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ST BONIFACE CHURCH IN NICOLAUS CELEBRATES A CENTURY OF LIFE

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The first Catholic Church in Sutter County was built here 100 years ago. The parishioners of St Boniface Church will celebrate the centennial anniversary on Sunday, May 18, 1969 with an anniversary Mass scheduled at 4 PM. Monsignor Thomas H Markham, Vicar General of the Sacramento Diocese, will officiate. The Mass will be followed by a dinner and dance at the Nicolaus Herman Sons Hall. Fathers Arnold Schaffer and Thomas Carrigan, pastor and assistant of St Joseph parish, Lincoln, of which St Boniface is a mission, are in charge of the arrangements, assisted by the local Altar Society.

Church Began in 1867

From 1869 until 1945 when a mission church was established in Yuba City, which later developed into St Isidore parish, this farming community boasted the only Catholic Church in Sutter County. Catholic services were first held in the Nicolaus public school in 1867 by Father James Callahan. In 1869 a church building committee was established under the direction of John A Peter, M Salatine, John McNamara and D.A. Mahoney.

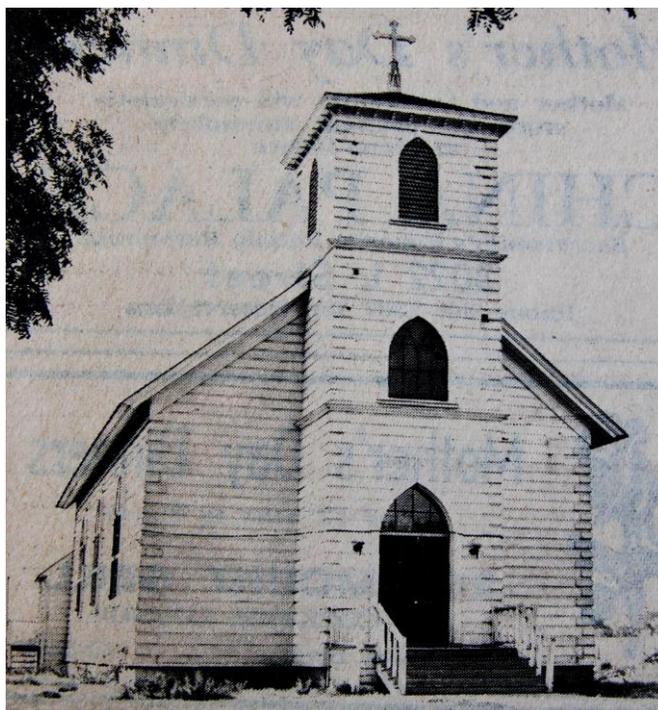


Photo from the Diocesan Archives

The Original St Boniface Church in 1869

The original church was dedicated in May 1869 with the Most Reverend Eugene O'Connell, Vicar Apostolic of the Vicariate of Marysville, officiating. At that time the membership was 81 with a Sunday school enrollment of 26.

The original church was erected at a cost of \$5000. In 1878 the church was severely damaged by a wind storm that blew it off the foundation. It was repaired at an additional cost of \$3000. At that time the trustees were John Peter, John Schwall, John McNamara and Matthew Meutschler.

The Long Trip

For all 100 years of its religious community existence, St Boniface has been a mission church. It has been associated with the parishes of Sacramento (when there was only one parish there), Marysville, Roseville, North Sacramento and Lincoln. Mass was celebrated by visiting priests on a monthly basis until 1923 when, under the late Monsignor Cornelius Murphy, it was attached to St Joseph parish, North Sacramento, and Mass was celebrated every Sunday and holy day.

The late Monsignor Patrick Donnelly, former pastor of Marysville, who started his priestly service in the diocese as an assistant at Roseville from 1918 to 1923 when St Boniface was a mission of Roseville, could provide graphic descriptions of the long and circuitous route he had to follow to say Mass in Nicolaus. The youthful Father Donnelly would travel from Roseville to Sacramento by stage, where he would board the Northern Electric train for East Nicolaus. There he would be met by Frank Schneider who carried the mail to Nicolaus by way of a two horse wagon.

Fifth Generation

At Nicolaus, Father Donnelly would stay overnight with the Mulvany family, then say Mass, conduct Sunday school and make the return trip to Roseville by way of horse drawn wagon, train and stage. Later, he obtained an early model Ford for his transportation through the vast parish. It too provided many memories of the past, such as getting stuck on some muddy back roads between Roseville and Nicolaus on the way to say Mass or on a sick call.

The first parishioners of St Boniface were of German and Irish descent. Numbered among the early members were the families of Schwall, Michel, Peter, May, Martini, Schneider, Kreig, Rebermann, Fuhrmann, Klauss, Meutschler, Kehl, Wagner, Borgman, McNamara, Dwyer, Conrick, Mulvany, Mahoney, Carroll, Hennessey, McGrath, Gallagher, Johnson, Doyle, Johnston and Mernor.

In 1890, the membership was increased by the settling of a group of immigrants from Switzerland, which included the families of Scheiber, Regli, Holdener, Peter, Leinert, Blattman, Muller, Linggi and Fassler. Today many members of the parish are fourth and fifth generation descendants of the original group that started the church.

New Church in 1952

In 1944, under Father Daniel Twomey, pastor of Lincoln at the time, a fund drive was initiated for the building of a new church. The effort produced \$35,000 in gifts and donations. The construction committee included Louis Shalz, Lloyd Hudson, Eugene Michel, John May, Albert Schwall, Thomas Sills and Thomas Mulvany. The new church was dedicated on May 11, 1952 with Bishop Robert Armstrong officiating. Father Andrew Tynan was the pastor. Father Eymard Gallagher, a native of the community who was ordained a year previously, celebrated the dedication Mass.



Photo by John E Boll

The Present St Boniface Church Built in 1952 and Flooded in 1955

The new church withstood the severe flood which struck this area in December 1955. Even though a small row boat had to be used to sail up the center aisle to retrieve the reserved Blessed Sacrament, after the water receded a few months later only minor repairs were required to restore the church to its original appearance.

In the early days of the church, catechism classes were taught by the priests assigned to the mission at the time. Later, lay members helped in teaching. Among these were the late Mrs. Eugene Michel (Margaret May) who taught classes for many years.

Catechetical Sisters

As time went on, other members of the church helped in the catechetical ministry of the church. These laypersons included Anthony Gallagher, Thomas Mulvany, Lloyd Hudson, Lucille Neil, John Blattman, Thomas Gianella, Kenneth Engasser, Louis Shalz, John Honig, Larry Brede and Diane Michel, Janice Borgman and Judy May. In 1954, Father Arnold Schaffer obtained the services of sister novices from the Mercy Novitiate in Auburn who took over the classes with some assistance from lay members.

In 1967, Father Schaffer, in conjunction with Father John Terwilliger, pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes parish, Sacramento, secured the services of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. In addition to conducting the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine program, they also engaged in social service work in Nicolaus, Wheatland and Lincoln as well as in the Del Paso Heights parish. At present, 65 children are enrolled in CCD classes from the first to sixth grade.



Photo by John E Boll 2013

The Interior of St Boniface Church Today

The old Nicolaus public school building was purchased in 1965 and has been converted into classrooms for the teaching of religion as well as a meeting place for various parish activities. The mission has an active Altar Society started by Father Twomey in 1942. Previous to that time individual members took care of the church and altar. For many years, Mrs Regina Peter was assisted by Misses Kate and Annie Fuhrmann and Mrs Emil Michel.

The present Altar Society has contributed much to the furnishing and care of the church. Through its efforts an electric organ was purchased. It also takes care of the expenses of the janitorial and gardening services. The present officers are Mrs Albert May, president; Mrs Harold Schwall, vice president; Mrs Lloyd Hudson, secretary; and Mrs Thomas Mulvany, treasurer.

A Catholic Youth Organization was organized in 1958 under the direction of then assistant pastor, Father Robert Lehmann. The original monthly meetings now take place on a weekly basis. The group actively assists in promoting parish projects. It has assumed an ecumenical flavor with many active participants from other churches in the area. Present officers are Larry Michel, president; Eddie Medina, vice president; Deanie Albert, secretary; Shirley Rockwell, treasurer.

For many years the choir has been under the direction of Mrs Thomas Mulvany who is also organist. She has been assisted by Mrs Larry Brede, Misses Susie Shalz, Karen Shalz and Glenda Peter.

Religious Vocations

The mission church has provided five members to the religious life. In addition to Monsignor Eymard Gallagher, editor of the Catholic Herald, the son of the late Anthony and Marie Gallagher, they include:

--Sister Elizabeth (Barbara) Furhmann), now deceased, daughter of the late Mr and Mrs Nicholas Furhmann, who served for more than 50 years as a Sister of Mercy of the Union. At one time she was superior of their Grass Valley school.

--Sister Mary Bernardine (Irma Schmidt), daughter of the late Mr and Mrs John Schmidt of Rio Oso, who is a Sister of Mercy and presently administrator of Mercy Hospital in Redding.

--Sister Mary Alberta (Evelyn Schwall) and Sister Miriam Joseph (Dolores Schwall), daughters of Mr and Mrs Albert Schwall of East Nicolaus, who are Sisters of Saint Mary's of the Valley and are presently teaching in schools at Beaverton and Tillamook in Oregon.

Priestly Service

This mission parish has been served by many priests in the course of a century. Lack of records makes any list incomplete, but they include Fathers James Callahan, Peter Foley, L. Haupt, William Rooney, Leo Baher, John Meiler, Matthew Coleman, Michael McNaboe, William Rooney, Andrew Tynan, Michael Myles, William Kelly, James Shea, Arnold Schaffer, Edward Hyatt, Robert Lehmann and Thomas Carrigan. [Updating the clergy list of those who have served the parish to the present include Fathers John Joseph Myles, Robert Connelly, John Boll, Joseph Huang, Manuel Soria, James Rockenstein, OFM, Julian Medina, Michael McFadden, Vincent Brady, Juan Perez, Pol Gumapo, Eric Lofgren, Fernando Mesa and Raul Mesa.](#)

The present number of members in the mission church is 266. Mass attendance grows during the planting and harvesting seasons with the influx of many farm workers. The oldest member of the parish is Mrs Mary Peter, a native of France, who came to Nicolaus in 1890 with her parents. She is 85. The youngest member is Christine Schwall, three month old daughter of Mr and Mrs Harold Schwall.

Congratulations to the Catholic community of Nicolaus for keeping the Catholic faith alive and growing in the ever changing times of the modern world. Ad Multos Annos! JEB



Photo by John E Boll 2013

St Boniface Church Today with a New Addition for Restrooms