

## Traer-St. Paul-Oral History

This is the oral history of the St. Paul Catholic Church in Traer recorded in 1987. My name is Barbara Novotny, my address is rural Traer, and I've been a member of this parish since 1931. [inaudible] I'm 87 years old, live on [inaudible]. I'm Walter Sefcek, age 59, I've been a member of St. Paul's parish since 1947. [inaudible]. I'm Callie Schmitt, and Lorie and I belong to the St. Paul's Youth Group. Do you remember some of your earliest memories of St. Paul Catholic Church in Traer? Well, some of my earliest memories are not of my own, this was before my time, but looking through the history of the parish, I see that it was founded in about 1873. When the town of Traer was founded and it had a very small group of Catholics at the time that organized and banded together and they had Mass in the private homes here in town and Father Kenny would come from Vinton, first he would come by train from Vinton and he would first stop at Dysart to say Mass and then he'd come to Traer and the Traer parish was actually started in 1880 and it's pretty closely related to the parish at Blessing which is about 9 miles north of Traer, the Immaculate Conception church there.

And there was a Father Lenihan that served the Blessing church from around 1905-1912 and the parish was placed under his care while he was there. The records show the first meeting of the St. Paul Board of Directors was on March 7th, 1912 and Father Cornelius Sampson was the pastor at that time. The church was getting itself organized and it had made plans for construction of the church to be put into a [inaudible] at that time, and in 1911 two lots were purchased to build a church on. And the ground was broken May 1st, 1912 and the church was constructed for a cost of 3,150 dollars. A very small wooden church 26x30 feet which was quite small, would seat less than 100 people. The building was dedicated May 25th, 1914 by Archbishop Keane, and the sacrament of Confirmation was administered at that time. And the church has had quite a few pastors since then. Msgr. Lenihan from 1905-1912, Father Cornelius Sampson from 1912-1915, Father Patrick Behan from 1915-1918, Father Maurice Nolan from 1918-1920, and Father John Richard from 1920-1944, Father Joseph Schemmel from 1944-1953, and Father John Graham from 1953-1955.

Ok, from about the time of 1912-1955 our parish was a mission of the Immaculate Conception church in Blessing, so a lot of activities were centered around that mother parish and that so many things [inaudible]. The only thing that I can recall when I first came at St Paul's parish in 1947, there were very few Catholics that were either employed or in business on Main Street. There were two businesses owned by Catholics was [inaudible] Madge had a ladies dress and hat shop and Louis Kass had a drug store and they were 3 employees that I can recall it was Eddie [inaudible] that worked for an implement store and Eleanor Hopnick was employed by [inaudible] grocery store and myself by the [inaudible] implement store. That was the only three on Main Street, we were kind of loners. I also remember being taught catechism every Sunday after Mass for a few minutes, Father John Richard would get a few little children together and we'd have a little catechism lesson after Mass on Sunday because he was living at Blessing and he wasn't here for the whole week, and during the Summer we'd have two weeks of catechism and we'd carpool and get ourselves up there any way we could for two weeks. We'd have catechism for all day and we'd take our lunch and uh, good catechism with all the Irish kids up

there, the Cavanaugh's, the McNorton's, the Cummings' and there were no facilities whatsoever for catechism classes or anything like that. The older children would meet in the garage and us little kids would meet out at kind of an old woodshed out there and we'd have our catechism there with the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary would come and stay and teach us our catechism. And I remember making my first Holy Communion it was in the Blessing church not in our church here, it was up at Blessing and I do remember very vividly because one of the members of my class, a little girl named Debbie [inaudible] we had communion on Sunday and the next following Tuesday morning she was suffocated in a load of corn. And I remember going to her funeral and we put on our little veils and the whole communion class attended her funeral, which was a very sad occasion.

I remember the building that we had, some of the physical characteristics of it, it was built on a very high steep bank on a city lot, it had two huge flights of stairs going up to it, and anyone who sang in the choir had to make an extra flight of steps up to the choir loft in the back of the church. It was nice in the summertime, but it was just miserable in the wintertime, especially on the occasion of a funeral or something it was very difficult. I can't imagine why they made so many steps to it, it wasn't really necessary. Then the earliest janitor was Fred Novatny, he was very dedicated, he had to come here early in the morning and fire up the coal and furnace, a coal and wood furnace, and the church had one heating register in the middle of the center aisle and uh, no indoor plumbing of any type, no water or facilities or anything like that. One of the projects that I can recall, the early 50's the Holy Name Society, we had an active membership of possibly 13 or 14 members, and for a project, we served breakfast during Lent. All the basement facilities, the area's about 30x40 and the furnace was off on the far end, and it took up a lot of space, so we'd have to carry a ladder down there for our cooking purposes, and we'd have electricity, we had electric fry pans and we served breakfast, we had bacon and eggs and rolls and it's hard to make a profit on breakfast so some of the parishioners felt sorry for us, so after about the 2nd week they started donating items like eggs and milk and some of the ladies even brought donuts so... [inaudible] we made a little profit the last 2 or 3 breakfasts, I think we probably gave that up after 5 or 6 breakfasts, because just the poor facilities we had weren't worth it. I remember some of money-making projects we had too, we used to have card parties in the homes. And just in the private homes, and the lady of the house would serve lunch and I remember that if we made 12 or 15 dollars that was considered real good for an evening. [inaudible] .....

[Exchange about the number of pews and pew rent omitted, difficult to understand. From around minute 9 to 10:43].

There was a late Mass here on Sunday, there was a 10:00 Mass, yeah there was a 10:00 Mass. I remember all the dinners we had up at Blessing, we'd have to take our food up there we would work with the Blessing people, we had games of chance, it was when Father Schemmel was here and he'd get a big tent, and he'd have those huge dinners there and we used to have to go in [and bring] 12 fried chickens at least 6 pies, and 2 gallons of coleslaw, 2 gallons of peeled potatoes and tomatoes, and dish towels, and whatever the parish would make, we'd make maybe 1,500 dollars and we'd split it between the two parishes then and we'd get 40% and Blessing would 60% of it. We all worked together in the making of the dinners. It was one money-making project. The Fall of the year wasn't it? Mm-hm, the Fall Festival, it became.

[Inaudible]. Do you have any comments that you want to add? You know in 1955 we got our own pastor, Father Francis Lana came a permanent pastor here and we were no longer connected with Blessing anymore, the church at Blessing. And St. Joseph parish at Dysart became our mission and Father Lana served both the parishes here. We bought a house for him [inaudible] for \$10,000 and he remodeled it and he remodeled the church a little bit and kind of fixed it up. And he was here until about, oh how long was he here? 1961 I guess it was. Father Barnes was here for a while, a year or two I think it was. Later on our church added on a few more families. We'd gone from about 15 or 20 families, more people are moving to town, farmers who retired, the town was growing, businesses were growing, so we needed a little more space, we were almost getting crowded, and we were getting a little more prosperous from all these dinners and breakfasts and things we'd been having, so they started talking about having a new church built, that would accommodate and have more facilities and would have more room for people.

Bill, can you remember anything about [inaudible]..... Should I talk about Father Lana Whatever you want to say. Well, when Father Lana was sent here he was prepared to locate a new place for the church. And we walked with him to three different areas which we liked, but we liked this one the best. So we tried to buy and they wanted 25,000 dollars for it, and we sent that to the Bishop and the Bishop said that no land was worth that much money so we had to give it up. So we gave up the building of the new church up until Father Bohr came. And then when Father Bohr came I was in the hospital. I just barely met him. When I was in the hospital I heard that Mrs. Levy died and I heard about this and so when I came home there were rumors that Mrs. Levy sold this property. This was the one we always liked the best. So, I called Father Bohr on the telephone and he wanted to know why we were in such a rush, and I said that I heard the property would be sold before long. He said, I should call a meeting. He asked who I should call for the meeting and I said the two Trustees, and the two Trustees came out and we had a meeting at the rectory and we decided that to buy the, we didn't have [inaudible] so I called Les Tomlinson, I was afraid that maybe Mrs. Levy would not want to sell to a church, I didn't know how she would feel about it. So I called Les Tomlinson and said that if he would do us a favor and see what she would sell this land and he come back the next day and said we could buy it for 18,000. So we called this meeting and we called [inaudible] and we decided to buy it and we wasn't all in favor, because that was going in debt. Anyway, the next day we bought the property up here where the church is today.

From then on, there was a [inaudible], we had a lot of work. The house was finally sold and moved away and the [inaudible] buried on the church property there. We didn't get too much help at times from our parishioners but we had so much to clean up, it was a real mess. Let's see and then when we went to build the church in 1964 I think and we contacted an architect from Cedar Rapids. Father Bohr said that the only way he would build the church was to have Jim [inaudible] as the foreman, and that was fine with the rest of us, so Jim wouldn't build it unless he had an architect, so we contacted the architect through Cedar Rapids and he showed us a building that we would have no windows in it and we all turned it down and he said he would come back with a newer model and brought it back then and we had another meeting and that had one or two windows and we didn't like it at all and we sat there with Father Bohr and pretty soon one by one went home and I admit that we were really downhearted and he said that the

only thing that he could do now, he decided, was to get a different architect, so we did and he called Jim the next morning and said that we're just not getting along with that architect and that we should locate somebody else so we did and we got [inaudible] and that's where we stand on the other church.

In the meantime, some folks seen that church in Ankeny, in the first place we had the church at Newhall and [inaudible] promised to build it and that's the one that the architect from Cedar Rapids was supposed to give us one just like it but he came back with all these different [inaudible]. So then we went up and looked at this church and we didn't like the way it was built before it had been [inaudible] so we got the architect and Father Bohr and myself, four of us went down there to Newhall and we asked if Jim [inaudible] if he could build [inaudible] and he said why he couldn't so we left it like that and we came back and hired this architect and that's where we started building this new church. Who were the members of the Building Committee? My father Frank Novatny was a member, Charles Duchek, John Baker, Burt Kavidra, Ed Pachinka, Joe Podhajsky, Jr., Bill Podhajsky, Ed [inaudible]. Could you tell us something about the physical features of the new church? Yes, the new church is designed to seat 418 people, the exterior of both the church and rectory is gray brick, the interior is walnut paneling, with a cedar decking supported by laminated beams, the church measures 48x118 feet, this includes the narthex, the nave, and the sanctuary. The choir space is another 20 feet.

I can remember that when they were wrecking the old church they salvaged the way of the cross which was donated by the Charles Bishop family and they also salvaged the statue of the Blessed Virgin and the statue of St Joseph and that's now in our new church. And later there was marble paneling. Jim Youngblood recommended that we could put the marble on the west end of it, and it was quite costly and we was very short on funds so we decided that we would donate it. Where did it come from? It come from Italy. Italian marble? Yeah. And I don't remember the cost of it but I think it was around 1,200 or 1,500 dollars.

Another big organization that was good for making money was the St. Paul Altar and Rosary Society, the called themselves the Altar and Rosary Society, because they did raise money to keep up the altar and material needed, but there was a big push between getting a new church paid for, there were big money-raisers, one of the projects they did was an auction, silent auction, whatever you call it here, and they took it upon themselves to serve lunch and dinner here every Wednesday and they would come maybe 7:00 in the morning and start frying eggs for the truckers and farmers that would come and bring their livestock to the auction. They would serve a dinner there and then coffee and pie and then in the afternoon, it was kind of an all-day affair, all day Wednesday. There was always a couple who would be in charge. They would have to come and get all the groceries together and they'd have to buy the hamburgers and buns, and the ladies that came to help had to bring pies which were donated and of course, they served those and made a good profit on it. We really made a lot of money to help pay for our church and all the furnishings in our new church. The sale barn project lasted for about 10 years, the ladies [inaudible]. Could you tell us anything about the St. Paul Cemetery? The cemetery was not started when we built the parish. The Bishop allowed us to have a cemetery, he wanted an acre down at the Buckingham Cemetery, which we refused, we met three times with the Bishop and on the third time he finally gave in and we got our own cemetery. Who was the first person buried in the St. Paul church? Ed Pachenko was the first parishioner buried in the St. Paul

Cemetery. The first one's married Jean Rund and Beth [inaudible]. And what year were they married? 1965 I think, in June. Who was the first one baptized in the church? First baptism was Daniel Glenn [inaudible], May 23rd, 1965. The first Mass offered in the new church was on May 21st, 1965. The first person laid to rest was Mrs. Anna [inaudible] June 26th, 1965. The first confirmation class was held on June 1st, of 1965. And the first Holy Communion class was held on May 23rd, 1965. Anything else special you can think of? We had to have 10 acres to start with because the Bishop wouldn't .... I remember your father said that we could get this [inaudible], which was about an acre and a half and so [inaudible].... way down below there where Farmer [inaudible], that's where we bought 2 acres, that's no place for it anyway. So, the only ground we had was this or else right up there on Crawford's or we could have bought where [inaudible], that was 10 acres there. And they wanted 10 acres [inaudible] there might have been a school here and maybe a hall, and that's one reason why we didn't build a basement under the old church, if we'd have built according to that first architect we'd had [inaudible]. That architect we should have fired him. He didn't charge us \$500 bucks and I tell you we never drew up a payment for anything. But that was, I'll never forget Father Bohr, he said "I didn't sleep the rest of the night." A lot of decisions to make, we did alright. Father Bohr mentioned when we built the church that he'd like to have it paid off within 10 years and he was here for 8 years and Father Roskopf come and in 2 years he had it paid off, so it really paid off [inaudible].

Some of the special things we have I want to bring up about our church. Mr. Sato was of Japanese descent, he was one of the architects that helped design the church and he spent some considerable time designing the steeple and had a slight oriental appearance and yet, it has the Catholic church effect. And also we have a nice flagpole that was in our parking lot that has been donated in the memory of William R. Podhajsky. The statue in the cemetery we have a usual crucifixion group and a statue of the resurrection this was a favorite theme or idea of Father Roskopf. I believe he did donate the statue, it's lighted in the evening, it's very beautiful out there, as well as the steeple is lighted. We also have Schumer clarions, we play the chimes, we used to play the Angelus during the day, and they toll the bells before Mass and we got to play hymns over it. It has an amplifier system inside the church and outside, it can be heard outdoors.

Are there any other specific memories you remember? One thing we have here at the Summer, our town has a Czech Fest. The whole town celebrates some of the Czech heritage of this area and we have a Czech Mass here. The first one that we had was in 1976, Father [inaudible] came from up in Minnesota with his group and he had a polka Mass here, that was kind of unique for all of us here. Mr. Dushek, one of the trustees here and Mr. Kolasky received an apostolic blessing in recognition of their work as trustees for 7 years here. Pope John Paul II. A lot of the parishioners in 1979 when the Pope visited Iowa, Pope John Paul II, they had 2 buses, we got together, the parish organized the group and made a tour down there and we spent the day when the Pope visited in Des Moines. We have a Knights of Columbus organization here, it is rather new in our parish, it was organized about 1984. Then Father \_\_\_\_\_ became our pastor in 1979. Father Roskopf went to Vinton and Father \_\_\_\_\_ came from Vinton to be our pastor here, and he is the present pastor here now.

Some special people to be remembered in the St. Paul parish are Burt Kavidra for his dedication to music in our parish. He has been the musical coordinator for over 30 years and also Barbara Novatny's love for music has led her to be the organist in the old church and she has continued to

be an active member of the St. Paul choir. Our ladies of the parish have been very active in the Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women. They have sold many layettes, put them together and made the handmade quilts, and they've worked for the Bishop's projects, and at this present time, Cecilia Podhajsky from our St. Paul parish is serving as the Dubuque Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women president. The religious training for our young people was first provided in the parish by the Sisters of St. Francis who traveled each week to Traer until 1965 when the parish itself assumed the responsibility for the religious instruction. Our CCD classes for grades 1-8 were held on Saturday forenoons until 1974 when due to a lack in attendance on Saturday mornings, the classes were changed to Thursday after school for grades 1-6. With that change we now have a 100% attendance, so it was a very good change to take place. Then our grades 7-12 meet on Thursday evenings. [end of side 1]

We'd like to continue telling about our CCD program, we have a preschool class which was established in 1976 by Cecilia Podhajsky, who continues to teach this class to this day. And this was begun for children, the minimum age of 4, who had not yet started in CCD, were not in grade 1 and they meet twice a week, excuse me, they meet twice a month during the 10:00 Mass and this was set up to help give them the basic instructions in prayer and prepare them for entering into the first grade. The classes that meet on Thursday after school, grades 1-6 always during Lent, have the Stations of the Cross, each week and then all grades preschool through 12th grade put together and present a Christmas liturgy on the first Sunday of December, and this is always followed by a parish potluck. So we have good community participation with all ages in our parish. We also have a growing and active youth group and our young people have been active over the past 4 or 5 years in taking part in awards ceremonies at St. Raphael's Cathedral in Dubuque and these programs called Family of God, I Live My Faith, and Marian awards, have helped the children that participate in them to grow in their faith and to learn about themselves and how to become a better Christian.

Our parish has always taken part in a communal penance service. The parishioners are all encouraged to come and receive the sacrament of reconciliation as a community. Twice a year these are held during the seasons of Advent and Lent. We have parishioners serve our parish as ushers and as altar boys, as choir members, lectors, and eucharistic ministers. I think I would like to end this part of our history of St. Paul parish with the acknowledgment of our first priest from St. Paul parish, John Seda the son of Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Seda, he will be ordained a deacon on May 1st, of this year of 1987 and on May 28th, 1988 he will be ordained a priest. This is a great source of pride for all our parishioners, we feel we have been greatly blessed and we pray that others will follow this call to a religious vocation.