

Pine Bluffs, St. Paul Bishop McGovern

[148] Rev. James Duffy, rector of the cathedral, Cheyenne, was, in all probability, the first priest to celebrate Mass in Pine Bluffs in the year 1907. Services were held in Blair Hall, north Main Street.

Rev. Gerard Schellinger was the first resident pastor and took over his charge in the fall of 1912. Soon after his appointment Fr. Schellinger began preparations for the new St. Paul's church. Two lots were donated for that purpose by J.B. Gillion, a non-Catholic. The \$4,000.00 building was dedicated October 5, 1913. At that time a third lot, the gift of C.L. Beatty, a non-Catholic, was added to the church property.

The sum of \$4,000.00 for the new church presented a problem to the small number of families in the parish, as it was almost impossible for them to meet the entire obligation the first year. As a consequence a debt of \$1,000.00 was contracted. This amount was paid off during the succeeding years and St. Paul's church was free from debt.

The year 1914 was the first during which parish records were kept. There were eighteen Catholic families in the Pine Bluffs district that year. In the whole parish there were eighteen baptisms, three marriages and one convert.

[149] Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, D.D., bishop of Cheyenne, conferred the sacrament of confirmation on thirty-seven candidates August 8, 1915. In the same year there were twenty-three members in the Altar and Rosary society.

St. Joseph's church, Albin, was built under Fr. Schellinger's direction in 1915. The church, which has a seating capacity of about forty, cost approximately \$1,000.00. The site was donated by John Nelson, a non-Catholic, with the condition that it be used for church purposes only. In

1919, a long-standing note for \$170.00 against the building was paid off. Fr. James Huffy was the first priest to attend the Albin mission in 1908.

He was also the first priest to celebrate Mass at Burns (1908). St. Mary's church was built in 1914 by Fr. Schellinger and dedicated in August, 1915, by Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, D.D. The building cost approximately \$1,000.00 and at the time of its dedication was free from debt. It has a seating capacity of about forty.

St. Raphael's church, Carpenter, was built in 1917 with a seating capacity of sixty or seventy. It was dedicated in August of the same year. The Catholic Church Extension Society gave a donation of \$500.00 toward the building which cost \$1,500.00 unfurnished. At the time of dedication there was a debt of \$250.00, [150] but this was paid in 1919. Fr. Duffy was the first priest to attend the Carpenter mission in 1907. A hall and lot were purchased for church purposes and were in use until the new church was about to be built. At that time the hall, which had been known as St. Peter's church, was sold, and the lot was traded for two other lots owned by the Federal Land Company.

In October, 1917, after an eventful pastorate Fr. Schellinger was appointed an army chaplain. To replace him came the Rev. Michael Healy, who was appointed temporary pastor. Fr. Healy continued in this office until June, 1925, when he entered St. Joseph's hospital in Denver. During Fr. Healy's temporary pastorate he built a substantial parochial residence at a cost of \$10,000.00. He collected \$4,600.00 of this amount from the people of the parish, which left a debt of \$5,400.00 against the building.

Rev. James McBride was appointed temporary pastor on the departure of Fr. Healy. Fr. Healy died on May 23, 1926. From this date until August, 1933, the affairs of the parish were administered by Fr. McBride.

In the minutes of the corporation of St. Paul's church under the date of June 26, 1925, Fr. McBride is referred to as temporary pastor and there is a casual reference to a fire which apparently originated in the sacristy of the church but did little damage.

[151] Fr. McBride worked earnestly to reduce the indebtedness on the parochial residence. In 1926 the parish borrowed \$2,000.00 from diocesan funds to pay off sums of \$1,500.00 and \$500.00, respectively to the Church of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and Matt Ferlic, both of Rock Springs. As part of the reduction of indebtedness program in January, 1926, \$300.00 was paid to Mrs. Carolina Egg. In April, 1926, on the advice of his excellency, the bishop, the parish rectory was insured for \$5,000.00 with the Catholic Mutual Relief Society of Omaha, Nebraska. In the following June a second \$300.00 was paid to Mrs. Carolina Egg.

In 1926, part of the rectory was rented to a local physician, and he and his family lived with the pastor for several years. The additional revenue from their rent was very helpful in increasing the funds of the parish.

In December, 1926, the debt to Mrs. C. Egg was liquidated by the payment of \$1,200.00, while other payments reduced the parish indebtedness to \$3,200.00. Most of this amount was owing directly to the diocese and between June, 1927, and May, 1928, \$1,200.00 was raised toward the reduction of this debt. In November, 1930, \$500.00 was paid on the debt, mainly through the efforts of the Altar and Rosary society.

In 1931, an attempt was made to raise money to pay for a new roof for the church, repairs to the [152] furnace and to the basement of the rectory. However, owing to lack of funds only the basement of the rectory was repaired. In the same year it was decided to introduce the envelope system of offerings in an effort to increase the amounts donated toward church support. Some time later, the lay directors of the corporation, shocked by the records made available by this system,

recommended that the parishioners be sharply reminded of their obligation to pay dues. Nevertheless, in the following year the effects of the economic depression were manifested in a marked decrease in parish revenues.

In July, 1932, Fr. McBride announced his impending departure from the parish. Upon motion the following tribute was inserted in the minutes of the corporation: "A vote of thanks was extended to Fr. McBride for his excellent service while pastor of St. Paul's church, not only for his efforts in reducing the debts and keeping expenses at a minimum but also in his friendly relations with the townspeople and the public of other faiths."

Between the years 1926 and 1933 the yearly revenues fluctuated considerably but there was a consistent drop from a high of \$3,700.00 in 1927 to around \$1,500.00 for the remaining years with the exception of receipts amounting to \$2,700.00 in 1929.

[153] During the period between 1925 and 1932 the census records available provide the following averages in which the figures given represent the number of Catholic families in the place named and the number of practical Catholics in that place (the first figure represents the number of families): Pine Bluffs, St. Paul's, 20, 36; Carpenter, St. Peter's, 7, 12; Burns, St. Mary's, 3, 5; Albin, St. Joseph's, 7, 10; Hillsdale, station, 4, 6; Little Horse Creek, station, 3, 3.

The number of conversions registered during the same period is six. On October 20, 1929, the Most Rev. P. A. McGovern, D.D., administered the sacrament of confirmation to twenty-four candidates.

Fr. McBride was succeeded by Rev. Welter Nicholson, who remained as pastor until July, 1935. During his administration church receipts fell away considerably, principally because of the drastic effects of the economic depression, poor markets and consistent crop failures due to

drought and the destructive activities of unprecedented hordes of insect pests. In these two years there was little, if any, fluctuation of Catholic population and the number of converts is listed as three.

In 1935 the parish became the charge of Rev. Jerome K. Denk, who took cognizance of the situation and went to work immediately in an energetic attempt to strengthen the parish in the number of faithful members and in its drained treasury department. With the [154] assistance of W.P.A. labor he had curbing laid in front of the church at low cost. He himself effected various necessary repairs and redecoration in the church and rectory, and did much also to improve the appearance of the lawn and garden surrounding the house.

In June, 1938, a second-hand car for parish purposes was bought at a cost of \$350.00, half of which was paid from the pastor's personal account.

In 1935, it was decided to discontinue holding services at Burns, because there were only two practical Catholics in the district, and they could attend Mass elsewhere. The stations of Hillsdale and Little Horse Creek were disregarded in parochial census returns from 1934 to date.

During Fr. Denk's regime the score of families attending St. Paul's church in 1934 increased to thirty-two in 1938. Four or five of these families came from the neighboring states of Nebraska and Colorado. The congregation at the mission of Carpenter remained more or less static.

In 1938 the indebtedness of the parish to the diocese was reduced to \$1,100.00 while there still remained an additional \$150.00 to be paid on the automobile. From 1935 to 1938 church receipts continued to hover between the \$1,500.00 and \$2,000.00 marks.

In May, 1937, the Most Rev. P. A. McGovern, D.D., administered the sacrament of confirmation to forty-seven candidates.

[155] In December, 1938, Fr. Denk was chosen to become the first pastor of the newly established parish on the south side of Cheyenne. He was succeeded by the Rev. Charles J. Gormly, former assistant in the parish of Our Lady of Sorrows at Rock Springs.

In March, 1939, although the parish was still limping financially due to the impoverished condition of the community there was, and is at this writing, a steady attendance of between seventy and eighty persons each Sunday at Pine Bluffs; Carpenter has a congregation varying in number from twenty to twenty-five, and Albin has a fairly steady attendance of some four adults and eight children.

The church buildings are in good repair with the exception of the mission church at Carpenter, the roof of which needs shingling.

Branches of the Altar and Rosary society function faithfully in Carpenter and Albin as well as in Pine Bluffs.

In 1937, from January 25th to 31st, a mission was conducted by the Rev. Raymond Hillinger of the diocesan missionary band of Chicago.

During 1938 there was one marriage in Pine Bluffs; ten baptisms there, five at Carpenter and one in Burns.