

ST. NICHOLAS CONGREGATION

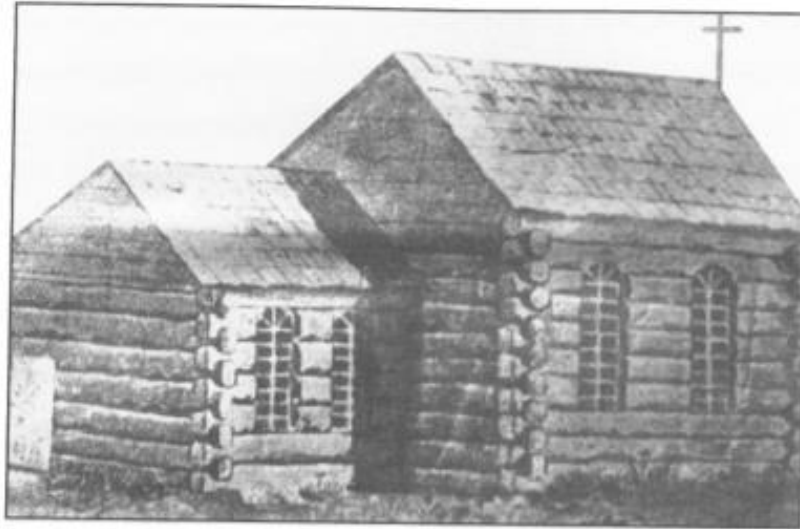
The Heart of our Luxembourg Heritage



St. Nicholas Parish dates back to 1848, the same year that Wisconsin became a state. Disturbed economic and political conditions in Europe caused many from the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to consider immigrating to the United States. The first arrivals reached Port Washington in 1844, and in 1845 a colony of 15 families located at Holy Cross. During 1846 about 10 families formed the Lake Church settlement. The Dacada area became the northernmost point of Luxembourg settlement, and soon the people wanted a parish of their own.

Some of the names of these pioneer families were: Pierron, Watry, Decker, Schmitz, Mueller, Schreiner, Schmidler, Jungers, Riesterer, Schmitt, Sinnen, Depies, Thill, Dahm, Schneider, Heinen, Steinmetzer, Holz, Majerus, Jacoby, Grahser, Breyer, Arendt, Roob, Laures, Bichler, Weber, Kloph, Schones, Gonwa, Hubing, Weter, Schueller, Ries, Farber, Feyereisen, Deheck, Becker and Birenbaum. How many still remain?

On Jan. 7, 1848 Mr. and Mrs. John Farber and Mr. and Mrs. Peter Becker sold property for the new parish to the five-year-old Diocese of Milwaukee for \$50.00 under the direction its first bishop, the Swiss-born John Martin Henni. The first Mass was offered in the home of Pierre Decker, who was later blessed with a priest son, Anton Decker. A 20 x 40 foot log church was built and established as a mission parish by Bishop Henni, who blessed it on Nov. 25, 1848. The parish was placed under the patronage of St. Nicholas, a favorite of the people from Luxembourg. It was built with a half floor, which supported the sanctuary and altar. There was no stove and no pews — the people knelt on the cold ground. This little church was erected between the present church and the former convent. Rev. George Laufhuber was assigned as pastor and the first resident priest, making St.



Log Cabin Church 1848

Nicholas the first staffed parish in Sheboygan County.

What became St. Mary Parish of Random Lake was organized in 1854 and the first church was built between the present day village and Silver Creek (the site of St. Mary's Cemetery). St. Mary's did not have a resident pastor until 1873 and for many of those years St. Mary's was a mission of St. Nicholas.

St. Nicholas Parish held its first election, and John Weber and Nic Kleitsch were chosen as trustees. In December of 1861 plans were presented to build a second church with pews, a new altar and necessary equipment. The church had stone masonry with 9 ft. foundations, and labor was supplied by members under the direction of John Schmidler. The second church was completed in 1863 with two native sons celebrating their first Mass (Rev. John Pierron and Rev. Anton Decker). The parish had grown to 100 families.

By 1870 eight priests from this new parish had been ordained. In 1878 a new organ was purchased for \$700. Nicholas Becker and his son John served alternately for nine years as organist until the Sis-

ters assumed this task. There was no electric power — the organ needed to be pumped. Young men were recruited for that task like the servers were.

A two-story Cream City brick school was constructed in 1883 at the cost of \$4,250. The school had a 10-month term for grades 1-8. School began in September 1884 with an enrollment of 100 pupils. The school also provided living quarters for three teaching Sisters, who

came from Holy Family Convent in Manitowoc. Beginning with the 1893-94 term St. Nicholas School was staffed by the School Sisters of St. Francis, whose motherhouse is St. Joseph's Convent on Layton Blvd. in Milwaukee. A rectory was built for \$2,500 in 1885, the same year that Milwaukee was raised to the status of an archdiocese. The parish had grown to 120 families. Catholic fraternal organizations were organized. There were liturgical changes, such as Pope Pius X's encouragement of the frequent reception of Holy Communion and the early reception of children to receive Christ.

In 1908 Archbishop Sebastian Messmer issued a Handbook For Catholic Parishioners, which attempted to put some



Second Church 1863



School of St. Nicholas 1884

order to the growth of the Church by establishing parish boundaries and spelling out the rights and obligations of the Catholic faithful. St. Nicholas Parish was incorporated under Wisconsin law a year later.

Rev. Conrad Flasch, who arrived as pastor in 1909, realized the need for a third church because the second building was too small and showing signs of age. In spite of financial constraints he presented a sketch which was completed by Hutter Construction of Fond du Lac and adopted in 1911. Parishioners worked together with the contractor. The beautiful colored fieldstone foundation was made of rocks brought by horse-drawn teams from many farm fields. The job of laying the Cream City brick was done by John Ubbink of Port Washington. Tradition tells of hardships suffered by the parishioners during the course of construction due to accidents and personal prejudices. Next came the beautiful stained glass windows, the bells, new pews, altars and the decorated sanctuary. The church was completed

Sisters in 1926. Electricity was installed that same year for \$1,170 by J. B. Rassel. The terrible Great Depression of the early 1930s left the parish in financial debt again. In 1934 grades 9 and 10 were added to the school system, but discontinued in 1939.

Rev. Anthony Mason came to the parish in 1935 and he was instrumental in organizing activities to occupy the youth of the parish. Besides fulfilling his calling as a priest and pastor Fr. Mason organized a youth band known as the "Dacada Dunkers." The band was heard on many occasions over a local radio station. Fr. Mason organized baseball and basketball teams. In 1938 he was instrumental in constructing the lighted ball diamond which was used practically every evening during the summer. Tag football, tobogganing and ice skating were popular activities. A stage was constructed in the church

by 1912 at a cost of \$24,791. Shortly afterward a Schaeffer pipe organ was installed. By 1918 membership had grown to 180 families and school enrollment to 148 pupils.

World War I brought about tragedy and changes in the financial status of the people. A false inflationary era of prosperity followed, which helped some folks who were greatly in debt. Soon afterward came the crash in the world market in 1929. It was necessary to build a convent for the

hall and drama was introduced into the school program. Christmas concerts and C.Y.O. drama productions entertained the young and adults, which Fr. Mason called family bonding. Fr. Mason often funded these projects personally and he was truly a leader of great generosity. He died at the very young age of 46 in 1940.

Rev. Philip Rose arrived and immediately plans were made to reduce the parish debt. Parish assessments were doubled. Preparations for the parish's 100th anniversary began. These included repairing the church roof and brickwork with new gutters, recessing of sanctuary radiators, electrical rewiring and plastering. Redecorating by Conrad Schmitt Studios began. The beautiful painting of "Our Lady, Consoler of the Afflicted" in the dome was completed by a young Bernard Gruenke. He designed the painting of the favorite patroness of the Luxembourg settlers from a postcard from the Cathedral of Luxembourg. Since Our Lady is also the patroness of the United States it's fitting that her portrait graces the center of the dome.



1945

World War II had brought difficult days of rationing, but the parishioners helped prepare for the centennial in any way they could. The new main altar, designed by Fr. Rose, was built of oak with handcarvings done by a specialist from Milwaukee. The hand carved crucifix is made of pear wood brought from Mexico by the pastor. The dossal drapes of rich heavy velour and the tassels were originally in the hold of the French luxury liner, Normandie. They were displayed as a canopy above the altar and drapery to the back of the altar. Tile flooring was installed in the aisles, and



Church Properties - 1948

there was special flooring for the sanctuary as well as cushioned kneelers. A confessional was added. The total cost was \$8,094 and the project was completed by Easter of 1942.

The school's entrance addition was constructed in 1943. This included restrooms, ceramic tile floors and walls. In 1944 the church kitchen was remodeled with new equipment and hot and cold water. The kitchen became practical for church dinners held as parish fundraisers. In 1946 St. Nicholas Parish was debt free for the first time in its history, and the roll included 127 families.

The centennial year arrived and everything was coming together nicely. The new Communion railing with beautiful oak and hand carving was installed in 1948 just before the day of celebration. Electric sanctuary chimes were installed. Side altars and furniture were added to match the main altar. The centennial year included a well planned parish mission in February and an inspirational pilgrimage to Holy Hill on Sept. 19. Fr. Rose celebrated Mass at the National Shrine of Mary with other roles filled by our servers, choir and parishioners. Following a picnic at Holy Hill the worthy activities included the Stations of the Cross and Benediction.



1941 church interior shows marble altar



St. Nicholas Rectory Built in 1957- 1959

The highlight of the centennial year was a Mass of Thanksgiving on Oct. 10, 1948. Archbishop Moses E. Kiley celebrated a High Mass with music presented by the choir under the direction of Sr. Chrysogone, O.S.F. A formal dinner for the clergy and special guests was served in the hall, and dinner for the parishioners followed from 4-7 p.m.

Rev. Raymond Winkler was the next pastor of St. Nicholas, and in 1957 construction began on a new rectory, which was completed in 1959. Terrazzo floors were installed in the school. Restrooms were built in the church hall with ceramic tile floors and walls. Additional teaching Sisters were no longer available so St. Nicholas welcomed its first lay teacher in 1961 when Miss Isabell O'Hara was assigned grades 3 and 4. The Schaefer pipe organ was replaced in 1962, but many great changes awaited Catholics around the world.

On Jan. 25, 1959, the same month that Archbishop William Cousins began his tenure, Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council. The pope urged the bishops to find more effective ways to spread the teachings of the Church to the modern world. The council met in four sessions between 1962-65. Liturgical reform, social action, and the rediscovery of lay ministry were some fruits of the council. However, the Church also needed to deal with a decline in the number of priestly and Religious vocations. Some of the changes were difficult for a number of church members and clergy to accept.

While the basic doctrines of the faith remained the same, there were changes such as using the English language at Mass instead of Latin. The "midnight fast" before receiving the Holy Eucharist was reduced to

one hour. The American Bishops allowed Catholics to replace "meatless Fridays" with another suitable penance or good work. Over 20 years all of these changes were put into practice at St. Nicholas, such as receiving Holy Communion under both species, receiving in the hand, and having both boy and girl altar servers.

The St. Nicholas Athletic Association was organized in 1960. Church picnics and variety shows were fundraisers for the updating of the athletic field. A tennis court was constructed in 1963 under the direction of Rev. Victor Kemmer. One challenge for St. Nicholas' members during this period was incorporating the new non-Luxembourger members of the community into parish life.

In 1964 Miss Mary Ann Casper replaced Miss O'Hara as the teacher for grades 3 and 4. These were the only lay teachers that St. Nicholas had until the school was closed in 1969. The Tri-Consolidated Catholic School was organized to combine St. Nicholas School, St. Mary School of Random Lake, and Rosemary School of Fredonia. C.C.D. (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) classes needed to be expanded from high school to the lower grades because more parish children were attending the public schools. The school building was still used for religious education.

Rev. Francis McGarry arrived as our 27th and final resident pastor in 1970. The enjoyable church carillon system was installed in 1972 and the chimes can be heard for miles around. Archbishop Cousins came to help St. Nicholas Parish celebrate its 125th anniversary in 1973, and a quasiquintennial dinner was held at the Belgium Community Center. At this time the St. Nicholas Grotto was dedicated and the statue of our patron saint was moved from inside the church to the exterior.



A Northwest view of St. Nicholas in 1998.

The Tri-Consolidated Catholic School was discontinued after five years. In 1974 St. Nicholas began its relationship with St. Mary's School of Random Lake for educating grades 1-6. The first St. Nicholas Parish Council was elected in the fall of 1979, and the initial meetings were held in summer 1980 after Rev. Guy Gurath had arrived as interim administrator. Archbishop Rembert Weakland then assigned Rev. Joseph Schwinn of Random Lake to become the pastor of both parishes. In 1980 Rev. David Wilbur, who had recently retired from St. Rose of Lima at Fredonia, came to live at St. Nicholas and serve as priest in residence. To save on heat the school building was closed and C.C.D. classes moved to the church. Fr. Schwinn departed in 1988, and Rev. Paul Janette was appointed pastor in 1989. Fr. Wilbur left in 1989, and Bishop Arnold Cotey, S.D.S., a missionary from Africa, came to live at St. Nicholas as he began his retirement.

In 1992 Rev. Richard Cerpich arrived as the new pastor of St. Mary and St. Nicholas as well as administrator of St. Patrick, Adell. He made parishioners aware of the shortage of priests and how it will affect all parishes in the archdiocese. During this time the ground level school rooms were used as a museum by the Luxembourg Society of Wisconsin.

To secure a promising future for Catholic education the St. Mary's/St. Nicholas Endowment Fund was organized. In 1996 the parishes of St. Mary, Cascade, and St. Michael, Town Mitchell, were added to Fr. Cerpich's responsibilities and we began to operate as a five-parish cluster. Religious education classes were conducted on a joint basis. The RCIA Program was established for adults interested in joining the Church.

Catholics now were encouraged to reach beyond parish boundaries to the greater community. Joint parish council meetings were held although each parish maintained a separate budget and administration. In July 1997 Claire Anderson was hired as the first full-time director of religious education. She was instrumental in recruiting enough volunteer teachers to fully staff the program, which now includes regular classes for adults.

The people of St. Nicholas have put much time and effort into planning for the parish sesquicentennial. To remember this 150th anniversary, the parish has commissioned afghans with memorable portraits in a beautiful arrangement. There also is a series of ornaments or sun catchers and the sesquicentennial book. On March 22 Rev. Keith Clark, a Capuchin, conducted a talk on the impor-

tance of prayer for every Catholic. On March 24 the Christian Women held a sesquicentennial style show which included vintage bridal gowns, baptismal gowns and First Communion dresses along with a re-enactment of the Dacada Dunkers band, followed by a potluck supper. A float is being planned for Luxembourg Fest and other area parades.

The highlight of the sesquicentennial year will be a 2 p.m. Mass of Thanksgiving on July 19, 1998, celebrated by Archbishop Weakland. There will be some entertainment and a catered meal in the beautiful wooded setting outdoors along with dinner music. The choir is planning special music for the Mass. The Luxembourg Heritage Museum will be open for viewing and antique farm machinery will be on display. A youth ball game will follow. In preparation for this event there have been a number of parish improvements, including new wiring, new flooring in the church, new carpeting in

the sanctuary and new concrete work in front of the church.

The people of St. Nicholas began a new parish experience on July 1, 1998, the first day for Our Lady of the Lakes Congregation. This is the name of the new parish formed from the merger of St. Nicholas of Dacada, St. Mary of Random Lake, St. Patrick of Adell and St. Mary of Cascade. (The members of St. Michael, Town Mitchell, chose to merge with Our Lady of Angels Parish in Armstrong.) Archbishop Weakland chose the name "Our Lady of the Lakes," which was one of three suggestions from our parishioners and council. The name signifies Mary, the Mother of God, as our special patroness as well as our close proximity to Lake Michigan, Random Lake and Lake Ellen.

The 86-year-old St. Nicholas Church building will remain an important site for Our Lady of the Lakes Parish. The schedule for the first year will have a 5 p.m. Saturday Mass at St. Nicholas, an 8 a.m. Sunday Mass at Cascade, and a 10 a.m. Sunday Mass at Random Lake. The church's rural setting of farms, fields, flowers and trees will remain as picturesque and inspirational as ever. We thank God for His many blessings on the people of St. Nicholas, and ask His guidance as we continue our Christian lives.