BLESSED HERITAGE ISSUE:
Pioneer Parish Bears Fruit That Lasts
140 Years of Catholic Education
Processions Bring Christ to the People
Dear Friends,

As a priest, it is both a blessing and a great responsibility to lead a parish like St. Michael, with such a strong legacy of Catholic faith and education. On one hand, you begin from a position of strength with the support of faithful, prayerful parishioners who want to see you succeed. On the other hand, you don’t want to be the one to mess it up.

For more than a decade now, I’ve been privileged to be your pastor. During that time, we have built upon our blessed heritage, expanding our parish school to include preschool and middle school grades, developing family formation and adding Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for families with younger children, and growing teen Discipleship Groups by leaps and bounds. Our worship space is a “bucket list” destination for area Catholics and sacred art lovers, and our youth ministry programs and engaged couple retreats are models for the archdiocese.

I would love to take credit for these developments, but in truth, St. Michael Catholic Church is blessed with outstanding staff, lay leaders and families who are paying it forward: receiving the great gifts of this parish with humble gratitude and sharing them with others in joyful service.

This parish is the namesake of our city, the faith-filled center of our community, and the place where Jesus dwells in the flesh—both in the Eucharist and in the Body of Christ that gathers to worship at our altar. May we always be prudent stewards of what we have inherited and continue to build the kingdom of God for His glory.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Peter Richards
Pastor

On the cover: A view of the historic St. Michael Catholic Church from the watertower in 1955, by Frank Zachman, courtesy of parishioner Bob Zahler.
Eucharistic Processions Bring Jesus to the People

On Divine Mercy Sunday, April 19, our priests took to the streets in a community-wide, mobile Eucharistic procession that was also livestreamed on Facebook. Beginning at the main altar in St. Michael Catholic Church, the procession stopped for outdoor Adoration at St. Albert, the Engel Haus senior living community, St. Michael Catholic School, Walnut Park and the Legacy senior living community, before returning to St. Michael church.

Along the winding route through both Albertville and St. Michael, people stopped to kneel and pray on sidewalks and driveways, in backyards and in parking lots. One priest stood in the back of an open Jeep with a large consecrated Host in the monstrance; the sacristan and second priest handled incensing and bells during Benediction, and a cantor followed behind, leading the Tantum Ergo at each of the stops and livestreaming music and prayer as the procession moved between stops.

St. Michael has a tradition of community processions dating to its earliest days as a frontier parish:

Particularly important in farming communities like St. Michael were Rogation Days, special days in the spring of the year when the congregation gathered to pray for good weather for the growing season. Rogation Days (three in a row) included mass and then a procession around the village led by the pastor. These were somewhat somber processions, expressions of humility before God. These processions occurred during the middle of the work week, and even though it was prime time for getting field work done, few farmers neglected to attend Rogation Days services. – *Faith, Family and Farming: A History of St. Michael, Minnesota*, Bob Zahler, pg. 175

Corpus Christi processions were another common tradition here, especially during the tenure of Fr. Anton Miks, who was pastor from 1904 to 1937. Each year on the Feast of Corpus Christi (the Body of Christ) in late May or early June, the priest processed with a monstrance beneath a canopy through the entire village, stopping at four chapels stationed like the points on a compass and decorated with flowers and statues. The congregation and village band processed as well, bearing banners and offering hymns to God. In more recent years this tradition has been resurrected, using decorated temporary altars set up at key points around the church grounds, rectory and school, facing north, south, east and west. The Feast of Corpus Christi this year is Thursday, June 11—watch the parish bulletin and website for details on this year’s procession the following weekend.
GOD’S COUNTRY: PIONEERING FARM FAMILIES BEAR FRUIT THAT LASTS

St. Michael is changing. Even transplants see new homes sprouting in area fields and lament that we are growing into a small suburban city. But this area has always attracted those looking for a better life. The current church is the fourth to bear the archangel's name, and the German Catholic farm families that settled here literally carved a community out of the wilderness, preserving the faith and traditions they brought from Europe to America.

Throughout its history, St. Michael has been known as the Holy Land, God's Country or “the Catholic bubble” thanks to the deep influence of the Church even on secular life. The faithfulness of the people—and their essentially German character and culture—persisted through most of the 20th century. In the past 20 years, the parish has grown and diversified, but continues to thrive and bear fruit. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Frontier Faith

Pioneer families began homesteading the Crow River Settlement in the mid-1800s, clearing and cultivating fields by hand. Draft animals were few, and the “roads” were little more than trails: When the first priests came here to minister, they traveled on foot because the paths were unsuitable for wagons or even single horses.

In 1856, Bishop Joseph Cretin dispatched Benedictine priest Fr. Demetrius di Marogna and two newly ordained German clerics from St. Paul to establish the monastery that became St. John's University. Not long after their arrival, they invited a popular Jesuit speaker, Fr. Francis Xavier Weninger, to preach missions in the area. Fr. Weninger required a proper sanctuary in which to preach, and that inspired the construction of a small log church somewhere near the current location of the Millside Tavern.

[According to Ignatius Gutzwiller Jr.,] Fr. Weninger dedicated the new church to St. Michael the Archangel during the first week of September 1856, and during the same week he solemnized the marriage of Anton...
Schnitzler to Catherine Knoebel and baptized Mary Zachman, daughter of John and Emily Zachman. When Fr. Weininger departed at the conclusion of his mission, he left behind a legacy: he had provided the name for the new parish and consequently one for the future city as well.


The parish grew relatively quickly from there: Parishioners decorated and improved the log church, even before enhancing their own homes, and expanded the structure in 1863. In 1866, a new wood frame church was constructed near the location of the brick historical church, and the historic cemetery was established. The first Catholic school and convent was opened in 1876, then, in 1892, a beautiful, brick, neo-gothic church was built in the center of town, complete with stained glass and statues. The historic church was completed with the support of just 70 local families, who must have had an eye toward the future: Its seating capacity was 500.

Answering God’s Call

Even in the early days, growth and change in St. Michael was not always easy. The families who settled here were persevering and sometimes stubborn, which caused friction with outsiders and even incoming priests. But the essential holiness of the community shines through in its vocations to priesthood and religious life. Since in 1856:

- 31 local men have been ordained to the priesthood
- 5 men have become religious brothers
- And 92 women have become religious sisters

The vast majority of these vocations were between the 1870s and 1960s. The last two decades have seen a resurgence, however, thanks to the witness of faith-filled priests, strong formation, and Youth Ministry centered on the sacraments and a personal relationship with Christ. Since 1995, four local men have been ordained to the priesthood and two to the permanent diaconate; additionally, three young women have become nuns, and another four men are discerning priesthood or the diaconate. The faith of our forefathers continues to bear fruit 165 years later, and we are blessed to build upon this heritage.

Additional Information

Much of the material for this edition of DISCIPLE is gleaned from the 2009 book Faith, Family and Farming: A History of St. Michael, Minnesota by St. Michael native and local history teacher Bob Zahler. The book is available for sale at Dehmer’s Meats or by contacting Zahler directly at zahlerb66@gmail.com.

Vocations Today

These men are currently discerning priesthood or the diaconate—please pray for them:

Josh Salonek: Theology III (scheduled to be ordained a transitional deacon this spring), St. Paul Seminary

Ryan Sustacek: College Senior, St. John Vianney Seminary

Jack Gebert: College Freshman, St. John Vianney Seminary

Michael Engel: Candidate for Permanent Diaconate, St. Paul Seminary
And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on his head, and clothed him in a purple cloak, and they came to him and said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they struck him repeatedly. Once more Pilate went out and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in him.” So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. And he said to them, “Behold, the man!” – John 19:2-5

The Third Sorrowful Mystery is the Crowning with Thorns, in which our Lord is dressed in royal robes, with sharp thorns for a crown and a reed for a scepter, suffering the mockery of the guards for His purported claim to kingship. It was in this state, scourged and bleeding, ridiculed and humbled, that Christ was brought back to Pilate and the Jewish crowd. The governor, who has already found no guilt in Jesus but has had Him flogged severely anyway, says to the people, “Ecce homo”—behold the man. The crowd replies in one voice: “Crucify him!”

Behold Him as he stands, the “King of the Jews,” who even in mockery is glorified. In Eastern iconography, this image is called “The Bridegroom”: we see the royal colors of his clothing and cruel crown encircling His head—but the reed in His hand appears green and growing and the ropes around His outstretched arms no longer appear to bind Him. Behind Him is a radiant light, calling to mind the kiss of heaven and earth in a mandorla, but also the dawning of a revelation—this so-called king of the Jews is in truth the King of Heaven and Earth.

THE THIRD SORROWFUL MYSTERY: THE CROWNING WITH THORNS

THE ART OF WORSHIP

TIMES CHANGE OUR MISSION DOES NOT

Support St. Michael Catholic School (StMCS) by joining our Virtual Bids for Kids event on Saturday, May 16! The entire parish is invited to help StMCS raise more than $125,000 to support our mission.

The event is free, but you still need a virtual ticket and bid number to participate. Register and preview silent auction items (including VIP parking spaces at the church) by clicking the Bids for Kids logo on our parish homepage, stmcatholicchurch.org.

St. Michael Catholic School
Living for Christ. Learning for Life.
St. Michael has an unbroken legacy of Catholic education stretching back more than 140 years. The first public school house in the village was constructed in 1869, but St. Michael’s pastor, Fr. Ignatius Schaller, believed it was essential to provide a place in which the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church could be taught.

The first Catholic school was completed in the summer of 1876. It was two-and-a-half stories: The first floor was classroom space, and the upper floors served as a convent for three School Sisters of Notre Dame and as boarding rooms for female students. That fall the school welcomed 15 students; during the winter, when farm work was less, enrollment jumped to 120 students. Tuition was $7.50 a month with room and board, and a dollar a month without.

According to a story recounted in Faith, Family and Farming: A History of St. Michael, Minnesota by Bob Zahler (page 192), Fr. Schaller had planned for years to bring the School Sisters to St. Michael. When one young girl asked for advice about entering religious life, he said he would tell her in time when and where she should go. She waited patiently for several years, then told him she planned to join a convent in St. Paul. Instead, he sent her to Milwaukee, to Mother Caroline of the School Sisters of Notre Dame—who had said years before she would send him nuns to teach at the school when he sent her a candidate for religious life. The relationship with St. Michael proved fruitful: 54 local girls became School Sisters in the following years.

A second Catholic school building was constructed and used from 1899 to 1940, with the original building serving as an expanded convent. The current building was completed in 1940 and included public education spaces and community-wide facilities such as a multipurpose gymnasium/auditorium and a bowling alley. In 1950, the school added 9th grade while plans were developed to build a Catholic high school. Construction of the new high school (now the community education building behind the historic church) was completed in fall of 1953. In 1958, the parish built a new convent next to the Catholic primary school, and in 1962, added a wing to the 1940 school to provide a cafeteria and more classroom space.

Sixty years later, these facilities are still in use—and St. Michael Catholic School continues to provide a great education rooted in Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. The last Catholic high school class graduated in 1968 and for a number of years, the school only went through grade 6, but in the past decade it is again growing, adding grades 7 and 8 in the main building and a preschool nearby. The 1958 convent has been remodeled to serve as offices and connected to the school with a handicap-accessible, secure main entrance. St. Michael Catholic School remains one of the most important ministries of the parish today—an essential piece of our blessed heritage and a foundation of faith for next generation.
SUNDAY MASS
Saturday Vigil 5 PM
Sunday 8 AM, 10:30 AM, 6 PM

WEEKDAY MASS
Monday 7:30 AM
Tuesday 6:30 PM
Wednesday 7:30 AM at St. Albert
Thursday 7:30 AM
Friday 7:45 AM (Summer 7:30 AM)
First Saturday 8 AM

RECONCILIATION
Saturday 7:30-9 AM, 3:30-4:45 PM
(except 7:45-8:30 AM on first Saturdays)
Sunday 9:30-10:15 AM
Tuesday 5:15-6:15 PM
Thursday 8-8:30 AM

Thank you for your generosity and prayers
With all of the uncertainty, it is a blessing to know we can still count on all of you. Thank for your continued support of our parish and ministries. Fr. Joe and I are praying for you, and we look forward to seeing you all again in person soon. – Fr. Peter Richards, pastor