

# History of Holy Name Parish, West Union

The first Catholic church in West Union was built in 1870 after a decade of visits by neighboring pastors at irregular intervals. The priests who took care of the West Union Catholics were Fathers M. O'Beirne and J. J. Quigley of Elkader, Henry McCullough of Waucoma, and Richard Nagle of McGregor.

They usually gathered in the Henry Wimber home, where the first Mass was celebrated in 1861. Among the early family names are found Cavanaugh, Dullard, Foley, Garrigan, Loftus, McCur, Muldowney, Owens, Quinn, Riley, Snell, and Wimber. Most of these are obviously Irish names, but there were German pioneers too. Father P. F. Harrison, pastor at Saint Rose near Waucoma, helped them to build a small frame church in 1870 and celebrated the first Mass in the church on November 13, 1870. He took care of the parish for only a short time longer and was succeeded by priests who attended West Union from Clermont. They were Father John J. Smith, a recent emigrant from Ireland, from January to December in 1871, Father M. O'Carroll for three years from 1872 to 1875, and Father E. O'Sullivan from 1875 to 1880. The latter went to Sioux City, where he died shortly afterwards. Sometimes these priests also cared for the Catholics at Fayette.

The first resident pastor was Father Patrick McMahon, coming to West Union in April 1879. It was he who began the sacramental records. He lived with the John Owens family during his one-year pastorate. Father Laurence H. Burns came in May 1880 and immediately purchased a house, to which an addition was built a year later. He remained five years, also attending Wadena. West Union pastors continued to care for the Wadena Catholics until 1899. At times Fayette and Clermont were also in charge of West Union pastors. Next to serve West Union was Father P. F. Cooney, from 1881 to 1888. Father James P. Mulligan served the parish for fourteen years, from 1888 to 1902. During his time, a paid choir of non-Catholics sang for high Mass, a unique situation in the diocese. How frequently is not recorded nor for how many years. The Rosary Society was organized during those years, perhaps to pay the choir. The church at Hawkeye was built during that time also.

The next forty years, Holy Name Parish was cared for by Fathers Cornelius S. Regan from 1902 to 1912, Thomas Fitzgerald from 1912 to 1915, Hugh F. Roney from 1915 to 1926, and Michael F. Toomey from 1926 to 1937.

In the past half century, priests of more recent memory served the parish. Father James H. Roche came in 1937 and was followed by Father Edmund L. Cooney in 1944. Father Cooney became widely known for his work in scouting and as archdiocesan scout chaplain. Father Cooney established Holy Name School for eight elementary grades in 1952. The white frame building of Burnham and Wood's Funeral Parlors was purchased and remodeled to provide classrooms and convent quarters. The Sisters of Charity B.V.M. staffed the school until its closing in 1968. They began with 82 children, and the enrollment increased to a peak of 155. In 1957 Father Kenneth M. Ryan came to the parish. He modernized the sanctuary to provide an altar suitable for the celebration of the liturgy. Father Eugene J. Weimer came to Holy Name Parish on August 19, 1965. A few years later the school closed in 1968 at the request of the Archdiocesan Board of

Education, which cited the shortage of religious Sisters and declining enrollment. Father Weimer immediately set up a religious education program for elementary grades and secondary students.

A parish center completed in 1980 replaced the school building and provided facilities for parish gatherings as well as the religion classes. Changes took place in all the buildings during Father Weimer's pastorate. The church was remodeled to provide an appropriate sanctuary for the renewed liturgy. Old pews were replaced with new. Air conditioning was provided. The annex between the two buildings provided passage from rectory to church. Because of declining health Father Weimer retired in 1986 and continued to live in West Union. His condition worsened during two years of retirement, and he died on May 20, 1988.

Father Thomas Schwinn came to Holy Name Parish in 1986 from Saint Mary's, Cascade. He served a parish of over 800 members and had the help of many of the laity in liturgy and visitation of the sick and aged. The annex between church and rectory was remodeled into both a winter chapel and an office and to provide one-level access. The parish installed new sanctuary furniture in Father Weimer's memory.

Seven women of the parish entered the convent. Five men were ordained to the priesthood: Rev. Thomas Dullard, 1889; Rev. Edward Dullard, 1892; Rev. Edward Fitzgerald, 1918; Msgr. William Roach, and Rev. Joe Hauer.

Rev. Dale J. Rausch became pastor of Holy Name in July, 1994. He served both St. Francis of Assisi, Fayette and Holy Name until 2003. From 2003 to 2010 Holy Name was linked with St. Peter's, Clermont. In July 2010 Father Rausch became a Sacramental Priest for the St. Joseph the Worker Cluster, and Rev. James Brokman became Pastor of Holy Name, St. Peter, St. Francis of Assisi and Immaculate Conception.

The Sullivan property was purchased in 1999, buildings removed, and landscaping was added.

Mount Calvary Catholic Cemetery is located 3 miles southeast of West Union. The Holy Name Church purchased the land from Foley's for \$50.00 in 1886, and deeded it to Bishop Hennessey. Before this time, Catholics were buried in the Catholic Cemetery in Clermont. Additional land was purchased for \$100.00 in 1930. The next addition was donated in part by Laurence and Letha Kerns, and the remainder purchased from George and Colleen Miller. The Meskel family served as directors for many years. The Chapel was built in 1951 by M.J. Leahy, in memory of his parents, Mr. And Mrs. Philip Leahy, St. The planting of the evergreen trees on the west and south edges was sponsored by the Knights of Columbus, and donated by families in 1994, in memory of their loved ones, Chris Heins, as an Eagle Scout project, added the fence in 1996 and Derek Ihde erected a sign for the cemetery as his project in 2009. The old evergreen trees were removed in 2010.

Organizations are the Rosary Society, dated back to the 1900's, Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Court Little Flower #814, 1923, Lay Carmelites, 1962 and the Knights of Columbus, St. Thomas Moore Council #4287 under Rev. Edmund Cooney and Charles Broghammer was the first Grand Knight.