

June 1, 2008

# CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

1908-2008

## St. Mary's Visitation

New Salem, MI



St. Mary's Church - New Salem, MI Fr. Kuehnel (1902-1913)

### SMV History

The Catholic community of New Salem was started by Fr. Marco in 1856. A log building was erected for worship south of New Salem four corners.

In 1865, a larger, more substantial wood-framed building was built in section one, on the current site of St. Mary's Visitation Church - Salem Township - on land donated by Adam Endres.

In 1866, the parish of St. Mary's was officially established. In 1876 the wood-framed church was enlarged.

In 1908 the wood-framed church was moved west to the corner of 25th & 146th by capstan and horse to make way for the new stone church. St. Mary's Cemetery had already wrapped around the wood building and some of the dead had to be moved to make way for the foundation of the new church building. The cornerstone for our present day stone building was put in place in 1908.

In 1911, the red tile roof was replaced with metal and the lightning-strike prone second steeple was removed.

In 1917, the old wood church which was serving as the church hall was taken apart piece by piece and carefully rebuilt to the east of the church (southeast corner of present parking lot). After Vatican II, the interior of the church was remodeled and the high altars were removed. The Blessed Mother statue was painted white and stood on the left of the sanctuary, and a mural of the resurrection was placed on the right.

In 1981, St. Mary's, New Salem merged with its neighbor, Visitation Church of North Dorr and became St. Mary's Visitation Church.

In 2003, the church was remodeled and updated to its current condition.

## SAINT MARY'S PARISH HISTORY

### "I Call 'Em As I See 'Em"

By

**Gerald Weber (unofficial Mayor of New Salem)**

March 19, 1971

*Reprinted with permission*



On the twenty-third of May 1901, I (Gerald Weber) was born. Father Ebert at Saint Mary's Church in New Salem, Michigan baptized me. I was raised on a farm and disciplined rather often in the wood shed with a barrel stave, but time does not stand still and before long, I was going to Saint Mary's School.

Saint Mary's School was a two-room school attached to the convent. The convent still stands on the same spot today. Sister Rose, a Dominican nun from Adrian, was our teacher. We had two teachers, each with a class of about twenty students. Things went well in fall and spring but those cold Michigan winters were rough.

The first one to arrive at school in the morning was elected to start the fires. Kindling wood, a half-gallon of kerosene and a bucket of black coal were the ingredients. Then light it.... PUFF! Smoke and soot was all over the place, but it took hold and burned after a time. Then, outside in the back and to the west a little, there was a small village of three [out] houses. Sister Rose, with her German accent, would send us out to shovel a path and sweep off the snow from the un-upholstered seats and place the Sears and Roebuck catalogue in its proper place. Brrr, it was cold but invigorating.



Next, we went to the convent or sometimes the church sacristy for Mass, where it would be either stifling hot or freezing cold, depending on how the fire "took" that particular morning. Then back to school where Sister

gathered us around the pot-bellied stove (a Burnside model) for classes and study. Here we would become burnt on one side while freezing on the other. When all this heat got to us, the boys with their barn clothes and their wet, sweaty feet really "stunk". The rest of us had to live with the smell, but we learned our four R's plus Catechism and Bible History. We learned them in both English and German. This was rough, but learn we did. The boys studied and memorized the Mass prayers in Latin and soon we were Mass Servers.

At this time Saint Mary's belonged to the Detroit Diocese. Father Kuehnel was our pastor from 1902 to 1913. The church was a wood-framed building (in 1971, our present school and hall). This building boasted two space heater stoves with about 50-60 feet of stovepipe overhead. The church lights were "super deluxe": Coal oil lights with reflections. We, also, had a pipe organ with huge pipes. They were four inches in diameter and five to six feet tall, and these led down to the smaller pipes. The organ had to be pumped by hand, (a bellow stripe system) like water pump. The young men of the parish did the pumping while the organist and choir "did their thing." Sometimes the young fellows would forget to pump and the organ sound would go dead. Wow! You should have seen the look on the organist's face, if looks could kill!



As the parish grew more room was needed, so it was decided to build a new and bigger church. The old church was raised, rollers put under it, and it was on its way out to the new location, a quarter of a mile west. This was the Heibel farm then, presently the Vogt farm. While it creaked and groaned its way down the road, to its new location, Mass was being offered inside the building. I served as Altar boy for this Mass.

A capstan, powered by a horse, was used to inch the building along. The poor horse walked in circles and no doubt, got dizzy, Ha! The mover was a man named Casper Poffhauser. This took days before it reached the new location where it was used until the new church was completed. Then the excavating was started. Some of the dead had to be moved and re-interred in another resting place.

These pioneer people put forth great effort and cooperation; sacrificed both physically and financially, to build this new church. All hand work, done by man and their teams of horses, but hard work was nothing new to these good people. Team and wagon did the task of hauling the gravel, cement, lumber, and tile roofing from a distance of two to eight miles. Wow!



A shelter or windbreak was set up just east of the present rectory. This was where all the cement blocks in our church were made, one at a time, placed on a plate, then carefully set aside to dry, only to be moved again and piled up like cord wood so the plates could be used again and again. Mostly all of this was volunteer labor. Work? Yes, hard, hard work!

In 1908 the corner stone was laid and up went the church. Progress was slow but finally it started to look like a church. The windows had arrived, imported from Germany. They were beautiful stained glass and donated by certain members of the parish. These windows are still the most beautiful church windows in western Michigan.



The bell was moved from the old church to the new belfry. In addition to the old bell, was a new larger bell that was donated by some of the parishioners of the church. On the small, oldest bell, VANDUZEN & TIFT, BUCK EYE

BELL FOUNDRY CO., CINCINNATI, OHIO is inscribed.

Inscribed on the new larger bell is STUCKSTEDE BELL FOUNDRY CO, ST. LOUIS, MO. Also engraved are these words in German, STIEFLEAT DIESER GLOUK-UND BEKANTER GEBER, (Something about promoters and known givers). Spelled in German, are these names:

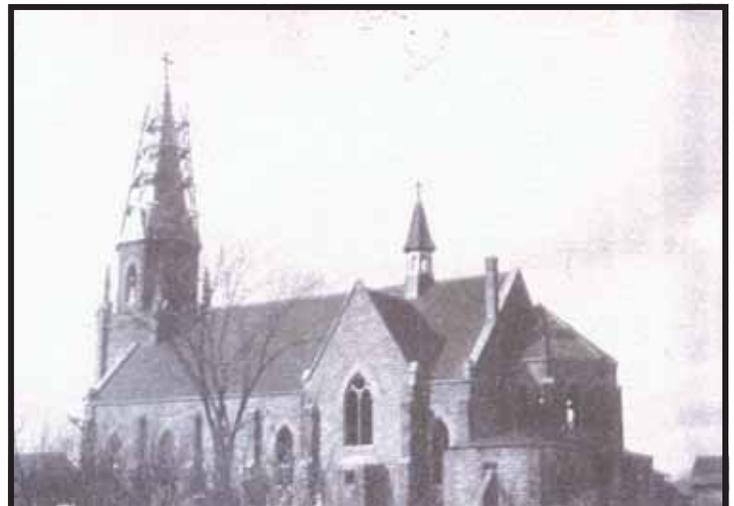


**BERHARED ANTEKIER, SEN  
JOHANN\*ANNA KATH ALFLEN  
JOHANN JOSEPH-KATH ALFLEN  
MATTHIAS HOS-KATH LENARTZ  
COELESTIN-KATH LENHART  
JOHANN-ELISABETH SCHICETEL  
JOHANN-MAGDALENA WIEST**

Engraved in Latin on one side of the bell is:  
**MATER ADMIRALIS VCCOR DEIPARAE GLORIAS  
LAQUOR IN HONOREM DIVINI NOMINIS  
CONSECRATUM FUT HOC SIGNUM IN DIE  
NATIVITATIS B.M.V.A.D. 1894**

**Translation:** I am the mother (bell), I am asked to speak (sing) the glories of the admirable Mother of God. This bell was consecrated on the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mother 1894.

The roof of the church had two steeples and red tile. It was a thing of great beauty but the weight of the half-inch thick, corrugated tile was no match for the Michigan elements and did not last. Several times the lightning struck the tower, smashing and breaking the tile over the entire roof. A huge hot air furnace was installed in the basement. The fuel used was wood, which was all hand-cut and hauled by team and wagon or sled to the church.



The first couple married in our new church was Elizabeth Alflen and Walter Wagner. The 1st Communion class was very large. Pope (Saint) Pius X had just changed the regulation age from sixteen to seven. My communion partner was Roman Herp of Wayland. This was in 1911.

Saint Joseph, Leighton, was a mission of Saint Mary's, New Salem at the time. I remember being transported there by lumber wagon and a team for a Forty-Hour Devotion Service. The wagon and team were owned

and driven by Peter Wiest. The passengers included our pastor, Father Kuehnel, the choir, which included my sisters: Florence Weber (Alflen), Nora Weber (Rewa), also Clara Alflen (Harig), Laura Weber (Schumaker) and the Mass Servers, Walter Weber, Albert Schaendorf, Laurence Lenartz, Clarence Homrich and myself (Gerald Weber). What a trip! Father Kuehnel stayed with a family by the name of Hoovers. They had a son who was a priest, Father Leo Hoovers. The choir stayed with the Hayles family and the servers stayed with the Ammens family. This was a very interesting experience for all of us, especially the Mass servers.

Saint Peter's, in Douglas, was another place Father and the choir went to perform wedding ceremonies. I'm not sure if they went by rail or wagon, but I am sure it wasn't by jet.

Visitation Church, North Dorr, was not open at this time, so Father Kuehnel took care of the funerals there. Father and the Mass servers would go in a horse drawn buggy, following the hearse also drawn by horse. At the graveside, Father and the Mass servers would have a sort of mission sermon, not the usual funeral sermon.

In 1913, Father Kuehnel was transferred and Father Fritz was sent here. Words can never express what went on. He was here between one and two years before he was excommunicated. Also, around this time two of our nuns went to neighboring homes, "kicked the habit" and went home to Ma (the scandal of New Salem). We then were without a resident pastor until 1914 or 1915 when a young priest was sent, Father Anthony Schneider, a city boy who resented, very much, coming to New Salem. He was not very pleased with his assignment because of whom he followed and also because he was sent to farmers. Using his words, these people were quite "Dunmen ungelbideten baurrn" (stupid, uneducated farmers).

So this was two strikes against us but the school remained open and some repairs and changes made for the better. The biggest change was that the boys could not come to school in their barn clothes. Our rough games, wrestling, prisoners goal and duck on the rock, had to stop and there was much more homework. Father was going to try to "educate" us dumb farm boys and girls.

On June of 1916, our first class of eighth-grade graduates was presented diplomas. The graduates were Dorothy Junglas; Herman Schumaker; Walter Weber, and Gerald Weber. Of course we were BIG STUFF.

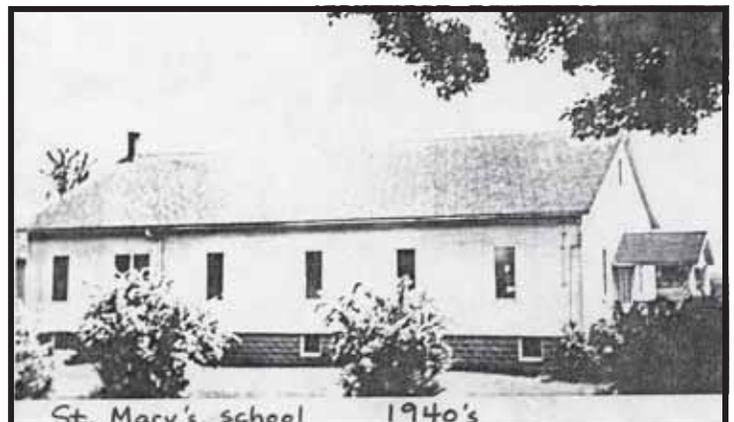
But soon there was a complete failure of cooperation between our pastor and people. The debt was not being paid, not even the interest. Things were in a sad, sad, state of affairs. My uncle, Father Anselm Weber had heard about our plight from his brother Joe, my father and tried to help by putting in a good word for Saint Mary's to our Bishop. The result was a meeting between Byron and Salem parishioners. Father Bosler was authorized by the Bishop to promise us a good, energetic and understanding priest if we could raise the money to pay our debt, and the church at North Dorr, Visitation, would be opened as a mission of Saint Sebastian. In half an hour the money was pledged and everyone left with hopes and dreams of a new beginning.

Well, we got our break. Father [Msgr.] Bolte was assigned Saint Mary's. HURRAY! This was in 1917. Father Bolte's coming was like a warm spring rain. Everything took on a new life. He started a Holy Name Society and they received Holy Communion once a month in a body. Before this we were lucky if we made our Easter Duty. The Church hall was taken apart, piece-by-piece, carefully marked and then rebuilt on its present site. All was accomplished by volunteer parish labor with Anton Weber, Jim Rewa, Henry Weber, Sr., Peter Junglas and Jack Smith as head Carpenters. This tremendous task was finally completed and we now had a place for social events, Holy time, Altar Society meetings, Chicken Dinners and other money raising events.

The church grounds also received a facelift - new sidewalks, driveways and some landscaping. The school system improved and things were going along real well.

In 1923, Father Bolte was transferred and Father Brogger came. He remained here until 1940. His was a hard task and became even more difficult as the depression hit our area. The first task he undertook was our cemetery. It was covered with a vine called myrtle and the burials at that time were in wooden rough boxes that soon rotted and sank into the ground. If you walked across the cemetery you might break your neck as you fell into a sunken grave. So headstones were removed and graves marked. The brush was cut, holes filled and the topsoil plowed. It was more hard work for the busy, but untiring men of the parish. The blue spruce were dug up from in front of the priest's house along the walk. I hauled them by team and the stone boat to the cemetery, where August Smith planted them. The headstones were replaced and straightened, the grass seed sowed and soon things looked green. The improvement was well worth all the effort. Finally, the electric line came through about this time and lights were in all the buildings. Running water and pour toilets followed this, which was a great improvement.

By 1930, money was getting scarce. Farms were being lost by foreclosure and we could no longer keep our school open. The Depression was here. Our school remained closed until 1941. We had no debt, but the relationship between pastor and parishioner was at a low ebb. Then May of 1940, Father Linus Schrembs came for a short stay of only six weeks, but even during this time, plans for opening the school were discussed.



Our next pastor was Father [Msgr.] Francis Schultz. A big and very energetic priest, he was the answer to our prayers. He continued for the reopening of our school. The upstairs of the hall was remodeled for classrooms; a new entrance was added to the north side with bathrooms on each side. This of course entailed septic tanks and a new well which had to be dug.

In September of 1941, school was again opened. We now had Dominican Sisters from Marywood Academy of Grand Rapids, Sister Juliana pioneered. Our enrollment was somewhere between forty and fifty pupils. Father Schultz was a great spiritual and financial leader. A new era was started and church services had a zip in them. A new roof was replaced on the hall and everything kept in good repair. We held two chicken dinners a year and they were a great success. Money was raised and saved for future development. In 1943, Father Schultz was transferred and we were sent Father Paul Schneider. He was a quiet, likeable priest and a truly spiritual man. He kept the ball rolling. Our chicken dinners were still financially successful, our school was kept open, and the buildings kept in good repair. A short time after he came his parents home burned, so they stayed with him for some time. His father was a "handy man" and a big help to have around. A 4-H project was started for the boys with him as their leader. He joined the choir and again new "zip" was added. Other improvements continued. A cemetery map was drawn up, which I think was a great help. It was a very haphazard set-up in the past and hard for the gravediggers to know where to find the lots. The outside of the church was painted and water -proofed.



We were again "on the top" spiritually and financially. The communions climbed to a new high and we had \$13,000 in the bank for the future. This was May 1946, and again a change for New Salem. Father Julius J. Amman was sent to us, a young priest full of vim, vigor and vitality. He was no amateur at getting things done, even if he had to do it himself. He was great with the "kids" and "oldsters" alike.

Again improvements were made. A parking place was needed, so a new one was made on the west side of

the school. The south entrance to the hall and school was rebuilt. The inside of the Church was in a very sad condition, so it was stripped and new tile type paneling put on. This again was done by many of our talented parishioners with the help of a few professionals, Mr. Ben Hoogterp from Grand Rapids and Clarence (Kelly) Rewa from our parish. The job was beautiful when it was finished.

The school enrollment increased to around a hundred and forty so, of course, we need transportation. After such discussion it was finally agreed to purchase a school bus. This was a gigantic step and was the first bus in private school in the state. Bus drivers were the biggest worry of most people but not for Father Amman. If there were none to be had he drove the bus himself.

Our church dinners and bingos kept going. None of the church savings had to be "dipped" into. Father J. Amman was transferred in 1951. He had made many good friends and was going to be missed. Father Theodore Jorna was sent to us. With his priestly zeal, the parish was continuing spiritually upward and communions on Sunday were nearly 100 %. His interest in the school was untiring. The enrollment again climbed to a total of one hundred sixty seven children. A new and bigger bus was purchased. This was a sixty-passenger bus, which made three trips, morning and afternoon, each day to bring the children from their homes to Saint Mary's school.

A hot lunch program was started. The ladies canned their surplus garden products, everything from pickles to applesauce, to help supplement what the government provided. It was the best and most economical lunch program in the area. New and better equipment was added to the kitchen. After we received surplus commodities it was state inspected.

The rectory was repaired and remodeled. Things were polished and painted and varnished and were kept this way by Father and his sister, Theresa, which came from Germany to keep house for Father. After she learned to speak English she took charge of the school lunch program. This was no small task and she handled it well.



Then came Vatican II, October 1962, and a lot of changes. This was not only difficult for the people but for Father as well. We started with a participated Latin Mass

and then the complete change to the vernacular. A portable altar facing the people was added. The choir learned the English Mass. All of this took time and patients of everyone concerned but the total result was a great satisfaction to us.

The chicken dinners were discontinued by a majority vote and were replaced by a "Festival Collection". Food prices were at an all time high. Most farmers did not raise their own chickens and after years of all this hard work people were happier to just give the money. Financially this worked well.

Father Jorna worked hard for the parish plus two or three days a week at the Chancery Office in the marriage court. His work is reflected in the parish yet today.

In 1964 Father Jorna was transferred and Father Raymond Sonefeld was our new pastor. He had been pastor at Saints Cyril and Methodius in Gun Lake. As most good pastors do, he left many good friends there and it took some time before the close relationship between pastor and parish really developed. Once it did, the bond was truly great and things started to rapidly improve.

Again Vatican II, with its new line of thought, was being felt. It was just hard to adjust to, but once we got started, things went smoothly again – great progress was made. Study and discussion clubs were formed; the C.C.D. program was expanded as now more of the area children were being bussed to our three public schools. C.C.D. teachers became a must and many of our laity were drafted into this program as teachers. Father was very interested in the religious welfare of the children and taught in both the High School and the Grade School programs.

Some of our people were game to try again to raise money to especially help our school remain open. The Game Dinner proved to be the most successful and is still held annually. The Ox-roast was another profitable event and is also being held annually in June. The ladies started holding a Bazaar with the fall Game Dinner and each year the profits have increased.



By now the interior of the church needed re-decorating with Vatican II's recommendation to remove high altars, it was decided to remove the main and side altars and put in a permanent center altar. A used marble altar was obtained and cut to size with enough left over to build small altars on the side for the tabernacle and the Infant of Prague statue. All of our old statues were removed except

Saint Joseph and the Blessed Mother. The Saint Joseph statue was placed on the west wall behind our votive stand and the Blessed Mother was repainted a cream color with gold trim and is enthroned above the Infant on the west wall. A modern painting of the Resurrection was added to the wall above the tabernacle. It is very outstanding and complies with the new liturgy very well. All this takes some getting used to but has grown on us and is appreciated more as time goes on.

New carpeting was installed in the aisle and sanctuary; new lights were installed and new furniture. A much-needed hot water heating system which helps keep the newly painted wall free from soot and dust. The old church pews were all removed to make way for the rented scaffolding. The parishioners did most of the painting and the finished job is beautiful; a great credit to Father Sonefeld and our untiring parishioners.

Father's next project was the roof and the outside of the church. The roof job was hired done, but again the good men of the parish worked long summer and fall evening hours to paint on a sealer-type paint (cement) to the old block. The windows were cleaned, puttied and painted. All old shrubs and flowers around the church were removed and a four-foot space was filled with crushed stone and evergreens planted. It has improved the looks of the church one hundred percent.

The financial struggle to keep the school open is getting harder. In 1967, we consolidated [schools] with Visitation and Saint Sebastian as they were having the same difficulties as we were. It was Named Holy Family School. In 1969, they no longer gave us nuns from



the Dominican order. We were forced to hire all lay-teachers and drop the seventh and eighth grades. We are still operating with six lay teachers this year (1970-1971) but the financial burden is more than we can bear and we have had to cash some of our time certificates. The Federal aid to private schools was outlawed and so the sacrifice may prove to be too great to continue this same program next year. Our enrollment has decreased to one hundred forty two students. Our present teachers are Mrs. Gene Fein, sixth grade; Mr. John Magnan, fifth grade; Miss Susan Grose, fourth grade; Mrs. Ina Bellgraph, first grade and principal. These [preceding] grades are taught at Saint Mary's school. Mrs. Marta Langlois teaches second grade and Mrs. Priscilla Lendgrin Third grade at the Visitation School, North Dorr.

Father Sonefeld was doing a good and big job, and all loved him. He was transferred in September 1970.

Father Thomas Hack, who had replaced Father Walters after he retired from forty-seven years of service to Visitation and Saint Sebastian, was made our Administrator, and Father Julius Amman was sent to reside and minister to our spiritual needs. His was a second time at our parish but due to illness he only stayed three months. So as of now, March 1971, we have no resident pastor and morale is low, but in the past we snapped back and we will do it again – be the Good Lord willing.

*by Gerald Weber, 1971*

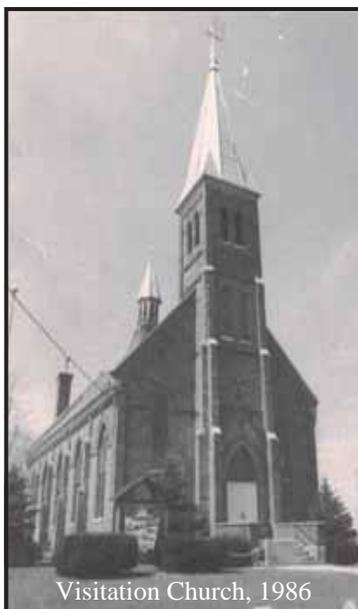
## The Rest of the Story

From the parish archives

This small town of New Salem is rich in spiritual history. A history that was started between 1852 – 1866. It started with three brothers who gave land to the Church. In 1852, the first brother, Fritz Endres donated land on which St. Sebastian – Byron Center was built upon. The Second brother, Adam Endres donated land in 1866 on which the St. Mary's –New Salem was built upon. The third brother, Phillip Endres donated land also in 1866, which St. Maria [Visitation] Church – North Dorr was built upon. One can only speculate what motivated these three brothers to create three closely knit, but separate churches. For a small rural area, the financial strain of supporting three churches proved to be a bit much. Visitation Church was mostly a mission church supported, in part, by either St. Sebastian or St. Mary's. In 1979 a parish survey was put out by Fr. Dovanzo. By a vote of 222-40 at St. Mary's Church and 58 to 57 at Visitation Church, the parishioners of these two communities agreed to combine the parishes of New Salem and North Dorr. The result: In 1981, under the guidance of Fr. [Msgr.] Michael Hazard, these two parishes were combined; St. Mary's Church became St. Mary's Visitation; and the old Visitation Church was razed January 22, 1988.



St. Mary's Church, 1986



Visitation Church, 1986

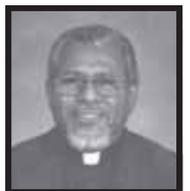
This event joined the closely knit communities into one parish. This parish from its roots had always had a strong sense of community and strove to bring its church family together whenever possible. In 1983, still under the leadership of Fr. [Msgr.] Mike Hazard, parishioners built a new hall with air conditioning with a capacity to hold 500 people. They deemed this new hall "The Community Center". In 1988, a new seven-classroom school was added to the East end of the Community Center. The original wood framed church which became the hall after the stone church was built, and later became a school as well, was dismantled as it had served its purpose and was no longer a safe building.

In 2001, nearly 100 years of Michigan weather had left the grand stone church itself in need of repair. A restoration project was started by Fr. Richard Altine at St. Mary's Visitation. This project included repairing & recoating the stone masonry to reflect the way it once looked. Expert craftsman painstakingly repaired the German-crafted stained glass windows; The old metal roof was replaced with a new shingled roof. The old wooden doors were replaced with new insulated steel doors. The hardwood flooring and pews were refinished. The walls were repainted a vibrant gold and a maroon accent trim was

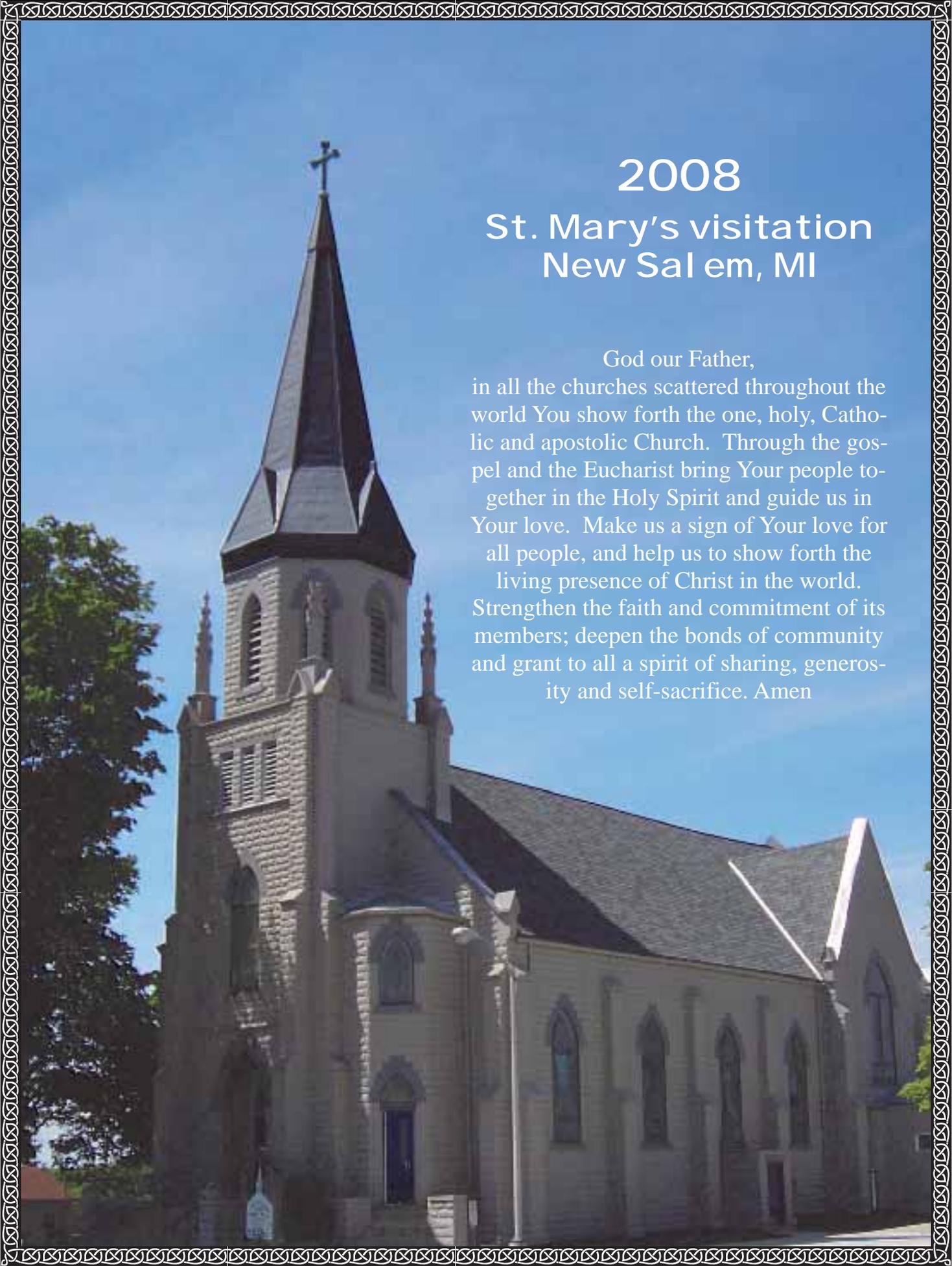


added. Special designs were painted above the double entrance doors and were made to mimic the stained glass. Shades of green and gold carpeting gave the church a warm feeling and the new lights added to the ambiance. A handicap ramp was installed to make it easier for all parishioners to help in the Liturgy, and a new air handler system was installed with air conditioning. As in the beginning, many parishioners donated their time and talents to do the carpentry, and electrical work, and roofing.

Now it is 2008. Fr. Stephen Rodrigo, S.J. is our current pastor, whom we are blessed to have. St. Mary's [Visitation] Church still stands high on a hill and has retained all the integrity and charm of its original structure. A character bestowed upon it by the families who sacrificed so much of themselves to build it for all the future faithful. Known affectionately as SMV, it is thought by many to be one of the most beautiful churches they've ever seen.



**"KEEP THE FAITH, DEO GRATIAS"**



2008

St. Mary's visitation  
New Salem, MI

God our Father,  
in all the churches scattered throughout the  
world You show forth the one, holy, Catho-  
lic and apostolic Church. Through the gos-  
pel and the Eucharist bring Your people to-  
gether in the Holy Spirit and guide us in  
Your love. Make us a sign of Your love for  
all people, and help us to show forth the  
living presence of Christ in the world.  
Strengthen the faith and commitment of its  
members; deepen the bonds of community  
and grant to all a spirit of sharing, generos-  
ity and self-sacrifice. Amen