



St. Nicholas Catholic Church
400 West 5th Street
Valentine, NE 69201



For 122 years Catholics of the Valentine area have been coming together to worship and to celebrate the sacraments.

During the summer of 1882, the first Holy Mass was offered by Father John J. Smith of O'Neill at the railroad construction camp on the Niobrara River known as the "Big Cut." He also said Mass at Fort Niobrara. In 1883 Fathers Francis Craft and J.A. Bushman, missionary priests among the Sioux, offered Mass in Valentine several times. Jesuit priests from St. Francis Mission including Fathers Jutz, Perrig, Digman and Bosh celebrated a monthly Mass at Cornell Hall for several years. Father Brophy of O'Neill also said Mass there.

In the fall of 1890, Father Ferdinand Lechleitner was appointed first resident pastor in Valentine. He offered Mass in homes, at the Courthouse, at Fort Niobrara, and at Cornell Hall. The area Father Lechleitner served from Valentine included Merriman on the west to Newport on the east, south to Brownlee, and then northeast to Norden and Springview.



"Big Cut" area



He is remembered as the "Pioneer Priest of North-Central Nebraska." The February 12, 1892, issue of the "Republican" states:

"P. Donoher informed the editor of this paper that Father Lechleitner will bring fifty families from the West to locate in Cherry County early this spring. Great praise is due this man."

And in the March 5, 1895, issue:

"Thro' the kindness of Father Lechleitner the "Republican" has received fifty copies of the 1895 yearbook from the Agriculture Department of Washington. These books are being distributed among the farmers."

The survival of the new families was attributed in great measure to the hardwork, generosity, and encouragement of Father Lechleitner who also had the confidence of the Sioux. In 1893 he accompanied Chief Two Strikes to the "Republican" newspaper to publicly announce his protest regarding parties who had been furnishing liquor to the Indians. In the spring of 1896, Father contributed seed grain to the farmers and gave of his time and money to plant trees to beautify the church yard.

In July of 1903, Father Lechleitner was transferred to St. Libory, Nebraska. Father Breitkoff and Father Muysen, the resident pastor from 1903-1906, and priests from St. Francis Mission cared for the spiritual needs of St. Nicholas until the appointment of Father Leo Blaere.

Father Blaere arrived from West Flanders, Belgium, in March 1907. In 1913, Father, in a letter to Bishop James Duffy, described his territory as covering 4,200 square miles which included Valentine and 13 missions. He once confided to a friend, Jack Bauer, that one of his greatest difficulties in traveling between missions was lack of sleep due to bed bugs!

Father Blaere's interest extended to the entire community, and he contributed to the growth of Valentine. In 1912 he loaned personal funds for the building of the Cherry County Hospital. He was a stockholder and member of the Board of Directors of the Nebraska State Bank, and was a staunch promoter of the Arts, serving consistently on committees for community concerts.

In September of 1949, Father Blaere was elevated to the rank of Domestic Prelate, with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor. The solemn investiture was held in Valentine on December 15, 1949. Then in 1955 he celebrated his Golden Jubilee. At the dinner for this occasion, Judge James C. Quigley expressed the high regard held for Monsignor Blaere by the entire community: "... Father Blaere belongs to the whole of Valentine. And the whole of Valentine belongs to him today. He has grown with Valentine and through the years has made a distinct and wholesome contribution to the spiritual morality of the community by



Fr. Lechleitner



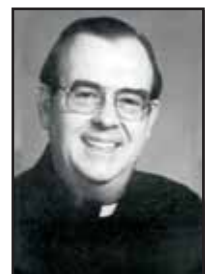
Msgr. Blaere



Fr. Dooley



Fr. Foster



Fr. Wiest

the example of his own good Christian life and character, so we, and I mean all of us, have sincere and deep respect and affection for him as a man and priest.”

Monsignor Blaere died February 18, 1958, after 51 years of service. He is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery, Valentine.

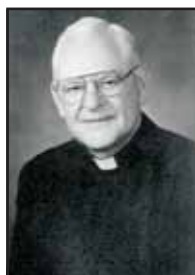
After the death of Father Blaere, Father Carl Ferris, a native son who was then the resident pastor in Nenzel, was appointed as interim pastor of St. Nicholas Church until the appointment of Father Raymond Dooley March 24, 1958. Father Dooley was the fourth resident pastor in 68 years to serve the parish and also the first native priest of the Diocese to serve St. Nicholas.

In 1965 Father Dooley was transferred to Alliance, and Father Robert Foster became the fifth resident pastor. For eight years he inspired and encouraged both the parishioners and the residents of Valentine and Nenzel through his genuine concern and Irish wit. In May 1973, Father Foster was appointed to St. Josaphat Church in Loup City.

Since 1973, St. Nicholas has been served by five other residents pastors:

Father Robert Wiest	1973-1983	Father James Heithoff	1998-2003
Father Ted Nekoliczak	1983-1989	Father Bernard Berger	2003-2008
Father James J. Janovec	1989-1998		

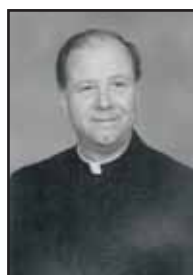
Four priests from the area have been ordained to the priesthood. Father Augustine (Albert Mathias) Nenzel, O.S.B., a native of Nenzel, was ordained in 1932. Father Carl Ferris received his Ordination May 3, 1955, in Grand Island and celebrated his first Mass in Valentine on May 5, 1955. Father Louis Nollette was ordained May 23, 1975, at his home parish in Nenzel and his brother, Father Neal Nollette, was ordained in Grand Island May 30, 1980.



Fr. Nekoliczak



Fr. Janovec



Fr. Heithoff



Fr. Berger

Before the appointing of a resident pastor to the area, the sacraments were often administered by priests from St. Francis Mission. The early baptism records of St. Nicholas are copies of records at St. Francis. Father Jutz prepared the first communion class of which nine children received their First Holy Communion on June 5, 1887. A 1915 obituary made mention of a couple being married April 10, 1883, at the Rosebud Agency, but early marriages and funerals were often held in private homes.



Fr. Carl Ferris

In 1907, and again in 1911, Bishop James J. Keanne, D.D., Bishop of Cheyenne, Wyoming, held Confirmation in Valentine. Bishop James A. Duffy of Kearney and later of Grand Island, administered Confirmation to large classes of children and adults in 1913 and in 1916.



During the 14 years Father Lechleitner served the area, the first church was built. Ground was broken in 1892. In 1896 the 20 foot by 40 foot main building with an attached 16 foot by 40 foot residence was completed on the corner lot of 3rd and Wood Streets. This was accomplished largely by the work of

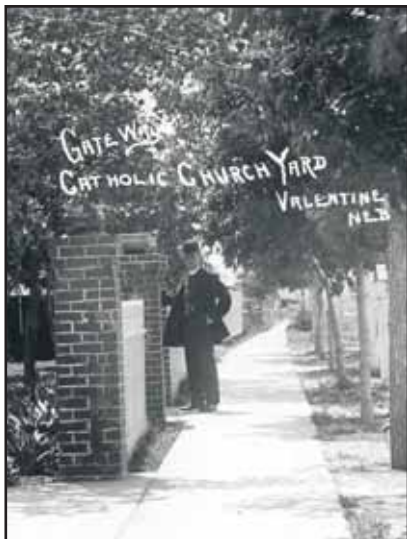
Father Lechleitner's own hands and paid for by the people of the parish.

The furnishings of this first church were simple. In October of 1896 Father instructed the congregation that in the absence of a stove and coal to heat the church, Mass services would be discontinued in the church. Gifts of pews by W.E. Haley and an altar by P. Sullivan were added in 1901.



In 1909 after the arrival of Father Blaere, a new parsonage was built just south of the church, and in 1911 a considerably larger church was completed on the site of the old church. The interior of this church, with stained glass windows imported from Germany, was much more elaborate than its pioneer predecessor. On Sunday, March 15, 1914, there was a blessing of a new bell bearing the names of Bishop Duffy and Father Blaere. An inscription in Latin from Psalms reads: "Praise the Lord all you Nations."

At the time of the completion of this church, Valentine was under the Omaha Diocese. In 1913 James A. Duffy, D.D. was appointed Bishop of Kearney - later changed to the Diocese of Grand Island.





The increasing size of the parish made the building of a new plant advisable, so in 1959, soon after Father Dooley became pastor, the building of an entire new parish unit, consisting of a church, rectory, and parish hall was begun. The new St. Nicholas Church was dedicated May 3, 1960. The stained glass windows from the old church were installed in the new church. Also, the large bell,

weighing 880 pounds, was installed in the tower of the new church along with a 440 pound bell from the former Benedictine College in Spalding - a gift from Father Dooley - and a third, smaller bell, which weighs 240 pounds.

During the 45 years these units have been in use, there have been many updates and some remodeling. In the 1970's the hall kitchen was completely remodeled and modernized. Air conditioning has been installed in the complete unit. In 1988 the altar area was remodeled along with updating of the decor throughout the church.

Church Expansion

In 1999 a major expansion capital campaign was begun to build a 4,000 foot addition extending to the south, west, and east of the existing church. It includes a narthex, or gathering area, two handicapped accessible restrooms, and two multi-purpose rooms. The back part of the church was also remodeled and includes a new reconciliation room. The completion of this expansion was celebrated by our parish April 28, 2002.



Ready

Set

Go!!



There has always been some form of religious education for the youth of our parish. In accounts of our parish history, mention is made of classes as early as 1887 being held to prepare children and sometimes adults for First Communion and Confirmation. For many years classes were held on Sunday mornings between the two Mass times. In July of 1952, the Sisters of Mercy of Omaha conducted a religious vacation school at St. Nicholas. During other summers Sisters from different religious orders would come for a week to offer instructions and to prepare children for their First Holy Communion. In the 1960's, weekly religion classes, taught by lay members, were begun on Saturday mornings with nuns continuing to come in the summers.

During the tenure of Father Foster, Franciscan Sisters Agnesine Hargarten and Florence Southall traveled from Hay Springs, Nebraska, once a week to work as Religious Education Coordinators. These nuns were affectionately known as "God's Squad."

In 1973 "The Blue Nuns," Sister Theresa White and Sister Carole Wakefield, arrived as members of the Pastoral Team of Father Wiest. Sister Carole became the Religious Education Coordinator followed by Sister Marietta Spenner in 1983. In 1989 the position of Religious Education Coordinator was assumed by a lay person, Mary Lou Stauffer, who still serves in this position today.



Sister Theresa White, Sister Marietta Spenner and Sister Carole Wakefield

Adult education has also been important. In 1903 Mass was held at the schoolhouse in Crookston with explanation of the Catholic Doctrine after Mass. Missions have been conducted in the parish dating back as early as June 1904. Catholics and non-Catholics were welcome and the missions were apparently well attended. At the mission in 1916 conducted by Father Michael Leary, S.J. of Chicago, the church was crowded with not even standing room left. Missions as well as other opportunities to gain knowledge in our faith are still offered today. Catechumenates are conducted for those interested in learning about our faith or preparing to become members of our church.

The generous services of the men and women of the church have always been important to the functioning of the parish. In the 1890's the ladies of the church in Valentine began to hold socials and bazaars to raise money for the building of the then planned church. On one bazaar at Cornell Hall in 1892, they took in \$350. These bazaars, with fancy work and food sales, continued into the 1960's.

After the completion of our present church, the Altar Society, composed of the women of the parish, was formed. The ladies provide meals for funerals, assist with receptions, and prepare dinners for banquets and various other occasions. The money made is used for needs of the parish as well as for donations to families in need, and to help sponsor different church activities.

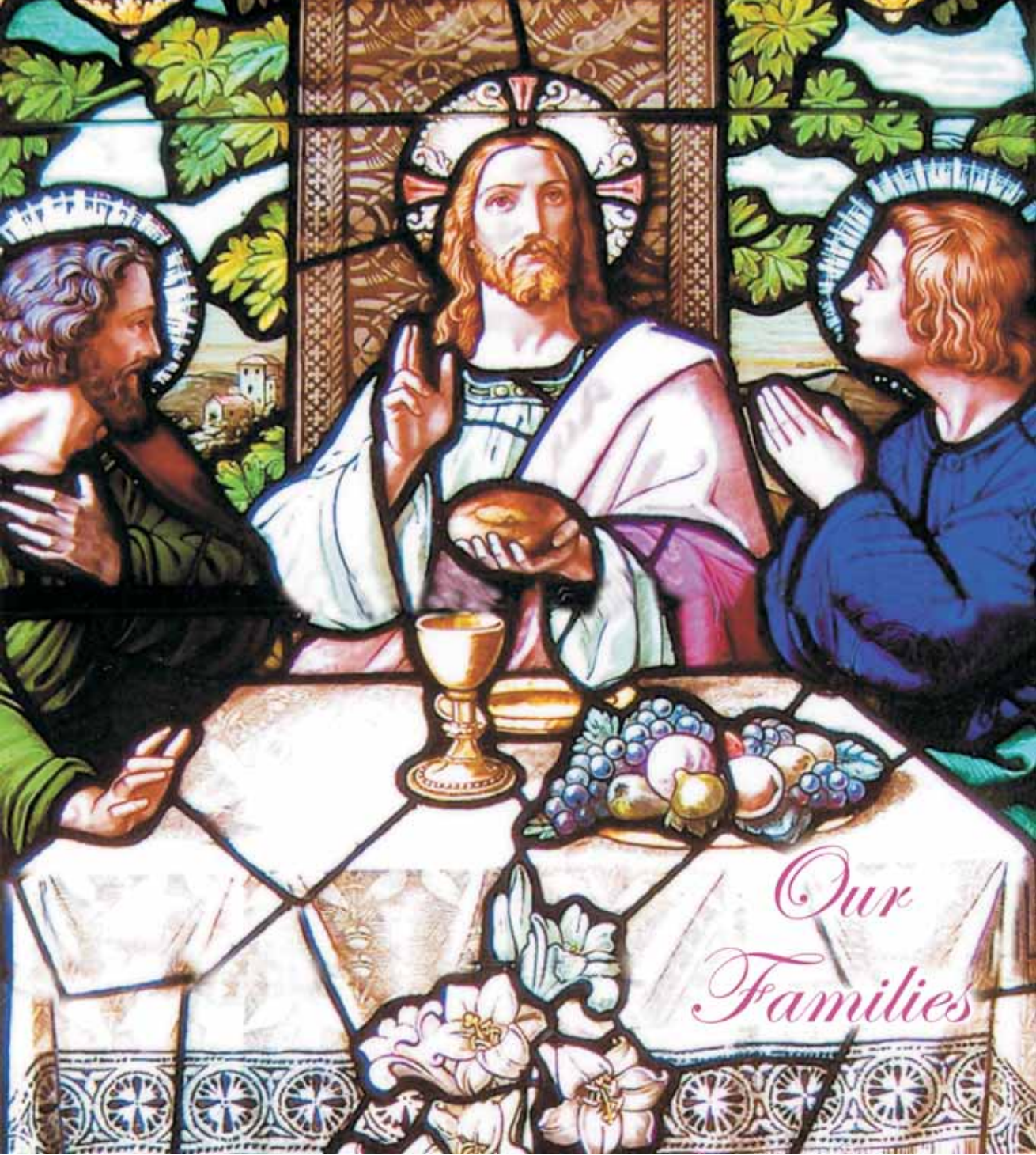
The Confraternity of Christian Mothers, which originated in France in 1850, was formed by a group of women who met to pray for one another and their children. A group was organized in Valentine in 1916. The Christian Mothers meet monthly to pray for the needs of the community.

The Knights of Columbus in Valentine began in 1957 as a club under the Mission, S.D. Council. This organization of Catholic men serves our parish and community in numerous ways. Each year they award a scholastic scholarship to a senior student. They sponsor the Free

Throw Contest for the community youth, and conduct a Tootsie Roll Drive to raise funds for the mentally challenged. They serve breakfasts for the church congregation on various occasions, lead a monthly Rosary after Mass and provide financial support to various church activities.

The young people of St. Nicholas Church also provide service to both our parish and the community. Youth activities this past year include sponsoring a Fall Fun Night in October for the children of the community, assisting in providing care packages to members of our congregation who are attending college or serving in the military, and conducting a spring food drive to collect canned goods for the Community Food Pantry.

Today the laity of the church - men, women, and youth - participate in Liturgical celebrations and serve actively in many other ministerial roles.



The parish congregation of St. Nicholas Church continues to grow - from 20 families in 1894 to approximately 280 families today. We continue to move on together in a spirit of caring and sharing. On September 29, 1996, when St. Nicholas celebrated the Centennial of the parish, Bishop McNamara remarked in his homily that the Church is the people who have passed down the faith through the years, and that long after the people here now are forgotten, the faith will still be carried on. Hopefully this St. Nicholas Church directory will help remind us how true his words still are today.