

Cedar Rapids - St. Pius X

Most of us say many times a day "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven." "Do we mean it, if we do then joyfully, we start up the project of another parish in which our Eucharistic Savior may dwell. And his children be taught to know him, to love him and to serve him." Msgr. Maurice S. Sheehy, August 15, 1960.

.... Fr. Dean Waltz, who was one of the first associate pastors at St Pius. As an educator, he was concerned about the class sizes at St. Matthew and IC schools and he conveyed the same to Archbishop Leo Binz in Dubuque. Northeast Cedar Rapids was growing rapidly, and it became evident to Msgr. Sheehy, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church that a new parish was needed to minister to the growing number of Catholics in the area. With the approval of Archbishop Leo Binz and the strong support from a number of families, it was decided to proceed. Msgr. Maurice Sheehy had always had a strong admiration for St. Pius X and after participating in ceremonies in Rome during the reburial of St. Pius at the at St. Peter's. He decided that if he ever had the opportunity, he would name a parish after the pontiff best known for his promotion of the holy eucharist, and so it was. The new parish was legally incorporated on September the 4th 1959. Immaculate Conception parishioners with some help from St. Matthews parishioners provided the financial impetus to make St. Pius parish a reality. Their funds allowed for purchase of land between 48th and 50th streets, NE, just off Collins Road and Castle Street. For the next year, planning and problems, many in connection with parish boundaries, were the subject of many meetings. Finally, on September 25th, 1960 Msgr. Sheehy celebrated the first Mass for St. Pius at the chapel at the Regis High School. Regis High School served as the temporary quarters for the new parish for approximately 400 families. Msgr. Sheehy continued to serve as the pastor for both parishes. He was assisted by Rev. Dean Walz. Ground was broken for the parish's church school building in November of 1960 and on May 7th, 1961 the building had progressed sufficiently to allow the Sisters of Mercy of Cedar Rapids to accept registrations for the coming Fall term at St. Pius. On September 3rd, 1961 Archbishop Binz dedicated the new building with 14 classrooms, a central library, audio/visual center and other school support facilities. An all-purpose room served as a church. Now all the parish needed was a pastor. Msgr. Sheehy notified the Archbishop and of course the Archbishop promptly replied by naming Msgr. Sheehy as pastor and Fr. Dean Walz as Assistant Pastor. The first trustees of the new church were Brian Riley, Jr. and Larry McGrath. Many people put many hours and spent much time in getting our parish started. I'm going to quote what Miles ... "on starting and maintaining a new parish, it was a lot of work, but a lot of fun too." Fr. Dean Walz "what I remember most about St. Pius is the spirit of cooperation among the people. There was a deep community spirit from the beginning, it was great." And I must add that the spirit here at St. Pius today is just as great as it was when we first started our parish. "The statue of St. Pius X on the south steps of our church was made in Rome. I know, I helped them pack it" quote Miles Nabb. A little quote from Dr. David Wolf, that time he belonged to our parish and his family and he said there was a swamp where our parking lot is now "it was infested with snakes" "in the fall of 1961 we were clearing brush, Fr. Walz was with us so everyone watched their language until a bunch of snakes came out." In February of 1966 we got the first new organ for St. Pius. "It was purchased with trading stamps donated by the Guild and parish members" quote June Cammer. The first marriage at St. Pius was December 28th, 1961. James Q McNeal, Jr. and Maxine Catherine Jones Clarkson, with Fr. Dean Walz celebrating the marriage Mass. First baptism at St. Pius was October 9th, 1960. Mark David

Kruse, son of Fredrick and Dorothy Lynch Kruse, baptized by Msgr. Sheehy. I'm going to talk a little bit about our school, because Msgr. Sheehy was very very proud of the school he started. I remember Msgr. very well and I remember the remark he made one Sunday at Mass, that he loved the Sisters of Mercy. He had a sister who was at that time in the Sisters of Mercy, but Cedar Rapids did not have any Franciscan Sisters and he felt that we should have the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration from LaCrosse, Wisconsin to administer our school. So, the Franciscan Sisters assumed the administration of the school on September 11th, 1961, and during this 1961-62 school year the school operated with an all lay faculty of 9 teachers with Sr. M. Dorothy, Sr. Mary Dorothy as principal, and the enrollment was 326 students. On April 3rd, 1962 the St. Pius Home and School Association was organized. At the same time plans were purchased for the purchase of a convent for the Sisters at 4520 Walker Street, NE. The convent was to include a chapel and on August 7th, 1962, 5 Franciscan sisters took up residence. 4 sisters and several lay teachers constituted the faculty for the 1962-63 school year. A very large 1st grade made it necessary to set up a temporary classroom in the all-purpose room, proving to be a difficult arrangement. The temporary classroom had to be discontinued and since the parish was without funds to finance an addition to the school at that time, it was decided to drop the 1st grade for the 1963-64 school year. Plans were immediately started for financing and expansion of the school. A tithing program was begun, and the decision was made to construct an addition of 8 classrooms, a central library, storage room and teacher's lounge. Work was completed by 1964. Msgr. Sheehy was a strong believer in Catholic education, and he spoke in favor of expanding the school building, specifically adding a junior high wing. During a meeting, a slight majority opposed for a new church building. At the end of the session Msgr. proclaimed, "alright, so you've decided to go ahead with the school." The school was so important to him, he recalled Fr. Walz. He was sure that it was the best of the parish, and the people loved him so much that they accepted his decision. And it wasn't until 1979, that first grade was resumed. And in 1983 and 84 a kindergarten room was added to the school. And today we have an art room, we have a qualified art teacher, we have a qualified music teacher, who is here and teaches regularly. We also participate in the physical education program which meets requirements of the state department of public instruction, is required by all students, and we have today, 17 full-time teachers, 7 part-time teachers, 19 classrooms, 1 library, and 1 gym. Our board of education consists of a pastor, and 6 elected representatives of the parish. The board has 2 non-voting members, who are the principal and director of religious education and also the executive officer of the board. They are responsible to the administration of the diocesan Office of Education. The purpose of the board is to promote an effective program of religious, intellectual, cultural, social and physical education for the children of the parish and to promote adult education. We also have a home school association and the home school association holds 1 open house in the Fall which is usually an ice cream social and they have 1 fundraising event each year and that's usually held in the Spring and they also have the book fair. Oh, we also today, used to be back to about 3 or 4 years ago we had this parent-teacher conferences, now we have parent-student teacher conferences scheduled twice a year in October and March. The faculty believes in much parent involvement in our school matters and we're very eager to discuss problem areas and policies with our parents and as they arise, we like to take care of these problems. Our school transportation for St. Pius, we have Cedar Rapids public school bus transportation and it's available to students attending St. Pius school and then we also have the city bus, which brings in many of our children. All of our students at St. Pius take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in October of each year and we have a school, has a service of a social worker, psychologist, speech

clinician, student nurses, we also have hearing, vision and speech screening conducted annually. We also have a wonderful school lunch program. St. Pius school participates in national school lunch program and the special milk program. Our last athletic program, we have football for grades 7 and 8th, basketball, boys and girls, softball, boys and girls and those for grades 7th and 8th, and 6th, 7th, and 8th boys have wrestling, and the children meet with the other parish schools for games every Sunday afternoon. Tuition for children attending St. Pius schools is determined by the Board of Education and is dependent on the number of children from a family attending school. And we also welcome non-members to our school. Those people who are not Catholic. We have several non-Catholic children in our school. It might be interesting for others to know that we have a very very fine staff of teachers at St. Pius. We always have been, and I believe this is due to the parents, and what the parents really want for their children. I've been with the school now for 23 years and I've seen lots and lots of changes. I've been through a lot of the priests, I've seen them come and go and I've seen 3 principals, I'm on my 4th principal now, here at St. Pius. We have, I find it very interesting, because as I stated earlier, we have 17 full-time teachers and 7 part-time teachers. We have only 1 sister in our school and she is principal. Sr. Pat Sepker (??) and she's been with us for about 9 years. So, times have changed here at St. Pius but it's still very nice to have a sister with us. The parents, not only the parents, but I think all our parish members of St. Pius are people who are really caring, and they're filled with warmth and love and they really want the best for themselves and for others. I'm going to go back to the time of about the time when Msgr. Sheehy had to leave. His health was failing, so in 1966 he retired and was succeeded at St. Pius by Rev. John Simms, and at the same time, Fr. Dean Walz left for a new assignment. So, we were assigned two new priests Rev. Joseph McGuire, who today is with the chaplain at Mercy Hospital, and Rev. Lavern Schuller, who is the chaplain in what I believe is the Navy, I'm not real sure. Well, as you know, Cedar Rapids was expanding and so was St Pius parish and remember now this is around 1966 when we had about 1,000 families. New educational programs for those not attending the parish school and for adults were launched. An all-purpose room was crowded for Mass and then late in the 1960's, more and more support developed for the construction for a separate church structure. The decision to go ahead was made and the parish leaders led a highly successful pledge drive. Groundbreaking for the new church was held in April of 1970. The 100-foot building with a seating capacity of 850 was dedicated January 31st, 1971 and the new rectory was completed at the same time. Today our parish has grown to 2,100 households and it seems like each week we look in the bulletin and we have new families coming to St. Pius and maybe this is the way that Monsignor Sheehy really wanted it. Maybe he's looking down upon us and wanting our parish to grow as it has been growing. After Fr. Sims left, we had Rev. Bernard Collins and he was a former pastor at Immaculate Conception here in Cedar Rapids and then he was transferred and the present, we have Fr. Joseph O'Brien and Fr. Carl Ries. I want to go back a minute and give recognition to the CCD program at St. Pius. As I mentioned earlier everybody was overwhelmed with our new facilities at St. Pius and it was, it is a real modern church, the architecture was just great at that time. We had to do something because at this time there was another educational crisis evolving besides additions to our school and we needed a religious education program for those children not attending St. Pius X School, and a means for adults to learn more about their faith. The CCD program for children has been underway but the number involved grew rapidly, and various approaches for teaching students at both schools and at home were used. It became clear in late 1960's a director was needed to guide volunteer teachers and the expanding program. Phyllis Hoffman was hired as the coordinator. And then in 1971 Clarise Flegler was employed as

the first director of religious education. By then we had 550 young people enrolled. She guided the religious ed program for about 7 years. I've worked with Clarise on confirmation and she was a terrific gal who worked.... And then next we had Paul Zimmerman and Neil LeMins as co-directors. And at the present time we have Julie Johnson and Liz ?????. I'm not sure about the enrollment, it's probably close to a 1,000. I know at one time it was over a 1,000 when Fr. Collins was here, they had about 1,100 I think, and I don't know, but I think it's around a 1,000 today. And again, they come in I think they hold class every night of the week except maybe Friday night. I want to do a little quote here from one of our principals here at St. Pius and this is quote "on September 22nd, 1962 the Franciscan sisters received their first car through donations at the church bazaar. A sign above the car stated, "help a sister mister and keep our sisters off the street" donations came to \$390 the car cost \$400. Over the years here at St. Pius we have had approximately 120 lay teachers, probably 35 Franciscan sisters have served in the ministry of education at St. Pius and approximately 1400 students have been graduated from the 8th grade in the years that St. Pius has existed. And in these years of St. Pius the 10th school and our church we have tried to promote our Catholic education and our Catholic faith for everybody involved in our school and in our parish. I'd also like to bring in a quote from Fr. O'Brien, he's our present pastor, Fr. Joseph O'Brien, he came with us approximately 6 years ago, I would say probably, I think about 1980 or 81. "Gather the people, tell the story and break the bread, these few words do oversimplify the reason why the parish exists, but they carry the essence of the main function of a parish. A parish is a part of salvation history, it relates the people to the traditions of the universal church, to the diocesan church, and is where most people encounter and become that reality we call the church.

I've been going through a book which was published when we celebrated our 25th year here at St. Pius, there's some really delightful quotes in here. Here's one from George Nardman, "the Sunday we turned the altar around and went from Latin to English there was a lot of confusion. We forgot to take up the collection and Msgr. Sheehy through up his hands. Can't you imagine today what would happen if we'd forget to take up our collections? In 1978 approximately in November Al Shirah was ordained the first St. Pius deacon, and then later we had 2 others who joined him, John Sweeney, in 1982 and Paul Zimmerman was ordained in 1984. As the number of families in our parish has grown the additional programs have also been added. We have liturgy committee to help with the Sunday Mass and we also have special weekends for young people, families, and married couples. I hope that the warmth, the care, and the love that St. Pius shows for all members of their parish, I hope that this will always continue. And while the parish is growing older, just look around at Sunday Mass, it is still the youngest in the Archdiocese. No new parish has been organized since September of 1959.

This has been the oral history of St. Pius X school and parish Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The person speaking is Lois Ann Lensing, a charter member of St. Pius Church and a teacher at St. Pius for 23 years. Her address is [omitted], age 57. This is Patty Getters [address omitted], age 35.