

Our History

Parish sends cakes, spiritual bouquets to soldiers at Christmas

By Ellen G. Krenke

Along with many other community organizations, St. Bernard parish did its part to support the troops during World Wars I and II.

"The beginning of World War I brought about many changes in the village," according to the church history. "The women knit items for soldiers at home and away and for the people of other countries.

"The school children also were busy. Seventh and eighth graders made quilts by knitting squares, younger children made baby layettes and also knit squares for quilts and afghans."

All of the children saved tin foil for the aluminum and fruit pits and nut shells for the activated carbon, the history states.

To protect soldiers from German gas attacks, these items were needed to produce activated carbon for gas masks. It took 200 peach pits or two pounds of nut shells to produce enough carbon to outfit one gas mask, so schools, churches and other organizations throughout the United States and Britain saved these items.

By 1942, the country was deeply embroiled in World War II. Gas rationing was in effect so people were encouraged to share rides to church, according to the church history.

The Red Cross asked for cigarettes, cookies and cakes to send to servicemen.

Sugar was being rationed at that time, so the rectory offered sugar from its ration.

Home nursing courses were taught in Middleton, and the sermon was eliminated from the 6 a.m., Mass, so that the men and women would not be late for their jobs at the Badger Ordinance Plant.

Fr. Ferdinand Mack, the pastor at St. Bernard, said officers from the plant met with local clergymen to warn them that their problems would increase with the "young folks" from the plant.

"It was the war days that brought people close together," Mack wrote in his memoirs.

Robert Hildebrandt compiled a list of more than 80 parishioners who were in the service.

Everyone was asked to pray for them and send spiritual bouquets to the service personnel at Christmas time. Many memorial Masses were said for service personnel during this time.



Children of St. Bernard Catholic School collected "nearly a ton" of clothing for war relief services in New York. From left to right in the truck, Marvin Hermans, Philip Breuning and Roland Lamberty, standing from left to right, Kathleen Hilgers, Barbara Nesson, Roger Hillenbrand, Joan Kaminsky, Phillis Breuning, LaVerne Hermans, Mary Stricker, Mary Anne Teff, Sr. Mary Jane Frances and Sr. Mary Philip, principal of the school.



Fr. Ladislav Szepe, pictured sitting with Fr. Ferdinand Mack, fled Russian persecution and was a displaced person in the American Zone of Austria before coming to St. Bernard as a curate in 1951.

Mack said the list was not limited to parish members. He said he was thanked by "a good Lutheran" who said he received prayers from the parish while he was in the South Pacific.

The first casualty was the nephew of

Al and Muriel Blaschke of St. Bernard.

In 1943, canned goods were collected after Masses to be sent to St. Vincent de Paul in Chicago for the needy in Europe, China and the Philippines.

St. Bernard Catholic School children collected "nearly a ton" of clothing for the National Catholic Welfare conference to be sent to the war relief services in New York.

Ladies were asked to donate three dozen cookies to the United Services Organization Center in Madison, because Truax Field was a very active service base at the time.

The days of fast and abstinence were still observed. However, farmers were given permission to harvest crops on Sundays and Holy Days and to serve meat while harvesting crops.

Along with the need to support the war effort came the need to start a Catholic school in Middleton.

The school was to be a memorial to the parishioners who served in the war.

"It was to be a permanent symbol of what they fought and died for so that future generations might be reminded of their sacrifices for God and country," according to the church history.