

CROOKSTON TIMES

Gentilly: St. Peter's celebrating centennial

By Torrie Greer

Posted Aug 15, 2014 at 11:17 AM

\$450K refurbishment secures parish's long-term future

St. Peter's Catholic Church in Gentilly will be holding a centennial celebration on Sunday, Aug. 17 with a 10:30 a.m. mass and luncheon afterwards.

"As a parish, we knew we we had some problems, so we asked ourselves, 'What do we want to do?'" Tim Dufault explained. "So we decided we could either raise a small fortune or shut the doors. There wasn't really a decision to be made – we knew what had to be done."

Bricks were removed and reapplied with new mortar, plaster on the walls was reapplied, repairs were made to the steeple, stained glass windows were fixed with new lead as well as smaller renovations, such as new tabletops in the kitchen. "The old girl got a good facelift," Dufault commented with a laugh.

"We're just looking for a good afternoon," he continued. "We still have some fundraising to do to cover the \$450,000 cost, however, but everyone has done what they could to help out.

"This celebration is open to everyone – we're proud of our history and heritage, and we want to share in this celebration with anyone and everyone."

Long history

– 1879 - 1881 Rev. Pierre Champagne, a missionary priest from Red Lake Falls was the first priest to serve the parish. When Fr. Champagne said mass occasionally in the village school house in Gentilly, many times would he walk about 13 miles from his headquarters in Red Lake Falls.

– 1881 - 1884 Rev. Alexander Bouchard was appointed the first resident pastor in June 1881. At this time the first church and rectory was built, serving 118 French Canadian families and 2 Irish – a total of 76 parishioners.

- 1884 – 1888 Rev. Clement Gamache was appointed second pastor. Fr. Gamache initiated work in the cemetery and completed an addition on the church. In 1884 the first bazaar was held which continued until 1960.
- 1888 – 1935 Rev. Elie Theillon, a young priest, born in Limousin, a dairying sector, educated, trained and ordained in France, became the third resident pastor. In 1901 a new two-story frame rectory was built and in 1915 the erection of a big brick church in Neo-Gothic style was completed. Halstead and Sullivan, architects of Duluth, Minnesota were hired to plan the church building. The contractor was Edward Jackson of Bemidji. An artist was hired to draft the scenes depicted in the stained glass windows. Reports were that the artist visited Jerusalem to create authentic backgrounds for the Biblical scenes. The scenes were designed in France, but the stained glass windows were made in Chicago and brought by rail, free, of charge, due to the kindness of J.J. Hill, a dear friend of Fr. Theillon.
- 1935 – 1960 Rev. John J.T. Philippe was appointed pastor after the death of Fr. Theillon. Fr. Philippe, born in Quebec, Canada, served 25 years, passing way May, 1960.
- 1960 Rev. Charles Charron, from Canada, served the parish during the illness of Fr. Philippe until the next assignment was made.
- 1960 – 1984 Monsignor Victor Cardin, Canadian born, was the fifth pastor of St. Peter's. He was ordained and said his first mass in Feuchten, Austria. He loved sports, especially hockey and was responsible for having the church and rectory placed on the National Historical Register in 1983. Msgr. retired from St. Peter's on Sept. 1, 1983.
- 1983 Rev. Donald Archer was assigned as the sixth pastor. He resigned July 1984.
- 1984 – 1995 Fr. William Keefe served as Administrator until retiring in July, 1995 at the age of 86.
- 1995 – 1998 Msgr. Roger Grundhaus, Pastor and Associates, Fr. Larry Delany, Fr. Mike Foltz and Deacon Dennis Bivens served as spiritual leaders of the parish. In 1995 Msgr. Grundhaus was appointed pastor, assisted by Fr. Luis Silva and Dea. Bivens.
- 1999 – 2004 Fr. David Super was appointed pastor, assisted by Fr. Luis Segundo Buitron and Dea. Bivens. Fr. Segundo served until July 2001.
- 2004 – 2012 Fr. Schreiner was then appointed pastor July 2004, assisted by Fr. Dominic Stephen and Dea. Dennis Bivens. Fr. Dominic served until July 2005, at

which time the tsunami hit his home diocese in India and he had to return to his country and his diocese. He was replaced by Fr. Mario Prada, who served until July, 2009. Then he was replaced by Fr. Antony Samy.

– 2012 – Present Fr. Vincent Miller was appointed pastor assisted by Deacon Dennis Bivens and Deacon Daniel James.