

Green River, Immaculate Conception Bishop McGovern

[92] There is little definite information about the early days of the Green River parish. The Rev. M.F. Cassidy, of Rawlins, who was the first priest to visit Green River, kept no records of the mission, but he is known to have worked there from about 1880 and to have helped in the building of the Immaculate Conception church in 1884. At that time the few families of the parish, perhaps eight in all, were able somehow to raise \$1,800.00 for their church.

In later years, until 1910, Green River was attended as a mission by nearby priests – the Revs. John Delehunty, John Nolan, Joseph Dryer, S.M., T.J. Barrett of Rock Springs, and the Revs. D.M. Tully and M.A. Kennedy of Evanston.

The first resident priest of Green River was the Rev. P.J. Lynch who came in 1910. He was succeeded by Rev. Neil Brennan. With the departure of Fr. Brennan, Green River again became a mission and was attended by the Revs. James Duffy and Joseph W. Sueppel of Kemmerer. They served for about a year and were followed by the Revs. M.J. Kelly and Anton Schiffrer of Rock Springs who cared for the parish until the arrival in 1912 of Rev. Patrick Long. Fr. [93] Long remained only a few months and was succeeded in June, 1913, by Green River's first true pastor – Rev. Henry Schellinger.

The pioneer took for himself a suite in the church cellar. The coal-bin and furnace-room served as chamber and study, an arrangement that did not interfere with the heating plant – an iron stove in the body of the church.

In 1915 Fr. Schellinger remodeled and enlarged the church at a cost of \$3,500.00, and in December, 1917, prepared for future expansion by purchasing lot 3, block 9, for \$400.00. A substantial parish house of

brick was built in 1920, at a cost of \$10,600.00. The debt contracted was paid within six years, and Fr. Schellinger continued his program by buying lot 4, block 9, for \$1,500.00. Improvements on the church building amounting to \$14,000.00 were made in 1937. The structure was raised a few feet, a basement auditorium was provided, the sacristy was enlarged to serve as a winter chapel, and a modern heating-plant was provided. The expenditure was met from funds on hand.

Bishop O'Connor of Omaha first administered the sacrament of confirmation in Green River. Classes have been confirmed by the Most Rev. P. A. McGovern, D.D., of Cheyenne, in 1913, 1920, 1924, 1928, 1931, 1934 and 1938.

[94] Missions have been given in 1920, by the Rev. M.A. Leary, S.J., and in 1926 by the Rev. B.J. Mulloy, C.S.C.

**HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE IMMACULATE
CONCEPTION
Green River, Wyoming
1941-1951
(January 1951)**

A successful mission was given in 1942 by Rev. Father Angelus, C.P., of Sierra Madre Monastery of the Passionist Fathers in Los Angeles, California.

Rev. Father John Murphy of the Paulist Order conducted a mission in 1945.

On May 14, 1941, Bishop P.A. McGovern, D.D., confirmed 26 persons.

On May 28, 1944, Bishop P.A. McGovern, D.D., confirmed a class of 30 persons.

On May 16, 1948, Coadjutor Bishop Hubert Newell, D.D., paid his first official visit to our parish and confirmed a class of 36. After Confirmation, a public reception was held in our Church Hall in his honor.

A few extensive improvements were made in December, 1950, consisting of redecorating the inside of the Church and installing gas furnaces in both house and church.

**Immaculate Conception Parish
Green River
1950-1960**

In December 1950 Father Schellinger had the interior of the Church redecorated and gas furnaces were installed in Church and rectory to replace the old coal furnaces.

Most Rev. Hubert M. Newell, Bishop of Cheyenne, administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to a class of thirty-five on May 25, 1952.

For some time Father Schellinger had his eye on the Carl Eklund home with a view to purchasing it and extending the Church property. The opportunity presented itself in 1953 and on April 30 he made the purchase at a cost of \$15,000.00. This leaves the Church with the entire north half of the block with the exception of a lot on the southeast corner.

In June 1913 Father Schellinger assumed the duties of pastor in Green River. After a long and fruitful pastorate of forty years he retired because of ill health on May 5, 1953. During his time as pastor the Church was enlarged and remodeled and a basement Hall constructed. Also he erected the substantial seven-room rectory. Of all the baptisms recorded during his long administration of the parish all but one were administered by him. Just before his departure from the parish he succeeded in buying the aforementioned Eklund residence with the view that it might serve as a sister's convent at some future date. When Father Schellinger resigned he retired to Florida where he acted as Chaplain to the Sisters of St. Joseph at Jensen Beach. A little over a year later he passed away there on Dec. 19, 1954. The remains were returned to Cheyenne for funeral services, which were held in the Cathedral on Dec. 27 with burial afterwards in the plot reserved for the clergy in Olivet Cemetery.

Very Rev. S.A. Welsh, pastor of Our Lady of Sorrows parish and dean of the Rock Springs deanery administered the parish for a couple of months until Father Charles Taylor arrived as administrator. Father Taylor remained until his departure for Rome to take up post-graduate studies and on Oct. 9 Father Marley was appointed pastor of Green River.

Soon after taking up residence Father Marley had a Baldwin electric organ installed and had extensive repairs made to the Church, rectory and basement hall. In the fall of 1954 a new marble altar and communion rail with appropriate wrought iron grillwork were installed at a cost of \$12,000.00. Because of the short distance to Rock Springs a forty-two-passenger school bus was purchased and upwards of 60 children transported back and forth every day to Our Lady of Sorrows school. This arrangement was satisfactory for the children, who could attend, but there were many who could not avail themselves of this opportunity and the arrival of the Sisters of Our Lady of Victory to take up residence in the parish was an event of tremendous importance. These Sisters arrived and took up residence on September 1, 1956. The old Ecklund residence was enlarged and remodeled as a convent for the Sisters with their own Chapel and reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. There were 240 grade and high school pupils under instruction that first year. The numbers have fluctuated up and down since then, due to lay offs on the railroad and construction work of different kinds.

A suitable place for the instruction of the children was necessary and plans for a Catechetical Center were submitted and accepted by architect Armand Kellogg of Rock Springs. Construction on the Center began on March 11, 1957 and was completed in September at a cost of \$36,275.00. Bishop Newell blessed the Catechetical Center on Sept 8, 1957, with thirteen priests of the deanery present. Classes began on the following week.

Early in 1959 arrangements were made with Fr. John O'Connor, pastor of St. Patrick's parish, Kemmerer, to have the Sisters go to Kemmerer on

Sunday of each week for catechetical work and return to Green River on Wednesday in time for classes. This arrangement is still in effect. The Sisters made their first trip to Kemmerer Feb. 15, 1959.

Father Marley was appointed pastor of Our Lady of Sorrows parish, Rock Springs, and dean of the Rock Springs deanery on Feb. 28, 1959.

Rev. Laurence Etchingham was appointed administrator of the parish and served in that capacity until Sept. 11. Father Thomas Cleary was appointed pastor effective Sept. 11, 1959. He had been pastor of Holy Rosary parish, Lander, for ten years prior to this appointment. Extensive damage by hail necessitated repairs to the roof of the convent and to the steeple and roof of the Church and a complete roof for the rectory shortly after his arrival. All the parish property is now in good shape.

The Sacrament of Confirmation was administered by Bishop Newell to a class of 39 on July 17, 1955, and to a class of 62 on March 6, 1958. The Paulist Fathers preached very successful missions in April 1954 and Feb. 1958.

Immaculate Conception Church
Green River
1960-1970

Father Thomas Cleary was appointed pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Green River in August 1959. The trustees of the parish at the time were Mr. Charles Viox and Mr. Edward Riley and having been re-elected to that office remain to the present date. The parish indebtedness to the Diocese of Cheyenne incurred through the construction of the Catechetical Center was \$25,000.00 in 1960, which was finally liquidated in 1965. The parish purchased a new Ford Fairlane car in August of 1966 for \$2,500.00. The car was for the O.L.V.M. Sisters who operate the Catechetical Center in the parish.

In October 21, 1966 Father Thomas Cleary was transferred to St. Rose of Lima Church, Torrington, and replacing him in this parish was Father James Godley transferred from St. Mary Magdalen, Evanston.

The physical and industrial growth of Green River and vicinity has been considerable in the last decade. A new County Courthouse completed in 1966 at a cost of one million and a half dollars. In July of 1969 the Union Pacific Railroad at an expenditure of \$1,600,000.00 completed a 162 room Club House to accommodate commuting train-men and in the Fall of 1969 a shopping center went into operation in the south side of town, owned and operated by Mr. Dee's a Wyoming Grocery Corporation.

In the Green River area the principal industry is trona mining. Trona is a natural base for soda ash used in the manufacture of glass, plastics, paints, detergents, and several other items in everyday use. In 1960 there were two trona plants west of Green River: Food Machinery Chemical Corporation (F.M.C.) and Stauffer Chemical Corporation. In 1960 F.M.C. plant employed 430 men producing a half million tons of soda

ash. In 1970 there are in excess of 600 employees producing 1.2 million tons of ash with a projected increase to 2.5 million tons by June 1973.

Stauffer Chemical Corporation has grown steadily since 1960 and foresees doubling its output in the next two or three years.

In 1960 Allied Chemical Corporation began further exploration for trona and was successful in this locality. In late 1966, after sinking a \$4.5 million shaft, the company announced the construction of a \$25 million trona mining and processing plant, which began operation at full capacity with over 200 employees. The annual payroll of this new plant is in excess of \$2 million and \$2 million spent annually with Wyoming businesses for supplies and equipment.

In 1967 Church & Dwight Co. manufacturer of Arm & Hammer Bicarbonate of Soda (Baking Soda) and kindred products constructed a \$5 million plant adjacent to the Allied plant, from which it purchases all its soda ash. This plant is now in full production and presently is the supply base of these products throughout the middle west and west coast.

In 1964 Texas Gulf Sulphur began successful exploratory drilling for trona about twenty miles west of Green River. The sinking of the mineshaft began in January 1968 with some 35 to 40 men employed. The projected starting point for the production of soda ash is April 1973 with a working force of approximately 250 and a production of about a quarter of million tons annually.

Immaculate Conception Church
Green River, Wyoming
1970 - 1980
Reverend James Godley, Pastor

In the late years of the decade of the sixties, the Trona Mining Industry began to expand and from a single mining company, F.M.C., two more were added: Stauffer Chemical and Allied Chemical, and through the seventies, three more were added. The population grew from 3,500 to 10,000 in a period of seven or eight years. The old church down town at Center Street and 2nd North became entirely too small to accommodate the population growth.

In the fall of 1973, plans were made to expand. The old parish residents were very reluctant to move nearly three miles south and east of town. Finally, with the certain and projected growth of the town, Bishop Newell and the Diocesan Building Committee advised that the move be made. Accordingly, it was agreed that plans be made to sell the downtown Church property and purchase land in an open area south of town. Shortly after this decision, the town of Green River decided to buy the old Church and also offered us a piece of land for the Immaculate Conception Church.

In March 1974, a Building Committee was formed and it was decided that Fund Raising Professionals be hired to conduct a drive. Havey Fund Raising Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin was agreed upon. A figure of \$225,000 was selected as a goal and pledges were received in that amount in a ten-week drive. In January, 1975, under the leadership of Scott, Louie, and Browning Architects of Salt Lake, our architect, Mr. Will Louie, showed plans for a Church to seat 450; a Social Hall to seat 300; six classrooms for CCD, and a rectory.

On May 10, 1975, the town of Green River purchased our old property for \$200,000 and gave the new parish 4-1/4 acres of land for the new site

and immediately the bids were let with Flaugh Construction Company of Cortez, Colorado, as contractors submitting the low bid. Work began in the early summer and the new Church facilities were completed in the fall of 1976.

The first Mass and Dedication was offered on October 16, 1976, and the growth of the town continued steadily so that the estimated population was 15,000. Many new Catholic people generously made pledges to reduce the debt and did so well that all debts were retired by the spring of 1977. Within the year of 1977, a sprinkling system with new lawns and landscaping were completed affording the Parish with adequate and beautiful facilities to continue the work of the Gospel message.

The services of the Victory Knoll Sisters were terminated in the Parishes of Immaculate Conception of Green River and St. Patrick's of Kemmerer, and it devolved on the laity to take over the C.C.D. Program, which became a great success. With the lay involvement, the Spiritual Growth of family and church life began to show dramatically. For the past five years, the Parish C.C.D. has had a group of 45 teachers trained in C.C.D. methods and techniques under the capable leadership of a lay woman whose dedication is an inspiring example to all involved in the most important work of the Church, the religious education of the youth

Green River 1990-2000
Immaculate Conception
Rev. Michael P. Hellman, Pastor
May 5, 2000

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

Rev. Eugene Sullivan (January 1986 - June 1991)

Rev. Angel Ornelas (June 12, 1991 - January 1994)

Rev. Michael P. Hellman (January 31, 1994 to present)

Sister Mary Kelliher (1985-1993)

Sister Betty Lorenz (July 1993 to present)

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

Lay Ministry Formation Program graduates between 1991 - 1997

Pat Cywinski awarded Green River Citizen of the year in 1996

Wesley Nash accepted into the Diaconate Program for the Diocese in 1999

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

Sister Mary Kelliher ministered to the Hispanic community and to the homebound members of our parish. Supported Mother's Group (young mothers with their children).

Sister Betty Lorenz began teaching ESL classes at our church in September 1996. Ministers to Hispanic community, homebound and bereaved.

Father Sullivan established Children's Christmas Pageant/potluck which is still celebrated during Advent.

Father Ornelas purchased a new copy machine in July 1992. He also enhanced the music of our parish by purchasing an Alien Organ in 1993.

Father Hellman established a time/talent sheet in 1994 which has served to involve more people in the various ministries of our parish community. In 1994 began Mass of Remembrance on All Saints Day each year. Began the celebration of Mardi Gras each weekend before Ash Wednesday as a social event in the parish in 1995, potluck dinners after the Mass of Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. See below for further details.

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