearly 20 men—armed with a growing bankroll of pledges and a list of nearly 50 supporters—ventured to Milwaukee to meet with Archbishop Messmer. The names of the delegation’s members are not available, but the leaders of the movement were Nicholas Goeller, Jacob Groh, John Zimmer, William Campbell, Charles

Birkhauser and Henry Umhoefer; some of them were undoubtedly present at the meeting with the Archbishop. The ethnic background of these leaders reflected the predominantly German character of the Menomonee Falls area, and to accommodate this important segment of the population, the boosters for the new church proposed to have preaching done in German and English.

The results of this meeting appear to have been inconclusive. According to earlier parish histories, Archbishop Messmer seemed amenable to forming a mission chapel at Menomonee Falls rather than a full-fledged parish. This, however, was not the only obstacle that the village residents faced. Fr. August Schaaf of Fussville also believed there were too few Catholics to sustain a new church. And, even more troubling, the villagers suffered “many hard blows” from people belonging to “neighboring churches.” Newspaper accounts are not clear as to who exactly these opponents were. It is possible that they were from nearby Catholic churches that did not want to lose any parishioners. But it is just as likely that the antagonism came from the other Menomonee Falls churches. Anti-Catholic bigotry pervaded American society at this time, and the people of Menomonee Falls were not immune to its ill effects. Archbishop Messmer provided an intriguing glimpse into this situation at the dedication of St. Mary Church when he “expressed gratification at the friendly feeling *now* [italics added] existing between the church people and those of other faiths....” Clearly, some sort of hostility had existed prior to the dedication, but what form it took and how strong it was is not clear from the available records.

Nevertheless, the Catholics of Menomonee Falls pressed ahead. On July 19, 1904, Archbishop Messmer arrived to inspect possible sites for a new structure. Church boosters chauffeured him around the village, and it was agreed that a spot on the east side on lower Second Street was a suitable

location. But the Archbishop had not yet made up his mind. One month later, he finally gave permission for the establishment of a new church. The villagers moved quickly. On August 13, they authorized John Zimmer, Nicholas Goeller, and Nicholas Becker to **purchase five lots at the previously approved site from Jesse Price for \$1,400.**



Later that month, a committee consisting of Goeller, Christ Weiland, Jacob Groh, Mike Poellman and Anton Schneider was formed to collect money for the new church. Archbishop Messmer appointed Reverend James Ritger of St. James, Lannon, to assist with the formation of the parish. On September 1, 1904, the new parish of St. James was incorporated. There is no evidence to reflect why the name St. James was chosen. Earlier parish histories indicate that it may have been a sign of respect for Fr. Ritger. An account of the founding of the parish recently recovered from the church cornerstone supports that claim. It notes that the “zealous and earnest work” of Fr. Ritger was largely responsible for the establishment of “our beautiful church.”

At a November 2 meeting, the treasurer announced subscriptions for the new church totaled \$6,190. And the building committee accepted the church plans submitted by the architectural firm of E. Brielmeier & Sons of Milwaukee. The villagers broke ground in November 1904 and over the winter the men hammered and chiseled their way through

three feet of limestone. To insure the work continued on St. James' Church, the committee staged a fund raising bazaar at Henrizi Hall on February 13-16, 1905. Admission costs 25 cents for adults and 10 cents for children. Meals cost 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children. Over the four days, the people of Menomonee Falls enjoyed music, dancing, prize giveaways and speeches from such luminaries as Archbishop Messmer and Milwaukee Mayor David Rose. The bazaar was a resounding success. The "cornerstone" parish history praised the congregation as well as the non-members (Protestant and Catholic alike) for their hard work and generosity. As a result, the parish netted another \$2,000. Buoyed by the increased financial support, the workmen completed the foundation by early spring 1905.

The construction of the church proper also proceeded rapidly. The committee originally awarded the construction contract to William Gessert, not because he submitted the lowest bid but because he was a parish member. At about that same time, the committee received word from Archbishop Messmer that the contract should be given to the lowest bidder, Peter Lauer of Milwaukee. The committee relented and awarded the contract to Lauer.

A festival-like atmosphere surrounded the **laying of the cornerstone on May 28, 1905**. Over 600 people enjoyed music from a local band and the Fussville choir. The faithful took up a collection and garnered \$200 for the new church. Several articles were placed in the cornerstone—a list of the church's charter members, a history of the founding of the parish, a history of Menomonee Falls and various coins, ranging from a penny to one dollar.



To cap the ceremony, Vicar General A. F. Schinner of Milwaukee addressed the crowd in English, and Fr. Bernard Traudt did so in German. *The Menomonee Falls News* described the planned church: "a solid brick structure, 82 ft. long and 44 ft. wide, with a tower at the north west corner 92 ft. in height." The church would have a capacity of 270 people, which "at small expense" could be expanded to 400 "if in the future the growth of the congregation shall demand it." The newspaper commended the congregation for "their energy and zeal" and also for "bringing to our midst a worthy house of worship" and a structure which was "certainly an ornament to our village." By the time of the church's dedication, the congregation had changed the parish's name from St. James to St. Mary.

### CHARTER MEMBERS OF ST. MARY PARISH

(From List Recovered from Church Cornerstone)

Rev. J. A. Ritger, Pastor

John Zimmer	C. G. Birkhauser	A. B. Schneider	Agnes Minten
Nic. Goeller	Wm. Schmidt	S. Debus	John Groh, Sr.
J. J. Groh, Jr.	Hy. Umhoefer	Geo. Indin	Geo. Hoenig
E. A. Henschel	Anton Schmidt	John Martin	M. Martin
Jos. Neu	Jacob Groh	J. B. Wittlin	Chris. Weiland
Richard Collins	Mary Michels	Hr. Schmitz	Frank Esser
John Weiland	Math. Becker	C. Dombrofske	Aug. Rott
Anton Schneider	Frank Bence	Nic. Becker	M. J. Poellman
Peter Ferrier	John Greif	Wm. Campbell	Wm. Gessert
Math. Debus	Jacob Weiland	Leonard Goetz	Math. Burg

Newspaper accounts refer to St. Mary Church, and a letter from Fr. Ritger dated May 28, 1905, also refers to St. Mary. The reason for the switch is not apparent from existing records, but it was clearly a sign of devotion to our Blessed Mother.

Construction surged forward throughout the summer, and workers drove the last nail on

November 21. As already noted, the dedication took place on Thanksgiving Day and was an inspiration to the entire congregation. They undoubtedly felt proud of the beautiful edifice they built through faith, determination and hard work. This exuberant spirit bode well for the parish's future. Only one more piece was needed to complete the founding of St. Mary Parish—a pastor to lead the flock.

### ***SHEPHERD OF SOULS: THE FR. DENTINGER YEARS, 1906-1929***

Archbishop Messmer did not wait long to choose a shepherd for the fledgling parish. On December 20, 1905, he selected **Arthur M. Dentinger as the first pastor for St. Mary.** He was born in Milwaukee on December 23, 1879, and from a very early age, seemed destined for the priesthood. Descendants of Fr. Dentinger relate that when he was still an infant, his dad was watching him in his stroller on the front porch one day. His dad's attention wandered, and the baby buggy rolled across the porch and down the front steps. In his panic, the elder Dentinger made a promise to God that if the baby escaped unharmed, he would pray that his son would become a priest. The child emerged unscathed, no worse the wear for his bumpy ride, and presumably, his dad kept his promise to God. Fr. Dentinger attended St. Joseph School, Marquette University, and St. Francis Seminary. Archbishop F. X. Katzer ordained Dentinger on October 26, 1902, and assigned him as an assistant to St. Peter Church, Beaver Dam. Three short years later, he assumed charge of St. Mary.



obvious spirituality, a keen administrative ability, an aura of leadership, or it may have been simply his German ethnicity, which matched nicely with an overwhelmingly German parish. Indeed, he seemed to connect immediately with his new flock. Several long-time parishioners recall that Fr. Dentinger possessed a stern and somewhat aloof demeanor, but he was always friendly and open to his parishioners. Whatever the reason for his appointment, Fr. Dentinger celebrated his first Mass as pastor of St. Mary on January 14, 1906.

Fr. Dentinger and the parishioners devoted that first year to improving the parish, physically and spiritually. Without a school to call its own, 40 parish children had to attend the public school in Menomonee Falls. To insure that they received the proper religious instruction, Fr. Dentinger taught catechism every Saturday in the school and every Sunday at the church. To further their own sense of devotion, the ladies of the parish formed the St. Anne Society in February 1906. By the end of the year, the society totaled 48 members. The congregation also turned its attention to physical improvements. In March, Archbishop Messmer returned to St. Mary and dedicated the **new 927-pound bell "St. Mary."** Two other bells were added in 1925, and they have been ever-present companions in Menomonee Falls, calling people to service and ringing out to mark sad and joyous occasions alike. In June 1906, the parish

Fr. Dentinger must have possessed qualities that convinced Messmer to put such a young man in charge of a young parish—perhaps an

purchased a one-acre plot from Nicholas Becker to be used as a cemetery. On September 8, 1906, Fr. Dentinger presided over the first celebration of the patron feast for St. Mary Parish. And in December, 83 men formed the Apostleship of Prayer as a companion group to the St. Anne Society. In one year, St. Mary had indeed come far. Fr. Dentinger's flock totaled 239 people, or 45 families (39 of which used German as their native tongue); he had officiated at six baptisms, three First Communions, one burial and two marriages.

Progress continued. The year 1907 saw the installation of electric lighting in the church, and in November, Archbishop Messmer returned to give a public lecture on the Papacy. He also administered the sacrament of confirmation for the first time at St. Mary. The inaugural group of confirmants numbered 17 young parishioners. The following year, William Gessert built a new rectory and also donated new confessionals to the parish. In 1909, the late Reverend N. M. Zimmer made a gift of two side altars, and a winter chapel was fitted out in the church basement. In 1910, several generous parishioners donated money to have the Milwaukee Mirror & Art Glass Company install nine new stained-glass windows. In 1911, the St. Anne Society raised \$600 to have the Associated Artists of Milwaukee decorate the interior of the church, and parishioners donated money for new stations of the cross.

As parishioners improved the spiritual life at St. Mary, they also coordinated events that helped the church become a focal point of their social life. The ladies of the parish spearheaded several events that not only fostered a sense of community but also raised needed funds for the church. They often hosted card parties (especially the popular game called cinch) and then auctioned off decorated lunch baskets. Yet another gathering in 1911 featured an apron bazaar with music, refreshments and a one-act drama entitled "A Meeting of the Young Ladies' Club." One of the most popular events was

the church-sponsored annual picnic. Typically, these were held around Labor Day and featured food, games and sometimes politics. St. Mary garnered a "neat sum" from its first parish picnic in September 1906 at which roughly 1,000 people enjoyed the proceedings and listened to keynote speaker State Senator Ernst Merton. The *Menomonee Falls News* got caught up in the spirit for the 1909 picnic. The paper proclaimed the upcoming picnic would be "one of the greatest events in this locality," and if someone failed to attend, they would "miss the biggest day in [their] life."

While St. Mary progressed, the Village of Menomonee Falls did likewise. The roads, for example, were improved dramatically. In 1915, macadam replaced the dirt roadbed along Main Street, and five years later, Menomonee Falls boasted that it was the first community in Waukesha County to have an uninterrupted stretch of concrete highway between it and Milwaukee. The *Menomonee Falls News*, foreshadowing things to come, asserted that the new link "practically makes us a suburb of the states metropolis." Other modern developments made their presence felt. Movies began to be shown in the village, though sporadically. In 1916, the silent film epic *The Birth of a Nation* was shown in Minten's Hall, and thereafter, movies carved an ever-expanding niche for the public's entertainment dollar. And in November 1919, some enterprising Menomonee Falls businessmen utilized a new technique to promote their business. Oldsmobile dealers Klinger and Minten hired an Alfred Lawson airplane to fly around the village to launch a new advertising campaign. The stunt certainly caused a stir among village residents and area farmers.

Even Fr. Dentinger took on a new role (though a temporary one) in 1913—newspaper correspondent. In April of that year, Fr. Dentinger and his father embarked on a four-month trip to Europe. The parishioners of St. Mary showed their high regard for their pastor and presented him with a "substantial purse" and wished him a bon voyage. While on his

trip, Dentinger sent several letters home that were published in the *Menomonee Falls News*. Only one of the letters survives, but it reveals that the good father had a literary flair, a sense of the dramatic and a profound appreciation for the history and pageantry of the "old world." When considering the Rome of the Caesars, Fr. Dentinger wrote, "the power of those rulers has departed, their triumphs are hushed and only their statues remain in the numerous museums to testify to their former power and glory." Fr. Dentinger was disappointed because he was unable to have an audience with his Holiness, Pope Pius X, due to the Pontiff's ill health. But he did meet with the Papal Secretary of State. His journey continued on to Paris, and then to Germany to meet with some of his father's relatives. He returned to Menomonee Falls in early August, and once again took up his duties at his rural parish.

As Fr. Dentinger settled into his priestly routine, it became apparent that the parish required a school of its own. By the end of 1915, 70 Catholic children were attending public school, and parish leaders felt that a parochial school was necessary to instill Catholic values into the school-aged children. On January 1, 1916, the parish unanimously voiced its approval for the project and appointed a committee to spearhead the effort. Within one week, the committee had secured the necessary funding, and by early March, architect William Herbst of Milwaukee had drawn up plans and William Gessert had been awarded the contract to construct the school. When the work crews finished, they had constructed a two-story, brick building at a cost of \$10,000. The first floor consisted of two classrooms and quarters for the sisters. A hall/auditorium with a stage occupied the entire second floor. The dedication took place on September 8, 1916, with Archbishop Messmer presiding, and the doors opened for business on September 11.

The experiences of the students attending St. Mary Parish School were drastically different than those of modern-day students. Firstly, all

of the teachers were sisters. From the beginning, the School Sisters of St. Francis supplied the teachers. Two of the very first, Sisters Baptiste and Waldeberta, both taught at St. Mary for the first ten years of the school's existence. Former students remember them with a mixture of respect, awe and just a touch of fear. Both were strict disciplinarians and made sure students toed the line, but they were also kindly educators who sincerely cared about the children. For years, the School Sisters provided a multitude of dedicated individuals who made the school itself a draw for area Catholics.

And there was something else rarely seen today: the school had eight grades, only two classrooms, and one teacher per classroom. Initially, Sister Waldeberta taught grades 1-4, and Sister Baptiste handled the higher levels. When it was time for a respective class's lesson, the children would move to the front of the room. The remaining three classes were given plenty of homework to keep them busy until it was their turn. Former students are unanimous in their praise of St. Mary Parish School, and the numerous awards received by the children over the years are testimony to the excellent education they received.

The students also received a great deal of exercise, for all of the children walked to and from school. Many young people today have undoubtedly heard horror stories from their grandparents about the hardships they endured on these treks (trudging 30 miles through ten-foot snowdrifts all the while fighting off bears, for example). Though the grandparents may have exaggerated *slightly*, some did walk several miles to get to school, and, yes, the weather could be bad and they might have had to fend off a ferocious housecat. But the experience certainly left an indelible impression upon many of the early students at St. Mary. Nearly all of the parishioners interviewed for this history described a similar scene at the end of the school day. A mass of students would depart from school toward home. As they progressed, children would peel off from the group to their house until

there was a solitary family or individual left. A hardship it may have been, but the children did it because that was the way it was. It provided an opportunity for them to desperately find answers for an upcoming test, exchange gossip, share secrets, and build life-long friendships. Few long-time parishioners would not have missed the experience for anything.

With the school in place, the children put their noses to the proverbial grindstone and focused on the three R's: readin', 'ritin' and 'rithmetic. But there was another set of three R's: recess, recreation and recognition. St. Mary alums fondly recall recesses during which they played in the orchard to the south of the church, skated on the frozen river and sledded on the school grounds. For recreation, students put on **annual "entertainments"** for parents and other guests in the school hall. In May 1918, the children put on what is akin to a modern-day talent show. It consisted of 14 presentations and included everything from comedy skits to patriotic songs (See text box for a complete program listing). On the recognition front, St. Mary celebrated its first graduating class in June 1919. Two students, Mary Schmitz and Blandina Ullrich, are listed as the first graduates. But Marie (Umhoefer) Martin and Sister Henrica Umhoefer are quick to tell you that their brother, Bob, was among the first, if not *the* first, graduate of St. Mary Parish School.

The innocence of these early school years was played out during a world crisis that intruded upon the lives of those at St. Mary and in Menomonee Falls—the First World War. When warfare erupted between the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary and the Allied Powers of England, France and Russia in August 1914, President Woodrow Wilson urged Americans

to remain neutral "in thought as well as deed." That, however, was no easy task for the throng of German settlers in the Menomonee Falls area who were understandably concerned about their kin in the Fatherland. Indeed, Menomonee Falls felt the sting of war at a very early stage. Fred Klug, Jr., and his parents had emigrated from Germany to Menomonee Falls in 1893 and took up farming near the village. Fred returned to Germany, married his childhood sweetheart, and found work as a tailor. He was killed in battle in October 1914, a life cut too short at age 39. Personal ties to Germany ran counter to American policy that favored the Allied Powers. As the war in Europe dragged on, the United States was drawn ever deeper into the conflict. When Germany resumed un-restricted submarine warfare in early 1917, President Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war. The U.S. officially entered the war on April 6, 1917.

The war ignited a wave of patriotism across the country. Flags flew everywhere. Parades marched down main streets nationwide. Young men flocked to enlist in the armed services. And the federal government marshaled all of its power to prosecute the war effort.

Government leaders whipped this patriotism to a fever pitch by encouraging everyone to do their part—be it serving in the military, producing more foodstuffs, buying war bonds or conserving materials needed for the war effort. This super-heated fervor had an unfortunate dark side. German-Americans became the targets of over-zealous patriots who believed the formers' loyalties were suspect. German families, who had lived in the U.S. for generations, were subjected to threats and all kinds of verbal abuse. With its large German population, it is likely that similar incidents took place in Menomonee Falls. In fact, the editor of the *Menomonee Falls News* addressed the issue in the early stages of the

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| <p><b>1918 ENTERTAINMENT</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. America</li> <li>2. Welcome Song</li> <li>3. Star Drill...20 Girls</li> <li>4. Song...St. Mary Choir</li> <li>5. Discontented Sisters<br/>2 Acts</li> <li>6. Mud Pies...Action Song</li> <li>7. Sunflower Drill...12 Boys</li> <li>8. Song...St. Mary Choir</li> <li>9. Taking Papa's Place<br/>Comedy</li> <li>10. Dirty Boy...Action Song</li> <li>11. Scarf Drill...9 Girls</li> <li>12. A Good Night's Rest<br/>Comedy</li> <li>13. Farewell</li> <li>14. Star Spangled Banner</li> </ol> |
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war. On May 11, 1917, an editorial denounced any attacks on German-American citizens. The paper reminded the zealots that a large percentage of area farmers were of German descent “who right now are being frantically appealed to help save the allies by producing more food for them.” The request seems to have cooled the antagonism, for no further incidents were reported in the paper. But hard feelings lingered. Marie Martin recalls that one family who occupied the pew directly behind her family would cover their ears whenever Fr. Dentinger preached in German.

Despite these rifts, the people of Menomonee Falls rallied behind the war effort. The village organized one of the first local Council of Defense groups in Waukesha County. Red Cross appeals and Liberty Bond drives were easily exceeded, and the village contributed its share of young men to the military. The parishioners of St. Mary did their part as well. On July 14, 1918, the congregation dedicated a service flag with nine stars representing the number of parishioners serving their country. One week later, Fr. Dentinger presided over a patriotic meeting at the parish hall. The audience sang “America” and “The Star Spangled Banner,” and Mrs. S. S. Trinwith spoke about the work of the Red Cross. Captain William B. Campbell made some remarks on behalf of the parish’s “**doughboys**,” and five additional stars were sewn into the service flag.

The war ended on November 11, 1918, and news of the armistice launched a euphoric wave that engulfed the entire country. In Menomonee Falls, the church bells pealed with joy. Businesses and schools closed to celebrate. Farmers poured into the village, and adults and children alike formed ranks for an impromptu parade. Flags adorned every house, and cars as well as bicycles were decorated with trailers of tin cans, a noisy reminder that the German Kai-

ser had been “canned.”

With the restrictions and hardships of the war ended, the people of St. Mary and Menomonee Falls strove for a return to “normalcy.” Many people characterize the 1920s as a frenzied period replete with rampant materialism, speakeasies, gangsters, “flappers” and colorful sports heroes like Babe Ruth. The pace in a small, rural village such as Menomonee Falls, however, was more leisurely. But the village did have its exciting moments too. On June 16, 1920, over four inches of rain fell in one hour’s time. Residents feared the dam would not hold back the water racing down the Menomonee River. The dam held, but the river still flooded its banks. Cars were swept away; some roads were under two to three feet of water, and area crops sustained heavy damage.

Once the floodwaters abated, life in the village and at St. Mary returned to normal. The remainder of the decade provided ample opportunities that boosted the pride of the people of St. Mary. In September 1920, Tharsilla Umhoefer and Gertrude Wolf heard the Lord’s call and joined the School Sisters of St. Francis, the parish’s first to enter religious life. In October, Menomonee Falls hosted an inter-community fair. Children from surrounding school districts participated in several contests, and St. Mary Parish School garnered first place. The number of school children had grown to 115 by 1921, prompting parish members to take space from the upstairs hall for an additional classroom. The following year was one of highs and lows. A diphtheria epidemic broke out among the school children in February 1922. Over 20 families were affected, and three children perished, undoubtedly a severe shock to their classmates. The parish forged ahead, however. At the end of the year, the congregation donated nearly \$4,000 to the United Catholic Charities Campaign to assist St. Francis Seminary as well as schools and

**St. Mary Doughboys**  
 Alex Zimmer  
 William B. Campbell  
 S. H. Campbell  
 Anton Minten  
 Ivan Minten  
 Ben Minten  
 Henry Holzem  
 Jos. Benstein  
 John Lauer  
 Al Benstein  
 F. Scharl  
 G. Umhoefer  
 M. Wierl

hospitals in the region. Church officials praised the parish for giving on an “unprecedented scale.” In 1923, the children created an exhibit that reaped 41 awards at the State Fair, and from 1924 to 1927, three St. Mary students—Lorraine Barth, Francine Krueger, and Emma Kruser—won the spelling contest at the Waukesha Dairy Show.

Sometimes the school children provide comic relief. John Badke entered St. Mary Parish School in 1926 and, similar to most Catholic schoolboys, became an altar boy. The experience of altar boys then was much more rigorous than today because they had to learn Latin in order to give all the responses to the priest during Mass. One particular Mass is indelibly etched in John’s mind. Around 1929, John, a new boy named Domino, and two other boys were serving. As the four were getting ready, Domino had to answer nature’s call and immediately headed for the outhouse. When Fr. Dentinger asked if everyone was ready to start Mass, John told him that Domino would be back any minute. But Domino took longer than they thought, so Fr. Dentinger started without him. As Domino came scurrying back into church, he heard Fr. Dentinger say, “Dominus Vobiscum” (The Lord be with you.). Domino must have been rattled. He was new, grew up speaking German, and to top things off, the Mass had already started. He misunderstood Fr. Dentinger and thought he had called out “Domino Wo Bist Du?” (Domino, where are you?) Before John could give the proper response in Latin, Domino answered in German with a little too much volume, “I’m behind the altar buttoning my pants!” The entire church burst into laughter, including the usually stern Fr. Dentinger.

Comic mishaps aside, the 1920s afforded several events from which the parish derived a great deal of pride. In 1925, Henry Schmitz was ordained and became the first “Son of the Parish” to join the priesthood. As mentioned earlier, St. Mary added two additional bells, “St. Joseph” and “St. Peter,” in December 1925. And 1927 turned out to be a banner

year for the parish. Fr. Dentinger celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination on October 25. Parishioners and the School Sisters made elaborate preparations for the event, and as a sign of respect, the Menomonee Falls Advancement Association asked village businesses to fly the American flag to honor this beloved pastor. At 10:00 a.m. on the 25<sup>th</sup>, a procession of altar boys, 25 flower girls and a large number of clergy escorted Fr. Dentinger from the rectory to the church where a Solemn High Mass was celebrated. Afterward, 150 clergy, relatives and parish representatives hosted a luncheon at the school hall. The festivities were not over. That evening, over 1,000 friends gathered at the high school auditorium to witness a program honoring Fr. Dentinger.

The glow from that wonderful event did not last very long. In early January 1929, Archbishop Messmer transferred Fr. Dentinger to SS. Peter & Paul Parish in Milwaukee. Parishioners were shocked as was the good father. He told a reporter that the appointment “came like a bolt out of a clear sky.” As word spread, the tributes poured in. The Rotary Club, for example, feted Fr. Dentinger with a luncheon and presented a Parker fountain pen desk set as a token of esteem. Not to be outdone, the congregation of St. Mary planned a lavish celebration to honor its pastor. A huge crowd packed the high school auditorium on January 25. Various parishioners and the school children took turns expressing their admiration and affection for the man who guided and shaped them from the parish’s very beginning. On January 31, the only pastor St. Mary had ever known resigned. Looking back, he could take pride in his work. The parish had grown to 570 members and was on a sound financial footing.

The school was one of the finest in the area. And the congregation had demonstrated time and again what it meant to walk in Jesus’ footsteps. No pastor could have done more.

## **WE SHALL OVERCOME: FR. BIER, THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II**



Fr. Charles J. Bier's pastorate coincided with two of the most challenging crises of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the Great Depression and World War II. That he guided the parish with such a steady hand is a testament to his leadership

and his faith. His parishioners could not know the problems that they would soon face as they gathered in early February 1929 for a luncheon to welcome their new pastor. What were the parishioners to make of their new spiritual leader? He was born in 1880, but there are conflicting accounts as to Fr. Bier's birthplace. An earlier parish history states he was born in Hungary, but his obituary in the *Menomonee Falls News* notes Vienna, Austria, was his hometown. In either case, his family moved to Janesville, Wisconsin, when Charles was very young. He studied at St. Francis Seminary and was ordained in 1905. He served as an assistant pastor at St. Patrick in Milwaukee and then as pastor at St. Michael in Dotyville and St. Mathias in Neosho. Long-time parishioners describe Fr. Bier as a "fine, spiritual man" and "the most saintly man I've ever met."

He spent his first year at St. Mary immersed in the many duties related to guiding a growing parish. But during the Christmas season, Fr. Bier found time to write a poem that was published in the local newspaper. In it, he hoped his flock would find a dwelling place for Christ "within [their] troubled breast[s]" so they could "feel His fond embrace" and their spirits "shall find rest." His allusion to "troubled breast[s]" undoubtedly referred to spiritual struggles within a person's heart, but he just as easily could have meant the economic troubles facing the country after the stock market crash of October 1929.

The ill effects of the Depression, however, were not felt immediately. Indeed, 1930 was a year of celebrations at St. Mary. In June, Fr. Bier marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination. The parishioners and the School Sisters planned an elaborate program to honor their pastor, and the *Menomonee Falls News* paid a glowing tribute to Fr. Bier: "He has...in an unusual measure gained the love of his congregation and the esteem of the community. His fair-mindedness, amiability, learning and willingness to support any worthwhile undertaking for the public good, have won him an enviable place in our local structure." Likewise, St. Mary Parish celebrated its Silver Anniversary. On September 14, the parish held its jubilee picnic, capped off with a chicken dinner in the church basement. Adults purchased tickets for 50 cents and children under 14 paid 35 cents.

In preparation for the anniversary, the school and church underwent extensive renovations. All of the schoolrooms received a new coat of paint. As for the church, the Married Ladies Sodality paid for a new pipe organ; parishioners had new lighting fixtures installed, new frescoes painted and donated new statuary. The day of the celebration—Thanksgiving Day, 1930—was a glorious event. The church interior was festooned with decorations of silver and gold, and the sanctuary and altar were decked out with bouquets of gold and white chrysanthemums. A host of clergy was on hand to help celebrate the High Mass, and the congregation welcomed back Fr. Dentinger, who preached the sermon.

1930 was a good year for Menomonee Falls as well. Over the course of the year, the village added a new municipal building, dedicated the new North Hills Golf Course and Country Club, and erected a new library. Local businesses also fared well. At the end

of the year, a *Menomonee Falls News* reporter interviewed a cross-section of village businessmen and discovered that, other than the automobile business, area entrepreneurs “suffered very little from the business depression, so general throughout the country.” The reporter attributed the situation to the enterprise and “fair methods” of local businessmen. Equally pertinent, however, was the fact that the effects of the country’s widespread unemployment and manufacturing distress had not yet trickled down to Menomonee Falls.

But the storm did come, and the ramifications were felt deeply in the community. The Menomonee River Sugar Company did not run the sugar beet factory during the 1931 campaign and closed its doors for good in early 1932, and the Citizens State Bank took a “bank holiday” in May 1933 from which it never returned. In his 1933 annual report, Fr. Bier warned that unemployment had “reduced many members to extreme poverty” and that low farm prices had “made paupers of many farmers.” The stress took its toll. In December 1931, parishioner Fred Schoen committed suicide. The only apparent reason for the tragedy was that Schoen, a carpenter, had had no work for several months. And area farmers joined the ranks of the disgruntled. Statistics show that the annual gross income for Waukesha County farmers declined from \$2,610 in 1927 to \$1,512 in 1933. In January 1933, over 4,000 farmers gathered at a meeting in Nightingale Hall to hear Milo Reno, president of the National Farm Holiday Association, exhort them to resort to vigilante action, if necessary, to halt foreclosures on farm mortgages. And in February, numerous area milk producers agreed to support a statewide milk strike in an effort to stabilize milk prices.

Marie (Umhoefer) Martin remembers her father was laid off from his factory job during the Depression. He did odd painting jobs when he could, but no other work was found. Fortunately, Marie obtained work with Stout

Manufacturing in Milwaukee and earned \$10 per week. She was the family’s only source of income, and money was extremely tight. “Dollar bills were made of rubber,” Marie recalls, “they stretched to meet their needs.” In a series of interviews, other long-time parishioners reflected that their families managed to get by because they could grow much of their food on the family farm. But if their parents were to describe that period, they would convey a much different picture. The anxiety they felt must have been staggering. They were unsure from one day to the next whether they could hold on to their jobs or their homes.

Relief efforts tried to alleviate the suffering. In May 1933, Commodity Exchange, Inc., of Milwaukee established an organization in Menomonee Falls that used company scrip to help the unemployed and as a means to facilitate the exchange of goods and/or services. The state and federal governments also stepped in. Statistics for Menomonee Falls are not available, but just over 25 per cent of Waukesha County’s population received some form of state government relief in April 1933. And the local newspaper provides examples of people in Menomonee Falls taking advantage of federal aid. Starting in December 1933, the federal government, as part of one of the New Deal programs, hired 45 unemployed men to work on public works projects around the village.

The Depression similarly battered Catholic churches throughout the Milwaukee Archdiocese. Many teetered toward bankruptcy. But St. Mary Parish weathered the storm, though not without its own set of difficulties. Indeed, 1932 seemed to be a normal year. On May 8—Mother’s Day—the parish held a special Mass for all of its mothers and daughters. Schoolgirls sang songs honoring Mary, our Blessed Mother, and Fr. Bier preached about motherhood “with all of its worries, sorrows, and joys.” Afterward, they gathered in the church basement where the men of the choir and the officers of

the Holy Name Society served breakfast. In June, 18 students received their diplomas, while all of the other children took part in a three-day retreat. The program focused on prayer, meditations, spiritual reading, as well as acts of self-denial and penance. And in August, the parish enjoyed its annual picnic. The local American Legion Band and Leroy Obermann's Orchestra furnished the music. An assortment of games and activities amused the kids and grownups alike, and everyone enjoyed a supper of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, baked ham, peas, rolls, tomatoes and cake. The year 1933 proved more problematic. The parish's indebtedness peaked at \$4,800, and \$520 in teachers' salaries went unpaid. In an attempt to improve the system for collecting revenue, the congregation changed from pew rents to membership dues.

Things held steady thereafter, although there were still problems. The situation was still bad enough that one of the School Sisters offered to teach the 1934-1935 scholastic year for free. Financial straits caused a nasty dispute in 1937-1938 between Fr. Bier and the parish trustees. The root of the problem stemmed from a \$600 boost in Fr. Bier's salary that the Archbishop approved. The trustees, however, balked, claiming they should have some say in setting the pastor's salary. Apparently, Fr. Bier received the extra money, but hard feelings lingered for some time.

To help combat these problems, the congregation resorted to straightforward methods to raise funds. In July 1937, the parish did not hold its annual picnic. Instead, Fr. Bier sent each parishioner an appeal for a cash donation. The measure raised \$1,280 for the church coffers. A more novel approach began in January. Parish members noted that Sunday Masses were getting too crowded by people who attended but were not registered members. To alleviate the problem and help raise needed funds, St. Mary issued membership cards to those who had paid their 1936 pew rent and who agreed to pay their 1937 pew rent, if possible. The card admitted them

free of charge to all church services. Anyone over 16 years of age who did not have a membership card had to pay 25 cents at the door before they were admitted. The system began on February 1, 1937, and was used for the remainder of the year. Several long-time parishioners remember that the program was very unpopular, and existing records do not indicate that the policy continued into 1938. These efforts and a simple tightening of the parish belt enabled the parish to reduce its debt steadily until it was fully paid on December 30, 1940.

Residents of Menomonee Falls likewise showed their vitality despite the stubborn economic hardships. In September 1940, businessmen and professional men of the village sponsored a fall festival. The *Menomonee Falls News* reported that the leaders were determined to show everyone "a most wonderful time, without costing a penny." Everything—the food, coffee, and beverages—was free of charge. Over 6,000 people thronged to the event. There were games and contests for everyone. The women competed in a husband-calling contest. Area farmers struggled with village businessmen in a tug-of-war. Local fire departments engaged in a water fight. And kids tried to tackle a greased pig. Though it was all too brief, the carnival supplied a much-needed boost for people's spirits. Menomonee Falls continued its push the following year and actually made some progress. In August 1941, the newspaper noted the many changes taking place in the village. New businesses sprouted and several older establishments found new owners. New buildings included a movie theater and the A. A. Schmidt & Sons Funeral Home.

Despite the advances, it took another world war to propel Menomonee Falls and the rest of the country out of the Great Depression. The war had been raging in Europe since 1939, and the U.S. government's support of the French and British made some inroads against the economic stagnation in America. Everything changed on December 7, 1941.

On that sleepy Sunday morning, the Japanese attacked naval forces at Pearl Harbor. The U.S. officially entered the war the following day, and for the next four years, the war effort overshadowed everything else.

The privations of the Depression years were quickly forgotten as American factories hummed with activity to supply the armaments and goods needed for the war, and farmers boosted their crop production. Though the economic outlook definitely brightened, the war brought about a different set of hardships for those on the home front. Millions of young men flocked to join the armed services, severely straining the labor supply for all kinds of businesses. Women picked up the slack, especially for factory work. Indeed, "Rosie the Riveter" became one of the most enduring and most heroic images of World War II. The labor shortage stung farmers doubly. The military claimed many husbands and sons, and many other hands left farms for higher-paying factory jobs. Waukesha's county board tried to help by forming local agricultural committees. These canvassed their communities looking for anyone willing and able to help area farmers. The war imposed still other hardships upon the American people. The military needed a wide variety of goods and that, in turn, caused shortages of basic items—meat, canned goods, coffee, sugar, butter, rubber, and gasoline—for those on the home front. Rationing became an irritating part of daily life.

Nevertheless, the people of Menomonee Falls did what they could to support the war effort. In March 1942, the village hosted a "Salvage for Victory" parade as a means for area farmers to donate their scrap metal and other salvageable goods. Governor Julius Heil appeared at Menomonee Falls' Fall Festival in October 1942 to dedicate an "Honor Roll" for area men entering military service. That same month, village residents took part in a practice blackout for an air raid mobilization test. In December 1942, the Menomonee Falls Telephone Company asked the ultimate sacrifice from teenage girls—to limit local calls

to five minutes to ease congestion of the switchboard.

Villagers supported the war monetarily as well. In May 1943, the U.S. Treasury Department awarded St. Mary School a Minute Man Flag for a 90 per cent participation rate in the purchase of Defense Bonds and Stamps in one week. Fr. Bier blessed the flag, along with a new American flag, on May 9. The students carried the new flags to the school grounds and hoisted them during a stirring ceremony. And local residents supported loan drives throughout the war. Area businessmen often provided incentives to insure the success of the drives. In 1944, for example, Ray Zahn, owner of the local theater, pledged a free ticket to each bond purchaser of the Fourth Loan Drive.

Above all, however, people's thoughts were with the servicemen fighting on battlefronts in Africa, Europe and the South Pacific. One of the grim realities of war is that young men die in battle, and two Menomonee Falls households felt the horrible pain of that truth. On November 20, 1943, Marine Private Walter J. Miller was the first local man killed in action. Willard Schneider, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Army Air Corps, was killed on July 7, 1944. St. Mary Church held a memorial service for this fallen parishioner on August 1.

Apparently, Menomonee Falls was spread further war casualties, but the carnage continued until the war finally ended in 1945. Germany's surrender in April certainly raised spirits, but Americans realized that there was still fighting to be done in the Pacific Theater. The news of Japan's surrender on August 14 unleashed a raucous celebration in Menomonee Falls. Church bells and the fire siren pierced the evening air to let everyone know that the horrible conflict had concluded. Motorists raced up and down village streets, horns blaring. The main intersection was roped off to let young and old dance with unbridled joy. And all of the churches in the village held special services to remember those who lost their lives, to thank God that

the trial was over, and to pray that another such nightmare may never occur again.

St. Mary celebrated this service without Fr. Bier. For years, he had suffered from tuberculosis and on several occasions left on extended leaves of absence to recuperate. In August 1943, he left for River Pines Sanitarium, Stevens Point, in an effort to regain his strength. Temporary administrators—Frs. A. P. Krause and Raymond H. Ziegler—assumed Fr. Bier's duties until he could return. Unfortunately, Nearly every parish has had a pastor who was universally loved and respected and becomes inseparable from the parish identity.

Fr. Bier who steered the parish through very troubled waters, did not return to St. Mary. He resigned as pastor and became chaplain at Villa Rieti Sanitarium near Jefferson, Wisconsin. But as a show of love for his former parish, he returned to St. Mary in June 1945 to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination. Despite his poor health, Fr. Bier continued working until the final five years of his life. He finally passed away in April 1965.

Fr. George Lochowitz succeeded Fr. Bier as pastor in 1944. His stay was fairly brief, however. In May 1946, he accepted the pastorate of St. Stephen Church, New Coeln, Milwaukee County. His successor led St. Mary through its most prolific period and became one of the parish's most beloved pastors.

### ***TABLE OF PLENTY: FR. CARL ESCHWEILER AND THE POST-WAR BOOM***

For St. Mary, **Fr. Carl Eschweiler** was that man. For the parishioners lucky enough to have known him, Fr. Eschweiler was warm, fatherly and a true spiritual leader. In short, he was a man of the people. He was born in Milwaukee on February 9, 1902. He attended St. Anne School and received his religious training at St. Francis Seminary. He was ordained in 1926 and commenced his priestly duties as assistant pastor in Hartford, Wisconsin, where he became acquainted with many folks in the Menomonee Falls area. He then served stints as pastor at Dane, Eagle and New Coeln before arriving in Menomonee Falls to take over St. Mary on May 1, 1946. For the next 25 years, he guided St. Mary through a period of growth and prosperity that drastically reshaped the parish landscape.

Having just emerged from a sustained economic depression and then a world war,



people in the United States eagerly yearned for a quieter, more prosperous period. Millions across the country flocked to the suburbs to create safe havens for themselves and their growing families. Menomonee Falls was part of this exodus. The village's population as of 1950 totaled 2,466; ten years later that figure soared to 18, 213. The population explosion and concurrent economic growth transformed Menomonee Falls from a small, agricultural support center into a bustling, expanding Milwaukee suburb.

For years previous, there had been a strong link between Menomonee Falls and the Wisconsin metropolis to the south. In 1937, the village built 36 homes in its new Hiawatha Heights sub-division, the first FHA-approved sub-division in Wisconsin. The building continued until the war halted additional construction. Most of the people who moved into this area worked in Milwaukee but wanted

a home in a small town setting. The lure of Milwaukee employment drew ever more people from the Falls. So many villagers worked at the Seaman Body division of Nash Motors that it was commonly referred to as the "Menomonee Falls rest home." The trend continued throughout the 1950s, and by the end of the decade, 61 percent of village residents worked in Milwaukee compared with 25 percent who found employment in Menomonee Falls. Nevertheless, the village enjoyed a tremendous amount of growth and prosperity in its own right during the post-war period.

Menomonee Falls' boom period literally began with a boom! In late July 1946, the entire village shook from a horrific gas explosion at Held's Café on the "four corners." The blast completely destroyed the café, blew a neighboring business off its foundations and shattered windows of several nearby establishments.

The village quickly recovered and embarked upon a period of sustained growth and improvement. In June 1947, the village began house-to-house mail delivery. With this new service, the local newspaper boasted that Menomonee Falls was "rapidly developing into a city of some prominence in the state." Two months later, the Hiawatha Shopping Center opened on the corner of Fond du Lac Avenue and Jacobson Drive. It included a new A & P Supermarket, an electrical appliance store, a pharmacy, a doctor's office, a dentist's office, a clothing store, and a savings and loan. The Falls' economy received a huge boost in 1948 when the Stolper Steel Products Corp. of Milwaukee announced it was constructing a new factory and headquarters in Menomonee Falls. The company launched operations in its new factory in 1950 and employed several hundred people.

This economic growth spurred the village's geographical growth. To attract even more businesses, village leaders began a series of six land annexations in 1958. Voters overwhelmingly approved these additions that,

in the end, achieved a "virtual consolidation of Menomonee Falls with Menomonee Township." These efforts bore fruit. In October 1959, the village set a record by issuing more than \$2.4 million in building permits. The centerpiece of this construction was the new Pilgrim Shopping Center located at the intersection of Pilgrim Road and Main Street. The site, the seventh largest shopping center in the Greater Milwaukee area built over the previous decade, included several small retail and service shops as well as a grocery store, a hardware store and a Woolworth's. It opened amidst a great deal of hoopla in November 1960, just in time for the Christmas shopping season.

Despite the prosperity that the country at large and Menomonee Falls experienced during the 1950s, an underlying anxiety crept into the national consciousness. The uncertainty of the Cold War between the United States and communist Soviet Union threatened the very stability that post-war America sought to create. The threat of nuclear Armageddon in this post-war atomic age spawned a hysteria to root out communists in the country, especially within the federal government. Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy championed this drive until his zealotry brought about his own political demise. The Cold War hit even closer to home. In the early 1950s, the *Menomonee Falls News* featured articles on civil defense and what to do in the event of a nuclear attack. And in 1956, the army constructed several NIKE missile sites in the Milwaukee area, including one between Menomonee Falls and Lannon. (The site was deactivated in 1961.) Though the Cold War mentality was very real, it did not stifle the prosperity and growth characteristic of this era.

The post-war baby boom deeply affected churches throughout the Milwaukee Archdiocese. Between 1953 and 1958, the number of Catholics in the area exploded, increasing by over 100,000 people. This spurt prompted the formation of 17 new parishes,

the construction of 74 new grade schools, and additions to 22 existing schools. St. Mary Parish certainly took part in what historian Steven Avella called a “veritable orgy of building.” At the start of World War II, the congregation tallied 954 souls, 174 of whom attended the school. As of 1947, those figures had climbed to 1,507 and 266, respectively. This tremendous growth stretched the existing resources of the parish to the breaking point.

Fr. Eschweiler needed help. Barely one month after his own arrival, the pastor received assistance with the arrival of Fr. Joseph Reichling. A native of Fond du Lac, Fr. Reichling studied at St. Francis Seminary and was ordained in 1937. During the war, he enlisted as a chaplain in the Army, rose to the rank of captain, and received a Bronze Star for his service in Italy and France. He arrived at St. Mary in July 1946, the first of a long line of assistant priests who have provided invaluable support and put their own stamp upon the spiritual life of the parish.

The school presented an even more pressing problem. The old, four-room schoolhouse was already overcrowded by the start of World War II, but the post-war surge of children threatened to burst the structure at the seams. To help alleviate the problem, the school set up temporary classrooms in the church basement. The parish had already made plans for a new school during Fr. Lochowicz’s pastorate, and had also started raising funds for the project. Wartime restrictions, however, blocked any further work. In **February 1947**, the parish appealed to the War Production Board and received permission to **build a new school**. The people of St. Mary wasted no time. They purchased a plot of land adjacent to the old school from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Wick and broke ground there in April 1947. Work proceeded rapidly, and the first four class-

rooms opened for business in January 1948. Four additional classrooms were soon completed. May 6, 1948, was a joyous day for the parish. Archbishop Moses Kiley not only confirmed about 100 young people, but he also formally dedicated the new school.

Despite the crowded conditions, St. Mary extended its educational opportunities. In September 1947, the parish offered high school classes for the first time. Twenty-four young people entered the ninth grade that fall. One year later, the school added tenth-grade classes. In March 1949, the two high school classes enjoyed a day trip to Chicago, where they visited the planetarium, the aquarium and the science museum. Prospects seemed bright that a complete high school could be available in the not too distant future. The number of students in the two secondary grades increased steadily and topped off at 64 in 1951, but the continued escalation of the number of students at the grade school level simply overwhelmed the school’s ability to keep up and dashed any dreams of making additional high school classes available. Sadly, St. Mary discontinued its fledgling high school after the 1953-1954 term.

The baby boom had a ripple effect on the parish as a whole. More children required more teachers, who, in turn, required more living space. For years, the School Sisters occupied a portion of the original school building for their quarters. When the parish completed the new school in 1948, the Sisters added the now vacant classrooms in the old



structure to their accommodations. But the new arrangement did not last long. Only one year later, children filled the new school to its capacity, forcing the school to appropriate two rooms in the old school for classroom space. As enrollment continued to spiral upward, the Sisters clearly needed a new residence. In early 1951, the parish made plans for a new convent that could accommodate 20. Excavation commenced in July 1951, and on May 15, 1952, the Sisters, undoubtedly with a great deal of joy in their hearts, moved into their new dwelling.



The effects of the baby boom finally reached St. Mary Church itself. As of 1947, the seating capacity of the church totaled 215, which was totally inadequate to meet the needs of a parish of 1,500 people. Fr. Eschweiler did what he could. He increased the number of Sunday Masses to five, but even that was not enough. Ray Etzel was an usher at that time, and he recalls that every Mass was standing room only. The problem soon reached critical mass as the congregation expanded to nearly 2,000. The parish held a special meeting on April 10, 1951, and voted unanimously to enlarge the church to accommodate 800 people. The plan called for the church to be elongated with wings to either side. Ground was broken in November 1951, and the cream city bricks from the chimney of the old sugar beet factory were used for the additions. Fr. Eschweiler targeted Easter Sunday 1953 as the day on which the parish would celebrate Mass in the newly remodeled church. Easter was the perfect day for such an event. It was, and is, a joyous occasion. It culminates Christ's sacrifice



on earth and promises a new life for everyone that follows in His path. That Easter Sunday Mass for St. Mary Parish likewise culminated the parishioners' sacrifices and promised a new venue in which they could express their love and faith in Our Risen Lord. The official dedication took place on June 14, 1953. Fr. Bier, along with 54 other clergy, returned to help celebrate the occasion. Bishop Atkielski congratulated the congregation, telling them that the church reflected "their faith, their love of their God and their loyal trust in their pastor." Their faith, he added, was their greatest heritage for it provided "solace, peace and the consolation of knowing any sacrifice they might have made has not been in vain."

The parishioners indeed made many sacrifices. The building program came at a high cost. The new school cost \$147,000; the convent totaled \$103,000; and **the church** cost \$249,000. Nevertheless, St. Mary, reflecting the generosity and determination of the parish as well as the general prosperity of the time, paid off the school within three years and the convent within two years of their completion.

There were many other examples of how St. Mary had emerged from the lean times of the Depression and war years and solidified the link between the parish and the boom taking place in Menomonee Falls. In 1948, for example, the parish began sponsoring a Home Show to coincide with the flurry of house construction in the village. Roughly 30 merchants set up displays exhibiting the latest household gadgets. The parish continued sponsoring the event at least through 1952. In October 1950, Fr. Eschweiler embarked on a month-long trip to Europe. At his farewell party, the parishioners presented their pastor with the princely sum of \$1,100 for traveling money. And in 1954, over 1,100 people took part in the parish's golden jubilee dinner, helping to raise \$10,000 for the church.

The parish fall festival of 1951 epitomized the affluence of the times. The event included the usual array of food, games and music, but the main attraction was the **“Name the Lambs” contest**. Participants had to supply names for a pair of male and female lambs. Nationally known contest judge Professor Hugh Riordan of Marquette University and his staff served as the final arbiters in the contest. The prizes were indeed grand. Third prize was a Hot-point refrigerator, valued at \$239.95; second prize was an RCA television set with a \$299.95 price tag; and first prize was a Nash Airflyte two-door sedan worth \$1,931.50. The contest was open to the general public, and thousands of entries poured in. Virginia Marquardt of Wauwatosa took top honors and the new car. Her winning entry included the name “BAAbie Boy” for the boy lamb and “Bleatable” for the girl. Professor Riordan thought the names were clever and alliterative. Then he stretched things too far by commenting, “As a former farm boy, I am convinced that almost any mama sheep’s heart would swell with pride and motherly-love at having such names for her little ones.”

There was nothing sheepish about the continued growth of the late 1950s—a growth that sparked still further changes. The most visible change took place in 1957 when Archbishop Albert Meyer established a new parish in Menomonee Falls—Good Shepherd. By this time, Fr. Eschweiler ministered to nearly 1,000 families, a monumental task for anyone. To lighten the load, Archbishop Meyer siphoned off some 300 families for Good Shepherd parish and its new pastor, Fr. Francis Eschweiler, brother of St. Mary’s pastor. The formation of Good Shepherd affected St. Mary School as well. The number of school children in Menomonee Falls continued to

**“NAME THE LAMB”  
CONTEST WINNERS**

**1<sup>st</sup> Prize**  
**“BAAbie Boy” and**  
**“Bleatable”**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Prize**  
**“Lord Nash” and “Lady Air-**  
**flyte”**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Prize**  
**“Menomonee Rex” and**  
**“Menomonee Regina”**

soar. A 1957 school census showed that the number of schoolchildren in the area had increased 500% from 1950 figures. St. Mary School struggled to squeeze in the multiplying hosts. In 1956, the school tallied 650 students. More room was needed, beyond the eight classrooms in the new school and the four in the old school. Administrators hastily converted the school library and another small room into classroom space. The following year, another 65 students registered. The opening of Good Shepherd School in 1958 provided a temporary respite by taking 240 students from St. Mary.

Nevertheless, parish leaders realized that the surge in enrollment would continue, and thus made plans to erect a ten-classroom addition to the school. Fr. Eschweiler told a reporter in January 1959, “We are trying to get ready for what’s coming.” The congregation agreed and approved the plans at the annual parish meeting in February. Crews started work on the new school that summer and razed the original school building. This was undoubtedly a bittersweet moment for the hundreds of parishioners who spent their childhood years in the old school. They realized there was a need for new classrooms, but the loss of a familiar friend left an empty space in their hearts. The new addition opened its doors in September 1960.

With a growing throng of young people in the village, St. Mary instituted a variety of activities and programs to instill Catholic values and to provide a constructive channel for their energies. Organized sports were one such outlet. St. Mary high school and grade school classes had football teams. Some experienced a great deal of success. The 1952 high school team went through the entire season undefeated. St. Mary encouraged other organizations to step in and help mold the parish youth. Parishioners organized a

Girl Scout/Brownie Troop in late 1955, and three years later, the Holy Name Society sponsored a Boy Scout Troop. For many years, these groups have taken part in activities that not only benefited the parish but the whole community. The parish itself took steps to provide a gathering place for its young people. In 1956, a booster club remodeled the church basement into a clubroom for parish kids. They used it for dances, various social gatherings, and as a game room.

Other programs were designed to reach young people who did not attend St. Mary School. Archbishop Stritch had established the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) in 1937. It was a parish-based catechetical program that drew upon lay volunteers to supply religious instruction to Catholic youths who attended public schools. St. Mary

organized its CCD program in 1956 and thus began a program of drawing public school children into the St. Mary family that has continued to the present.

Clearly, the immediate post-war period was a time of tremendous change in the physical sense. However, the parish was about to embark upon a period of dramatic doctrinal or spiritual change.



## *AWAKE! AWAKE, AND GREET THE NEW MORN: THE 1960S AND VATICAN II*

The spectacular growth of the 1950s spilled over into the following decade, but the winds of change drastically altered the social landscape of the United States in the 1960s. A multitude of minority groups—African-Americans, Native Americans, women, and Hispanics—demanded equitable and just treatment. Young people rebelled against the perceived restraints of middle-class life and sought new horizons through sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll. And protests against the American presence in Vietnam captured headlines around the country. It was a volatile time. The proponents of change butted heads with the needs and desires of a generation scarred by depression and world war. All too often, violence erupted when these two forces clashed. The assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., the riots in Los Angeles, Newark, and Detroit, and the battle in the streets of Chicago during the 1968 Democratic Convention left people wondering what had gone wrong.

Though a small, mid-western town, Menomonee Falls did not escape the turmoil completely. The steady growth continued, to be sure. Its population continued to climb, reaching 31,697 by the end of the decade. And the village's progress pushed forward. The decade's high point was the dedication of the Community Memorial Hospital in June 1964. Likewise, the growth at St. Mary persisted. The number of parishioners reached 4,419 in 1961. Two short years later, nearly 1,000 more were added to the flock. All of the school expansion of the previous years was unable to handle the flood of children. The lack of space forced Fr. Eschweiler to announce in December 1961 that the school would drop its first-grade classes the following year. Even the addition of five more classrooms in 1965 did not resolve the problem. St. Mary did not offer first-grade classes again until 1969.

While the growth continued, the people of Menomonee Falls began to be caught up in the currents of change that coursed across the country. In May 1964, for example, a group of local residents formed the Committee on Human Rights to disseminate information concerning the Civil Rights Bill before Congress. Beyond passage of the bill, the committee hoped to "promote a spirit of mutual respect and understanding among races" in Menomonee Falls.

Racial discord eventually infiltrated the village's borders when trouble in Milwaukee affected the nearby suburbs. For years, African-Americans living in Milwaukee's inner city had suffered from discrimination, joblessness and poverty. To address some of these problems, blacks began pushing for school desegregation and open housing. Given the spirit of the times, it was not surprising that a riot broke out on July 30, 1967. The police, the National Guard and a timely rainstorm quickly suppressed the outburst. Historian John Gurda notes that, though the riot itself was modest compared with those of other cities, it still created a "siege mentality" among white Milwaukee residents. Mayor Henry Maier attempted to forestall further trouble by imposing a round-the-clock curfew in Milwaukee. Menomonee Falls, along with other surrounding communities, followed Milwaukee's lead and likewise imposed curfews from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. An eerie nighttime silence settled over the Falls, which had become a "virtual ghost town."

Later that year, Menomonee Falls became embroiled in its own open housing controversy. In November 1967, a committee recommended that the Village Board adopt an open housing ordinance. An overflow crowd packed the Municipal Building's council chambers for a public hearing in December. Roughly two dozen people spoke at the

meeting and were evenly divided on the issue. Opponents claimed the ordinance was unnecessary, took rights away from the majority or placed undue burdens on property owners. Pastor Kenneth Lake of the Independent Baptist Church asserted that, according to the Bible, blacks were the “servant race” and that the ordinance was trying to raise them above their divinely ordained station. Supporters turned that argument on its head, claiming that morality and justice demanded equal opportunities. In the end, the Village Board unanimously adopted the ordinance.

The parishioners of St. Mary not only faced the transformation of American society, but they were also swept up in the currents of change that swirled within the Roman Catholic Church. Pope John XXIII recognized that the Church needed to adapt to a rapidly changing global society, and, thus, he convened a council in Rome on October 11, 1962. The council continued after John XXIII’s death in 1963 and the succession of Pope Paul VI. To be more in tune with the social and spiritual needs of Catholics, the Second Vatican Council sought to modernize the Church and its liturgical practices. In short, the Church reached out to the people to bring them closer to the faith and make them more active instruments of the Church.

To make the Mass more meaningful, the Vatican Council advocated moving the altar out from the sanctuary to allow the priest to face the congregation. Moreover, the priest now said the Mass in English rather than Latin. Other notable changes involved the relaxation of the rules governing abstinence on Fridays and fasting before Communion. The changes sparked mixed reactions among the parishioners of St. Mary. Some missed the comfort, the solemnity, and the discipline of long-established Church practices. Most, however, favored the metamorphosis because it encouraged active participation in the Mass. The first step occurred in the early 1960s, when lectors and commenta-

tors began serving at Mass. From this humble start, the parishioners launched a process of piecemeal change that continued for many years after the Vatican II Council ended. The basic goal of these changes remained constant—to make the celebration of the Mass an active experience through which each person could take Jesus’ words to heart.

Vatican II also called upon lay people to become more involved in the life of the parish. From the very beginning, the people of St. Mary had been involved in the religious and social life of the church. By the mid-1960s, several long-standing groups were still in place. The Holy Name Society, Senior Sodality, Junior Sodality and Ushers Society remained cornerstones in the congregation’s faith life and provided essential leadership for church dinners, bazaars and picnics. More recent organizations such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society, CCD, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts expanded the social and spiritual growth opportunities for adults and youth of the parish.

There was yet another lay organization that not only encouraged involvement within the parish but well beyond. The Christian Family Movement (CFM) was a post-World War II initiative with roots that reach back to the early 20th century and Canon Joseph Cardijn of Belgium. He hoped to bring disaffected youth back to the Church and to improve the wider community. To these ends, he trained “cells” of dedicated young people to act as apostles, dealing with social problems through the credo “observe, judge, act.”

Canon Cardijn’s philosophy of social activism surged across the Atlantic to the United States in the 1930s and spurred several ventures, one of which was the CFM. Married couples belonging to the CFM fostered greater faith-filled family life through “intense involvement with the neighborhood, the parish, the community, the world.” CFMers were “disturbers of the peace” who advocated reform with the Church and within society at

large. Liturgically—well in advance of Vatican II—they celebrated dialogue Masses and also held services at which the altar was turned around and the priest faced the congregation. In the social realm, CFMers promoted political activism, encouraging Catholics to run for public office in order to reform society. They also hosted foreign students to forge new friendships and give a positive impression of American family life. During the Cold War, the CFM assisted refugees fleeing communist countries. And, amid a budding civil rights movement, the CFM promoted racial toleration.

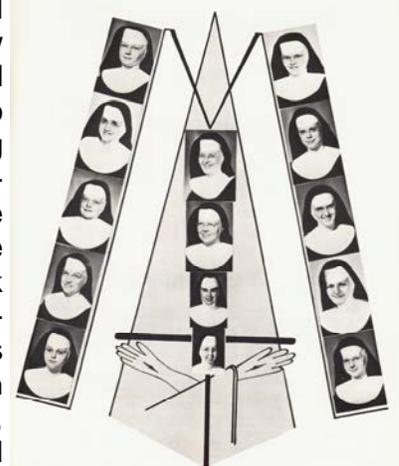
The CFM first reached St. Mary around 1962. True to form, the St. Mary group addressed issues inside and outside the parish. In 1964, St. Mary CFMers sponsored a series of talks examining problems related to marriage. Fr. Eschweiler and Dr. John Barta led discussions on Sex in Marriage, Love and Control, and Responsible Parenthood. Later that year, the CFM had Waukesha Assemblyman Harold Clemens speak about relevant issues in the upcoming legislative session. Over the next several years, the organization traveled to the Veteran's Hospital at Wood, Wisconsin, to visit with veterans who had no families, discussed ways to welcome newcomers to the parish, encouraged ecumenical efforts and interfaith dialogue and held Cana Masses for member couples. At a Mass on November 28, 1967, 65 couples attended and renewed their marriage vows. The CFM as well as the other lay groups at St. Mary certainly provided fertile ground for the lay leadership that fully implemented the changes wrought by Vatican

There were many other events designed to embrace the Vatican II vision to reach out to everyone, not just Catholics. The St. Mary Sodality hosted a talk in January 1965 at which Fr. Matthew Gottschalk of St. Francis Church in Milwaukee's inner city spoke about the "Life of the Negro in this Area." And at its February 1967 meeting, the Sodality invited Fr. Eschweiler and Mrs. Lawrence Mueller of St. Paul United Church of Christ to talk about

the ecumenical movement. Fr. Eschweiler noted that unity among churches would not happen immediately and would not be easy, but the meeting demonstrated that great strides had been made. Indeed, he commented that the meeting would not have been possible 20 years earlier. The Catholic Youth Organization of St. Mary hosted a study in communication for its members. Parish leaders held ten workshops to help young people learn how to communicate ideas more effectively and, in the process, discover untapped talents and develop leadership skills they never knew they had.

### **Vatican II modifications also filtered down to the School Sisters.**

New rules allowed the sisters to begin using their baptismal name rather than the name they took when they entered religious life. Thus, in June 1967, school principal



Sister Carlotta began using her given name, Sister Rose Eschweiler, a younger sibling of Fr. Carl. Simultaneously, relaxed dress codes enabled the sisters to wear more contemporary suits rather than the traditional habit. The changes must have been dramatic. Diane Harley recalls what a shock it was to learn that her teachers had hair and knees!! Even Fr. Carl did not recognize Sister Rose, his own sister, in her new "uniform"!! The relaxation of these rules prompted one sister to joke to future Principal Sister Nivard Hainault that in the old days it was "night prayers and lights out." But in the post-Vatican period, it became "light prayers and nights out."

St. Mary Parish School and its curriculum also felt the effects of Vatican II. In October 1966, Sister Rose discussed the changes at a joint

meeting of the Senior Sodality and the Holy Name Society. She used stark words, telling the crowd that education was in “revolution.” To better prepare students, Catholic schools had to emphasize intellectual growth that enabled them to succeed in the outside world. A Christian would “make little or no impact” on the world, Sister Rose asserted, unless he or she thrived in their secular studies. Vatican II likewise altered religious teaching. The emphasis shifted from teaching morality in terms of “thou shalt/thou shalt not” to stressing God’s love and concern for his people and that scripture was a “record of God’s efforts to save mankind....”

**With the new rules and practices stemming from Vatican II,**

St. Mary needed a vehicle to explain the changes and inform the congregation about the activities offered through the parish. In October 1966, the Holy Name Society proposed, and Fr. Eschweiler heartily endorsed, a parish newsletter—the *Peals from the Bells of St. Mary*. The tremendous changes of the time and the rapid growth of the parish, Fr. Eschweiler believed, threatened the unity of the parish. Something needed to be done or St. Mary faced the “unhappy prospect of becoming a group of disjointed bodies meeting in an edifice on Sunday to worship God instead of a unified family of God meeting in His house to join with Him in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.” The Holy Name Society immediately addressed Fr. Eschweiler’s concern and the *Peals* was the result. In the first edition, parishioners learned that the paper hoped to “unify the parish” and “strive in every manner possible to remind us we are all together a body.” Every member was encouraged to take part in Christ’s mission and help meet the needs of the diverse groups that comprise the congregation. If this were done, the parish would successfully “recognize Christ in each other and the family ties which bind us.” Since that time, the *Peals*



has offered an effective channel for new voices, new ideas and a shared sense of belonging to God’s family of believers.

Just as the *Peals* was re-energizing the parish’s sense of unity, the family spirit of St. Mary suffered a jolt in September 1967 when Fr. Eschweiler announced that he was leaving the parish to take over pastoral duties at St. Therese in Eagle. His departure, according to the *Peals*, left “a huge gap in the leadership and spiritual direction” of the parish’s 1,500 families. He had touched thousands of people over the years through his kind words and rousing sermons. Parishioners remembered him as a truly humble man. In 1965, for example, Pope Paul VI bestowed the title Monsignor upon Fr. Eschweiler. In typical fashion, Monsignor Eschweiler downplayed the honor. His pastoral work, he told a reporter, would “always remain uppermost in my mind.” He did not want the title and colorful robes to distract from that primary focus and thus, wanted people to continue calling him “just plain Father Eschweiler.” His pastoral work included one of his proudest achievements—establishing closer ties with people of other faiths. His parting words of wisdom to the people of Menomonee Falls neatly illustrated his broad mindedness. He encouraged churches of all faiths to “unite on the basic moral issues involved in the civil rights movement.” After 21 years of faithful service, the people of Menomonee Falls and of St. Mary said goodbye to their pastor, counselor, and friend.

Fr. Raymond Winkler arrived in October 1967 to assume leadership of the parish. A Michigan native, Fr. Winkler studied at St. Francis Seminary and was ordained in 1938. He served as assistant pastor at St. Monica in Whitefish Bay and subsequently at St. George in Kenosha. His first pastor’s post was at St. Nicholas parish in Dacata, Sheboygan County, from 1952 until 1963. He then moved on to Milwaukee’s inner city, serving as pastor at St. Leo on 25<sup>th</sup> and Locust streets. St. Leo was a large congregation, totaling roughly 2,000 families, and Fr. Winkler called it a

“small United Nations.” Hispanics, American Indians, and African Americans worshipped together and found innovative ways to combat the problems and poverty of the parish’s inner city neighborhood. One of those methods was the formation of a parish council in 1966. When he arrived at St. Mary, Fr. Winkler wasted little time applying the lessons learned at St. Leo to his new post.

In his first column in the *Peals*, Fr. Winkler encouraged the people of St. Mary to form a parish council. He argued that such a body would enable the parish to observe Pope Paul VI’s call to lengthen “the arms of the priest, which do not reach everywhere, and are not sufficient for all labors.” A council could more effectively coordinate the activities of the various parish groups and draw upon the collective wisdom of the congregation to address future problems. The faithful at St. Mary moved quickly. They formed an organizing committee and held the first meeting of the St. Mary Parish Council on March 7, 1968. The council rapidly evolved into a “viable and strong” organization. Since that time, council members have done an incredible amount of work serving as a liaison between the people and parish staff, dealing with parish budgets and other administrative duties, planning new forms of worship, and facilitating ways to reach out to the general public.

Fr. Winkler was not around long enough to see his vision fully blossom. Poor health plagued him during his time at St. Mary, and in May 1969, he left to become chaplain of St. Alphonsus Hospital in Port Washington. The *Peals* praised Fr. Winkler for his leadership in the early days of the council and also because he “stimulated many of us to realize our responsibility to our fellow parishioners.”

Though saddened by the loss of Fr. Winkler, the congregation was undoubtedly delighted when Fr. Eschweiler returned to St. Mary. Fr. Carl’s second tour of duty at St. Mary differed from his first. Above all, the tremendous growth of the 1950s and 1960s in the village

had finally peaked and had started to plateau. Moreover, the feverish activity and change inspired by that growth had calmed somewhat. Vatican II innovations continued, to be sure, but at a less frenetic pace. Perhaps it was this fact that enabled Fr. Eschweiler to focus on his true passion—his pastoral duties—while at St. Mary. He informed the Parish Council at its October meeting that he was turning over most of his responsibilities to the council while his life would be devoted to saying Mass, preaching from the pulpit and teaching the children. And he told the congregation in the September 1969 *Peals* that a modern parish was a “bee-hive of activity.” But the only activity that truly counted, he added, was “the one to which Christ welcomes us as we gather round the altar. From this Act of Christ in union with us and we with Him there must flow the spiritual energy which we need to make our activity in parish affairs truly Christ-like.”

The parish launched several new initiatives that heightened the “spiritual energy” of its members. In 1969, for example, St. Mary commissioned Eucharistic ministers to help distribute Communion, and teams were organized to take the Blessed Sacrament to the hospital and nursing home. The parish also began celebrating “Folk Masses” that year under the guidance of Associate Pastor Fr. Nick Bisenius. Fr. Nick acknowledged that not everyone cared for this new mode of expression, but he believed that those involved with the “Folk Mass” were definitely “uplifted and feel more joined together with others in worship.” This satisfaction, he claimed, was “a good sign that people have been reached and also moved which is the aim of all liturgical expression.”

The parish did indeed continue to reach people and explain the changing nature of the Church. Fr. Bisenius penned several “Our Changing Church” articles for the *Peals*, and St. Mary collaborated with Good Shepherd parish to offer adult education programs that not only examined Vatican II changes but problems that afflicted modern society, such

as alcoholism, drugs and the generation gap. And in 1970 St. Mary joined with other area churches to form a FISH group in Menomonee Falls. FISH (the name comes from an early symbol of Christianity) was an ecumenical group whose purpose was “to resume the simple acts that neighbors used to do for each other.” These acts—reading to the blind, babysitting, providing a meal, giving rides to shut-ins or spending time with an elderly person—were simple acts of kindness that meant so much to the sick, the lonely, and the needy. The *Peals* exhorted the parishioners, “Let’s show that God is not dead—He is alive and active at St. Mary’s!”

The hum of activity at St. Mary continued, but without Fr. Eschweiler. Cancer ravaged his body and once indomitable will and forced him to retire in June 1971, after 45 years in the priesthood. To honor their beloved pastor, the people of St. Mary renamed the school hall “Eschweiler Hall” in October. A few months later, the cancer claimed Fr. Eschweiler on February 10, 1971. His loss was a terrible blow to the congregation. St. Mary and Menomonee Falls were diminished for not having his inspired leadership and genuine caring.

### ***ALL ARE WELCOME: FR. GORDON WEBER YEARS, 1971-1984***

The unenviable task of succeeding Fr. Eschweiler fell to **Fr. Gordon Weber**. Fr. Weber realized he had some very big shoes to fill. Indeed, he compared himself to Phil Bengston, who took over as coach of the Green Bay Packers from the legendary Vince Lombardi. Unlike Coach Bengston, however, Fr. Weber experienced a great deal of success and made his own indelible mark upon St. Mary Parish.



Fr. Weber was born in Milwaukee in 1926. He was baptized at St. Agnes, attended Marquette University High School and St. Francis Seminary and was ordained in 1952. Previous to his arrival at St. Mary, he had assignments at St. Catherine parish in Milwaukee, at St. Mary parish in Elm Grove and at Our Lady of Sorrows parish in Milwaukee. He also served as a professor at St. Francis de Sales Preparatory Seminary. Fr. Weber considered himself moderately progressive with regard to Vatican II changes. In his view, the focus on increasing lay participation in the apostolate of the Church

was a definite improvement on the old days of “pay/pray/obey.” He was no revolutionary. He did not want to make changes simply for changes sake. But he certainly wanted to guard against what he called “cautious inactivity.” Similar to his predecessor, Fr. Weber envisioned a priest role as one who “forms community.”

It was probably this like-mindedness that prompted Fr. Eschweiler to hand-pick Fr. Weber as the next pastor of St. Mary. Fr. Weber arrived in December 1970, and the *Peals* introduced him as the “eventual successor” to Fr. Eschweiler. Once Fr. Weber became entrenched as pastor, he worked to create what he called a “full-service” parish, one that used every available means to help people spiritually, psychologically and materially. This in turn would strengthen the sense of community by creating a bond between St. Mary and those receiving parish services.

This was a challenge. St. Mary Parish continued to grow. Nearby Germantown was

one of the fastest growing areas in the state at that time, and Catholics in the area continued flocking to St. Mary. The congregation swelled from 5,655 members in 1967 to 7,265 in 1972. In his 1972 annual report, Fr. Weber noted that St. Mary, like any huge parish, presented “more things to be done than possibly can be done [by] any priest who is alert to opportunities for apostolic service.” Fortunately, St. Mary had an abundance of talented **individuals who eagerly provided the necessary leadership to create a “full-service” parish.**



St. Mary instituted several measures to address the spiritual needs of the parish. The congregation’s persistent expansion created what Fr. Weber called a “hazardous” overcrowding at Masses. To help alleviate the problem, the parish converted the school’s **“Mission Room”** into a chapel and multi-purpose room. Marian Hall was dedicated in 1973, and Fr. Weber noted that the facility added a “new dimension” to parish life. It not only provided additional space for prayer and worship but also offered facilities for religious education, special occasions, school programs and other parish groups. That same year, Bill Erickson revived the church choir. Under the direction of Mr. Erickson and subsequent directors—Daniel Desaulniers and Mary Briggs—the choir has added a joyful, vibrant element to the celebration of the Mass.

Religious education was yet another component geared toward the congregation’s spirituality. St. Mary had offered religious classes to Catholic children of high school age since the 1950s but in the wake of Vatican II, also added programs for elementary school and even pre-school children in the late 1960s. Professional direction was needed to guide the rapidly expanding program; thus, the parish hired Dave Heinz in 1968 as its first full-time director. He and his successors

could always count on many devout parishioners who were willing to help young people embrace Jesus’ love. The program continued to grow during Fr. Weber’s tenure. By 1973, some 80 staff and teachers provided instruction for over 1,000 children.

Fr. Weber realized that religious education should not end after high school. It was a life-long process. Thus he and parish leaders worked to strengthen adult learning opportunities, or what Fr. Weber called “teachable moments.” Fr. Eschweiler had offered talks on various topics of interest, and Fr. Weber continued the practice. But he also encouraged the formation of smaller “Christian communities” to deepen one’s faith. By 1972, a ladies group met every other week to discuss Bible readings, a special group was formed for Lenten preparation, and the parish scheduled “parent learning time” twice a month at the same time as the children’s religious education program. The following year, Fr. Weber estimated that 25 adults were attending weekly educational programs and that roughly 160 attended special programs.

Fr. Weber relied upon his associate priests and the School Sisters to help make St. Mary run smoothly. By and large, however, the parish laity contributed the bulk of the workers. Some lay members took their devotion to an even higher level with the permanent deaconate program. Archbishop William Cousins restored the program for the Milwaukee Archdiocese in 1973. The following year, a series of Sacred Heart theologians helped with religious education and other programs at St. Mary. By 1977, St. Mary gained its first permanent deacon with the ordination of **Robert Boehlen**. Boehlen was a husband, father and employee of



Wisconsin Electric Power Company, but he wanted an opportunity to serve the Church in a “priest-like way.” The diaconate program was just such an opportunity. Thomas Wuchterl had been a St. Mary parishioner since 1960. A young priest prompted Thomas to become a deacon, and after five years of rigorous training, he was ordained in 1978. He has served St. Mary Parish ever since, assisting with baptisms, witnessing marriages, visiting hospitals and nursing homes, leading prayer services and overseeing the marriage enrichment program. In addition to these first two men, Deacons Buck Buth and Thomas Monday eventually joined the parish family and provided invaluable service over the years.

Amidst all of the activity, St. Mary paused to enjoy a very special occasion. In April 1977, Fr. Weber celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination. The entire issue of the *Peals* was devoted to honoring Fr. Weber. In it, Sister Angela Ireland praised him for his concern for social justice in all its forms. His concern for others was not surprising because he was a “sensitive man, who will always ‘make time’ to listen and who always cares.” Because of his sensitivity, “one *always* comes away feeling so much better for having been in his presence.” In the parish bulletin, Father thanked the people of St. Mary for their friendship and asked for their “continued prayers that I might be the better priest—to all whom I encounter—especially to the least, the neediest of the brethren.”

Fr. Weber’s concern for the “neediest of the brethren” was genuine and more of the parish’s efforts were directed toward reaching out to those in need. In February 1972, the Women’s Sodality voted to help with the new “Meals on Wheels” program by picking up the tab for people too poor to pay the fee. And in 1973, a small group of parishioners established the Good Samaritan Group, affiliated with the St. Vincent de Paul Society. As its name implies, this group performed acts of charity for the less fortunate. The parish formed another group devoted to helping

those in need—the Social Concerns Committee. This group had a wide-ranging, multi-pronged mission: to address the needs of the elderly, to advocate pro-life education and legislation, to reach out to criminals and to engage in activities to feed the hungry. Both groups played instrumental roles in bringing two families from war-ravaged Southeast Asia to start new lives in the United States. In 1975, Phuc Viet Nguyen and his family arrived from Vietnam and four years later, Khanti Somsak and his family arrived from Laos.

The parish launched other organizations and made new efforts to reach out to ever more people. In April 1978, a widow/widowers group was formed to provide support and social opportunities for parishioners who had lost a spouse. By 1980, St. Mary had formed a senior citizens group, a hospital visitors group, and a home visitors group designed to visit newcomers, shut-ins, the unchurched and the alienated. And in October 1980, the parish held its first Mass for the deaf. Jane Schindler of Richfield, Chairperson of the Deaf Awareness Committee for Waukesha and Washington Counties, convinced Fr. Weber to let her use sign language at the Mass to benefit the hearing impaired. Schindler told a *Milwaukee Journal* reporter that there were many deaf people in the area who did not go to church because they could not participate in the service. The response from everyone was overwhelmingly positive and arrangements were made for Mrs. Schindler to sign one Mass a month through June 1981. Joanna Charpentier, the four-year-old daughter of Anne and Joel Charpentier, certainly benefited from Mrs. Schindler’s efforts. Not only was Joanna able to make more sense of the liturgy, but she also learned how to say “Merry Christmas” in sign language.

There was another reason to celebrate in 1980—the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Mary Parish. In the Jubilee issue of the *Peals*, Fr. Weber encouraged the congregation to take the time to rejoice for St. Mary had been an

“exceptional community.” But he also urged members “to become less concerned about ourselves – and share our fruit with others.” Jesus, he continued, was known as “the man for others,” so too should the people of St. Mary be “people for others.” Reaching out and sharing with others could be an anniversary gift “to God, parish, neighbor, and yourself.” The Jubilee Committee planned an entire year’s worth of events to celebrate the history of the parish. The parish sold commemorative plates, and the school children designed a jubilee pin. Nearly 700 school alumni, including two from the class of 1919, attended an open house held on September 28. A special High Mass on October 5 capped the festivities. Archbishop Rembert Weakland joined former clergy and religious to celebrate the event.

The 1970s, however, were not without hardship. Spiraling inflation and unemployment hindered the general economic climate, and the effects reached Menomonee Falls and St. Mary. As the money from the collection plate declined, the parish relied upon alternative sources of funding—some new and some tried and true. For years, the Ladies Sodality contributed to the parish’s well being by sponsoring rummage sales, bake sales and Christmas fairs.



In 1974, St. Mary launched the Stewardship Program to help insure the renewal of congregation pledges. That same year, the parish com-

menced playing bingo on the third Sunday of every month and garnered nearly \$20,000 in proceeds in the first year. And in 1975, the church celebrated its first “Family Fun Festival,” one of its primary fund-raising events. Through the dedication and hard work of numerous parishioners, St. Mary weathered the difficulties of the 1970s with much success. The parish met its general operating expenses but also managed to complete a major

renovation of the church in 1978. The bricks and mortar on the outside were cleaned and repaired, and the inside was refurbished to blend new and old elements that focused the congregation’s attention toward the sanctuary—“to the altar of sacrifice and celebration, to the pulpit and the proclamation of the word, as well as to the figure of Christ.” Among the more prominent changes were the improved lighting in the sanctuary and the removal of the communion rail (which was reused in the choir loft).

The school had its own troubles in the 1970s. From the peak of the mid-1960s, enrollment steadily declined until stabilizing in the 1970s to between 400-500 students. Facing tougher financial times, many area parents found it cheaper to send their children to public schools. To offset the loss, parish leaders established a tuition program to keep the school financially viable.

Fortunately, the school had strong leaders and dedicated teachers who maintained the school’s reputation for quality education.

**Sister Nivard Hainault, school principal from 1973 to 1987,** was one of those leaders. She was born in Michigan’s upper peninsula. She attended a Catholic grade school, and the sisters who ran the school inspired her so deeply that she knew at a very young age that she wanted to become a sister herself. She joined the School Sisters of St. Francis in 1942 and graduated in 1948. She worked at a number of schools before arriving at St. Catherine School, Milwaukee, in 1957. It was there that she met Fr. Weber. In 1973, Sister Nivard took on a new challenge when Fr. Weber asked her to be principal of St. Mary Parish School. He hired her because he saw someone who was firm as well as affirming. Sister Nivard stressed discipline because it provided an environment in which students could better learn. She was such a stickler



that the kids called her “Sarge.” But she had her playful side as well. On one occasion, the children wanted a “change of uniform day.” Rather than let the entire student body dress as they wanted, Sister Nivard crossed them up and came to school dressed in the school uniform.

Sister Nivard and the teachers created an environment that was firm but fun and also positive and enriching. These qualities helped the students excel long after they had left St. Mary. And undoubtedly it was these qualities that convinced parish leaders that they should add a kindergarten program so that even younger children could benefit. They set the program in motion around 1981, and it was an immediate success. It continues to flourish and as of 2004, 39 children were enrolled at St. Mary kindergarten.

Sister Nivard left St. Mary in 1987. Her years at the school were a “joy” because it was a place where the people truly appreciated good educators. She called the school “stimulating, invigorating, life giving.” The parishioners certainly respected and valued her efforts. As a going away gift, they gave her a two-week trip to Ireland, Wales and England.

As the school progressed, Fr. Weber continued his efforts to enhance St. Mary’s sense of community by making it a “full-service parish.” In 1983, the parish launched a Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) process and also made a concerted effort to invite and welcome marginal or inactive Catholics. And St. Mary took part in the Archdiocese RENEW program in the early 1980s. RENEW was an extensive attempt from 1981 to 1983 to foster spiritual development throughout the Archdiocese. Each fall and spring, participating parishes held 5-6 week sessions during which parishioners met in small groups to explore various aspects of discipleship. Roughly 260 people at St. Mary took part in the RENEW groups in 1982 and another 150 participated in 1983.

Yet another “full-service” program of the early 1980s was one of the first of its kind in the country. In 1980, Fr. Weber and Associate Pastor Fr. Rick Pettey attended a conference in Steubenville, Ohio, that discussed enlarging the role of lay ministries in light of the declining number of priests. Upon their return, Fr. Weber and Fr. Pettey organized a General Lay Ministry (GLM) program. They selected Sister Jeanine Retzer to be the GLM coordinator and established a lay ministry board, comprised of ten lay people. In an interview, Fr. Weber noted that St. Mary introduced the program because, in such a large parish, “it was hard to be real communities rather than just mobs.” To overcome this problem, parish leaders decided that “small sharing groups, low key models of basic ecclesial communities” could best elevate the feeling of fellowship among the congregation.

Sister Retzer screened many applicants and settled on 22 parishioners to take part in the program. This inaugural group went through a rigorous two-year training period that included academic studies, spiritual retreats and an internship in the area of the person’s main interests. If, for example, the candidate wanted to serve married couples, he/she would intern with a marriage enrichment group. In 1982, in the middle of the GLM training, Sister Connie Pytlik, School Sisters of Notre Dame, took over as director. In January 1983, Auxiliary Bishop Richard Sklba and Sister Retzer symbolically commissioned the 22 candidates with the laying on of hands. The ministers commenced their work with various neighborhood groups or parish interest groups. Fr. Weber recalls that the program was very successful, and a second class began its training immediately after the first. The ministers provided in-valuable service to the parish and the community and developed leadership skills that benefited others above and beyond St. Mary Parish. A former lay minister, for example, went on to effectively run a parish in northern Wisconsin when her pastor fell ill.

Fr. Weber did not remain at St. Mary long enough to fully benefit from the fruits of his labor. In January 1985, Archbishop Weakland transferred Fr. Weber to St. Eugene Parish in Fox Point. The school children held a special farewell for Fr. Weber and presented him with eight packets containing letters written by every student. Visibly moved, Fr. Weber thanked the children for “all the love that has been shared.” In the Sunday bulletin, Fr. Weber commended the parishioners. “With initiative and independence,” he wrote, “you have combined respect and a spirit of interdependence. And in sharing we have been blessed.”

In an interview, Fr. Weber noted that his time at St. Mary was “very happy,” and he commented that the parish had a “happy blend of talents,” from the trustees and Parish Council to the kitchen crew and janitors. He considers his greatest achievement at St. Mary the focus on the laity and their participation with the parish. He wanted the parishioners to understand that the Church was everyone, not just the priest. As long as they maintained that spirit, St. Mary would always be blessed.

### ***ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS: FR. JOE JANICKI YEARS, 1985-1998***

**Fr. Joseph Janicki** took over as pastor of St. Mary on March 16, 1985. He was born February 15, 1938, in Waukesha. He entered St. Francis Seminary in 1952 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1964. Prior to coming to St. Mary, Fr. Janicki served the archdiocese in various ways. He labored as associate pastor for St. Rita parish in West Allis from 1964 to 1966 and at St. Peter & Paul in Milwaukee from 1966 to 1969. He then became Assistant Chancellor for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee from 1969 to 1978. During that time, he took a two-year leave to study canon law at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. In 1978, he was promoted to Vice Chancellor and in 1980 to Vicar for Priest Personnel. When he arrived in Menomonee Falls, he inherited a dynamic parish that constantly searched for new ways to improve the Catholic identity of the parish and the school. Over the next thirteen years of Fr. Janicki’s pastorate, the people of St. Mary continued their march forward and embraced Christ’s call to become servants for others.



Menomonee Falls and St. Boniface in Germantown to discuss possible collaborative efforts that would extend the parish’s reach. Talks continued among the “Four Saints and a Good Shepherd” for two years, and programs dealing with child/youth ministry and adult education/formation were launched in 1988. By 1992, St. Mary expanded its joint projects and had established ministries to help the separated/divorced, the children of divorced or deceased parents and those who have lost loved ones.

The parish also added to its General Lay Ministry Program. In 1987, the second GLM class of thirty individuals (twenty of whom belonged to St. Mary parish) was commissioned. This class, similar to the first, underwent a rigorous two year training program. They studied Scripture, the Sacraments, worship and the history of the Catholic Church. They also learned communication and leadership skills, group dynamics and interpersonal relationships. They spent their third year doing “field service” in the parish. Tom and Shirley Bigley, for example, worked with St. Mary’s engagement

In 1985, St. Mary joined St. Anthony, St. James and Good Shepherd parishes of

enrichment program. The parents of nine children, they believed they could offer advice and guidance to young couples or single parents. Fr. Weber praised the GLM program because it helped members of the congregation “take ownership” of their church. GLM participants echoed that theme. Craig Walker was impressed with the diverse talents of his comrades, and Tom Bigley was enthused about the contributions that average people can make to the life of the church.

The GLM and St. Mary were fortunate to have Patricia Zealley as program administrator and pastoral assistant. She had received a bachelor’s degree in religious studies from Cardinal Stritch College in 1980 and worked in adult education at St. Alphonsus parish in Greendale. She had always felt a very strong call for the ministry and pastoral duties but realized she needed additional training. Consequently, she enrolled at St. Francis Seminary and obtained a Master of Divinity degree. She took most of the same courses that men studying for the priesthood take and felt ready to tackle new challenges. She started at St. Mary in 1984 as the part-time GLM coordinator. With Fr. Janicki’s blessing, Patricia became the first lay person to complete an internship as a pastoral assistant. She became St. Mary’s full-time pastoral assistant in January 1986 and assumed an expanded array of duties. In addition to the GLM program, she assisted with counseling, preparation for marriage or baptism, hospital visitations, and teaching in the grade school. Zealley asserted that women brought special sensitivities to their ministries that affected the way they looked at “our faith, our church, and our styles of leadership.” She likened her own ministry to that



of a midwife. It was a powerful, distinctly feminine image that spoke “of helping something come to birth.”

St. Mary experienced still other examples of parishioner-driven devotion. In 1985, for example, Linda Marcou and Ann Sherwood wanted to create something that illustrated the joy of the Easter season. They believed the crucifix in the church sanctuary with the suffering figure of Christ did not reflect the promise or the joy of the risen Lord. Both were experienced quilters and put their God-given talents to use. **They created a huge 8 x 13 foot quilt to hang over the crucifix.** The quilt included an empty cross surrounded by a brightly colored pieced square. Some parishioners objected to covering the cross, but most felt the banner projected a happier mood following the somber Lenten season. Marcou told a reporter that the project was a labor of love and inspiration. “It didn’t come from me,” she said. From start to finish, it was something “that should be done.”

Buoyed by the parish’s vibrant faith life, parish staff sought new forms of religious expression. Pope John Paul II declared 1988 a Marian Year, or a time to celebrate the love and holiness of the Blessed Virgin. Archbishop Weakland designated St. Mary a “pilgrimage church” to which Christians would travel and gather. St. Mary and the other area churches joined to celebrate the Festival of Praise in May, the culmination of the year’s series of events. As “pilgrimage church,” St. Mary hosted the special service, and liturgy director Dan Desaulniers developed a **contemporary celebration.** The service stressed Mary’s humanity. In



his sermon, Fr. Janicki called Mary “sister and Mother.” Scripture readings, prayers, music and interpretive sacred dance filled the program. The combined choirs of St. Mary, St. Anthony and St. James parishes sang a new hymn composed by Desaulniers entitled, “Woman Blessed of Earth.” The response to the dance, according to Deasaulniers, was “mostly positive,” but it showed the parish’s willingness to try new methods to draw people closer to the faith.

More worldly matters also occupied much of the parish’s time. Finances, naturally, were one of the main concerns. St. Mary initiated new measures to keep the parish fiscally strong. Parishioners started the “Feastable” in the fall of 1985. It not only provided an opportunity for members to gather and share a good meal, but it also generated revenue



for the parish. Indeed, the “**Feastable**” became an enduring fundraiser for St. Mary. To this day, it is one of the parish’s principle events, combining fellowship, fun and fund-

ing. St. Mary turned a separate problem into another opportunity to augment the parish finances. The number of sisters teaching at the school had been consistently declining, until there were only five in 1985. Of that total, only three resided in the parish convent. To utilize the extra space in the building, the parish closed the convent and renamed the building the Parish Center. It rented out the apartments on the third floor to the sisters. The second floor housed Spiritual Life & Worship and other meeting rooms, while the first floor was rented to Catholic Mutual Insurance and used for office space, a printing room and recovery group meetings. The parish still rents out the space. Assistant Sacristan Jim Gremminger occupies one of the apartments, and the re-

maining space is rented out to the community.

Parish finances as well as the basic mission and other needs/problems of St. Mary came under further scrutiny in 1989. That year, the Parish Council directed the Planning Committee to launch a long-range planning process that would enable St. Mary to set and prioritize goals and objectives. In 1990, the committee formulated a position paper that examined the historical role of Jesus as priest, prophet and servant-king and the role of the Catholic Church in general and St. Mary Parish in particular to fulfill Christ’s call. Though part of a larger whole, the committee called each parish a “living cell,” a unique element in the realization of Christ’s mission. The committee called upon the people of St. Mary to unite as a faith community and strive to strengthen the prayer life of each individual and the entire congregation. Everyone was urged to use their time, talents and treasure to minister to the spiritual and material needs of others, thereby creating a warm, hospitable environment in which anyone can know God’s love.

One of the projects that emerged in the early stages of the planning process was the push for a new school gym/activity center. For several decades, there had been talk of adding a gym to the grounds, but by the late 1980s, the situation had reached the point where something needed to be done. Gym classes had to maneuver around the poles in Eschweiler Hall. Children from grades 1-3 had to stage plays in the church with scenery propped up in front of the altar. And St. Mary had to rent space at other schools for athletic events and various extra-curricular activities. These conditions strained school resources and the time of the kids, parents and teachers. An anonymous \$250,000 donation gave the project an enormous boost, but the estimated costs aroused much opposition. Fr. Janicki stipulated that a parish referendum should be held, and that a two-third’s majority needed to

vote in favor of the project before any major fund drive could proceed. Ballots were mailed in April 1990 to all registered families, and those endorsing the activity center won a narrow 487 to 465 victory.

Because the project failed to win the designated majority, no parish fund drive would take place. Nevertheless, the Parish Council passed a resolution allowing for the formation of a private group, the Friends of St. Mary, to solicit funds for the project. If the Friends raised \$500,000 (over \$300,000 had already been raised), the Parish Council would approve the building of **the activity center**. The Friends dove headlong into the fray. By September 1991, the group had procured over \$425,000, despite a stubborn recession and the outbreak of the Gulf War. Shortly thereafter, the parish acquired the Koch property, just to the south of the school, as the future site of the activity center. The Friends soon reached their \$500,000 goal and relinquished their fund-raising duties to the parish.

The Planning Committee finished its long-range planning process in early November 1991, and the following spring, it issued a five-year agenda. The committee stressed that Jesus calls each of us to discipleship, and St. Mary can fulfill that mission through worship (the liturgy), word (Christian formation) and service (human concerns). To implement fully these three elements, St. Mary needed to enhance the human and material resources devoted to the parish mission. To that end, Fr. Janicki announced in February 1992 that the council had endorsed a major fundraising appeal to finance three major goals: the activity center, several capital improvements and an educational endowment fund. The council hired a professional fundraiser, The

James Company, to direct the effort. The campaign regarding the activity center was already on solid footing thanks in large part to the Friends.

The project forged ahead. By the time the groundbreaking took place on August 24, 1992, over \$700,000 had been raised. The activity center was completed in spring 1993, and since that time it has become the focal point of St. Mary's social/athletic life and even part of its religious experience. It has hosted basketball games, volleyball matches, banquets, graduations, concerts, plays, wine tastings, scouting activities, adorations and even a Lenten labyrinth. Whatever objections



or concerns people may have had about the activity center in the beginning have long since disappeared.

The activity center was but one part of the fundraising campaign. Roughly \$300,000

was needed for various capital projects, such as replacing the school and church boilers, fixing the roof of the Hayes Avenue wing of the school, repaving the parking lot, updating the Eschweiler kitchen and repainting the church. Another key component of the campaign was the educational endowment fund. For years, the School Sisters of St. Francis staffed the school at virtually no cost to the parish. Parents only had to pay for books, supplies and a minor portion of building upkeep. As the number of sisters at the school dwindled, more lay teachers had to be hired at competitive wages. Tuition had to be charged, and as of 1992, that fee had climbed to \$950. Though many families struggled to pay the costs, they did so because they believed in the value of a Catholic education. An endowment fund would help offset those costs and help future generations of students. A fund had been established in the late 1980s and had reached nearly \$18,000 by early

1992, but it needed a dramatic push forward. The ultimate goal for the campaign was to increase the endowment to \$100,000. By June 1994, the total raised had swelled to nearly \$60,000. At that time, parish leaders increased the goal of the endowment fund to \$500,000. Currently, the fund is valued at \$141,000.

As the parish worked to improve school finances, the school itself continued its tradition of quality education. Under the leadership of Barb Lee, principal from 1987-1997, St. Mary Parish School persisted in its focus on fundamental Catholic beliefs but stepped up efforts to get the children more emotionally involved with their faith. In the 1990s, the school transformed the Wednesday Mass into a hands-on celebration. Each grade, with the teacher's help, took turns planning the liturgy for the Mass. Sometimes the children developed spiritual dramatizations or made use of a special chorus, but in every case the children had a vested interest, a personal stake, in the expression of the Word of God.

The image of Christ as servant was a vital element of God's Word; therefore, the school went to great pains to kindle within each student the value of service, the sense that justice and social action was the way to show God's love for us. To practice what they preached, the teachers and the children orchestrated activities within the school and beyond that clearly demonstrated what it meant to be a follower of Christ. The children took part in Habitat for Humanity trips, participated in peer mediation training to learn to resolve student conflicts, set up play-days with the kindergarten children, collected food, books, clothing and money for the needy and numerous other cooperative projects. The bottom line, according to 6<sup>th</sup>-grade teacher Diane Harley, was that there were a lot of kids who did a lot of good for the school.

As important as the religious dimension was, Miss Lee and the teachers realized that the school would have to offer the same type of

curriculum and extra-curricular activities as public schools if St. Mary was to attract and retain its students. Miss Lee started with some very basic changes. In 1987, the children ate their lunch in the classroom. Shortly after her arrival, Miss Lee established a school cafeteria and a hot lunch program. Throughout her years as principal, the school expanded its extra-curricular activities, especially after the activity center was built. Boys and girls competed in track, basketball and volleyball. School plays, several written by music teacher Marie Makal, became much-anticipated events. And a student council was established. Open to any child in grades 5-8, the council quickly became the engine that fueled numerous clothing and food drives and other social activities. The council is still a force and was recently honored by being selected as the host school for the Student Council Jam in April 2005, the first time a private school received that award.

In the 1997-1998 school year, St. Mary took part in a program that tested children's creativity, problem-solving talents, listening skills and ability to work together. "Odyssey of the Mind" or "Destination Imagination" was an exercise in cooperative learning. Diane Harley initiated the program in which students of all ages could gather at lunchtime and form groups to solve either a word problem or a building problem. More serious students tackled a long-term problem for a competition in West Bend. These students dedicated a lot of time toward this effort, meeting after school twice a week from December through March. St. Mary sent two teams of seven students each to the contest. Each team was given a category (Marvelous Mentors or Create & Animate) and had to write an eight-minute skit to illustrate the category. Though teams did have coaches, the children worked together to produce every aspect of the skit—the script, props, costumes and performance. Only the children's imagination limited them, and sometimes the results were surprising. The team that took part in the Create & Animate category developed a skit in which a mad scientist's taco came to life after his cat spills

chemicals on it.

Over the years, "Destination Imagination" became a very popular program. As of 2005, 108 students, roughly one-fourth of the school enrollment, participate, and St. Mary is again sending two teams to a competition. The program is so effective because it allows children's imaginations to run wild, while it also teaches them skills that can only benefit them as adults.

Educational practices at St. Mary also changed dramatically during the 1990s. The teachers realized they and the students would have to adapt if they were to keep pace with a rapidly changing world. Computers were the instruments that wrought much of this change, and St. Mary took steps early on to enable students to learn how to play these newfangled instruments. In 1991, the school, the Athletic Association and the Home & School Association raised enough funds to establish a **computer lab**. The lab consisted of nine new Macintosh computers, a laser printer and a CD ROM to use with talking books and a computerized encyclopedia/reference program. Brenda Bauer was hired to develop and teach a computer literacy curriculum to grades 5-8. Computers have made a definite impact upon St. Mary. The lab continues to flourish, and now, every classroom has a computer.



Not everything, however, revolves around computers. St. Mary teachers continue to stress the fundamentals, such as writing. Recently, the school instituted a writing program called "6+1 Traits." The teachers not only assign letter grades to writing assignments but they also evaluate students' writing based on six traits or points, such as ideas, organization, grammar, presentation, voice and word choice. The combination of

a faith dimension, tried-and-true teaching methods and innovative programs has made St. Mary School the jewel that it is. It is definitely one of the reasons generations of families have remained at St. Mary. In an interview, Marie Makal commented that the school's "For All Generations" theme really rings true. Diane Harley and several of her peers attended the school as children and returned as teachers because they wanted to make the current generation's experience as good as theirs was.

The school certainly pursued the Parish Council's 5-Year Plan in terms of worship, word and service. To achieve the vision of the 5-Year Plan, however, the parish had its own work to do. To strengthen the celebration of the word, or Christian formation, St. Mary maintained its stress on a life-long program of catechesis—homilies, religious instruction, sacramental preparation, RCIA and adult education programs. But the council felt more should be done to reach inactive or alienated Catholics and bring them back into the fold. In 1993-1994, the Christian Formation Committee engaged in a process of welcoming back non-practicing Catholics. But, by their own admission, they enjoyed only modest success. Yet, the committee kept reaching out.

The parish embraced the 5-Year Plan's emphasis on service. By 1993, the Human Concerns Committee expanded its direct service efforts. It joined the Milwaukee Careers Cooperative, a non-profit employment agency owned by churches, synagogues and community organizations that helps the poor unemployed of Milwaukee find jobs. The committee also teamed up with the Sojourner Truth House, a shelter for battered women and their children, and Casa Maria, which operated 4 homeless shelters in Milwaukee's inner city.

Lastly, the parish initiated a “twinning” relationship with Sacred Heart of Jesus in Puerto Cortes, Honduras. Over the next few years, Deacon Tom Monday made several trips to Honduras to assess the needs of that far-flung parish consisting of 65 villages. Money was the number one priority. The people of St. Mary generously provided enough money to build a new church in Jalisco and another in La Fraternidad as well as enough to buy staple goods—medicine, seeds and fertilizer, for example—for an impoverished part of the world. The arrangement continues to this day and provides immeasurable mutual benefits. Both churches celebrate cultural diversity and build personal relationships by sharing faith, prayer and social life.

St. Mary made an administrative change in 1997 that helped parish leaders focus on these ever-expanding pastoral efforts. As the congregation’s activities swelled, Fr. Janicki needed someone to handle the day-to-day operations. Consequently, he hired Paula Grant as administrative assistant. Her duties increased after Fr. Greg Greiten became pastor; thus her job title was upgraded to executive assistant. Since 1997, Paula has been on the parish’s “front line,” helping to insure that things run smoothly.

As the parish focused on improving its service to the living, it also took steps to improve services for the deceased of the parish. In the early 1990s, Allen Johnson, Greg Lauer and the other members of the St. Mary Cemetery Committee explored the possibility of building a **chapel in the parish cemetery** to use for burial services in inclement weather. Plans changed as a number of people expressed interest in having a mausoleum rather than just a chapel. Fr. Janicki told a reporter, “We found out there were an awful lot of people in the area who wanted above-ground burial.” Plans changed again when many people exhibited strong interest in crema-

tion. The committee originally set the number of niches for urns at 85, but that number was nearly doubled due to the demand. The parish began selling crypts and niches in 1994 and used the money for construction of the mausoleum. People from other churches and even other denominations could purchase spaces. The structure was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, 1995, the parish’s 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Josef Klotz of Esser-Oakbrook Studios, Oconomowoc, designed a massive stained-glass window that dominates the space of the mausoleum chapel. The window appropriately symbolizes resurrected life.

St. Mary lost Fr. Janicki’s services in June 1998. Archbishop Weakland transferred Fr. Janicki to St. Cecilia Church, Theinsville. The parish threw Fr. Janicki a going-away party on May 29 and presented him with enough money to buy a much-needed new car. The parishioners accomplished a lot during his years as pastor. A new activity center and mausoleum had been built, the school continued to flourish, new relationships had been forged with nearby parishes and even with parishes in remote parts of the world and St. Mary underwent a lengthy planning process to sort priorities and set goals. The parish bedrock was firmly in place and would provide firm footing for Fr. Janicki’s successor. Before he left, Fr. Janicki told a reporter he wanted to thank the parishioners “for 13 great years. I will always remember them. I wish them well, and I wish the new pastor well.” The year after Fr. Janicki left was tumultuous. Fr. Joe Debski took over the reins as pastor but resigned after only six months to go on sabbatical. Fr. Charles Wheatley stepped in



as interim administrator until a long-term solution could be found. In addition, the pastoral assistant left St. Mary and the terms of all nine Parish Council members expired. As St. Mary moved toward the new millennium, the parish eagerly sought a sense of stability among its leadership that would allow the parish to move forward.

***IN CHRIST THERE IS A TABLE SET FOR ALL:  
FR. GREGORY J. GREITEN, 1999-***

Archbishop Weakland set things in motion when he named **Fr. Gregory Greiten** pastor in June 1999. Fr. Greg was born in Milwaukee, but his family moved to Oconomowoc when he was only two years old. He attended St. Jerome grade school, and by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, a friend persuaded him to attend high school at St. Lawrence Seminary in Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin. Fr. Greg was not yet thinking of the priesthood as a vocation, but considered St. Lawrence an opportunity to step out from the shadow of his two older brothers. His parents were hesitant about letting their youngest son leave home at the tender age of 13, but they relented with the understanding that he would stick it out for at least a full year. They did not need to worry. The priests/instructors at St. Lawrence and his many friends had Greg seriously considering the religious life by his junior year. He graduated in May 1983 and eventually went to St. Francis Seminary. While there, he obtained a bachelor's degree in social work from Marquette University. He then entered the graduate program at St. Francis Seminary. In 1992, he obtained a Master's of Divinity degree and was also ordained to the priesthood.

The Archbishop first assigned Fr. Greg to Blessed Sacrament Parish in Milwaukee. He served there three years and then moved on to St. Mary Parish in Hales Corners, where he labored as associate pastor for four years. At the end of his fourth year, the Archdiocese Priest Placement Board called Fr. Greg and



asked if he was ready to accept a challenge. The Archbishop offered him the pastorate at St. Mary in Menomonee Falls and gave him 24 hours to mull over the opportunity. He decided he was ready and moved to Menomonee Falls in June 1999.

St. Mary Parish was thrilled to have a new pastor and a young one at that—Fr. Greg was only 33 years old at the time of his appointment. Almost immediately, Fr. Greg had the sense that the parish was settling down as the congregation came together. Fr. Greg did not have any grandiose plans for St. Mary when he arrived, but he knew the parish could not move forward unless the congregation worked together as a team. To illustrate his vision, he used the image of King Arthur and the Round Table. There was no head or foot at this table. Everyone was an equal partner and shared in the work and the success. Fr. Greg also utilized the image of Christ and his Apostles gathered around a round table and a prayer called “In Search of a Round Table” to instill the team concept among the parish staff. The prayer asked people to reflect upon Jesus’ and their own ministries and to keep the image of a round table in their mind. “Roundtabling” would “take some sawing... some redefining and redesigning.” The process could be painful but “so was the cross” and from such a death “comes life, from such dying, comes rising.” “Roundtabling” meant “being with, a part of, together, and one.” This would answer God’s call to be “a People not ‘them and us.’”

The people of St. Mary took those words to heart and took steps to rejuvenate the parish's sense of teamwork. One of the first decisions that Fr. Greg and a newly elected Parish Council made was to stagger council members' terms, thus preventing wholesale turnover and providing a sense of continuity for the parish. In September of 1999, Sister Jane Mary Lorbiecki, School Sisters of Notre Dame, arrived to take over the duties of pastoral associate. To this day, she has orchestrated programs that spiritually guide parishioners from the "womb to the tomb."

The parish built even more momentum in 2000. In that year, St. Mary expanded its ties to its **sister parish, Sacred Heart of Jesus in Honduras**, by literally lending a hand. Deacon Tom Monday and a group of parishioners journeyed to Honduras and helped set up a medical clinic, constructed pews for a chapel, painted the interior of the church in Jalisco, repaired a generator, helped a villager erect framing for a new dwelling, and performed general plumbing and electrical work.

Parishioner Mike Reesman took part in this inaugural venture. He had always wanted to do missionary work and jumped at the chance to aid the people of Honduras. The trip opened Mike's eyes, physically and spiritually. The tropical climate, obviously, differed radically from that of Menomonee Falls, and this trip was the first time



that Mike had ever seen mountains! Beyond the geographical differences, the staggering poverty of the region assaulted Mike's imagination beyond anything his mind could conjure. The people of Honduras look at basic goods, things that we take for granted, as great treasures. Despite the paucity of material goods, the people of Hon-

duras helped Mike truly realize what is important in life. Their sense of family and faith is so strong, Mike asserts, that they are "happier than we are."

Though there have been many examples of this spirituality, two especially stand out in Mike's mind. On the 2001 trip, Mike and his St. Mary's cohorts presented a Bible, a crucifix and a pair of shoes to Dom Solame, an elderly gentleman in the village of Las Pilas. Their generosity spurred Dom Solame to give an impromptu speech. Though few in the St. Mary's group could understand him, the sheer force of Dom Solame's emotion overwhelmed everyone. Fortunately, someone recorded Dom Solame's talk, and Norberto Sandoval provided a translation. After receiving the Bible, Dom Solame said, "The Bible is my life. It is the word of God. In spite of my poverty, that is what I believe." And to his beneficiaries he declared, "I do not have much of anything, what I have is because of people who came here. You are welcome in my house. We are brothers." When he received the crucifix, Dom Solame told the group, "Jesus Christ shows us that we have the same God. It does not matter where you live, or what language you speak, Jesus Christ can keep us united as brothers....God has brought you here. He is going to reward you. He is going to recognize the effort that you took in order to get here. With this crucifix, I am going to remember all of you. I will always pray for you."

Another Honduran family made an indelible impression upon Mike. He visited Abel Aguilar, his wife Maria and their four children on the 2002 trip and found them living in utter squalor. Abel could not find work, and his family had no food to eat. Mike and Dave Whorrall gave the family the little money they had in their pockets. The following year, Mike

found the family in a much better situation. Abel found work as a security guard at a factory in Puerto Cortes. He works six 12-hour days for 72 cents an hour. The wages may seem paltry to us, but it is enough for the family to survive. To thank Mike for his help the previous year, Maria gave him a post card and a pen. These trinkets are among Mike's most prized possessions because the family scraped together enough money from their own meager resources to obtain them. Experiences like these, Mike claims, show that he comes away from these trips with so much more than he gives.

Deacon Tom Wuchterl likewise participated in the first trip to Honduras. Similar to Mike, Tom fell "instantly" in love with the country and its people. Despite the excitement of this new venture, Tom was burdened with a heavy heart due to the recent loss of his beloved wife. But something occurred on this trip that convinced Tom that the Lord was taking him on a "beautiful, beautiful journey." One night, shortly after the group's arrival, they held a prayer service but there were no communion wafers. Instead, someone procured a loaf of bread, and as Tom and his friends shared this bread at the altar, all of Tom's grief vanished. That simple act of breaking bread at the Lord's table eased Tom's loss and cemented in his heart the feeling that being in Honduras and helping the people there was absolutely the right thing to do.

Every year since the initial trip, Mike, Tom and many others have journeyed to Honduras to establish or renew friendships and, by the sweat of their brows, help the people of Sacred Heart rejoice in God's good news. Fr. Greg participated in the 2005 trip and, afterward, claimed it was a "life-changing experience."

Examples of successful teamwork during Fr. Greg's early years could also be found closer to home. Parish members raised enough funds to expand the school's computer lab,

and funds from the estate of Dennis Droese provided the money to relocate the school offices from the second floor to the first. David Ciepluch, Director of Building and Grounds, and Fr. Greg encouraged this latter move as a means to better control access to the school. After much renovation and shuffling of school offices, classrooms and Christian Formation offices, school security was drastically improved.

Stunning news interrupted the parish's momentum. In February 2000, the Archbishop invited Fr. Greg to travel to Rome and obtain a doctorate in sacred scripture. The Archdiocese desperately needed scholars like Fr. Greg to come back to the seminary and train future priests, and the announcement was made that Fr. Greg would be leaving. But two factors muddied the waters for Fr. Greg. First of all, his father, Denis, died suddenly on March 20, 2000. Secondly, he dreaded the thought of putting St. Mary through another transitional period so soon after his arrival. In the end, Fr. Greg declined the invitation. He told the Archbishop that his heart was in his ministry and serving the people. The Sunday before Christmas, Fr. Greg announced at Mass that "I'll be home for Christmas." The congregation stood and cheered.

No doubt buoyed by Fr. Greg's good news, the St. Mary's "team" plowed ahead in 2001. Indeed, a new member was added in June 2001 with the hiring of Barb Vite as Coordinator of Stewardship and Development. It is a cold, hard fact that money is needed to make things move, and Barb was hired to handle parish public relations and cultivate any resources that would pave the way for parish ambitions. But Fr. Greg also wanted someone who shared his non-traditional view of stewardship, someone who looked beyond money to stress education and school development. Given the importance St. Mary Parish has always placed on its school, it is not surprising that this emphasis was made a part of the coordinator's position.

With a new player added, the team strove to deepen the congregation's spirit of cooperation and togetherness. The Parish Council and the Prayer & Worship Committee developed new goals and objectives to celebrate diversity within St. Mary Parish. There were a small number of Hispanic, African-American and Asian families that attended St. Mary; thus, the parish made a concerted effort to incorporate more multicultural music into the liturgy. African and Gospel music were used on occasion, and in fall 2001, the school children celebrated the Mass of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Fr. Greg said the entire Eucharistic Prayer in Spanish.

St. Mary took additional steps to get the parish's young people more involved in the liturgy and more involved in living Christ's words each and every day. Parishioner (and future Prayer and Worship Director) Mary Briggs formed the Youth Worship Group to lead the singing at the 10:30 Mass on the third Sunday of each month. And in spring 2001, the parish hired Gary Newman to act as full-time Youth Minister. He not only oversaw St. Mary's Christian Formation program, but over the years he has involved many young people in activities that demonstrate that "living Jesus" was hard work but well worth the reward. In July 2003, for example, eight young people made St. Mary's proud. They traveled to Worcester, Massachusetts, to serve those most in need—the poor, homeless, elderly and drug or alcohol dependent, among others. Each of the participants witnessed firsthand how their effort and spirit truly made a difference.

The horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, tempered any joy or excitement generated by St. Mary's outreach. Numbed by the tragedy, people all over the country gathered in churches, synagogues and mosques to pray for those killed in the attacks. The people of Menomonee Falls were no different, and the "Four Saints and a

Shepherd" united for a memorial service. Donations flooded in to aid relief efforts. The children of St. Mary School made their own contribution. Every class took part in a "penny challenge." Each student was given a large plastic bucket to fill with pennies. They were awarded one point for every penny and lost a point for every silver coin in their bucket. The class that had the most points won a pizza party or an "out of uniform" day. In a "friendly" spirit of sabotage, some of the children undermined a sibling's or schoolmate's efforts by throwing silver coins into their bucket. At least in this case, the questionable means justified the ends. St. Mary Parish School raised over \$1,200 for relief aid for 9/11 victims.

The 9/11 tragedy touched everyone deeply, but the nation and St. Mary Parish moved on to reclaim a semblance of a normal life. In 2002, St. Mary instituted a number of changes that strengthened its lifelong stress on Christian Formation. In February, the "Four Saints and a Shepherd" collaborated on a nearly week-long mission. The theme for "Mission 2002" was to "become one body, one spirit, in Christ." Hosted by St. James Parish, the mission brought together five congregations to sing, pray, hear speakers discuss ways to live and share our faith and enjoy one another's company at various social gatherings. Other collaborative adult ventures included adult cluster confirmation groups and "Catholics Returning Home," a program designed to help disaffected Catholics renew their faith and cultivate a relationship with the Church.

The parish's children received additional attention as well. In spring 2002, St. Mary welcomed Barbara Searing as the parish's first full-time Child Minister. Barbara's duties were to develop innovative programs for grades K-4 through 5 that would deepen their understanding of the Catholic faith. And to further enhance the weekly celebration of God's word, a kids' choir and a contemporary choir were started over the summer.

St. Mary experienced more than programmatic changes in 2002, however. That year Fr. Greg and the Parish Council announced an ambitious renovation program that would literally change the face of the parish. Several factors spurred this agenda. Firstly, there was the need to take care of basic maintenance that had been deferred for decades. Secondly, the parish had to address handicap accessibility issues for the church. And finally, Fr. Greg and the council wanted to spruce up the parish in preparation for St. Mary's centennial. Renovation plans involved more than just physical changes. Parish leaders wanted to undergo a critical examination of St. Mary's mission and how best to take advantage of any opportunities or confront any challenges in order to achieve that mission.

To set things in motion, Fr. Greg established a strategic planning committee in January 2002. Co-chaired by John Niebler and Thomas Meilinger, the committee was charged with several tasks. They assessed the status of the parish facilities, the needs and attitudes of the congregation and the state of current parish ministries/programs. Once it had sifted through the data, the committee would issue a 25-year master plan. The parish hired Plunkett-Raysich Architects to study the existing buildings and make recommendations for necessary changes.

In September 2002, the committee announced its multi-phased master plan that addressed critical maintenance needs, improvements to the church worship and gathering space, changes to the ministerial/



administration spaces and enhancements to the school and recreational facility. The estimated cost for the renovations was \$6 million. Of that total, \$1.5 million was slated for maintenance costs alone!

The hefty price tag raised some eyebrows among the parishioners. But, undaunted by the enormity of the task, the people of St. Mary launched a new capital campaign with a spirit that would have made the

parish founders proud. The "For All Generations" campaign officially kicked off on December 8, 2002, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, but the campaign really stepped up on May 18, 2003, or "Solicitation Sunday." Only one week later, nearly 200 families had pledged over \$1.2 million toward the \$6 million goal. And by July, 614 parish families had earmarked over \$2.3 million for the campaign. This success reflects the commitment of the parishioners but also is attributable to the talents of Director of Administrative Services Gayle Rzany. She has capably directed the parish through the often murky labyrinth of financing a major capital campaign.

While the financial campaign progressed, St. Mary certainly did not neglect its spiritual mission. During the 2003 Lenten season, the parish unveiled a new mission statement: "Called by name in Baptism and nourished by the Eucharist, the faith community of St. Mary Parish embraces the gospel of Jesus Christ to grow in holiness, serve others and bring forth the Kingdom of God." In an interview, Fr. Greg acknowledged that the plans to renew the parish buildings were exciting, but it was more important to renew hearts. He drew upon the writings of St. Francis de Sales as a

## *For All Generations* Timeline

As a parish community approaching its centennial year, St. Mary's was experiencing the growing pains of an expanding Christian Community. In seeking to "Live Jesus" by envisioning the parish future, the parish community developed a 25-year strategic plan reflecting on the growth in our parish and school community in light of the challenging realities in our Catholic church and society.

- Fall 2002 - A Feasibility study was conducted. The result was For All Generations, a major multi-million dollar fundraising campaign to help finance and new construction of our church and school facilities.
- March 2003 - For All Generations Campaign was launched

The Dream continues to become a reality . . . . .

- February—April 2004: Phase I—Parish Center renovated into office space
- June 2004: 47-year old Rectory was used as a training setting for area firefighters
- July 2004: demolition of Rectory
- Fall 2004: Church windows removed, restored
- January 2005: Church windows reinstalled
- April 11, 2005: opening of 1905 & 1952 cornerstones / time capsules
- June-August 2005: Phase II: school renovation (*science lab w/green house, Eschweiler hall reconstructed into 2 new kindergarten classrooms, electrical and plumbing upgrades, restroom renovations, renovation of lower level of the Activity Center conversation into adult meeting room space, youth ministry room and athletic locker rooms*) and parking lot and site access improvements were made
- November 2005: Renovation of Marian Hall
- 
- January –March 2006: Phase III—improvements to the electrical heating / cooling system in the Church basement, new boiler was installed.
- Future: Plans for the renovation of our worship space, a new Eucharistic Chapel, reconciliation Chapel and other liturgical function areas on the main floor

source of inspiration. In *Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Francis noted that true reformation did not begin with external things. Rather, it came about through the heart. "For this reason," he wrote, "I have wished above all else to engrave and inscribe on your heart this holy, sacred maxim, LIVE JESUS!" Fr. Greg urged the entire congregation to adopt St. Francis' advice and embrace the Gospel and live their faith every day. The parish adopted the new mission statement on the Feast of Pentecost, June 8, 2003. People signed the mission statement at all of the Masses, and those signatures hang in the church with the original copies of the mission statement.

Youth Ministry students also embraced those words. They "climbed high and crawled low" to help prepare the church for the Holy Week and Easter liturgies. The Confirmation class made sandwiches for Franciscan Peacemakers and Guest House shelter, and the YNIA Service Trip kids helped elderly in the community with yard work and other odd jobs. In 2004, the Youth Ministry started the new S.A.L.T. service program. The children studied several local service agencies, decided what Action they would take for their chosen agency, then Linked up with the agency and the people they were to help to see the impact of their actions and lastly, would Think about their service and how it affected them.

Sister Jane Mary, Geri Roskopf and several other women of the parish launched a new program—the Elizabeth Ministry—on, appropriately, Mother's Day, 2003. The Elizabeth Ministry is an international organization that provides support to women and their families during the "joys, challenges and sorrows of the childbearing years." At St. Mary, the ministry started with the Rosebud Program. Any woman needing information, support or prayers with regard to a range of issues—pregnancy, birth, loss, adoption, infertility—was encouraged to add a rosebud and information tag to a vase in the church's west wing. That person would then receive a visit by someone who had a similar experience.

This ministry of care offered a friendly face and a helpful word.

That renewed spirit carried over into 2004. That fall, St. Mary, along with eight other parishes, took part in the "Theology on the Mount" program held at Mt. Mary College. This initiative is scheduled for completion in fall 2006, and according to Sister Jane Mary, it is a revised version of the General Lay Ministry of the 1980s. It focuses on adult formation and offers instruction in basic theology, scripture and methods. It is designed to help people explore their faith and improve their grasp of basic beliefs, and hopefully be a source of "new blood" for participating parishes in the form of future catechists, liturgical ministers, small group leaders or RCIA team members.

St. Mary Parish School gained "new blood" in July 2004 when Linda Joyner became the new principal. She had served as a teacher and vice-principal at Mother of Good Counsel Parish, Milwaukee, since 1994 before joining St. Mary. She found it exciting to come on board during a time of "renovation and change." There will be "growing pains," she acknowledged, but the "transformation will surely stimulate growth in both the parish and school."

The renovation program of which Linda spoke was, of course, never far from people's minds—or their ears and eyes for that matter. Construction officially began in February 2004 with the remodeling of the parish office building to the east of the church. David Ciepluch became the parish's "point man" or, in his words, "advocate" during the construction. It was his role to make sure the architect's plans worked and that St. Mary got "its money's worth." After many headaches, Phase I ended when parish staff began moving in on May 7. Phase II started over the summer. On June 29, the rectory performed one last service. The Menomonee Falls Fire Department used it and the adjacent house on Main Street for a training exercise. The buildings were filled with smoke and three

crews practiced rescue operations. A week later, the rectory was demolished. Phase II also included the conversion of the school's Eschweiler Hall into kindergarten rooms, a science lab and a greenhouse; the installation of a new parking lot and handicapped entrance on the church's west end; and the renovation of the Activity Center's lower level to include new adult meeting rooms, lavatories, locker rooms and a youth room.

The renovation is a part of the preparation for the parish's centennial anniversary in November 2005. But the celebrations had already begun in 2004. September 1, 2004, marked the 100th anniversary of the parish's incorporation. It was also the first day of the school year. After the all-school Mass, Fr. Greg led a solemn procession with the Eucharist from the church to the school. It wound its way through the lower levels of the Activity Center and through each level of the school. Along the way, Fr. Greg blessed the newly remodeled areas of the activity center and school as well as the students and teachers in each classroom.

The year 2005 promises many celebrations as anticipation of the centennial intensifies. The first involved the commemoration of the laying of the cornerstone in 1905. **On April 11, 2005, the 1905 and 1953 cornerstones were opened.** In an ironic circumstance, the parish

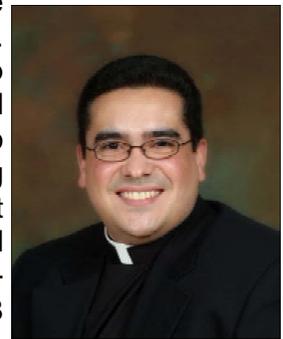


hired Bill Dentinger, Inc., to do the work. The owner of the company is a grandnephew of Fr. Dentinger, St. Mary's first pastor. After

much hammering, chiseling and sawing, the crews successfully cut into the sealed containers within the cornerstones and withdrew the contents. The documents, newspapers and coins emerged in surprisingly good condition. On May 15, Pentecost Sunday—the “birthday” of the Catholic Church, St. Mary displayed these items that represented the birth of the parish. Several relatives of Fr. Dentinger, St. Mary's first pastor, shared the day's festivities.

One week later, parishioners participated in another joyful event. While the people of St. Mary proudly look back, Saturday, May 21, was a day to celebrate the future of the Church.

On that day, Archbishop Timothy Dolan ordained **Norberto Sandoval** into the priesthood, capping his six years of ministry at St. Mary. Norberto had left his native Venezuela in September 1998 and came to St. Francis



Seminary to study for the priesthood. This move required a huge leap of faith on Norberto's part. He knew little English and was unfamiliar with parish life in the U.S. Fortunately, there were many helping hands along the way. To ease the transition, the seminary had Norberto spend weekends living with a young associate pastor at St. Mary Parish in Hales Corners—Fr. Gregory Greiten. When Fr. Greg took the helm at St. Mary in Menomonee Falls, he asked the seminary to have Norberto continue his weekend stays with Fr. Greg. The parishioners welcomed Norberto with open arms and followed him as he progressed through his spiritual sojourn. They rejoiced with Norberto when he was ordained into the diaconate on September 25, 2004, and again at his ordination into the priesthood. To conclude this joyous day, Fr. Norberto celebrated his first Mass with the people of St. Mary. As his vocation in the priesthood progresses, the parishioners will always fondly remember his roots at St. Mary.

The joy of this centennial year was tempered by the loss of our Holy Father Pope John Paul II on April 2, 2005. During his 26 years as a leader of the Church, he inspired millions, perhaps billions, through his steadfast devotion, his efforts to reach out to those of other faiths and his genuine belief in the dignity of every person. It is no exaggeration to state that his outlook and his actions truly changed the world. Though saddened by his death, the people of St. Mary, and indeed Catholics worldwide, can draw courage and strength from his example and carry the cross in order to live Jesus.

## **WE REMEMBER**

A centennial anniversary is the perfect time to look back and reflect upon St. Mary's past, to appreciate what has been accomplished.

It is also the perfect time to look to the future, to the possibilities of what might be. While no one can foresee

what lies ahead, one thing is certain; the future of

St. Mary Church will be built upon a solid

foundation of faith, hope, charity and love

that our predecessors established

100 years ago

for all generations.

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Deacon T. Wuchterl

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The people of St. Mary Parish celebrated their centennial at many different events throughout the year. Each month brought another opportunity for our faith community to come together as one.

## **ST. MARY CENTENNIAL YEAR EVENTS**

### November 2005

- Centennial Mass  
w/Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan

### December 2005

- St. Nick at Night Family Celebration
- Centennial Container of Hope for Honduras

### January 2006

- Catholic Schools Week Celebration

### February 2006

- St. Mary Centennial Piano & Organ Recital

### March 2006

- Cluster Mission
- Song of Mark production
- Career Day
- Parish Auction
- Godspell production

### April 2006

- Art Show
- Women's Day of Reflection

### May 2006

- May Crowning
- Centennial Pilgrimage to Notre Dame

### June 2006

- Teen Spirit Week
- Centennial Youth Service Trip to Toronto

### July 2006

- Centennial Youth Service Trip to Indiana
- 4th of July Parade

### August 2006

- Wheeling for Healing to support Juvenile Diabetes research

### September 2006

- All-Parish Retreat

### October 2006

- Dinner Theatre
- Centennial Trip to Rome
- Centennial Feastable—Parish Family Dinner

### November 2006

- Centennial Wine Tasting
- Closing Centennial Celebration

*A special thank you to our Centennial Committee: Michelle Klotz, Brian Wagner, Jill Schmidt, Geri Roskopf, Billie Yaeger, Ken Wildt, Barb Sellhausen, Lisa Ulicki, Dan Johnson, Barb Muth, Kim Newman and Sue Foley.*

**On the following pages we share some pictorial highlights of our parish and our people in action during our centennial year.**