

**History of Parish of St. Laurence O'Toole  
LARAMIE, WYOMING  
1940-1950 (incl.)**

[Ms note. Copy. Original sent to Rev. George Stoll Diocesan Historian JMcD]

The Clergy: During this decade the priests who ministered to the spiritual needs of the St Laurence O'Toole parish in Laramie, Wyoming were: Rev. John McDevitt, J.C.D., pastor throughout the whole period; Rev. Adolph Pate, Assistant until February 1943 when he was appointed Pastor in Lander, Wyoming; Rev. Charles Gormly, Assistant February 1943 to May 1944; Rev. John J. Corrigan, Assistant October 1944 until the present writing. In 1948 on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of ordination to the priesthood of the Rev. Pastor, and during his absence in Europe on vacation, the parish was administered June-October by Rev. John J. Corrigan, assisted by Rev. James Godley, J.C.D.

People and Finances:

In the ten years 1940-1950 Laramie has grown from 10600 to its present population of almost 16000, the parish population increasing from 290 to 370 families.

The annual financial revenues have kept pace with the growth of the times, advancing from \$9700.00 in 1940 to over \$20,000.00 in 1949 and in 1950. In the latter two years payments on pledges for the School Building Fund have brought the annual gross revenue up to \$40,000.00.

By the end of 1945 the parish was clear of all debt and a Building Fund was begun for the future erection of a parochial school for the parish. Towards the end of 1949 this Fund had amounted to some \$65,000.00 and His Excellency, Bishop McGovern, decided the time was ripe for launching a concerted drive for additional funds to build the proposed school. Under the guidance of Bishops McGovern and Newell the expert

services of the American City Bureau was employed to conduct this drive. His Excellency Most Rev. Hubert M. Newell, Coadjutor Bishop of Cheyenne, formally launched the drive on November 14, 1950; by an auspicious accident this is the feast day of St Laurence O'Toole, patron of the parish.

Under the leadership of Carl F. Eberhart, prominent Laramie Catholic, acting as Chairman, assisted by a Building Committee of Joseph R. Sullivan, Thomas D. Craven, William Breslin, Joseph L. Madigan Robert Gonzales and numerous other men and women of the parish, the drive was successful beyond the best dreams of everyone.

In cash and pledges the campaign realized some \$80,000.00. Those pledges are to be redeemed on or before December 1952 and, at the present writing; about forty per cent have been paid up.

As a result of the success of this campaign the firm of Kellogg and Kellogg of Cheyenne was employed as Architects and, their plans being approved by the Trustees of the Church, a formal contract was let July 24th 1950 to the Spiegelberg Lumber and Building Company of Laramie, Wyoming for the erection of the new school. This is to be a one storey building, fireproof throughout, built of concrete, steel, bricks and tile, and will have six spacious class rooms, a Principal's office, toilet facilities, a large gymnasium-auditorium, a parish meeting room and kitchen; in the basement are located a furnace-boiler room and a large storage room. The plans and specifications have been so arranged as to permit expansion in two directions in the future and as the needs arise. The school as now being built will accommodate comfortably over 200 children. At this writing the building work is now well advanced, the basement, foundations, floors and upper steel structural work being finished in December 1950. Every indication is that the complete project will be finished by the contracted date of May 24 1951 ready for the opening of school in September 1951. On the part of the parish Father McDevitt had purchased a square block in Laramie in 1936, bounded by

Kearney and Sheridan Streets and Third and Fourth Streets and this is the site of the new building. Ample recreation grounds adjoin the new school. The building unfurnished will cost \$171,469.00; architects' fees an additional six per cent of this amount.

The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas, have contracted to supply sufficient teaching Sisters and a music teacher to staff the new school. This will really be homecoming for this Order as they taught in a former parochial school in Laramie until it was closed in 1900.

**New Property:** In February 1950 the parish bought for \$17,000.00 a large modern sixteen room house and garage with the lot upon which they are located at 420 Kearney Street from Mrs. Phoebe Reese. This location is just one city block east of the new school and, with very little to remodel, the house will make an excellent convent for the future teaching Sisters. No debt was incurred in its purchase.

In October 1946 the rectory property, located at 320 Grand Avenue opposite the Church was sold to Dr. S.M. Stewart for \$25,000.00 and the parish rectory is now located at 312 Iverson Avenue in lot 4, block 190, immediately to the rear of the church lots. This new rectory lot was purchased from Mrs. George Fox in November 1944 for the sum of \$7300.00. At that time the new lot contained two frame houses one of which was readjusted as a rectory and the other rented up to June 1950 as a boarding house. This boarding house was sold in July 1950 to John J. Kanaly for \$300.00 and was removed from the property by Mr. Kanaly who now becomes the owner of the oldest house in Laramie now in a new location! Thus the parish now owns, unencumbered by any debt, all of the property of the entire east half of block 190.

**Spiritual Progress:** In these years two Missions over and above annual Retreats have been held in the parish and the Forty Hours is conducted annually. Eight years ago the Perpetual Novena in honor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was canonically erected in the church and the Novena

devotions have been conducted weekly since that time. In 1948 was inaugurated the custom of holding an annual Day of Recollection for Men and an annual Day of Recollection for Women was began in 1950.

In the past decade five girls from the parish have entered Religion:

Roberta Dorman (Sister M. Jeannine of the Sisters of Mercy); Catherine Lebhart (Sister Frederic Marie) [now, in 2004, Catherine Louise], Maureen O'Flannigan (Sister M. Thomas), Eileen O'Flannigan (Sister M. Sheila), and Ruth Barron (Sister Myra), all of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. He

Thomas O'Flannigan of the parish is a Philosophy student in St. Thomas Seminary, Denver, Colorado, studying for the priesthood for the Diocese of Cheyenne.

For the benefit of the Catholic Students attending the University of Wyoming a very active Newman Club provides for the spiritual intellectual and social needs of these young people. At the present time over five hundred Catholic students are at the University out of a total registration of some 3000. As an auxiliary to the Newman Club a chapter of Phi Kappa, men's Catholic Fraternity, was established in Laramie in 1949 and was officially recognized and established in October 1950. At the present time these young men live in a fine spacious house at 819 University Avenue, property of the late Mrs. Annie Moore who provided in her will that the Fraternity have first option to buy the property. At present Mrs. Moore's estate has not been fully probated but the National Officers of Phi Kappa have assured the local fraternity that sufficient funds will be forthcoming on request to purchase the property. Phi Kappa has twenty-four members in Laramie at the present time and, if past performances are any indication, the Fraternity should prove to be a decided asset for Catholic thought and action at the University and in the community.

Hard upon the arrival of the Phi Kappa Fraternity on the campus of the University of Wyoming many Catholic women students have repeatedly petitioned the Rev. Pastor to use his influence to establish a Catholic Sorority. In this regard some preliminary correspondence has taken place with the National Officers of Theta Phi Alpha, National Catholic Sorority, but nothing definite is contemplated as yet.

To supplement the weekly Catechism Classes an annual Religious Vacation School has been conducted during the past ten years conducted variously by the B.V.M. Sisters from Casper, Wyoming, the Dominican Sisters of Cheyenne, Wyoming, and the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas.

Most Rev. P.A. McGovern, D.D., Bishop of Cheyenne have administered the Sacrament of Confirmations in the parish in 1941, again in 1944 by Bishop McGovern and in 1947 by Most Rev. Hubert M. Newell, D.D., Coadjutor Bishop of Cheyenne.

#### Donations and Bequests:

Remembering God and Religion in their wills during this period the following generous bequests were made to the parish: John Travelle d. 1945 \$1000.00; William H. Bridger d.1945 \$100.00; Mrs. Mary Liddell d.1946 \$14,000.00 to the Diocese of Cheyenne for the education of students to the priesthood; Miss Maggie Blair d.1946 \$500.00 to the parish; Mr. A.C. Jones d.1946, a non-Catholic, for many years a friend of the Rev. Pastor, to the parish \$1000.00. In the near future the parish will be recipient of \$2000.00 from the estate of Mrs. Katie Stringer d. 1943.

Over these same years generous donations from John Travelle, Paul R. Branch and Mr. and Mrs. Al Haberland have enriched the church with four beautiful stained glass windows depicting the "Nativity of Our

Lord”, “The Holy Family in Nazareth”, “The Sermon on The Mount” and “Assumption of B.V.M. into Heaven”.

Recent donations from Mr. and Mrs. Edward Goetz, Mrs. John B. Connor, former owner of Connor Hotel, the estate of Mr. and Mrs. John McCue, will provide three more windows in the near future portraying “The Resurrection of Our Lord”, The Storm on the Sea of Galilee”, and “The Good Shepherd”. To complete our stained glass windows we are praying fervently for some generous soul to come forward who will contribute a final window in honor of St. Laurence O’Toole!!

World War II Record: During World War II the St. Laurence O’Toole parish gave of its sons and daughters some one hundred and twenty-five to the Armed Services of the United States and two of these, Joseph Pingitzer and Floyd Maes paid the supreme sacrifice for their country. Some 268 past members of the Laramie Newman Club were in the service of the country.

In the years 1942-1944 a small business building owned by the parish was put at the service of the American Red Cross free of charge and was used as a Blood Bank center.

**HIGHLIGHT OF HISTORY OF PARISH  
OF ST. LAURENCE O'TOOLE  
LARAMIE 1950-1960**

August 17, 1950

The ground was blessed and broken for a new school by His Excellency, Bishop Newell.

September 16, 1951

St. Laurence School dedicated and opened at cost of \$193,000.00, exclusive of furnishings. 197 students were enrolled.

The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth staffed school. The first principal of the school was Sister Mary Carlotta. The first faculty included Sister Loretto, Sister Martha Mary, Sister Lorraine, Sister Gregory, Sister Catherine Sienna, and Sister Mary Incarnata. In 1953 Sister Mary Sarah succeeded Sister Mary Carlotta as principal of the school.

September, 1956

A new addition to the school was completed, consisting of two large classrooms and a library, at the cost of \$45,000, exclusive of furnishings. One sister and one lay teacher increased the faculty.

September 1959

St. Laurence School increased its facilities to include a full junior high school. The first ninth grade consisted of 24 members. The faculty includes 8 teaching sisters, a sister engaged in teaching music, and two full-time lay teachers. The enrollment of the total school for 1959-1960 was 425 students.

October 1956

The Church of St. Laurence O'Toole was renovated and re-decorated, with a liturgical altar and sanctuary furnishings. Four stained glass windows were added to the west wall. At the present time all the windows in the church are stained glass. Renovation costs were \$16,000.

October 1957

The present rectory at 700 Ivinson was purchased by the parish at a cost of \$18,000, remodeling, \$7,000.

Addenda: May 28, 1955, the son of Mr. & Mrs. Thomas O'Flannigan, Thomas Leonard O'Flannigan, born Dec. 11, 1929, in Laramie (baptized, first Communion and Confirmation also this parish) was ordained to the Sacred Priesthood by His Excellency Most Rev. Hubert M. Newell, D.D., Cheyenne, being the first such ordination in this parish church and Father Tom being the third native son of this parish ordained Priest.

On May 11, 1958, date of profession of Miss Nora Patricia O'Flannigan, youngest daughter of above Mr. & Mrs. Thomas O'Flannigan this parish, in the order of Good Shepherd. Sisters receiving name in religion of "Sr. Mary of St. James."

October 1959

A new double garage was added to the rectory at a cost of \$3,000.

September 2, 1957

His Excellency Bishop Newell dedicated and opened Newman Hall at 1800 Grand Avenue at a cost of approximately 360,000 [sic], including furnishings. This hall is for the benefit of all Catholic students, faculty members, and Catholic office personnel at the University of Wyoming. It was mission of the Church of St. Laurence O'Toole until September 1, 1959, when it was opened as a new parish of St. Paul. Reverend Charles F. Taylor, J.C.D., was appointed pastor on that date.

February 21, 1960

Monsignor John McDevitt has been pastor of the parish since 1935. On this date the parish of St. Laurence O'Toole celebrated the anniversary of Monsignor's coming to Laramie as the pastor of the only parish in Laramie.



April 1952

Father John McDevitt received recognition from His Holiness, Pius XII, when he -was made a domestic prelate, one of three in the diocese. The parish celebrated this occasion with a solemn high Mass and a program given in honor of the new Monsignor.

The following priests have served as assistants in the parish since 1950:

Rev. John J. Corrigan

Rev. Charles A. Bartek

Rev. Thomas Fahey

Rev. Joseph Moroney

Rev. Laurence Etchingham

Rev. Gilbert Callahan

St. Laurence School has profited from the assistance of a very active Home and School Association and an Athletic Association. Throughout the nine-year period since it's opening, the school has enjoyed the benefits of a hot-lunch program.

December 1959

Mr. Joseph R. Sullivan, trustee of the Church, died suddenly. His son, Dr. E.J. Sullivan, succeeded him.

[Signed] John McDevitt,  
Pastor

**Church of St. Laurence O'Toole**  
**Laramie, Wyoming**  
**1960-1970**

In May, 1960, Msgr. John McDevitt celebrated his Silver Jubilee as Pastor of the 2nd oldest parish in the Diocese. His grateful Parishioners presented him with a purse, sufficient for a three month vacation to his beloved Ireland. The following March "his cup, indeed runeth over," when his prized St. Laurence Eagle basketball five won the Tenth Annual Diocesan, Parochial Tourney in Rock Springs.

Seemingly in the best of health, Monsignor was readying for a trip to Ireland, when on a fishing trip, Sunday June 18th, 1961, he suffered a massive thrombosis. He died in the early hours of the next morning. Since Bishop Newell was convalescing from a heart attack, Bishop David Maloney of Denver offered the Pontifical Requiem Mass, with the Preacher being Right Reverend John Marley, long time friend, and Pastor of Our Lady of Sorrows Parish, Rock Springs.

Appointed to succeed Monsignor McDevitt was Rev. John Meyer, then Pastor of St. Joseph's Parish in Rawlins. The appointment was effective July 19th, 1961. Father Gilbert Callahan, assistant to the late Monsignor, continued on as a zealous Curate. In September, 1965, he was sent to St. Margaret's Parish, Riverton, to be Curate to Rev. Adolph Pate. In these four years. Father Callahan had shown himself to be a splendid priest, with a special talent for dealing with the aged, sick and infirm.

The new Associate Pastor was Father George Tellez. He served the parish well for three years. His talent brought C.C.D. and C.Y.O. activities to an unprecedented height of excellence. This worthy priest received his first Pastorship in August, 1968, when he became Pastor of St. Edmunds, Ranchester. To serve as Associate Pastor, in Father Tellez's stead, there came the newly ordained Father Carl Beavers of Powell. He continues to serve the Parish in a most efficient manner. Particularly may

be noted his excellence as a Preacher, instructor of converts, and teacher of catechism and algebra at the school.

Principals at St. Laurence School, comprising Six Primary and Three Jr. High grades, were Sister Kevin Marie Flynn, M.A., 1960-1966, and Sister Patricia Sullivan, M.A., 1966 to the present. School enrollment reached an all time high of 420 the School Year of 1960-61 and a low of 286 this present year of 1969-70.

Extra Spiritual activities have been many and varied the past ten years. There have been twelve Missions given: three in Spanish, five in English for adults and four for the school children. Three Cursillos in Christianity and One Search for Christian Perfection were participated in. Ten weekends of Recollection for adults and five Days of Recollection for Teen-agers have been held. There is a weekly Novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help and First Friday evening Nocturnal Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament each month. Bishop Newell administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to classes well in excess of one hundred in 1962, 64, 66, 68, and 69. First Communion classes were held twice yearly. C.C.D. classes and vacation school are regularly had each week and for a special two weeks in June.

In August, 1961, the Mission of St. Brenden, in Rock River, was reopened. Mass is offered there each Sunday, with an average attendance of 35.

Various Parish societies existing are: Altar and Rosary Society, Knights of Columbus Council, C.Y.O. group. Home and School Association, Boy and Girl Scouts, Cub and Brownie Scouts, and the Eucharistic Guard.

Trustees of the Parish are Carl Ebehart, Treasurer, and Dr. Bernard Sullivan, Secretary. During their Trusteeship, the Parish indebtedness has been reduced from \$35,000.00 to \$19,000.00. During this time property to the value of \$62,000.00 has been purchased and paid for.

Two offices were added to the Rectory. The entire Parish Plant of eleven buildings has been painted twice, the Church interior decorated twice, the church exterior steam cleaned, bricks pointed and repaired and the Church basement renovated for use. This operation included a cement floor, new steps and windows installed, complete painting of walls and the laying of a vinyl tile floor and installing accordion divider doors.

**Jubilee Homily**  
**Centenary of St. Lawrence O'Toole parish**  
**Laramie**  
**Nov. 18, 1973**

It is a pleasure to extend prayerful congratulations and good wishes from all the diocese to Father Moroney, Father Mahler, the Sisters of Charity, and the good people of St. Lawrence O'Toole parish on the completion of a hundred years of fruitful Christian service. We pray that the many blessings that have marked the parish since those long-ago founding days may be multiplied in the second century.

The beginnings of Laramie and the other Southern Wyoming towns in the late 1860s, following the close of the Civil War, make exciting reading. They tell the dramatic story of the Union Pacific Railroad as it sent construction crews racing across mountain and plain to link up with the Central Pacific, and to join once and for all the great open spaces of the west to the industrial and populous east.

Like most of the frontier settlements, Laramie began as a tent city in 1868. Almost overnight it became a noisy, boisterous town, thronging with contraction workers, cattle ranchers, Indian soldiers from nearby Fort Sanders, and adventurers of every type. The population soared to several thousand within months, but it declined almost as quickly the next year with the completion of the transcontinental railroad in May, 1869. In the summer of that year, a special census showed less than 2,100 people in all of Albany County.

The only priest in all the territory in 1868 was Father William Kelly, who had been sent from Nebraska to minister to Catholics in the area. Records show he offered Mass occasionally at Fort Sanders and at Laramie. In 1869, Bishop O'Gorman, of Omaha, who was charged with the spiritual care of the territory, came to Laramie to administer

Confirmation. During his visit, he laid the cornerstone of a church to serve the community.

Because of the uncertainty of the town's future, and the small population, nothing was done to further construction on the church until 1872, when Father Eugene Cusson, a zealous young priest from French Canada, assumed the pastorate. He immediately resumed the project on the lot adjoining this present church. He patterned the steep roof and the rough stone walls after the churches in the Quebec region, which were so dear to his heart. It was from his homeland that he also chose the saint whose name graced the little church. It seemed an unlikely choice for a man steeped in the French traditions of Eastern Canada. St. Lawrence O'Toole, of course, was an Irishman. He had been Archbishop of Dublin in that turbulent 12th century that had seen the martyrdom of St. Thomas a Becket at the instigation of King Henry II. Archbishop Lawrence nursed the hope that he somehow might be able to persuade King Henry to live peaceably with the Church, and he determined to go to France where the King was sojourning with his Court in the of affecting a settlement. Shortly after reaching France, the Archbishop became ill, and died a few days later in a monastery in Normandy. The time was Nov. 14, 1180, nearly 800 years ago. His body lies buried in the Church of Our Lady in a nearby little town on the French coast, looking westward to England and Ireland.

Many of the French who settled in the early years in Quebec were originally from Normandy. They brought the devotion of St. Lawrence O'Toole with them, and they gave his name to the great St. Lawrence River, which flows like a silver highway from Lake Superior to the Ocean.

It was just a century ago that the little stone church in Laramie, was brought to completion, and it must have seemed entirely appropriate to Father Cusson that it be dedicated to the beloved St. Lawrence O'Toole.

So many things have transpired in the hundred years that not even mention of most of them can be attempted in this brief sermon. However, there are a few events that stand out so sharp] that they must be recognized.

Certainly, one event was the opening of the 24-bed hospital by the Sisters of Charity in 1876. It was probably the first hospital in the territory, except for the facility at Fort Sanders. It was indeed a courageous venture for the sisters on the edge of the frontier. Two years later, the sisters, undaunted by the roughness of the life, opened the first parochial school in the Territory of Wyoming, with 80 children in attendance.

Unfortunately, neither the hospital nor the school survived the century, being forced to close because the small population made support too great a burden.

However, the seeds planted in those early days were destined to bear fruit in our time, when, in 1951, the sisters returned to staff a new parochial school, which has been such a joy to the parish.

Two other important events which at least must be mentioned are the building of this church 1926, and the construction of the Newman parish facility in 1957.

These events, as significant as they were, and giving clear evidence of the growth in number and vigor of the Catholic community, cannot be appreciated unless interpreted in the light of the priests who guided the parish through the years. Each, like Father Kelly, was an interesting and stimulating person, each was totally different from the others in personality and characteristics and each was an outstanding and genuinely dedicated priest.

We have spoken of Father Cusson who was pastor from 1872 to 1879. It was he who in his zeal and ardor brought the sisters to Laramie to

establish the hospital and parish school, and it was he, also, who ministered to Catholics as far away as Evanston, South Pass and Atlantic City. He was indefatigable in his labors.

His successor was the formidable Msgr. Hugh Cummiskey, whose long and exciting pastoral lasted some 41 years. He has been dead for more than half a century, but his name lives on in legend. He was a vigorous and strong-willed man who ruled his parish with a firm hand. He had little use for the Catholic men's organizations in the 1880s and 1890s, and banished them all from the parish. He proved to be more than the equal for the notoriously bigoted APA organization which was the scourge of Catholics throughout America at the turn of the century.

Father Cummiskey's devotion to his people was attested by the fact that he not infrequently traveled several days on horseback, sometimes in the dead of winter, to minister to the sick and dying. Bishop McGovern, in his history of the diocese, summed up his work when he said of him: "He was held in esteem by all the citizens of Laramie, irrespective of creed because he had ever been the exemplar of priestly virtue."

His successor as pastor, Father John T. Nicholson, was a native Irishman who had come to the United States as a youth to make his seminary studies, but who never lost his affection for Ireland. It is related of him that he spent some time in Germany in 1916, and that, while there, he tried to aid Sir Roger Casement in securing German assistance for the Irish cause. In doing so he aroused the wrath of the English Government. Happily, he did not fall into their hands.

Father Nicholson had been ordained in 1897, and had served in Houston, Texas, until coming to Wyoming for his health in the latter part of 1916. He was pastor in Newcastle and Buffalo until his transfer to Laramie in 1920. A scholarly man, he was devoted to his people and solicitous in every matter that concerned them. It was he who built this church, taking the design from a church he had admired in Germany. Many of



the tiles and designs in the sanctuary were of his own creation. He died in 1935, and through a fortunate investment he had made, willed a bequest of \$20, 000 to the parish. This later was a decisive factor in making the parochial school a reality.

Father John McDevitt became pastor in the mid 1930s and proved a worthy successor to the great priests who preceded him. He was conscious of the needs of all of the members of the growing parish and was especially devoted to the Catholic students at the University. His enthusiasm for parochial education brought into existence St. Lawrence School in 1951, and his concern for University community was rewarded with the construction of the Newman parish in 1956. Father McDevitt was not a native Irishman, but had gone to that land as a child and was educated there. And he, too, took an active interest in its welfare. He was a man of many enthusiasms, a sincere love for his fellow priests, a great respect and esteem for the sisters, and a deep affection for his people, old and young.

At Monsignor McDevitt's death in 1961, Father John Meyer came to succeed him, remaining until 1972. His pastoral zeal, his priestly devotion, his genuine friendly interest in people endeared him to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. He was dedicated to the parochial school, an excellent administrator and concerned about his parishioners, old or young. His presence here today limits our comments about him, but does not detract from the priestly qualities that distinguished his service to the Laramie community.

Father Moroney is now imprinting his personality and his talents on the parish and is evincing the same devotion to the priestly office and to his pastoral duties that marked his predecessors. He, too, is adding a chapter to the parish history.

We have mentioned the pastors. We are mindful of the many other priests who have served in the parish with generosity and fidelity. We are

sorry each cannot be recalled by name. We have also mentioned the sisters and wish that they also might be named and receive the recognition they deserve. But we have not yet recognized the wonderful lady of the Laramie community. During the years, since those beginning days in 1868, they have been noted for their love of the Church, and their devotion to the priests and sisters. We salute them, living and dead, and pray during this Mass that they may be blessed in time and in eternity. Conscious of what they and the priests and sisters have done in a hundred years, we can only say in conclusion: May the Lord be praised for the many works of faith and love in the Laramie Christian Community in the past century. May the Lord reward abundantly all who have had a part in them. May He strengthen and inspire all of us so that the works of the second century may continue to reflect glory to the Most High God, and achieve the salvation of souls without number.

**St. Laurence O'Toole**  
**The parish history for St. Laurence O'Toole Church of Laramie,**  
**Wyoming, for the years 1970 - 1980 follows:**

The ten year period beginning in 1970 saw many changes in the life of St. Laurence O'Toole Parish. First of all, with the adoption of limited tenure, the parish saw three pastors in this short period of time.

Monsignor John Meyer was transferred to St. Joseph's, Rawlins, in August 1972. Reverend Joseph Moroney, pastor of Our Lady of the Mountains, Jackson, became the new pastor of St. Laurence O'Toole. In June 1977, Father Moroney finished the first five years of tenure and chose to accept a new assignment of pastor of St. Patrick's Church, Casper. His place was taken by Monsignor George A. Stoll, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church, Buffalo. With him came the Rev. Thomas Tracey, a former Columbian missionary who had spent twelve years in China.

During the ten year span, various associate pastors served the parish community. First of all was Rev. John Wright, succeeded by Rev. Carl Beavers, who served under Monsignor Meyer, and was transferred to St. Joseph's Children's Home when Monsignor Meyer was moved to Rawlins. Rev. Frank Redle, Rev. Frank Mahler, Rev. Thomas Ogg, and Rev. Gerald Sullivan assisted Rev. Joseph Moroney during his tenure as pastor. Rev. Thomas Tracey, Rev. Victor Grabrian, Rev. Joseph Daley, and Rev. John E. Casey, S.J., who had served in the Archdiocese of Denver for more than 30 years, helped Monsignor Stoll.

Sister Sandra served the school during this time as principal, with Sister Regina as assistant principal. Sister Rose Linus taught fourth grade with Sister Louise working part time as librarian. During the period of 1975-1980, St. Laurence School showed the greatest growth of any school run by the Sisters of Leavenworth, with an enrollment of 210 children in the first to sixth grades, with a full time kindergarten. Also, during this time, Father Maroney had the entire school carpeted, which

made for a neat appearance, warmer rooms, and a quieter school. In 1978, bingo was started in the school on Tuesday nights as a source of income for the maintenance of the school. Prominent among the workers and directors of the games were Feeney Cortez, Butch Beman, Earl and Esther Kelley, Al and Joyce Martinez, and Rey and Sandy Aguilar.

The Altar Society continued to be the most active group in the parish with an annual Fall Festival, with most of the funds used for the benefit of the church. Father Moroney was responsible for the renovation of the church. The original altar was redesigned with a smaller altar facing the congregation and an altar of repose off the right side of the church for the Blessed Sacrament. The entire church was rewired and light fixtures changed to a lighter glass so that the interior of the church became much brighter. He oversaw the repainting of the church to white, which also aided the lighting. With the help of a financial campaign, which realized about \$130,000 over a period of three years, he was able to complete many beautiful and tasteful changes in the church, the school, and the church basement. With the help of many volunteers, the church basement was painted, and a new ceiling was installed with new lighting. Through this, a dismal, unfinished basement became a favorite gathering place for the entire parish. Father Moroney also finished the carpeting of the church.

During the course of the years, many tentative plans were discussed to bring the parish buildings together on one location. At one time, Father Moroney considered selling the rectory to Catholic Social Services for \$35,000. Later Father Stoll had it appraised and considered selling it with an inflated price of \$55,000. When faced with the prospect of duplicating the number of rooms in the old home at present costs, both Father Moroney and Father Stoll decided to remain in the old location. From time to time, studies were made of a new location, but either the price was too high or the location not as desirable. One of the obstacles was the long-term lease to the Connor Hotel of the church property adjacent to the building. At the present time, the search for a centralized

location for all the church buildings continues, but the actualization of this dream awaits lower prices, greater need, and the sale of the present properties.

With the fine condition of the existing buildings after the renovations of Father Moroney, the present pastor has turned his efforts to gathering funds for future building and saving funds to make the future of the school more secure. At this time, the church has invested funds of about one hundred thousand dollars and the future spending will be limited so additional funds will be available for new buildings in the future. Present Mass attendance has grown from 720 to more than 1100 on most Sundays. Frequently during the 9:30 and 11:30 Masses, there is standing room only with the side rooms filled, especially the McDevitt room to the east of the sanctuary. Among the few major changes, a large ramp has been added to the East Side of the church for the sake of the handicapped. It has proven to be quite useful not only for persons in wheel chairs but also those who find climbing steps difficult. The cost was approximately \$5,000. Various memorial funds have been set up and the parishioners have been most generous. During this time, a new organ for the body of the church was purchased and more than fourteen thousand dollars was spent for an Allen computer organ for the choir. During the last three years, three guitar groups have begun. One group sings each Sunday at the 9:30 Mass. The children's group, together with another guitar group of adults, take turns singing at the Saturday night Mass. An adult choir has been in existence for three years with new and traditional hymns and the various parts of the Mass sung by both choir and congregation.

With the able direction of Father Daley, Communion of the Cup was introduced for all Masses both weekday and Sundays. Among the innovations of the parish was the addition of Robert Guth as a parish minister in 1979, and Sister Rose in 1980. In this way, the elderly receive communion weekly in homes, instructions for first confession

and communion is given for older children, and various adult education programs are fostered.

The decade for 1970--1980 saw many priests serving the parish. While no new buildings were constructed, a tasteful renovation of the existing structures was completed. The parish saw varied activities implemented with a great stress on lay participation as in the Parish Council, which was reconstituted in May 1980. St. Laurence also was a pioneer in developing the use of parish ministers.

## **Laramie 1980-1990**

### **St. Laurence O'Toole**

Beginning in 1980, for most of the ten year period in the life of St. Laurence O'Toole Parish, Monsignor George A. Stoll was Pastor, and was assisted by Associate Pastor Rev. John E. Casey, S.J. who had previously served in the Archdiocese of Denver for more than 30 years. Monsignor Stoll suffered a heart attack on September 23, 1987, and in October was diagnosed as having cancer. With great courage and fortitude. Father Stoll battled his illness, receiving treatments in Cheyenne and still performing as many tasks at St. Laurence O'Toole as possible. However, his health deteriorated all too quickly and he passed away on April 23, 1988. During Monsignor's illness he was assisted by Rev. Fred Wendel, who was transferred here as a Priest in residence on February 1, 1987 from Our Lady of Peace in Pinedale. Upon the Pastor's death, Father Wendel became the Parish Administrator until May 23, 1989. Rev. William Espenshade from St. John the Baptist in Buffalo became Pastor on May 24, 1989. In December he became ill and had to take a medical leave. Rev. August Koeune assisted during the month of December, and on December 23, 1989 Rev. Michael Hellman came to St. Laurence O'Toole. He served until May 1989, Rev. Gerald Sullivan from St. Patrick's in Kemmerer was named Pastor on May 2, 1989.

Rev. Robert Lynch S.J. served the parish as an Associate Pastor for a short time from December 14, 1986 to February 1, 1987. He was transferred to Pinedale to be Pastor of Our Lady of Peace. Rev. Charles Velasquez became Associate Pastor on May 2, 1989.

Robert Guth served as a Parish Minister for many years, and Sister Mary Monica assisted with Communion calls. Ann Weber was the Church Secretary until February 1985 when she moved to Denver. Sandra Aguilar has served as the Parish Administrator since.

During this ten year time span of the parish, many improvements were made to the church. Starting in 1981, a ramp for the handicapped was added to the east side of the church. A new Alien computer organ was purchased for the choir loft. The new organ for the body of the church, purchased in the late 70's, was damaged by lightning and was replaced using the insurance settlement and a financial gift from Tony and Zeila Joyce. Later in the decade, in 1986, the interior of the church was painted. The labor was donated, and the C.C.W. provided the paint, as well as paneling for the basement, painting of the doors and benches, and heating fans. A parish meeting room was sectioned off and named the Marion Room. The 5:30 p.m. Saturday Choir scraped, sanded and painted the outside church doors. A new Suburban vehicle was purchased for use by groups within the church, and a new car was purchased for the St. Laurence Convent Sisters.

Many memorials were made during this decade to the Church, including a new tabernacle, standing candlesticks, a hand-crocheted picture in the Marian Room, two holy water fonts, a remote-controlled microphone, and a sanctuary light. Monetary gifts were used to purchase sanctuary kneelers and to upholster chairs. A memorial fund for Monsignor Stoll was used to repair the stained glass windows, and parishioners refurbished the surrounding wood. There was also a gift of a dishwasher for the church basement.

Traditionally, the people of the parish donated fresh garden flowers for the altar during the spring and summer months. At Christmas, poinsettias and other potted flowers are given as memorials by people in the parish. Easter lilies and potted spring plants are likewise donated at Easter. The C.C.W. decorates the Altar at both times.

In 1986 the rectory at 700 Ivinson Avenue was 108 years old. One night a portion of the ceiling in the Pastor's bedroom fell down, fortunately missing him. A new ceiling was installed, and a new roof was put on the rectory. The Assistant Pastor's quarters were redecorated when Rev.



Lynch arrived, and later the upstairs bathroom was repaired. The Convent was insulated at about this same time. The only building not to survive the decade was a little house at 605 S. 4th which had to be demolished when its basement started crumbling.

Early in the 1980's, Sister Margaret Finch became principal of the school. She served from 1981 to 1983. Sister Katherine Mary Westhues became principal in 1983, and served the rest of the decade. During this ten year period the enrollment averaged about 150 students. Throughout these years a new boiler and a new roof were needed at the school. In accordance with changes in fire codes, new doors were put on the classrooms and fans were also installed in the kitchen. Asbestos was also removed from the tunnels. The kindergarten and first grade classrooms were painted, as were the gym and lunchroom. A new fence was installed around the playground on Kearney Street and new play ground equipment was constructed. On July 14, 1985 a class reunion was held for school alumni up to 1965.

Weekly bingo games that were started in 1978 to support the school were suspended in November 1987 due to dwindling attendance. The Home and School Association annually held a Trash and Treasure Sale, a Spring Dinner Dance, and a Christmas Shopping Spree to benefit the school. Annually, parishioners collected Campbell Company labels and cash register tapes from Buttreys Food Store to benefit the school. Magazine drives, book fairs, beef raffles, potlucks, and Halloween Carnivals were held. Even the sale of green and white backpacks by the Home and School Association, monetary memorials, donations from the C.C.W. and Chapter II funds all helped to support the school in addition to tuition and church support.

St. Laurence O'Toole Preschool was started in late 1979 in a house owned by the parish at 603 S. Fourth Street. In 1986 it received the gift of a fenced playground. An average of 35 children, aged 2 1/2 to 5 years, attended either a morning or an afternoon session.

In addition to the schools, St Laurence O'Toole had many outstanding education programs for children in public schools. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (C.C.D.) had three groups:

Preschool was held during the 9:30 a.m. mass on Sunday mornings, Kindergarten through 6th grades after school one afternoon, and 7th through 12th grades one evening each week. Brother Martin, Diocese Director of Religious Education prepared teachers of religion for certification in 1987.

St. Laurence Catholic Youth Ministry was started for youth who wanted to grow in their faith through fellowship and community involvement. They planned and provided music for Masses and served as ushers and lectors. They joined other youth groups around the state for fall and spring festivals, lock-ins and other events.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I. A.) program was also started during the late 1980's. Annually an average of 15 adults participated in the program. An outgrowth of the R.C.I. A. class of 1989-90 was an Adult Education Class, formed because several of the class members wanted to keep meeting and learning.

In addition, St. Laurence O'Toole also had prebaptism classes, a Pre-marriage Program by couples in the Parish, and Natural Family Planning from The Couple-to-Couple League. Eighteen people were part of the Ministry of the Laity Formation Program.

The ten years from 1980-90 saw many special spiritual events at St. Laurence O'Toole. On June 6, 1989 the first ordination of a Deacon was held in our church when Thomas Cronkleton was ordained. On December 29, 1989 he was ordained a Priest and he offered his first mass of Thanksgiving on New Year's Eve.

The C.C.D students and the women of C.C.W. led the parish with Intercessory prayer for the Priests of the Diocese during their year of

EMMAUS, January 1983 to January 1984. Out of the Renew Program, a Prayer Network was formed in July 1987. This was an opportunity in our day-to-day world to be ministers of Christ's love by offering to pray for someone who may need us.

Special Lenten happenings over the ten years included Lenten discussion groups, film series, designing the covers for the bulletins by the school children. Living Stations of the Cross, Pot Luck dinners, and Scripture classes for high school students.

Starting in 1985, food was collected at the Thanksgiving Mass for the Monsignor Stoll Parish Pantry. An annual Thanksgiving Dinner was held for people who were alone for the day. Almost all of the food was donated, prepared and served by people of the Parish. Dinners were delivered to shut-ins, and usually a total of about 200 people were served.

In the late 1980's, under the leadership of Rev. Espenshade, a Parish Council and a Parish Finance Committee were formed to advise the Pastor, along with the Trustees and the School Board.

Again in the 80's, the C.C.W was the most active organization. Their two big fundraising events were the annual Fall Festival and a Fiesta in December to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe. They provided for the upkeep of the sanctuary and of the church basement and kitchen. They furnished funeral dinners, special parish dinners and receptions, masses and communion services at Bethesda Nursing Home. Each spring and fall they coordinated special masses, with anointing and luncheons after for the sick of the parish. They served coffee and rolls once a month after the Sunday masses, and used the donations along with parish food collections on the third Sunday of the month to support the Monsignor Stoll Parish Pantry, which had been started in the late 1970's. An example of the need within the community can be realized by a note in the parish bulletin that in 1986 the parish pantry served 19,440 meals (to

720 persons, each for an average of nine days). By 1987, 86,550 meals had been served from the program's inception in 1978.

The Knights of Columbus became a very active group during the last ten years. They conducted monthly pancake breakfasts and weekly breakfasts during Lent. Most of the money went to support our seminarian. They also sponsored an annual parish picnic in August, a Mardi Gras party, a Boy Scout Troop (which has produced ten Eagle Scouts) and a Cub Scout troop. They also assisted with the Christmas party at the school,

The Secular Franciscan Order consisting of lay members met monthly. They served the parish with prayers and a wide variety of activities. They sold religious articles after Sunday Masses, at the Fall Festival, and at the Christmas Shopping Spree.

At the start of the decade, Monsignor Stoll had \$201,000 invested in various funds. Several notes in the bulletin throughout the ten-year period attest to the sound financial condition of the parish community. In 1985, he commented that "May and June showed a nice improvement after a few months of decline". In 1986 he commented that "The Easter Collection was the same as last year when the economy was better". And in August of 1987 his last comment was, "In spite of poor economic times our collections were even somewhat better than last year. People who used envelopes gave more than \$120,000 and there was \$12/000 in plate collections". In 1985 there were two special collections, one for the victims of the earthquake in Mexico, and the other for the flood victims in Cheyenne. Throughout the decade there was a slow, steady financial growth of the parish.

By the end of the decade, after the arrival of Rev. Gerald Sullivan and Rev. Charles Velasquez, the parish began to stabilize. The rectory was still a topic of conversation, and it was put up for sale briefly and then taken off the market until better economic times. With all buildings in

good repair, a stable staff, and a favorable financial condition, everyone was looking forward to the next ten years.