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History of the Catholic Church in Kearney

St. James Catholic Church

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HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN KEARNEY

The first Catholic families of this region had little opportunity to assist at the Sacrifice of the Mass. Several years after the coming of the railroads to Kearney, Mass was offered on a relatively regular basis. After 1876 Mass was offered at regular periods in an old printing shop and then in a hall which was over an Office of a Lumber firm on Central Avenue just south of the railroad tracks. The Catholic people of Kearney were cared for by Priests who came from Omaha, Columbus and Grand Island.

On June 1, 1881 Bishop James O'Connor purchased property in the South section of Kearney. It was located on the east side of Avenue A between 18th and 19th Streets. That same year Father P.J. Boyle was appointed as its first resident Pastor. The first rectory was built by him in 1883, and the First Church was probably built at this time. Father Nicholas Stoltz succeeded him in 1885.

After Kearney rose from a mission status it was extended to all of Buffalo County and parts of Dawson and Custer Counties. The parishes at Prairie Center, Pleasanton, Elm Creek, Lexington, Eddyville, Oconto, Shelton, Ravenna as well as the mission Churches of Amherst, Overton, St Joseph and St. Wenceslaus were separated from the original Kearney Parish.

During Father Hork's Pastorate, a church was begun on property purchased on June 20, 1884 at 26th St and 6th Ave. Within a few years a frame church and rectory were built on these lots. This Church was used until the present Church and rectory were built.

On September 1, 1890, Father Eugene Geary was appointed Pastor of Kearney. Two years later, in 1892, Father James A Bruen was made Pastor. He was followed by Father John Fitzpatrick a year later. He was succeeded in 1897 by Father Patrick McGovern who was later to become Bishop of Cheyenne. He remained until 1897 and was succeeded by Father Petlach. He was followed three and a half years later, in July of 1902, by Father

Thomas Haley. His successor was Father F.M. McCarthy. He purchased a Presbyterian Church on the present St. James site on the corner of First Avenue and Twenty Fourth Street, March 31 and April 24, 1905. The present rectory was built by Father McCarthy in 1905. Late in the year 1906, Father Michael Daly undertook the duties of the pastor of St. James. With his guidance plans were made for a New Church in 1908. Father Henry Munsterman was appointed pastor when the church was completed in Jan. 1911. The church was of Romanesque design and had a seating capacity of five hundred persons.

On March 8, 1912, the Northwestern part of the state of Nebraska was erected into a diocese, and Kearney was chosen as the residency for the Bishop of the Diocese. Most Rev. James A. Duffy was chosen as the first Bishop of Kearney. He was consecrated in Cheyenne April 18, 1913 and installed in the Cathedral in Kearney, April 24, 1914. On December 30, 1914 two lots on the Southwest corner of 25th Street and 2nd Avenue for \$1800.00 and on April 1, 1915 the adjoining lot on 25th Street was purchased. Plans were made for a new school to be built upon these properties. With the aid of money from the Extension Society of Chicago contracts were let and the school was completed and dedicated in September 1915. The school was staffed and operated by the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine in Kentucky.

Kearney remained as the See of the Diocese until April 17, 1917 at which time Grand Island was made the See City by Bishop Duffy. At this time there were only about 65 Catholic Families in Kearney.

Father Henry Muensterman continued as Pastor until August 15, 1938. On August 27, 1938 Father Francis J. Tschida was made Pastor. He was installed in that capacity on September 11, 1938. In 1951 he was made a Domestic Prelate and was appointed as Vicar General of the Diocese. On April 2, 1953 Msgr. Tschida purchased for the parish additional property on 24th Street, adjoining the Parish property. He served the Parish as

Pastor until his death in December of 1956.

Father Raymond Miles was appointed to St. James Parish on February 1, 1957. That same month the Parish purchased 60 acres of land at 35th Street and Avenue A for the city's first Catholic High School. Pope John the Twenty Third appointed Father Miles as a Domestic Prelate on February 13, 1959. Construction began on the school in July of 1960. In November of 1960 property was purchased at the Northeast corner of 24th Street and 2nd Avenue. This was to be used for a Convent by the Dominican Sisters who staffed the school. The Sisters moved into the Convent on February 22, 1961. The Catholic High School of Kearney was dedicated on October 18, 1961.

After the retirement of Msgr. Miles, Father Eamon O'Dowd of Wood River was appointed by Bishop Paschang, as Pastor of St. James Parish assuming his duties August 1, 1970.

Father O'Dowd recognizing the need for a Parish Council, as encouraged by Vatican II, implemented the required procedures. An election was held on December 13, 1970. The first nine members elected were: for a 3 year term, Joyce Wink (Mrs Alan), Jerry Grossart, Tony Moreau, for a 2 year term, Laddie Bicak, Justus Dobesh, Leonard Silver, for a 1 year term, Gerry Messbarger, Sid Hellman and Mary J Methe (Mrs Gene).

The first effort of the Parish Council was to establish a Constitution and By Laws which would enable members of St. James Parish to share in the development of Parish policy and the realization of spiritual and common goals.

Subsequent meetings by this Council during 1971, 1972 and 1973 along with their Pastor Father O'Dowd, and other Committees of Laymen have been successful in accomplishing these Apostolic Works.

This is the history of St. James Parish ending June 30, 1973

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