

## OUR LADY OF THE LAKES CONGREGATION

### History of St. Mary's Church/Chapel, Random Lake, Wis. *Compiled in May, 2016.*

*Information from "History of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin" pgs. 516-517, as well as a variety of historical articles in the Our Lady of the Lakes archives.*

The congregation of St. Mary's at Random Lake, Wisconsin, was organized about the year 1854, at which time quite a number of Catholic families had settled in and around that place. The site selected by these people at that time for a church, and which was located about one and one-half miles from the village (near the current St. Mary's Cemetery), was donated to the congregation by David Leahy and wife, who were among the earliest settlers. The first church built was a small and unpretentious frame structure, but which admirably filled the demands of the rather limited number belonging to the congregation at that time. After the parish had been organized and the church erected, Random Lake received occasional visits from the pastor resident at Cascade. These visits, however, were necessarily few and far between, as, owing to the almost impassable condition of the roads during a considerable portion of the year, and the many arduous duties devolving upon the pastor, it was impossible for him to devote any considerable time to the welfare and advancement of any particular flock.

After the parish had been attended for some time in this manner, it was made a mission to St. Nicholas at Dacada, and as such transferred to that parish. Thus matters continued for a series of years, the congregation of St. Mary's growing and prospering under the able direction of its pastors, until in 1873 the number had increased to such an extent that it became necessary to erect a larger church for their accommodation. With the unanimous consent of the entire parish, then, immediate steps were taken towards the erection of a solid stone structure, the dimensions of which were 34x60 feet. By the middle of November, 1873, this building was completed, and Father Hamm, attending the mission at the time, celebrated the first Mass in the new building.

Soon after this another satisfactory and very important change was made, when the Rt. Rev. Bishop of the diocese appointed the Rev. Father Charles Fessler as the first resident pastor of St. Mary's, with St. Patrick's congregation in Adell for its mission. In the meantime, the congregation had built a suitable parsonage for the accommodation of their pastor, so that, on his advent among them, he found, not only a new and well-furnished church, but also a comfortable home prepared for him. Preceding the coming of Father Fessler as resident pastor of this congregation, the mission had been attended by a number of priests located at Holy Cross, Cascade and Dacada. The first of these of whom any record is made was the Rev. Father La Focher, who was followed successively by the Rev. Fathers Gernbauer, De Becke, Stocki, Bradley, Tierney, Bradley, Fusseder, McGowan, Pettit, Seif, McMahan, Schwaiger, and Hamm.

After the careful and judicious administration of Father Fessler, affairs of St. Mary's progressed in a most satisfactory manner. He was, however, at length transferred to another pastorate, and



**Front view of current  
St. Mary's Chapel, Random Lake**

was succeeded at Random Lake by the Rev. Father Haberstock, who was also followed in succession by the Rev. Fathers Welbes, Lochemes, Muenzer, Froehlich, and the present pastor, the Rev. A. V. Mueller. The satisfactory condition of affairs in this congregation were, however, sadly marred, when, on March 24, 1895, the entire church structure was burned to the ground. While there was not for one moment a doubt in the minds of any of the congregation as to the immediate erection of another structure, there was considerable agitation in regard to the matter of locality. This was caused from the fact that Random Lake village had largely increased in size during the past few years, so that many of the parishioners believed that the present and future interests of the congregation would be best promoted by building the new church in the village.

The discussion was finally settled by the decision of the Administrator of the diocese, who favored a village site. For this purpose, a piece of land was secured from the Butler estate. Mrs. Butler donating her interests in the same. This site was most desirable, not only from the beauty of its locality, but, also, for its convenience. In the interim, so that during the completion of the structure the people might have a place to hold divine service, arrangements were made for the erection of the schoolhouse and Sisters' house. This building was 24 x 56 feet, 20 feet high, and had a wing 12 x 18 feet, and of the same height. This building, the work on which was begun July 1, 1895, was completed and ready for occupancy by September 1. In the meantime, plans had been drawn, presented and accepted for the new church, the design being a tasteful combination of Roman Gothic styles, the main portion of this building is 88 feet in length, 38 feet in width, and the walls are 22 feet high. This church, which is handsomely furnished throughout, was considered one of the most tasty and substantial structures in the diocese.

The official dedication of the new church took place on January 24, 1896, and was preside over by Archbishop Katzer, Archbishop of Milwaukee.

The congregation at that time consisted of about forty-five families, and in the parochial school, which had a regular attendance of thirty-three scholars, was conducted by one lay teacher. There was a branch of the Catholic Knights of Wisconsin connected with this congregation, of which James Leahy is president; Nic Ludewisse, vice-president; Peter Hammes, secretary; and Gerhard Franzen, treasurer.

The congregation of St. Patrick's at Adell, in the township of Sherman, Sheboygan County, was established in the year 1854, and was attended as a mission by pastors from Random Lake. Services were held at this place on every Sunday and holyday. The congregation had sixty families, all of whom are Irish.



*St. Mary's Chapel before the sanctuary and sacristy were added on the east end in 1924.*

By 1924, the church had to be enlarged by building on a sanctuary and an addition to the church. At this time, two classrooms were added to the school.

On October 23, 1930, the congregation of St. Mary's celebrated its diamond jubilee with a solemn high Mass of thanksgiving and a luncheon for visiting priests. At that time, St. Mary's numbered about 110 families and its school had an enrollment of 69 children.

The interior of the church was redecorated in 1940 and communion rails were installed, along with new lighting fixtures. This same year, the parish celebrated its 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The parish numbered 110 families, with 75 children enrolled in the school.

In 1946, the congregation celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This was one year late because the new liturgical altar and tabernacle were not completed until then.

In June of 1955, the interior of the church was repainted.

In May of 1962, the St. Mary School was razed in order to erect a new school and convent. Classes for grades 1-8 began operating in November of 1962.

A change in the liturgy brought about a change in the sanctuary in 1965. A new altar was built so the priest could face the congregation while saying the Mass.



*Prior to the 1980 remodel  
(paint job from 1955, but new altar added in 1965)*

In September of 1968, due to a shortage of teaching nuns from the diocese, it was voted to drop the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades at St. Mary's and have these students attend the Random Lake Elementary School.

Changes kept coming. In 1969, St. Mary's of Random Lake, St. Nicholas of Dacada and Rosemary School in Fredonia, decided to consolidate. Grades 1-4 operated at St. Mary's and grades 4-8 operated at Rosemary School. This arrangement ended in 1974 when Rosemary School was again on its own. The St. Mary School operated with grades 1-6, which included pupils from St. Nicholas, Dacada.

In 1980, a major change occurred when Fr. Francis McGarry retired from St. Nicholas Dacada. Concerned about the impending shortage of priests, Archbishop Rembert Weakland, O.S.B., combined the pastoral responsibilities of St. Nicholas with those of St. Mary's in Random Lake. Fr. Joseph Schwinn became the pastor of both parishes.

The winter and spring of 1980 also brought about a renovation at St. Mary's. Along with the painting and redecorating of the interior, the communion rail was removed. The original altar was moved forward and a huge crucifix was placed about the tabernacle. There still was considerable repair work to be done on the exterior of the church.

In 1980, the membership of the parish was approximately 175 families and 200 single members. The school enrolled about 120 children. The staff consisted of seven teachers, a principal and a librarian, four of whom were Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi order.

In 1989, kindergarten and pre-school classes were added to St. Mary's. The staff consisted of five teachers plus a principal and a librarian.



*After the 1980 remodel*

On July 1, 1998, due to the shortage of priests, St. Mary's in Random Lake, St. Nicholas in Dacada, St. Patrick's in Adell and St. Mary's in Cascade, merged into one parish. The name of the newly-formed parish became Our Lady of the Lakes, with St. Mary's in Random Lake becoming the main worship site.

In June of 2005, Rev. Richard J. Cerpich (St. Mary's last resident pastor) retired, and St. Mary's Chapel in Cascade was closed. Later, the buildings in Cascade were sold.

In July, 2005, Our Lady of the Lakes-Random Lake, St. Mary's-Lake Church and Holy Rosary-Fredonia began sharing co-pastors, with Rev. James P. Vojtik and Rev. Richard Fleischman being the first co-pastors.

Most recent resident pastors/administrators:

1960-6/1988 Rev. Joseph F. Schwinn

7/1988-4/1989 Rev. Joseph A. Aufdermauer

John Theisen?

5/1989-6/1992 Rev. Paul D. Janette

6/1992-6/2005 Rev. Richard J. Cerpich (Last resident Pastor)

Cluster Co-pastors:

7/2005-6/2007 Rev. James Vojtik and Rev. Richard Fleischman, co-pastors

7/2007-6/2010 Rev. Richard Fleischman and Rev. Guy Gurath, co-pastors

7/2010-6/2011 Rev. Richard Fleischman, pastor

7/2011-6/2012 Rev. Richard Fleischman & Rev. Todd Budde, co-pastors

7/2012-6/2013 Rev. Todd Budde, administrator

2013-present Rev. Todd Budde, pastor

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Additional Information on 2015-Present on next page

In 2015, a beautiful prayer garden was added to the grounds, in conjunction with a renovation at the former school building when two former classrooms were turned into a Community Room and the bathrooms were renovated.

From December 2017-April 2018, renovations were made to repair the cracks in the walls, refinish the pews, restore the statues and the Stations of the Cross, refinish the terrazzo flooring, install new carpeting, clean the stained-glass windows, restore the altars, and repaint the chapel interior using a new color scheme.



***After the 2017-2018 renovation***

Here at Our Lady of the Lakes, we are blessed to have such a beautiful chapel but it has not been without the hard work and dedication of many, past and present, that St. Mary's Chapel is what it is today.