

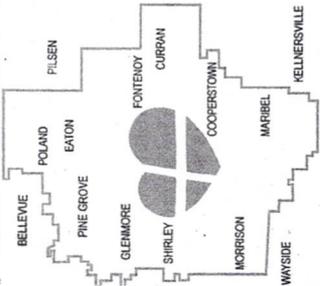
The Heartbeat of Denmark, Wisconsin, and Surrounding Communities

# THE DENMARK NEWS

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A packed house in the historic St. James Catholic Church on Sunday morning for the parish's 175th Anniversary Celebration.

## 175 years of community and faith

### St. James celebrates milestone anniversary

By Jacob Heiser  
The Denmark News

On Sunday morning, hundreds of people gathered in the unincorporated community of Cooperstown for a celebration 175 years in the making. That day, the congregation of St.

James Catholic Church held an all-day commemoration of the 175th anniversary of the parish's founding featuring prayer, music, reflection, fun and heritage. The Denmark News made

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the journey out to Cooperstown to join in the recognition of such a historic milestone.

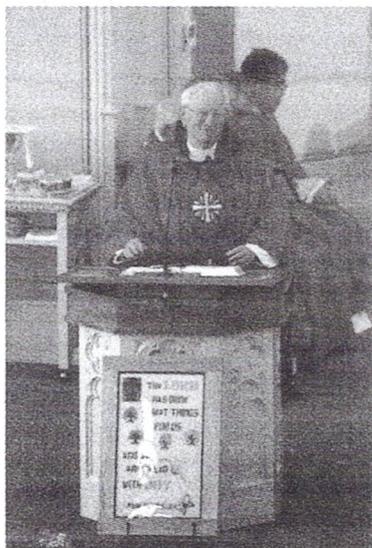
The parish now known as St. James Catholic Church in Cooperstown was first founded in 1850 as a mission of Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Manitowoc Rapids. Over the years, the site has known three church buildings with the current one being completed in 1915. The parish has experienced many changes over the decades yet has always maintained a strong connection to its roots. Many of the surnames seen on the earliest tombstones in the church's cemetery are shared by a number of current parishioners, and the congregation regularly honors their shared Irish, German, Bohemian and Polish immigrant heritage. A number of members of the parish have been working tirelessly for over a year to ensure that Sunday's celebration would be a success with hundreds of combined hours going into their efforts.

On Sunday, which was the Feast of St. James in the Catholic Church, the big day had finally arrived. By 9 a.m., attendees had already begun filing into the church to get a prime spot for the special 10 a.m. Mass. As the church filled, the temperature rose as the start of Mass approached. Just before 10 a.m., St. James's Pastor Father Brian Belongia welcomed the crowd and remarked, "Not many parishes

can claim 175 years...we are truly blessed." He then gave a brief introduction of the service's concelebrants before stating, "This is a great day, and we are all happy to be with you. It is an honor to be here."

The special anniversary Mass was led by Principal Celebrant Bishop Ricken along with concelebrants Bishop Frank Dewane, Father Brian Belongia, Father Bill O'Brien, Father Dennis Ryan, Father Santiago Turiano and Deacon Dan Gray. Bishop Dewane and Father O'Brien are both originally from the parish, and Father Ryan and Father Turiano are former pastors of the congregation. Following the Mass's procession, Bishop David Ricken of the Diocese of Green Bay, addressed the congregation. Bishop Ricken stated, "I've celebrated a lot of parish anniversaries in the diocese, but never 175...you are definitely an exception." He then went over the history of the church and parish and remarked on the congregation's "resilience" through hardships and tragedies. He praised the beauty of the stained glass windows as "some of the most beautiful in the diocese" and reflected on the parishioners who came before them and passed on stating, "We owe it to them to celebrate this milestone." The Mass then proceeded with parishioners Traci Hickey and Leroy Kane providing the day's readings and Nic Lyons leading the Psalm response. The Gospel reading--Luke 11:1-13--was delivered by Deacon Dan Gray before Bishop Frank Dewane of the Dioceses of Venice, Florida, assumed the pulpit for the day's homily.

Bishop Dewane thanked Bishop Ricken as well as Father Brian and the anniversary's planning committee for inviting him to take part in the day's proceedings stating he was "truly delighted to be here". He then explained how he had attended church at St. James as a boy and had been a member of the school's last graduating class. He said St. James was a "small parish that always punched higher than its weight" which he credited to the generations of parishioners. He continued, "History



Bishop David Ricken welcoming the congregation at the start of the Mass.



St. James native son Bishop Frank Dewane delivering his homily from the church's pulpit.

is sometimes forgotten. What has been demonstrated here is that you know where you are and who you are." Bishop Dewane also told the assembly to be mindful of the current state of the church stating, "While we look back, we also have to look towards the present...we need to continue to ask God to bless this parish." He further stated St. James is "an extraordinary community of faith, hope and love". He closed his homily by urging those in attendance to, "Be as the men and women who came before us here at St. James; always a parish that puts God first."

Once Mass concluded, one and all were invited to join in a traditional church picnic celebration on the church's grounds. To the south of the cemetery, a large tent had been erected where parish volunteers were selling liquid refreshments on one side and a stage hosted Mark Jirikovec and His Orchestra performing their polka favorites on the other. Another tent hosted a concession stand where representatives from DeGrand's Family Restaurant were selling a variety of concessions. The church's lawn featured kids games as well as bouncy houses from Wizard Kingdom Inflatables, and all ages could enjoy the Cemetery Scavenger Hunt which had participants searching the grave-



Bishop David Ricken and his concelebrants during the Mass's consecration. Pictured: (from left to right) Deacon Dan Gray, Father Bill O'Brien, Father Brian Belongia, Father Dennis Ryan, Bishop David Ricken, Father Santiago Turiano and Bishop Frank Dewane.

yard for numerous interesting facts while filling out a checklist with trivia questions. Parishioners also hosted a number of raffles and drawings throughout the day. At 2 p.m., students from the Heritage Academy of Irish Dance provided a demonstration of their traditional dance routines under the tent, amazing the crowd with their skills. Attendees could take a break from the oppressive heat in the church's basement which hosted historical displays documenting the parish's 175-year history as

well as celebratory cake and ice cream.

Despite the excessive heat, the congregation of St. James Catholic Church in Cooperstown was able to pull off a thoughtful, community-focused and fun celebration of their shared faith and history to commemorate their 175th anniversary. The event had all the hallmarks of the traditional church picnic and was the perfect encapsulation of the strong bonds of community and spirituality that has kept the parish going for so long.