

## **FAITHFUL SERVICE**

### ***Sacred Heart Church***

### ***1065 W. Fifth***

*[The following story is based on the extensive research conducted by Sister Rosalie Cersovsky, C.S.J.]*

According to the Colby newspapers, the earliest Mass in Thomas County was held at Michael Donelan's residence on Thursday, December 2, 1886, at 11:00 a.m. Rev. John George Fleisch of Herndon served Colby. However, the Mass that early settlers remembered was held in a small house in the south part of town in October 1887, with twelve people present.

The first pastor of Sacred Heart Church was August P. Heimann. When Father Heimann came to Colby there were about twelve Catholic families. He offered Mass in private homes and in the Armory (on North Franklin) and a few months later a home was rented where the large double parlors were used as a place of worship.

In 1890 the first church building was built and was dedicated to the Sacred Heart. The church was a frame building that was 28 feet by 40 feet and was located on the site of the present church. The church was built under the supervision of Father Heimann. Joseph Voisin, a member of the Church Committee, was very active in collecting money and helping with the construction of this church, which cost about \$1,000 to build. This small church served the community of Colby from the years 1890 until 1909. A small three-room rectory for the use of the pastor was also constructed.

In 1909, the records show that Sacred Heart Parish had grown and the old frame church had become inadequate. It was decided that a larger building had to be built. The parish was then under the pastorate of Father John Fitzgerald, who lived at Goodland and attended to Colby two Sundays a month. In 1908, work was begun on a new church. This church was built on the same site of the original building and was of red brick. The contract was let to Winters and Short of Atwood, Kansas.

The cornerstone was laid by Bishop John Cunningham, Bishop of Concordia, Kansas on November 4, 1908 and he dedicated it in September 1909. The accounts of the day state that this church was the largest and most beautiful church in the county.

During construction, the old frame building was moved to one side and used for divine services while the new building was being constructed. The former church was then sold and moved out of Colby. Later the building was moved back to Colby as a residence and is located at 440 North Range.

By 1925, the original rectory had become too small and a larger, more modern rectory was planned by Father Michael Mulvihill who was then pastor at Colby. This rectory building was begun October 7, 1925 and was finished before March 1926. The rectory was designed by C.A. Smith, architect of Salina, Kansas with the Hankins Contractors of Colby doing the building work. The cost of the building was about \$10,000.00.

On January 27, 1938, Father Martin J. Schmitt was appointed to Sacred Heart Parish which then numbered about 100 families. On November 6, 1938, the church caught on fire and was totally destroyed. The cause of the fire is unknown.

Father Schmitt and the parish decided to build another church immediately. The firm of Brinkman and Hagen, architects of Emporia, Kansas, was engaged to draw up

plans for a new and larger church. These plans were fashioned after the church at Loretto, Kansas which Father Schmitt liked.

The basement for the church was begun early in 1939. The dimensions of this church were 106 feet by 40 feet. Due to the depression and bad crops in Western Kansas, the parish was able to build only as far as the first floor. [*note: the war was also a contributing factor in the delay of finishing the church*] The basement was used as a church from the date of its finishing until the present church was completed in 1951.

This basement church was beautifully built and for several years was entirely adequate. It was as nice and proper as any church in the diocese. Nels and Floyd Jaspersen were hired as foremen in building the basement church and men of the parish volunteered their services for the labor. The capacity of this basement church was around 300. It cost about \$17,000.00. The first Mass here was offered by Father Schmitt on June 11, 1939 and it was dedicated by Bishop Frank A. Thill on September 10, 1939.

From the years between 1939 through 1946 the parish grew and gathered funds for the completion of this church. In June 1946, Father Schmitt took sick and died on September 28, 1946 never realizing the finished structure.

In October, 1946, Father Edmond M. Arpin came to Sacred Heart Parish with instructions from the Salina Diocese to proceed with the project of a new and larger church for Colby. Plans were made to finance this project and to continue to consult with Brinkman and Hagan.

The growth of Sacred Heart Parish had been notable. Hence, the plans that Father Schmitt had ordered for Colby's new Catholic Church in 1938 proved to be utterly inadequate. These plans had to be scrapped and new plans ordered. At this time Colby's parish had more than 165 families. Father Arpin and the building committee decided that a Modernistic design would be much cheaper and very proper. In planning for this building, the Committee and Pastor wanted to build for future growth in the parish.

By July 1, 1950, the plans for the new Colby church were complete. Bids were submitted by several contracting firms in Kansas. On July 31, 1950, the contract was let to Joseph Sebacker of Oakley, Kansas. The plans called for an extension of over 30 feet over and above the basement church. The overall size of the new building was to be 132 feet by 40 feet, with a seating capacity of over 500 people.

The terms of the various contracts were as follows: General Contractor- Joseph Sebacker, \$122,319; Plumbing and Heating- Davidson Plumbing Co., Wichita, \$15,575; and Electrical- J. H. Girvan, Plainville, Ks, \$4,500. The overall cost of this church was a little over \$160,000.00. Work on finishing this church was begun in August 1950. By March, 1951, the cornerstone was ready to be laid. The new Catholic Church was dedicated on Tuesday, April 15, 1952 by Bishop Thill.

In 1967, Msgr. Arpin told the *Prairie Drummer* that "We are proud of our Church, new school (built in 1960), and convent (built in 1964). However, our church is not complete. As soon as we finish paying for the present building we plan to do some painting, install art windows, and call in an interior decorator to do some remodeling."

Twenty-five years after the present church was built and through the efforts and generosity of the parishioners, Sacred Heart Parish had 64 stained-glass windows installed. The artwork depicted in the glass illustrates different aspects of the Catholic faith and the history of Sacred Heart Parish and of Thomas County. The colored panels, which cost about \$26,000, were installed on the inside so that they would not be damaged by hailstorms that regularly frequent this area.

A great deal of planning went into this project. School children submitted sketches of the themes which were used in the 28 lower windows. Many of the sketches were followed closely while some were redesigned by the official artist for the project, EA Glubka of the Hauser Studios in Winona, MN. The upper windows of the nave depict saints. On June 13, 1976, the new stained-glass windows were dedicated.

During his years as pastor (1982-1985), Fr. Mark Berland began the remodeling fund to renovate the sanctuary of the Church and assisted in drawing up the plans. When Fr. Henry J. Kieffer, came to Colby in August 1985, he took on the remodeling project. In September of 1986, remodeling of the Sacred Heart Church began. During this time, Eucharistic Celebrations were held in the school gym and in the Cultural Arts Center at Colby Community College.

Christmas of 1986 was very special to the parishioners of Sacred Heart when they were able to worship in the church again. After much planning, effort, sacrifice and fund raising, they were at long last enjoying the beauty of God's Temple and theirs as they sang out with great emotion and thanksgiving: "O Come all Ye Faithful...Come, let us adore Him." The total cost of this remodeling came to approximately \$110,000.

In view of the fact that more office and meeting space accommodations were needed in the parish, and that at the time only three sisters were living in the large convent building, it was mutually decided that an exchange of residence be made by the pastor and the Sisters at the end of 1987. The current convent is the former rectory built in 1926 and the former convent serves as the rectory and parish offices. Sacred Heart Grade School is thriving with an enrollment of 103 students in grades K through 5<sup>th</sup> and 54 preschoolers in 2003.

The International Style of this Modernistic structure is an excellent example of post-WWII design rarely found in rural communities. But at the same time, it is most often the churches in these communities that reflect the best architectural styles. At this time, the Sacred Heart Church is having the mortar pointed by the Mid-Continental Restoration Co., Inc. of Ft. Scott, KS. It is a worthwhile effort to maintain a building that having reached the 50-year mark probably deserves to be nominated to the National Register.