

## *St. Lawrence Parish – A Brief History*

It was the year 1846 when 14 families, all recent immigrants from Germany, erected the first Catholic Church in St. Lawrence. This log church was built mainly at night, by the light of bonfires, as the men worked on their land during the day. It stood on what is now the south-east corner of the cemetery. The church was blessed by Bishop Henni in October of 1846.

The following year a rectory and school house were built. Rev. C. Schraunbach, the first resident pastor, also served the parishes of St. Matthias at Nabob and SS Peter and Paul at Nenno. In 1849, Johann and Margaretha Schuetz donated 8.1 acres of land, and in 1852, a large framed church was built east of today's rectory. In 1861, an addition was built and an organ and two bells were purchased. On Christmas Eve 1861, the lonely settlers heard the chords of an organ and the sound of bells for the first time since leaving their homeland.

The present Gothic style brick church was completed in 1881 at a cost of \$40,000 and was free of debt when it was consecrated. Archbishop M. Heiss of Milwaukee consecrated the church on October 4, 1882. The main altar, still a beautiful part of the sanctuary, was purchased from Goyers Brothers in Louvain, Belgium, in February 1883, for \$2,346. The altar is hand carved wood. The statues, too, are also hand carved wood. The statue at the top center is St. Lawrence, patron saint of the parish. On his right side is the Centurion who was converted to Catholicism because of the manner in which St. Lawrence accepted his martyrdom. On the left is the Centurion governor. St. Lawrence is holding a grill because he was grilled by his enemies. The pictures on the side of the altar tell the story of his martyrdom. St. Aloysius, is on the left side of the altar, and the saint on the right is unknown. At the bottom of the altar are the four evangelists – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew is pictured with a lion, Mark with wings, Luke with an ox and John has an eagle. Enclosed in the altar table are special containers holding the relics of the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, as well as of St. Fidelis Sigmaringen. The stations along the walls were added in 1907.

St. Lawrence was and still is a small community with several taverns. In 1910, a new pastor arrived at St. Lawrence. He had the tavernkeepers sign the following agreement: "We hereby promise and obligate ourselves not to sell or give out any drinks Sunday mornings during time of church services and will keep saloon closed during the main church service Sunday mornings and on Church Holidays. For every infringement, we obligate and promise to pay \$10 to the Congregation."

Records show that the first school opened in 1849. In 1886, Michael and Clara Hook donated land north of the church, now the parking lot, for construction of a brick building to be used as the new school and nun's residence. It was completed at a cost of \$5,000 and consisted of three departments for the school and an area for the nun's residence. At this time, 40 years after 14 families built the first church, the parish community numbered 152 families, 800-900 souls. There were about 155 students in the school, about 50 students per room with one teaching nun in each room. The Sisters of St. Agnes and the School Sisters of St. Francis were the two orders of nuns who taught at St. Lawrence.

When remodeling the old school became too expensive, a decision was made to build a new school. In January 1963, 163 students, grades one through eight, moved into their new school. The class of 1968, 18 students, was the last class to graduate from St. Lawrence. Classes for grades one through six were held in the 1968-69 school year. The school closed in 1969 after 82 years of providing parochial education.

In January 1973, the brick school/nun's residence was demolished and the area became the church parking lot. The Slinger School District rented the 1963 school until 2003. Today, the parish uses the school for Religious Education classes. The parish rectory, built in 1874, is used for the parish offices.

In the 1930s, a church hall and kitchen were added under the church. Ground had to be removed with picks and shovels until space allowed teams of horses and mules to take over. Several renovations over the years have given the parish a modern facility for numerous events, the annual chili dinner being one of them. On the agenda for the near future is an addition to make the hall area handicap accessible.

Today our parish serves over 630 families from the surrounding area. A Religious Education program provides instruction for our youth. A Christian Women's Society and the Knights of Columbus are active organizations in our parish providing adults the opportunity to intermingle in a Christian environment.

*Major sources: Two histories of the parish: CENTENNIAL JUBILEE 1846-1946 and GENERATIONS OF FAITH 1846-1996*

