

# 75 Years of Catholicity In Spencerport Reviewed

## History From Early Beginnings Records Notable Progress

The history of St. John's parish in Spencerport dates back almost a century. As early as the year 1851 Rev. Bernard O'Reilly, pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Rochester and later consecrated Bishop of Hartford, while travelling through the town of Ogden assured James McQuaid, a resident of the town that he would send a priest from his parish to say Mass for the Catholic population.

In that year Father Michael Welch came from Rochester and celebrated Mass for the Catholic inhabitants of Ogden. A wagon shop, located at Ogden Center and owned and operated by an Irish Catholic named William Kenny, served as the first place of public worship for the Catholics of the community.

A year later, in 1852, Father Fitzpatrick, also from Rochester ministered to the spiritual needs of a growing Catholic population. The same building was used but it had been purchased by the town and served now as a town hall.

For several years Catholic services continued to be held in the town building, priests coming from Rochester and Brockport to offer Mass. In 1857 the people saw the great need for a building of their own. In that year a small wooden chapel was erected on the hill east of the village in the neighborhood of the present Spencerport Motors garage. The exact location of the chapel is the site of the present home of Andrew Bennett on Coitman Ave. Father McGowan of Brockport and his successors, Father Creedon and Keenan, attended the little chapel for the next few years serving the spiritual wants of the Catholics in Ogden.

### FATHER STORY—ERECTION OF OLD CHURCH

In 1862, Rev. Richard Story was appointed pastor at Brockport and at the same time named to take charge of Spencerport. The Catholic population had increased and the small chapel on Spencerport Road could no longer accommodate the fast growing congregation. Moreover it was the contention of Bishop Timon of Buffalo to the various pastors that the little chapel was located in a hidden locality as if to indicate that the people were ashamed of their religion. He urged that the church be placed in a more prominent part of the village before he could officially pay a visit for Confirmation. As a result in 1865 it was necessary for many from Spencerport to go to Brockport in order to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Father Story then purchased a site of land on the corner of Martha and Amy Streets for the purpose of erecting a new and larger church. On Oct. 7, 1867 the solemn ceremonies of the laying of the cornerstone took place. The following document was enclosed: "This cornerstone of Spencerport Church was blessed and laid on the 7th of October, 1867, in honor of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the title of St. John the Evangelist. Pius I., being Pontiff, Andrew Johnson, President of the United States, William Slayton, President of the Trustees of the village, Rev. Richard Story, Pastor by the Very Rev. Wm. Gleason, Administrator of the Diocese of Buffalo *ad vacante* (the See being vacant); Rev. James Early preaching the sermon many priests assisting in great crowd of people with common joy of all to the greater glory of God and good of the Catholic cause."

A few days after the laying of the cornerstone, the erection of the church began. After the work had progressed as far as the shingling of the building the wooden structure was blown to the ground by a terrific gale on Dec. 8, 1867. Shortly thereafter work was once more resumed and in less than a year the building was completed.

In 1868 Spencerport became part of the Rochester diocese. On Nov. 2 of that year St. John's Church was dedicated by Most Rev. Bernard McQuaid, the first Bishop of Rochester, assisted by a number of priests from neighboring parishes. It might be of interest to note that this was the second church to be dedicated by Bishop McQuaid after assuming the See of Rochester the first being Holy Redeemer's in the city, on July 23, 1862.

Sept. 8, 1868 marked the first meeting of the trustees of the parish.

## Lay Trustees Of St. John's

A word concerning the lay-trustees of St. John's who so faithfully served the parish should not be without its place in any parish history. Since the very beginning St. John's has had the good fortune to have as lay-trustees men who were bent upon doing all in their power for the betterment of this parish. They worked hand and hand with the priests who labored here in every undertaking that would add to the material side of the parochial plant. Special mention is due John Morgan who served as trustee intermittently for 40 years; Richard Kinella, one of the present trustees, who has served for the past 28 years, and George Helfrich, who acted as trustee for approximately 23 years. The gratitude of priests and congregation goes out to this devoted line of earnest workers for the generous manner in which they have fulfilled their office down through the years.

Most Rev. Bernard McQuaid, Very Rev. James Early, Vicar General, Rev. Richard Story the pastor, and William D. Kinney and John Doyle, parishioners, served as the first trustees. Since, for a number of years, Spencerport was an out-mission of Brockport, the early baptismal and marriage records of St. John's were kept at Brockport. It was not until 1875 that separate records are found at Spencerport. In that year the first baptism recorded was that of John Bennett son of John Bennett and Helen Casey, on Feb. 2, 1875. The first marriage of which there is knowledge was that between John Morgan and Catherine Sherman on Sunday morning, Oct. 24, 1875, after the last Mass. During the pastorate of Father Story in June of 1873 four and one-half acres of land were purchased from William Brown to be used for a cemetery. The first burial was that of Thomas Reynolds of Ogden Center on April 12, 1874. Much could be said of the noble work accomplished by Father Story in those pioneer days; it suffices to say he proved a faithful shepherd who cared for his flock.

Father Story, after a pastorate of 15 years was succeeded in August of 1878 by Rev. James Connelly who became the first resident pastor of St. John's. The present rectory next to the old church was completed at that time. Upon the death of Father Connelly, a year later, Rev. James E. Hartley, later pastor at Palmyra, was appointed to take charge. Father Hartley was the first priest to say Mass in Hilton. John Conroy a resident of the town of Hilton and still active as a trustee of St. Leo's church, asked Father Hartley to come to Hilton and offer Mass for the Catholics of that community. From 1880 until 1882 Father Hartley often celebrated Mass in Hilton in a building known as Pennyson Hall. In 1883 the zealous and loyal Catholics of that village purchased land that they might erect a church of their own. The same year the present St. Leo's Church was completed and dedicated. The parish was made an out-mission of Spencerport.

In connection with the celebration of the first Mass in Hilton, it is of interest to add that the Rt. Rev. Msgr. James E. Hartley, P.A. Rector Emeritus of St. Bernard's Seminary, served that Mass. He often served Mass in Spencerport during the pastorate of Fr. Hartley, his uncle.

Father Hartley resigned the administration of Spencerport in 1884 and was succeeded in turn by Rev. James Hickey who later became pastor of Holy Apostle's Church in Rochester. A census taken up at this time revealed 501 souls in the parish. Father Magin succeeded Father Hickey in 1888 and served the parish until 1893 when Father Chyne who served for four years, was named pastor. From 1897 until 1903 there was no resident pastor at Spencerport but the spiritual needs of the people were ministered to by priests from Rochester. For five years Rev. Andrew Breen, well known for his oratory, faithfully served St. John's; he resided at St. Bernard's Seminary. The year following, priests likewise from the Seminary administered the duties of the parish. Among these priests were Fathers Eckel, Cowen, Cosgrove, Lapham and Edelman.

Kindness, devotedness to their flock were qualities which endeared all these priests to their people.

## Parish Justly Proud Of Religious Vocations

St. John's parish is not without its contributions to the great number of those who have dedicated their lives to God in the religious life.

The first boy from Ogden to be ordained to the priesthood was James Kiernan. He was born in this town on Dec. 30, 1853. Studied in St. Andrew's Seminary and later in St. Joseph's Provincial Seminary, Troy, N. Y. On July 9, 1881 he was ordained by Most Rev. Bernard McQuaid to the priesthood. He sang his first Solemn Mass in the old church on Sunday, July 12, of the same year.

Father Kiernan's first appointment was as assistant to Father O'Hara at the Cathedral. In 1888 he was promoted to the rectorship of the Cathedral and served as Vicar General of the Diocese. Later he was named Pastor of St. Mary's Church where he labored until his death.

It was due to Father Kiernan's deep interest in school work that the Cathedral school developed such widespread prominence as a seat of learning. Moreover it was through his efforts that a great part of the Rochester examinations were secured for the children of the Catholic schools in the city.

Father Kiernan after 18 years of outstanding work in the diocese died May 18, 1900.

The next vocation from this parish was that of Rev. William Morgan. Father Morgan was born in Adams Basin on June 27, 1864. He was ordained to the priesthood at Niagara, May 27, 1890, for the diocese of San Francisco. Through out his ministry he was assigned to the youth Directory a home for boys. He labored faithfully and zealously in the direction and training of boys until his death Feb. 2, 1875.

Rev. William Murray a priest of the Redemptorist Order is a native of Ogden. He began his studies for the priesthood at St. Andrew's Seminary. Later desiring to enter a religious order he transferred to the seminaries conducted by the Redemptorist Fathers for the young men who desire to become members of that

### FATHER KELLY—ERECTION OF NEW CHURCH

The year 1903 marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the parish. In that year Bishop McQuaid appointed Rev. John Kelly whom many will remember to the pastorate of Spencerport. During his administration the community saw the erection of the present beautiful church, a true "gem" of English-Gothic architecture. Throughout the diocese St. John's Church has come to be regarded as one of the finest in the suburban areas. It is interesting to note that the cobblestones used in erecting the church came from the farms of parishioners, so that it might be said—each home became as it were a part of the house of God. Much of the work in the building of the church was voluntary labor readily offered by the parishioners themselves.

On July 30, 1914, Father Kelly purchased the land for the new church from Mrs. J. Curtis for \$1,150. Before he began the building

### ASSISTANT PASTOR



Rev. Alfred J. Morr

community. He was ordained in the year 1916 and has since been zealously and actively engaged in the priestly work. Father Murray is well known for the many fine missions he has given in churches throughout our diocese.

Studying for the priesthood at St. Andrew's Seminary in William Quigley, another boy of the parish, St. John's has reason for joy and gladness in this small group of worthy priests who have entered the sacerdotal ranks from homes in the parish.

Finally a word of the young women from Spencerport who have pledged their lives to a service of God in the Religious Sisterhood. The first to enter the convent from St. John's was Sister St. James Morgan, of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Later Sister St. James Welch, now ministered at St. Monica's, and Sister Maria Joseph Helfrich, ministered at Corpus Christi, assumed the habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph. The first graduate of our school to enter the convent was Sister Helen Louise Kirby, S.S.J., who is now ministered in the Immaculate Conception parish, Ithaca. She was followed a few years later by Sister Mary Virginia Sweeney of the Sisters of Mercy. Her mission is St. James Hospital, Hornell, N. Y.

"These sisters have been and are a source of pride to our parish. Their lives, their work in the diocese is likewise a glorious tribute to the parish which equipped them to answer the Divine call."

"We are grateful to Almighty God for His many blessings on St. John's Parish during the past 75 years and we humbly pray that parish and people may continue to be worthy of His favor. We give public testimony of a genuine Catholic spirit which prompted such loyal, such generous support from the people of this parish down through the years. To the Bishops who have been our shepherds, to the Sisters who served here, to the Pastors and assistants who have labored for the development of St. John's, we pay a well deserved tribute of praise for all their noble work in a glorious period of 75 years."

of the church he accumulated a sum of \$8,500. Ten thousands dollars was obtained through a loan. The church cost approximately \$22,000. When Father Kelly left St. John's the indebtedness on the church property was \$10,200.

March 15, 1915, the ground for the new church was broken and on Sunday May 30, of the same year, the cornerstone was laid. Bishop Hickey presided and preached an inspiring sermon. On Nov. 21 of the same year the church was dedicated with solemn ceremonies by Most Rev. Thomas Hickey. A great number of priests and people were in attendance on this occasion. It was likewise on this same date that the last Mass was said in the old church at 7:30 o'clock by Father Kelly and the first Mass in the new church celebrated by Bishop Hickey at 10:30 o'clock. The two seminarians present at the dedication exercises were Rt. Rev. William Bergan, Pastor of St. Monica's Church and Chancellor of the diocese, and Very Rev. Edward Lyons, President of St. Andrew's Seminary.

St. John's Church is a beautiful monument or testimonial of the loyalty, the devotion of these people to their holy faith.

After 14 years of zealous and fruitful service in this parish, Father Kelly in 1917 was appointed pastor at Victor. Again he gave of his time, his energy in erecting a new and beautiful church in that village. Succeeding Father Kelly, Rev. James Winters was appointed to take charge and for 8 years he administered the parochial duties at St. John's. Through his untiring labors and the generosity of his parishioners the debt necessitated by the new church was reduced to \$3,500. During his pastorate the side altars in the new church were erected, and the beautiful stained glass windows put into the church. The altars, windows and confessional were all donations from parishioners. Likewise the rectory was redecorated and refurnished during his administration. With a smile for all, a breezy outlook on life, an optimist of the highest degree, Father Winters endeared himself to all at St. John's and his untimely death brought grief to the entire community. Upon the death of Father Win-

## Assistant Pastors

A history of the parish would not be complete without mention of the assistants who have likewise labored in Spencerport. The early years of St. John's found the church ministered to by the Pastor only. After growth began to show itself, priests were called in to help on Saturdays, Sundays and Holydays. Among the priests who served in this capacity were Fathers Edward Meagher, Wm. Brien, F. Marks and J. Duffy.

The Rev. Ambrose Kavanaugh was the first regular assistant pastor of St. John's Church. A native of Rochester he was ordained in the year 1933 and was appointed assistant in this parish in June of the same year. Father Kavanaugh is remembered by the parishioners for his devoted attention to the sick and his zealous carrying out of the usual parish functions. In the confessional and in the pulpit he strove for the spiritual betterment of the people he had been sent to serve.

Rev. Emmett Davis was appointed assistant pastor in October of 1936. He had been ordained in June of the same year. Four years of yeoman service to Father Predmore and to the parish were given by Father Davis. A happy manner, a lively interest in life went hand in hand with a priestly zeal that was known most clearly by those whom he called back from waywardness. Father Davis was succeeded in June of 1940 by Rev. Alfred Morr the present assistant pastor.

in 1926, Rt. Rev. John F. Coggan of St. Bernard's Seminary was appointed administrator of the parish. In September of the same year, Rev. George Predmore, of whom all hold fond memories, was named to his first parish, St. John's in this village. The work he accomplished, the friends he made during his 15 years as pastor are facts well known to all. Seeing the great need for a Catholic school, one of his first endeavors upon assuming the pastorate of Spencerport, was to provide such a school for the children of the parish. He was well aware of the words of Pope Pius IX that parents have a most serious obligation of providing a Catholic education for their children. He was also mindful of the words of Bishop McQuaid: "Let me remind you that there is not a charity in all this country, Hospitals, Asylums, Refuges of any sort, which for far-reaching, widespread and lasting charity can for one moment be compared with our Parochial Schools. I have ever said that I would rather see the school house without the Church than the Church without the school house."

Father Predmore made it possible for parents to fulfill their obligation when in 1927 he received permission to convert the old Church into a school building. The services of the Sisters of St. Joseph were obtained and in the fall of 1927 the school was opened with a registration of 100 pupils which surpassed the expectation of both Pastor and people. The following June, St. John's had its first graduating class. It included three members: Marion Hincley, Helen Puffer and Margaret Udeil. Since that year 210 children have been graduated from St. John's School.

For the first few months after the school was opened it was necessary to bring the Sisters in each day from Nazareth Convent. In the late fall of 1927 the downstairs part of the present Convent was rented from John Ryan and the Sisters resided there. In 1928 the building was purchased for \$8,500. It has since been used by the Sisters as their Convent. The first superior to serve in the school was Sister M. Thomasina. She was succeeded by Sister M. Julia who in turn was followed by the present superior, Sister M. Antoinette. During the past summer, Sister Antoinette had the joy of celebrating her fiftieth year in the religious life. It will not be possible to enumerate all the devoted Sisters of St. Joseph who have labored in "our parish school" since its opening. They are many and have left their mark not only here but in many places far and near to which they have been sent as teachers of the young.

The early days of the school were not without their hardships and trials. For several years it was necessary for the parents to trans-

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