

St. Leo s Catholic Church
LUSK
1940-1950

The spiritual care of Lusk was confided to the Order of Minor Conventuals after they established their convent in Douglas y in 1911. St. Leo's Church in Lusk therefore remained in their charge until June 15, 1949 when Father Terence McGovern, a Diocesan priest, took spiritual charge of it.

Fr. Ignatius Berna, O.M.C., erected a frame church building in Lusk in 1912. This building w-s dedicated under the patronage of St. Leo by Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, D.D., Bishop of Cheyenne, May 30th, 1913. To this day this same building with some necessary repairs has served the faithful of Lusk and surrounding districts as their principal place of worship.

Up until 1942 St. Leo's church Lusk w-s attended on weekends by one of the Franciscan Fathers from Douglas. At that time owing to difficulties of travel brought about by war restrictions permission was granted to have one of the Fathers from Douglas take up residence in Lusk. Fr. Roderick Oriens was the first resident priest, and he remained in Lusk till March 6th 1943 when he was succeeded by Fr. Othmar Miller. Fr. Miller rented a small three room house on the east side of town for almost three years. At that time the present rectory and property was bought from Miss Doris Kinney for approximately \$1800.00. After some very much needed repairs to the house Fr. Miller took possession of the rectory in 1946. This rectory is across the street from the church, though inadequate for the purpose it was the best that could be bought at the time.

With the approval of the Very Rev. Provincial O.M.C., on August the 5th, 1947, His Excellency, the bishop, created a new parish at Lusk embracing Niobrara County. Fr. Miller who had been in charge was

appointed administrator and pastor pro tempore of the newly established parish.

Poor health forced Fr. Miller in 1948 to seek a milder climate and lower altitude. He was replaced in Lusk by Fr. Walter Steiner, O.M.C., October 7th, 1948.

Fr. Walter Steiner found it difficult to adjust himself to conditions in the West and consequently asked to be changed. He was succeeded by Fr. Elmer Mulcahy, O.M.C., January 7th, 1949. Fr. Mulcahy remained in charge until June 15th, 1949, when Fr. McGovern was appointed pastor by his Excellency the bishop.

On arrival Fr. McGovern found a small but- very devoted flock who showed an eagerness to cooperate with their new pastor. In compliance with diocesan statutes Fr. McGovern was formally installed pastor. June 26, 1949 by Very Rev. Thomas F. O'Reilly, V.G.

Fr. McGovern feels there is much to be done in organizing this new parish. Both church and rectory are very inadequate in this growing community and hence it devolves upon the new pastor to build a suitable church and priest's home in keeping with the demands of the community. Already a small start has been made to raise the necessary funds.

On October 13th, 1949, His Excellency Most Rev. Hubert M. Newell, D.D., coadjutor bishop of Cheyenne, administered the Sacrament of confirmation to 31 children and 6 adults. This was the largest class of pupils in the history of Lusk. The following February 26th Bishop Newell kindly consented to come to Lusk and dedicate a new Wurlitzer organ in St. Leo's Church. For that occasion Fr. McGovern invited a young but very promising organist Robert Cavarra from Denver, who delighted all present with his beautiful rendition of sacred music. To add to the success of that day Very Rev. Thomas F. O'Reilly, V.G., kindly

consented to take St. Anthony's church choir under the direction of Wilbur L. Stearns, to Lusk for a sacred concert.

Since 1938 Mass has been celebrated very Sunday in St. Leo's Church Lusk. Prior to that Mass was celebrated every second Sunday.

The missions and stations attached to St. Leo's Church have never been very extensive. With the discovery of oil in Lance Creek 35 miles northwest of Lusk during the early 1920s, it was found necessary to give the Catholic population of this field the opportunity of attending Mass. Therefore, after much deliberation a church was built at Manville which then promised to be an active community. However, this was a false alarm and Manville did not long retain its prosperity. St. Mary's Church, Manville, was closed, and in 1943 it was sold to Marion Houchin, Ogalala, Nebraska for the sum of \$500.00. The same fate befell the community of Van Tassel which at one time claimed 100 families. This town was a market center for the surrounding ranchers but with the depression of the 1930s it has almost disappeared. The church at Van Tassel (Holy Name of Jesus) was moved to Lance Creek in 1946, and for the first time Sunday Mass was given the people of this oil field. Mass is celebrated twice a month on the first and third Sundays.

From the earliest missionary days in this area Mass has been celebrated in the home of Kenneth Hughes, Flattop, on the Second Saturday of the month. This gives an opportunity of assisting at Mass to about 8 people, who otherwise would find it difficult to make the 30-odd miles into Lusk on Sunday. Mass is also celebrated at Hat Creek in the home of Henry Wasserberger. This station is 35 miles north of Lusk and is attended on the fourth Saturday of the month. The average attendance at Mass here is about 10 people.

Terence McGovern

LUSK, WYOMING
HISTORY OF ST LEO'S PARISH
1950-1960

The year is 1950. Rev. Terence McGovern is pastor. Significantly, Father McGovern is the first diocesan priest to serve in Lusk. Although the parish was taken care of for several years by the Franciscan Fathers from Douglas, it was only when Father McGovern was appointed pastor that St. Leo's assumed a parish status.

In the beginning of 1950, the pastor purchased a new Wurlitzer organ for the Church at a cost of about \$2,000.00. Before that year was at an end this acquisition was fully paid for by the generous donations of the parishioners.

Father McGovern was pastor of St. Leo's parish, where he was held in high esteem by all the people, until May 1951, at which time he was appointed pastor of Corpus Christi parish in Newcastle.

In May 1951, Rev. Michael J. McBrien, was appointed pastor of St. Leo's parish, and he was installed as pastor on June 24, 1951. In September of this year, a parishioner, Mrs. Henry Wasserburger, donated carpet for the sanctuary and center isle. This gesture added much to the beauty of the church.

In June of 1952, at the suggestion of the Most Reverend Ordinary of the diocese, it was decided at a meeting of the trustees, to build a new rectory south of the Church.

In September of that year, the contract to build a new seven room rectory was let to Oscar Bostrum, a local contractor. Construction started in October 1952, and was completed in March 1953. The old rectory was sold in the meantime to Mary Wilson for \$5,000.00. On April 19, 1953, an open house was staged for the people of the community as well as the parishioners. Some three hundred people passed through its portals on

that day and were impressed by the architecture and the appointments. The building and the furniture cost approximately \$25,000.00 which was paid for promptly.

In May 1956, the church was redecorated on the inside, and even though the building is small and inadequate for the parish needs, it still maintains a dignity and beauty seldom found in larger edifices.

At this writing the parish is in the process of buying a tract of land west of town which will serve as a future site for a new parish plant.

HISTORY OF ST. LEO'S CATHOLIC CHURCH LUSK, WYOMING 1960-1970

During the years prior to 1960 much discussion took place regarding the purchase of a site for a new Church and Rectory. A special meeting of the Board of Trustees of St. Leo's Church was held in the Rectory, September 21, 1960, and at that meeting it was decided to purchase a parcel of land west of the town of Lusk, known as the Hale estate. This land is described as Section 2, Township 32.

On May 14, 1966 a special meeting of the Board of Trustees was held in the rectory in the presence of the President of the Corporation, Bishop Hubert M. Newell, and the pastor of St. Leo's Church, Rev. Cornelius O'Connor. The purpose of the meeting was to select a bid from six contractors who had submitted bids for the new Church. On the advice of His Excellency, Bishop Newell, it was decided to accept the low bid of \$90,417.00 presented by C.E. Holland of the Frontier Lumber Co. in Lusk. The construction was under the supervision of Goodrich & Wilking, Architects, Casper, Wyoming.

Work on the new Church started shortly after the contract had been awarded and the beautiful, spacious new edifice was completed in May 1967. The formal opening or dedication took place July 7, 1967 with His Excellency, Bishop Newell present and more than 35 priests. A very large number of parishioners and out of town people attended the parish banquet held in the basement of the new Church. Thus, 1967 will go down in the memory of the Catholics of Lusk as the fulfillment of a dream of over fifty years.

Honorable Frank Barrett, one of Lusk's most distinguished citizens for 43 years, and former Governor, Congressman and Senator of the United States, died in 1963 and was buried in impressive rites in Lusk High School auditorium, with Bishop Hubert Newell officiating.

Rev. Michael McBrien, pastor at Lusk since May 29, 1951, was appointed pastor at Newcastle, Sept. 29, 1960, and was succeeded by Rev. Cornelius O'Connor, who served until his appointment as pastor at Gillette Aug. 23, 1968. He was succeeded by the present pastor, Rev. Terence McGovern.

St. Leo

The parish history for St. Leo's Catholic Church of Lusk for the years 1970 - 1980 inclusive follows:

1970 found Father Terrence McGovern serving as pastor of the Church. It was his second tour of St. Leo's Church. On April 8, 1970, a \$12,000 four-year note at 4-1/2% was made to St. Matthews Church in Gillette, Wyoming. This loan was made to pay off Miss Pauline Bruch, a parishioner, who had loaned Fr. O'Connor \$20,000 when the new St. Leo's Church was built in the present location, 900 West 5th Street. The move was made from Pine Street. In March 1971, Frank Kihn and Paul Pfister were elected Trustees of the Church Corporation. January 5, 1973, was a day of great rejoicing and jubilation in the parish as the church mortgage was burned and the note to St. Matthew's Church was completely paid off.

Fr. Colm Wood succeeded Fr. McGovern as pastor sometime after January, 1973, as Fr. Wood signed the Trustee Corporation minutes which authorized the sale of the old St. Leo's church on Pine Street to Larry Carstiens for the sum of \$3,100. This transaction took place on May 9, 1974. In December of that year, a note for \$7,034.96 at 10-1/2% interest was made by Fr. Wood with the Stockman's National Bank, Lusk, Wyoming, for the purchase of materials and the remodeling of the rectory adjacent to the old St. Leo's Church. Sometime between January 7, and March 15, 1975, Fr. Bart Svete was appointed pastor. During Fr. Svete's tenure, a modular home was erected south of the church. A bequest in the amount of \$35,700, by Michael Cordell, a former parishioner, and the sale of the rectory on Pine Street in the amount of \$28,000 paid for the modular rectory at the cost of \$45,781. The modular rectory was set on a full concrete basement by the Plains Building Supply Company of Torrington, Wyoming. This was done on January 15, 1976. By June of that year, the basement was completed by Fr. Svete and Don Brooks. The completed project of new basement cost \$5,500. The total cost of the rectory amounted to \$52,763.46.

In June 1977, Fr. Bart Svete was appointed pastor of Corpus Christi Church, Newcastle. With this move, St. Leo's was left without a pastor and was to become a "mission" to be served from Guernsey. Fr. Pat Trujillo was then pastor of St. Anthony's Church, Guernsey, and began services here in July. In October, Fr. Bernard Bianco, who formerly served the Diocese from 1947 to 1956 as a Conventual Franciscan, returned to the Diocese after being released from his Government position in the Department of Justice, was appointed Administrator by Bishop Newell and so the "mission" status for St. Leo's only lasted three months.

In January 1978, the sanctuary was remodeled so that the presidential chair would be elevated one step above the sanctuary. At that time, it came to our attention that the stained-glass windows of the Church were installed backwards. As a result of this error, the pressure of the winds was breaking the lead joints holding the stained-glass pieces in place. After a diligent search, the Marsolek Stained Glass Company of Winona, Minnesota, who had done some work on St. Anthony's Church, Casper, was awarded the contract to restore the stained glass windows and put on "lexan" storm windows where needed. This contract amounted to \$6,000.

In June 1978, Fr. Bianco was incardinated into the Diocese and was appointed Pastor of St. Leo's Parish in Lusk, and St. Anthony's Parish in Guernsey. For a whole year, Fr. Bianco spent three days in Lusk and three days in Guernsey. In June 1979, Father Bianco was released of the responsibility of St. Anthony's Church in Guernsey, when Fr. James Krah, on loan from an eastern diocese, was appointed to Guernsey. During the time of the dual pastorate, Fr. Bianco inaugurated the first Parish Councils in both Lusk and Guernsey. Bishop Hart came to Guernsey on June 30, 1979, and installed the officers of both councils. The two parishes got together for a parish dinner to commemorate the event.

In the fall of 1979, a new Baldwin organ was given to the Church in memory of Anna Wasserburger, who has been organist for St. Leo's Church for many, many years.

St. Leo
Lusk 1980-1990
Rev. Evan P. Shea

1. Names of clergy & religious serving during the decade and dates of service:

1980 - 1983 - Fr. Bernard Bianco.

1983 - 1985 - Fr. Robert Siu.

1985 - Fr. Bernard Bianco.

1985 - 1987 - Fr. Anthony Jablanowski.

1987 - 1988 - Fr. Bernard Bianco.

1988 - Fr. Pat Shea.

1986 - 1987 - Sister Wydra, Lauritia

2. Notable accomplishments by lay leaders and parishioners:(give dates)

The women of the Parish have hosted two Deanery tours in the decade with a turnout as large as any other Council in the Deanery. We have had two Deanery Presidents, six to eight Deanery Chairwomen, and several Diocesan Chairwomen.

In spite of the lack of clerical leadership through much of the decade, the lay people have kept the Parish functioning, financially and liturgically.

3. Notable accomplishments by the clergy and religious during the decade: (give dates)

In asking around, the only notable accomplishments from religious and clergy that anyone mentions are the Eucharistic celebrations and homilies of Msgr. Kimmet when he filled in on week ends.

4. Construction - new or remodeling: (give dates)

Summer, 1989 - Installation of moveable (folding) partitions which gave three new CCD classrooms. Added closet for storage in entrance to Church Hall.

5. Land acquisitions: (give dates)

None.

6. Lay Trustees and term of service for each:

1981 - 1983 - Charles Brush and William Dochery.

1983 - 1986 - Dave Edinger and Thomas Coesens.

1986 - 1990 - Charles Brush and Charles Pearson.

1990 - present - Bonnie Zowada and Edwin Tschacher.

7. Pastor's overview of the decade:

As I only spent two and a half years of the decade as Pastor of Lusk Church, it is a little hard to give an overview of the decade. But from what I have read and heard about happenings here through the decade, I am somewhat surprised that there are any Catholics attending St. Leo's Church. Not only are they attending church, but also they are active in the church both financially and liturgically.

8. Significant Parish events and programs: (give dates)

The most significant happening was the Bishop's assigning me to St. Leo as its Pastor. However, we have had a few celebrations since that time. My installation as Pastor was not only liturgically a celebration, but also a social celebration. Baptizing my grandson was also a celebrating affair.

Saint Leo
Lusk 1990-2000
Evan P. Shea, Pastor
April 4, 2000

1. Names of clergy and religious serving during the decade and dates of service.

Rev. Fr. Evan P. Shea, pastor, 1988 through 2003.

2. Notable accomplishments by lay leaders and parishioners. (Give dates.)

In 1995 James Kruse with the help of the parish and finance councils conducted a very successful stewardship program. The program was started to stress time and talent first and then giving. As a direct result of this program, every parishioner (after receiving first Communion) has a ministry. There was a 12% increase in giving. In 1997 Charles Bruch and Charles Pearson conducted a follow up program dedicated to increasing the income of St. Leo's. A 5% increase in income resulted.

3. Notable accomplishments by the clergy and religious. (give dates.)

In September of 1990 the pastor with the help and approval of the parish council started a college scholarship program with a gift of \$2500.00. The program was started as a separate entity with its own trust fund and a board of directors. The board consisted of the pastor and two lay people appointed by the president of the parish council. Last year \$3,000.00 was distributed to college students.

4. Construction - new or remodeling. (give dates.)

In September of 1990 contractor started on the new doors for the church. New doors were put at the front, one door at the entrance of the kitchen, and one at the entrance to the sacristy. A closet was built under the front steps and the vestibule of the church. Movable partitions were installed in the hall to make three new classrooms. In 1994 we replaced the converted oil furnaces with high gas efficiency furnaces in the church.

5. Land acquisitions. (give dates.) None.

6. Lay trustees and term of service for each.

Charles L. Bruch and Charles L. Pearson terms ended June 30, 1990; Bonnie Zowada and Edwin Tschacher terms started July 1, 1991; Edwin Tschacher's term ended June 30, 1996; Kathleen Heine elected trustee July 1, 1996; Bonnie Zowada and Kathleen Heine were still trustees in 2000.

7. Pastor's overview of the decade.

This decade has seen a significant decline in the membership of St. Leo's parish. The decline can be attributed to the declining opportunity to make a living in Niobrara county. When the young people leave for college, 85% do not return to the county. Also the price of things we buy, food, housing, clothes, etc., keeps rising while the price paid for cattle and sheep keeps on declining.

8. Significant parish events and programs. (give dates.)

In 1995 and 1997 we had stewardship programs conducted by the lay people of the parish. In spite of the declining incomes, and the decline in membership, the income of the parish increased.

The parish celebrated the 85th anniversary of its founding by Bishop Keane with an evening Mass in the park, and a dinner and dance on two successive evenings. About twelve priests attended, as well as former parishioners and present parishioners.