

Oxford Junction - Sacred Heart - Oral History, 1987

Interviewing Mrs. Catherine Borsch, Oxford Junction, Iowa, Sacred Heart Church, age 87. Being interviewed by Mrs. Janiece Lacy, Oxford Junction, Sacred Heart Church, age 66.

I am visiting with Mrs. Lewis Catherine Borsch, known to her by many friends as Katy. She was born here in Oxford Junction and has spent her entire life in this community. She has always taken an active part in Sacred Heart and its activities. Katy, would you tell us some of the church history and activities throughout the years? Between 1860 and 1870 there were Bohemians moving into the Oxford Junction community from Czechoslovakia and English-speaking people from Canada and the Eastern states. Since there was no church in Oxford Junction the Bohemians went to Baldwin where Mass was celebrated once a month. The others attended Mass at Toronto where there was a resident priest. At times there were Masses held in private homes. My grandparent's Frank and Elizabeth Lasack had had Mass held in their home. In 1881 the two groups decided to build a church together, they called it St. Mary's also known as the Irish Catholic Church. In 1897 the Bohemians decided to build their own church. It was named Sacred Heart. Two lots were purchased for \$160. The church was built and later a rectory. On these lots now stands the present church, rectory, and parish hall. My brother Louis G. Lasack was one of the first to be baptized at Sacred Heart. The two churches, St. Mary's and Sacred Heart continued with the priest at Sacred Heart taking care of both parishes. In the late '20's St. Mary's closed and was taken down. The members of that congregation then joined with Sacred Heart.

For many years people paid what was called pew rent, this along with the Sunday plate collection, also one for coal and three church holidays supported the church. The choir was very active. One of the early ones went out and sang at different functions. These concerts were a source of revenue to purchase equipment for the church. For a number of years, they also put on public plays to raise money. The Rosary Society was the first to be organized. It took care of all the altars, cleaning of the church, and needed articles for the church and sanctuary. They served dinners and bake sales for money makers. This society was active until about 1986. There was a Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and also several men organizations. The Study Club was formed in 1939. It helped the members learn more about the church. It did many things for the church, among these were new Stations of the Cross. The Sanctuary Guild was organized in 1943. It is now the active organization and has taken over the activities for making money for extra church expenses. They have taken over providing articles needed for the altar and sanctuary. They make their money through the annual Fall chicken dinner and bake sale, and light projects. They also serve wedding receptions and funeral dinners. There is a business and social meeting held each month.

Father Joseph Gregor came to us in 1931 and stayed with us for 29 years. He celebrated his golden anniversary and was elevated to a Monsignor, and celebrated his diamond jubilee. These were events that our parish was able to enjoy and celebrate with him. In 1960 he retired and moved to Anamosa. He lived to be two months short of his 100th birthday. Throughout the years summer school, as well as school-year catechism and classes, were held. For many years the Sisters of Mercy from Cedar Rapids conducted the sessions. For the last few years we only have school-year catechism instructions for the children and young folks. Sister Marie Louise, RSM, formerly Hilda Dirga, and Sister Mary Henry, RSM, the former Betty Dirga, entered the convent

life from the Sacred Heart church. Reverend Joseph Kissling became our pastor in 1960. In 1962 under his direction, a new rectory was built. A new church was started in 1967, although Father Kissling initiated the building the church, he was transferred before completion. Msgr. William Roach was here for the completion and dedication of the church, the sanctuary lamp and altar statues and the Stations of the Cross, which had been antique, are in the new church. Father Robert Swift, our next priest, who as an excellent carpenter, made many beautiful wooden articles to complete the sanctuary furniture. The former church has been converted to a parish hall. It has been named, re-named, Gregor Hall, in honor of their former pastor, Msgr. Joseph Gregor. We have an Education Board which is very active. They, along with the pastor and the teachers, are trying to give our children and young group the best instruction possible. A new parish board has been organized and is functioning. In June of 1986 Father Robert Ament became our new priest. He also is pastor of the Holy Trinity at Baldwin.

Thank you Katy. So many of our older generations are gone. It is a real privilege to have you share your memories with us. In closing I would like to say that over the years many articles have been donated to our parish. One of the recent ones was a new organ donated by Kate and her late husband Louis Borsch. How fortunate we have been over the years to have had so many people like this to help our parish grow.