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St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church

Waterford, Wisconsin



Dedication Pictorial Directory
2007

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

The earliest written records of Racine County acknowledge, that other than Native American tribes, the first European immigrants came to this area in 1837 when Wisconsin was only a Territory. The first inhabitants thought the Fox River could be forded, so local historians attribute the name water-ford. Later, under a mandate from the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature, it was formally named WATERFORD.

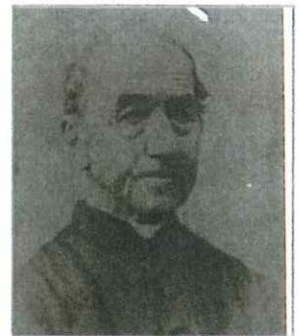


The next immigrants to the Waterford area were Irish Catholics. They arrived in 1842 ... six years before we became a state. Father Morrissey passed through Waterford on his way to Janesville in 1843. He gathered families at the home of Ed Bennett where the first Mass was celebrated.



In 1844 settlement occurred rapidly with the arrival of German families and Missionary priests who would visit on a regular schedule. The next Catholic service was June, 1846 celebrated in the village of Waterford, officiated by Rev. Kendeler, of Burlington in the new copper shop.

When Wisconsin became a state in 1848, Fr Kundig from St. Martin's parish, south of Hales Corners, came to celebrate Mass and was the first to urge the people in attendance to build a church. Thus in a wholesome and blessed ecumenical spirit, Samuel Russ, a non-Catholic, donated a half block for the new church. The other half of the block was purchased for one hundred seventy-five dollars. The foundation



OUR PAST GENERATION

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS



for the first Catholic church in Waterford was laid the next year and was named St. Thomas Aquinas.

Three years later, Fr Kundig celebrated Mass on the feast day of Corpus Christi. 1851 saw many things happening...a room was donated at Fr Kundig's request for a school and twelve students attended. The Ladies Aid Society was formed and the church was furnished. 1851 was also the first year that records were kept for the sacraments of belief:

baptisms, confirmations, first communicants, matrimonial vows, and Christian burials. Our first resident pastor was Father Greenbauer. Under his guidance an addition was built onto the church because there was need for a sacristy and an enlargement of the school building.

St. Thomas Aquinas was formally dedicated in 1853 by Bishop J.M. Henni. At the same time the cemetery was consecrated and the first sacrament of Confirmation was administered.

The next ten years, from 1853-1863 saw comings and goings of six pastors. Some only stayed two months. During this time period Rev Sanner had the framed addition to the church moved and a rectory built. It was later occupied by the school sisters. Fr Minderer, Fr Seif, Fr Stehle, and Fr Schaudenbach also attended to members of the parish. Fr Heiss was the only one who remained for three years.

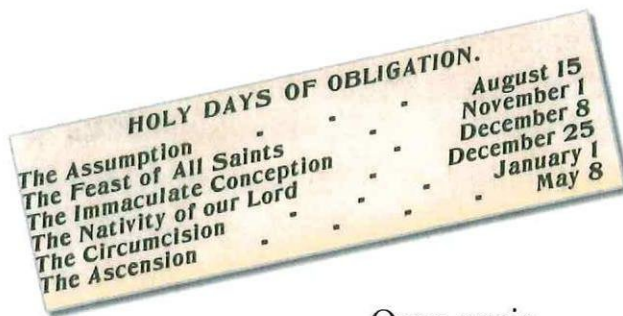


John M. Henni

1837 First people inhabit this area
 1842 Irish Catholics arrive
 1843 Missionary, Fr. Morrisay, says mass
 1844 German Catholics arrive
 1848 Fr. Kundig says mass once a month
 Samuel Russ donates a half block for the church
 Other half later bought for \$175.00

1849 Foundation laid for church, named St. Thomas by Fr. H. Fusseder
 1950 Church is renovated and decorated, new altars, confessionals, altar rail, Stainless Steel cross put on church—cost \$25,000.00.
 1851 First mass said in church by Fr. Kundig, Feast of Corpus Christi First room donated, by Mr. Luig, for school. 12 children attend

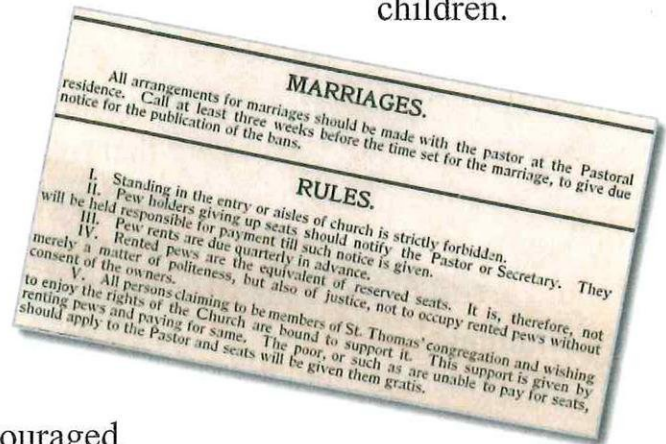
HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS



Fr Conrad was the next pastor, and he did not think the lay teachers were devoted to teaching and thus had three sisters of Notre Dame come to teach the children.

Once again,
a new school was built and part of it was for the personal use of the sisters. But there were problems between the sisters and some people of the parish. Should the children be taught in English or German?

Consequently the sisters left. Then Rev P. DeBerge arrived; he also becomes discouraged and leaves after eight months. Then in 1865, Fr Exel comes, but he also finds St. Thomas in disorder. The German immigrants and the Irish settlers could not agree. So the Irish organized their own parish in Dover; it was called St. Mary's. Due to the disagreement between these two ethnic groups, Fr Exel, as well, becomes discouraged and leaves.



Finally, things get better! In 1868 Fr Joerger becomes the new pastor; the sisters of Notre Dame return and school opens. In 1873 once again, pastors are only spending a short time at St. Thomas. 1874 Rev P. Schwaiger ministers to the faithful. In 1877 Fr P.A. Schumacher starts building a new church because the old church was becoming

Records for sacraments started Ladies
Aid Society formed by Fr. Kundig under the
patronage of Blessed Virgin Mary
New church furnished
1852 First Pastor, Fr. Gernbauer addition built on
church—1/2 sacristy, 1/2 school
1853 Church dedicated, confirmation, cemetery
consecrated by Bishop J. M. Henni

inside of church completed
1854 Six different pastors in ten years:
1855 Rev. H. Seif—two months
Rev. H. M. Stehle—a few months
Rev. C. Schaudenbach (visiting priest)
Frame addition to church was moved, used
for school, Sacristy added to church
1856 Rev. J. Sanner

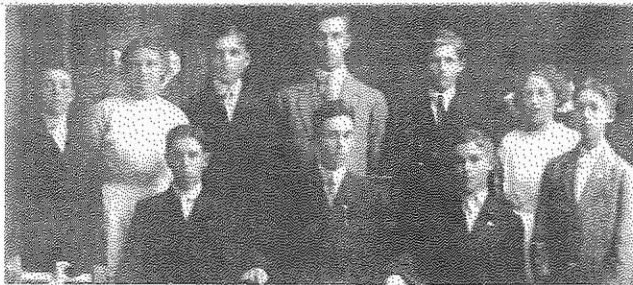
HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

dilapidated, and it was too small. There were eighty families in the parish. In three years, 1880, the cornerstone was blessed. In 1882 the high altar was erected with statues of St. Aloysius, St. Theresa, and St. Thomas Aquinas and the church was consecrated. At this time Fr Schwinn is the pastor. The school grows to one hundred students. Finally, there is peace and cooperation at St. Thomas.



Father Schwinn's successor arrived in 1898. Fr B. Weyer becomes pastor for six years. He was responsible for many improvements on the premises. He is followed by Father A. Albers who arrived in 1904, and he continued with needed improvements of the

church... the least of them was electric lights in the church. The cemetery was surveyed and platted. Sidewalks were cemented from the cemetery to the church. But the work on the cemetery was not completed before Fr Albers died, May 1, 1912. He is buried at St. Thomas Aquinas Cemetery.



Pictures from the past...

In 1911 or 1912, these proud eighth-graders posed with their diplomas upon graduating from St. Thomas Aquinas School, Watertord.

Third from the left in the back row is George Kempen, father of Evelyn Kempen Bonneprise, Brookfield, who submitted the original photograph for publication.

Boy on left in the front row could be named Frank Kipp. The other graduates are not identified.

"About a year ago, someone sent me a copy of a photo from a high school class in Watertord, and I noted that you would like to receive old photos of this type of local people," Bonneprise wrote in a letter that accompanied her photo. "I think this is a wonderful idea."

(Photo submitted by Evelyn Kempen Bonneprise)

- 1858 Rectory built, later occupied by school sisters, two stories 32X34, cost \$1000
- 1860 Rev. M. Minderer, stays a few months, Irish leave, form own church
- 1861 Rev. G. Michael Heiss
- 1864 Fr. Conrad
- Three school sisters of Notre Dame came to teach school

- New school built, 46X30, cost \$3,500. It was used as a school, chapel, and Three rooms for personal use of the sisters. A kitchen was built on later.
- 1865 Rev. P. DeBerge—8 months
- Rev. C. Exel—few months
- 1867 Sisters resign

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS



The new priest at St. Thomas Aquinas is Fr J.P. Pierron who serves longer than any pastor up to that time. He knew the church families referred to his predecessor as "Good Father Albers." So money was collected to have a chapel erected over Fr Albers's grave. The mason, Joseph D. Reesman, and carpenter, Joseph Harter did the work and a beautiful chapel now stands over the beloved pastor's gravesite. In 1914 the new "art glass" windows were donated and later installed in the church. These are the same stained glass windows that were restored and are presently in our new 2007 House of Worship.

WW I started in 1917 and St. Thomas had thirty-four men and one lady leave Waterford to serve our country. The first to leave was Alfred Essman. He was the first and only one from St. Thomas parish who lost his life. The VFW Post is named in his honor.



On November 22, 1919 St. Thomas church caught fire due to a chimney over-heating. Fortunately, the church was saved. Insurance covered the repairs. Fr Pierron was still pastor but had been ill for a year so Fr George Knackert covered his duties until Fr Pierron retired in 1934. Then Fr Bach arrives but retires after a year due to illness. It should be noted that Fr Pierron celebrated his Golden Jubilee in 1944 at St. Thomas Aquinas Church. However, he died in 1945 and was laid to rest in St. Thomas Aquinas Cemetery.

1868 Fr. J. M. Joerger pastor, School sisters return, Sacrament of Confirmation administered
 1870 Small organ for church purchased, cost \$425.00. Fr. Joerger left.
 1873 Seven pastors came and went
 Rev. R. G. Strickner—9 months
 Rev. H. Uhlenmeyer—one year, built addition to school

Rev. P. Schwaiger arrives—Fence built around the cemetery
 1877 Rev. P. A. Schumacher, started on new church
 1880 Cornerstone of church blessed, new church begun
 1881 New church blessed, cost \$10,000, Gratis work worth \$10,000. New bell blessed

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

In 1935 a new pastor, Father E. Hertel was welcomed to St. Thomas. He serves as pastor for twenty-eight years. In 1936 a building drive started for a new school. Mother of Perpetual Help Devotions were started on Tuesday nights to pray for help getting a new school. In 1941 the cornerstone was laid. Cost of the school was fifty-five thousand dollars.



Then WW II strikes and fifty-eight parishioners go to serve and fight. Two of our finest parishioners who served our nation lost their lives fighting for freedom. They were Philip Bylewski and Theodore Mehring. After the War, 1949, the inside of the church was renovated to prepare for the one-hundredth anniversary celebration (1951) of its erection. Also, during this time of Fr Hertel's shepherding, the old rectory was sold and in 1954 a new larger rectory was built. This is the same rectory we have today! Because St.

Thomas celebrated Forty Hours Devotion each year, the new rectory allowed many of the visiting priests participating in the ceremony a place to spend the night. Additionally, St. Thomas has had assistant pastors over the years, and each had housing arrangements in the new rectory. Fr



- 1882 Church consecrated by Bishop Heiss, high altar erected at cost of \$630. Statues of St. Aloyius, St. Theresa, and St. Thomas Aquinas are put on the altar
- 1888 Fr. S Schwinn, One hundred children in school, St. Mary's Altar Society, St. Theresa Ladies Society
- 1898 Fr. B. Weyer arrives and stays for six years

- Basement dug under church, furnace installed, tower clock obtained
- 1899 Hand written record of Christian Ladies Society started, dues are .75 cents a year
- 1901 New rectory built and old rectory remodeled for sisters, cost \$3,300.
- 1904 Rev. A. Albers arrives

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS



Wagner, Fr Fetherstone, Fr Nichols and Fr Walter are just a few of the assistants utilizing the rectory. St. Thomas also celebrates in 1957 Father Hertel's fortieth anniversary of his ordination. Then just two years later, 1959, ground was broken for an addition to the school. There are three hundred ninety-seven students enrolled at this time. The new addition is dedicated

in 1960. The enrollment grows in 1961, 1962, respectively, to four hundred twenty-three and four hundred ninety-seven students. Then



Father Hertel's sudden death in 1963 ended a very dedicated life who served his parishioners and the community unconditionally. He was laid to rest in the family plot in Watertown, his hometown.

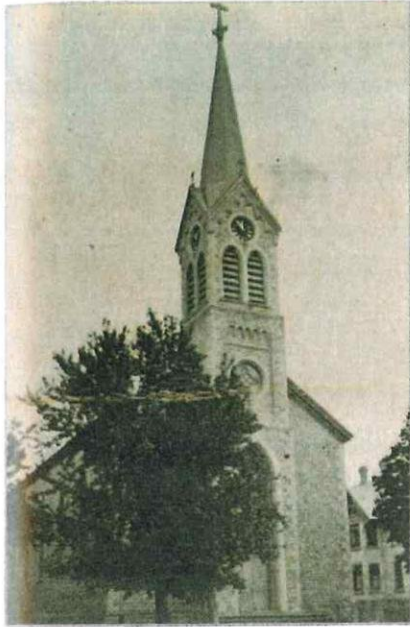


Father Skalitzky and Fr Schaefer take charge of St. Thomas church in 1963. There are four hundred fifty-two students enrolled in school. Also in 1963 the Second Vatican Council allowed each country to say Mass in the vernacular. So English is introduced into the sacrifice of the Mass. In 1966 on the feast day of St. Thomas, a statue of St. Thomas Aquinas

- 1907 Church resingled, electric lights installed
Church tower struck by lightning, a man is killed, lightning rods put on church and school
- 1907 Cement sidewalks from cemetery to church
Church redecorated
- 1908 Ten graduates of St. Thomas school, electric lights in the sisters home

- 1912 Fr. Albers dies, buried in St. Thomas Cemetery
Father J. P. Pierron arrives, builds chapel over grave of Fr. Albers at a cost of \$800.
- 1914 New art glass windows donated, cost \$1700.
New heating in church at cost of \$1296.50, other repairs to church and sisters home \$600. All paid for by the end of the year.

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS



was erected in front of the church in memory of all the priests who had served the parish. This was also the year the clock and bells in the tower were stopped because of needed repairs. Assistant pastor, Fr Schaefer organized a Community Fund Drive to have the clock and bells electrified. Donations reached close to six thousand dollars and the time-piece was restarted. The bells rang every fifteen minutes daily and for the Angelus at six in the morning, noon and six in the evening. On Sunday's,



they rang ten minutes before each Mass. The clock was lighted at night. It had been ten months since the bells had rung. Fr Schaefer will be remembered for his work with the youth of the parish and community. On April 23, 1967 the parish lost our pastor, Fr Skalitzky after a prolonged illness. He was laid to rest in Sun Prairie, his hometown.

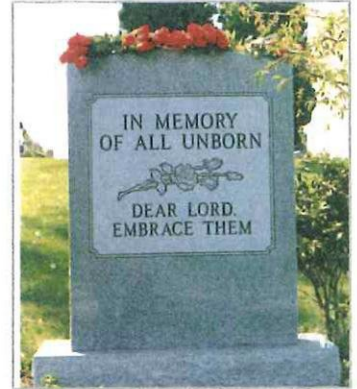
It was in 1968 when we received our new pastor, Father C. Uhen and our new assistant pastor, Fr



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|------|---|------|---|
| 1915 | New entrance to cemetery | | |
| 1915 | School painted | | |
| 1917 | World War I, St. Thomas had thirty four young men and one lady (nurse) Go to fight for our country. Alfred Essman was the only one from the Parish to die fighting. Donations from parish collection for soldiers | 1919 | Welfare totaled \$337.50 The Racine County War Chest was founded. |
| | | | Fire in chimney of church \$1,313 32 in damages, insurance covered cost |
| | | | St. Thomas School Society founded |
| | | | Missionary Association of Catholic Women, Branch 118 |
| | | 1921 | First charity drive for archdiocese |

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Frieber. Father Uhen had a twenty year pastorate at St. Thomas Aquinas and as of this printing is still very active helping out as a retired priest in the city of Racine. The parish joined in celebrating Father Uhen's twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination in May, 1968. The church had six hundred family units and two thousand sixty-three total souls. School enrollment numbered two hundred sixty students. Our parish family was blessed when the Call to the priesthood was

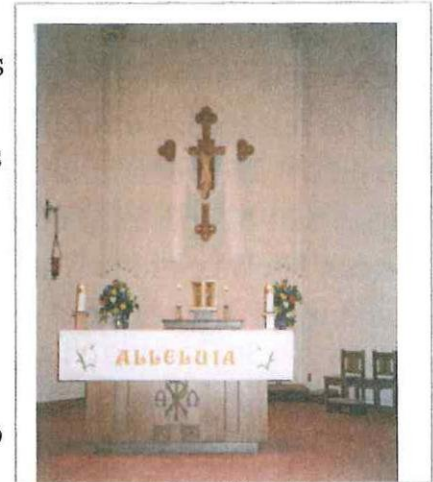


answered for the first time by one of our own parishioners. Ronald Gramza was ordained by Archbishop William Cousins on May 26, 1973. Father Gramza celebrated his first Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas. Also, under Father Uhen's leadership the school gym was constructed with the cornerstone dated 1980. Later, it was made official that the



gym was named the Uhen Center in honor of Father Uhen's pastoral serenity and athletic discipline. In 1988 Father Uhen retired from the active priesthood.

Sometime around 1987 the Priests' Council of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee articulated and requested that a pastor of a parish should stay six years and then move on to another parish. The diocesan priests felt a pastor could get



- 1922 New organ, Married Ladies Society donated it. Seven stop pipe organ at a cost of \$2,700.00. It was first played on the feast of St. Thomas, March 12,
- 1925 Christian Ladies dues rose to \$1.00 a year
- 1926 Sisters of Notre Dame leave, School Sister of St. Francis arrive
- 1930 New roof on church

- 1931 Church painted, new floor and statues repainted
- 1934 Fr. Pierron retires, Fr. Bach arrives and retires because of ill health
- 1935 Fr. Hertel new pastor
- 1936 Mother of Perpetual Help Devotions started
- 1941 Cornerstone for new school was put in. School completed, cost \$55,000.00

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

too attached to his flock. Another reason was each pastor has to adhere to certain criteria during his stay and moving them more often makes them more accountable. There are a number of circumstances where a pastor can request for an extension of his time at a given parish.



Father Tom Tearney embraced the pastorate of St. Thomas parish in 1988. He had a big heart and a strong singing voice. His passion was the celebration



of the liturgy. Father was responsible for getting the parish back-on-track as was required per the Vatican Guidelines, but sadly some parishioners did not fully comprehend the import of some of those changes. Nearly all of the parishioners remember Father's great interest in baking, and everyone enjoyed his loaves of bread at the annual St. Thomas Country Fair that Father personally baked in order to raise dollars and help make the Fair a great financial success. Also, Father

Tom started the very successful eighth grade spaghetti dinner that continues yet today. He left after three years. Sadly, Father Tearney passed away shortly after he left St. Thomas.



Father Dennis Van Beek came in 1991 to shepherd the flock at St. Thomas Aquinas. He was very happy whenever school was in

	World War II, Fifty-eight parishioners go to war. Two died: Theodore Mehring and Philip Bylewski.		from Charles Reesman.
1942	Silver Jubilee for Fr. Hertel	1946	First permanent assistant pastor, Fr. Wagner
1944	Fr. Pierrons Golden Jubilee	1949	Fr. Fetherstone, New assistant pastor.
	Old convent torn down, house and property across street bought, cost \$6,000.00. Paid off in four years, thanks to a large bequest	1950	Church renovated and decorated, new altars, confessionals, altar rail. Stainless Steel cross put on church—cost \$25,000.00
		1951	Land for sisters convent purchased
			One hundredth anniversary of church

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

session as he enjoyed teaching religion to the children. Father is best known for his brief but very powerful and thought-provoking homilies at every daily Mass and at all Sunday Masses. While at St. Thomas he was made Dean of District Three, and therefore became Very Reverend Fr Van Beek. This is the equivalent of what used to be known as a Monsignor. Father had three goals that he wanted to accomplish. They were to teach, to sanctify, and to serve. He often said, it was for the people to judge if he succeeded. He was and wanted his parishioners to become a



“Holy People.” Father was very loved by all, and people felt a great loss when it was time for his departure after nine years as our favored Shepherd. During Father’s pastorate at St. Thomas, the parish was blessed with our second parishioner’s Call to the priesthood.

Michael Erwin was ordained on May 16, 1998 by Archbishop Rembert Weakland. The celebration of Father Erwin’s first Mass was at his home parish...St. Thomas Aquinas. Additionally, Joseph Hying and Carl Mahnke studied and were ordained as permanent Deacons. Mr. Hying became Deacon Hying in 1992 and Mr. Mahnke became Deacon Mahnke in 1998.



- | | | | |
|------|---|------|---|
| 1954 | New rectory built, old rectory sold and moved | 1960 | seven sisters, two lay teachers. Dedicate new school addition |
| 1957 | Fr. Hertel celebrates fortieth anniversary of his ordination | 1961 | Four hundred twenty- three school students, seven sisters, three lay teachers. Fr. Nichols is assistant |
| 1958 | Another wing to existing school planned | 1962 | Four hundred forty-seven students, Fr. Nichols transferred |
| 1959 | Three hundred ninety-seven students in school
Broke ground for new addition to school, | | Fr. Walter arrives |

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

The year 2000 Father Edwin Kornath becomes our pastor. Father was very intelligent and had an unbelievable knowledge of the history of the saints. His homily often was the sharing of that knowledge. It was a special love of his. During his time at St. Thomas, the parish welcomed another parish member's Call to the Deaconate. Jim Nichols was ordained Deacon Nichols on June 11, 2005. We



would be remiss if we did not mention that it was under Father Kornath's leadership that our early planning was started: to investigate the financial impact: the structural size, and the location of our new House of Worship. After six years pasturing at St. Thomas Aquinas, Father Kornath left in 2005.



In June 2005 Father Gene Doda becomes our new pastor. He immediately took charge of the planning of the new church.

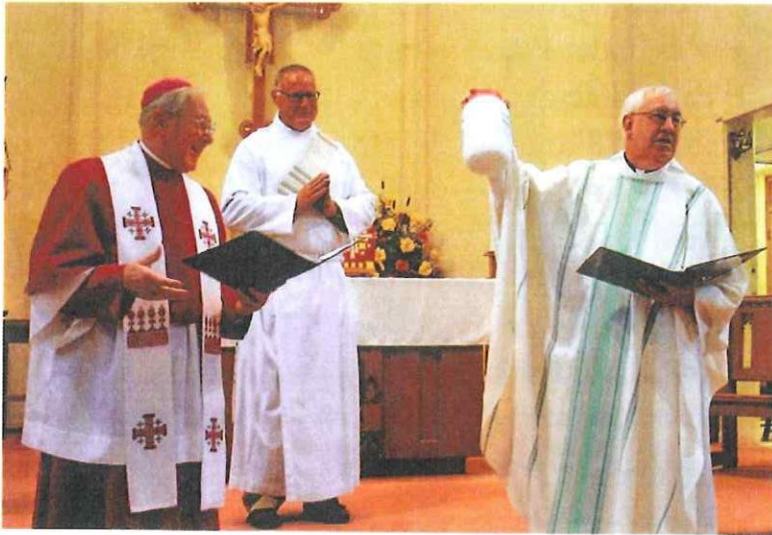


- 1963 Fr. Hertel dies, Fr. Skalitzky and Fr. Schaefer arrive
- 1964 Four hundred fifty-two students in school
English introduced into Mass
First church picnic
- 1967 St. Thomas statue dedicated in honor of priests (in front of church)
Clock and bells in tower stop (need repair)

- Two hundred ninety-five students
Fr. Skalitzky dies,
Fr. Schaefer, after village campaign and parish members donations, gets the bells ringing again.
- 1968 Fr. Uhen arrives, Fr. Kenneth Frieber is his Assistant
- 1973 Ronald Gramza is ordained, Father Gramza

HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

In less than a year on April 29, 2006, the parish witnessed Auxiliary Bishop R. Sklba and Father Gene, along with the architect and contractor break ground for the new church. Then on the seventh of April, 2007 on Holy Saturday, Father Gene celebrated the first Mass in our beautifully constructed new church. Presently, our membership consists of 1251 family units or 3495 Christian



souls; the enrollment at St. Thomas School is 201 students. We formally celebrated the dedication and consecration of our new House of Worship with Archbishop Timothy Dolan officiating on June 17, 2007.

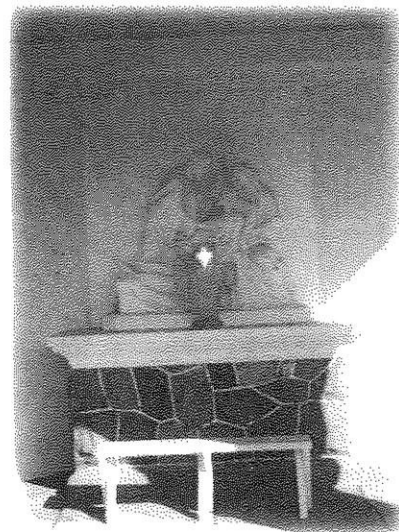
1974 was a member of St. Thomas
Bingo committee formed
1988 Fr. Tearney arrives
1989 Church redecorated
1991 Fr. D. Van Beek arrives
1992 Deacon Joe Hying
1998 Deacon Carl Mahnke
1998 Michael Erwin is ordained, Fr. Erwin, a St.
Thomas member, said first Sacrifice of the
Mass at St. Thomas on May 16th

2000 Fr. Ed Kornath, Deacon Jim Nichols
2003 Plans for new church start
2005 Fr. Gene Doda arrives
2006 April 29, ground breaking for new church
2007 April 7, Holy Saturday, first mass said in new
St. Thomas Aquinas Church
2007 June 17, The new St. Thomas Aquinas
Church is dedicated by Archbishop Timothy
M. Dolan

ST. THOMAS CEMETERY

On September 8, 1853 St. Thomas Cemetery was consecrated by Bishop J.M. Henni. It was Reverend P. Schwaiger in 1874 who had the cemetery fenced. In 1910 Fr Albers had the low spots filled-in, and it was surveyed and platted with a cement sidewalk from the cemetery to the church. On May 1, 1912 Fr Albers, the pastor, died and was buried in St. Thomas Cemetery.

In 1913 a Memorial Chapel in memory of Fr Albers was erected over his gravesite. The chapel cost eight-hundred dollars. Also, the cemetery monuments were cleaned and straightened. It took twenty-five men two days to do the cemetery clean-up. By 1915 the entrance was built at a cost of four-hundred dollars. Father Pierron who had directed the building of the Memorial Chapel for his predecessor was also honored when he was laid to rest in the Memorial Chapel in 1945.



There are "stories" that behind the tree-line on the Northeast boundary of the cemetery, bodies of suicide deaths were buried. There is no record of anyone being laid to rest in this area; thus it is not known if anyone was ever buried in that Northeast boundary of the cemetery.

Henry Naber family in 1941 donated the "triangle of land" to the church as an addition to the cemetery when the family passed away. Joe Linneman donated dirt-fill and Mr. Reesman hauled the fill to the cemetery. Also, the Norton family donated land on the North side for the enlargement to St. Thomas Cemetery. Because the above area was low in elevation, D. Beck filled in the low lying area and paid the back taxes so the church could receive a clear title to the land. Additionally, in 1948 D. Beck donated forty acres of land for a fee of six-thousand dollars. The rest of the land value was considered a gift. This land was sold for over a million dollars in the year 2000 and helped immensely to our funding of the new House of Worship! In 1950 the church purchased an additional two and a half acres of land North of the cemetery.

Presently, we have approximately 900 souls interned at St. Thomas Cemetery with some graves that date back as far as 1850.

Every effort was made to compile a complete and accurate historical review. We hope you appreciate the "historicity" of St. Thomas Aquinas early beginnings.