



History of St. Mary Parish.

Centennial (1883-1983) of St. Mary Church of the Immaculate Conception, Alpena, MI. CAP at Orchard Lake.

The history of the Catholic Church in the United States, parallels the history of the country itself. Christopher Columbus was Catholic, and in his footsteps came the Spanish and French missionaries who founded the church in the new world.

The history of the Catholic church in northern Michigan goes back to April 13, 1861, the day after the Civil War began. On that day, the Most Rev. Frederick Baraga, Bishop of Sault Ste. Marie, paid \$30.00 to James K. Lockwood, for a lot on the north side of Chisholm St., between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues. Mr. Lockwood made a gift of an adjoining lot.

Alpena, a lumbering settlement which had changed its name from Fremont only two years before, along with points on the north Huron Shore, lay in a kind of no-man's-land between the Dioceses of Sault Ste. Marie and Detroit. Bishop Baraga had clear jurisdiction over his former missions in the northwest lower peninsula. Cheboygan, one of five original counties in the north, had been assigned to Bishop Baraga in 1854, and Alpena at that time was a part of Cheboygan County. Alpena was separated in 1857 by Act of the Legislature. This uncertain status, at least about points south of Alpena, is indicated in a letter Bishop Baraga wrote to Fr. Patrick Murray of Beaver Island, November c 20, 1867: "Visit the people along the shore as often as you can. I am sure that the Bishop of Detroit is unable to do anything for them."

Bishop Baraga felt the need for a Catholic Church in Alpena. On Easter Monday, April 1, 1861, his diary relates that he left Sault Ste. Marie and started walking to Alpena. There, he intended to catch a fishing boat for Detroit and then go on to Cincinnati. The 64-year old Bishop, accompanied by a mail carrier, traveled the distance in nine days, arriving the evening of April 9th, 1861. The following day, he held conversations with Mr. Lockwood and on April 13th, he purchased a lot for a church. Bishop Baraga spent nine days waiting for a boat to Detroit in the house of a blacksmith named Samuel Ankers.

It was due to this visit of Bishop Baraga that the church got its start in Alpena. Fr. Patrick Murray came to Alpena at Bishop Baraga's direction, on September 2, 1864; and remained until September 14th. In that interval, he baptized seven children. Fr. Murray then returned to Beaver Harbor, Beaver Island. There he received a letter from Bishop Baraga, dated November 27, 1864, saying: "I see by your letter that you remained only a short time in Alpena; much shorter than I intended you to stay." He wrote again on July 10, 1865: I send you this letter from Samuel Ankers, by which you will see how necessary it is that somebody go to Alpena to raise up that church. I have nobody whom I can send but you. You have already worked there with good success: go again and do as

much as you can."

Fr. Murray complied, coming to Alpena on August 17, 1865, and remaining until September 22nd of that year, recording five more Baptisms. Bishop Baraga then asked Fr. Murray if he "would not like it better to be stationed at Alpena, than at Beaver Harbor." Finally, on February 15, 1866, Bishop Baraga wrote: "I received your letter of January 29th and am glad to see what a dutiful son you are. You are perfectly willing to go whither I shall send you. Make the necessary preparations at Beaver Harbor, and then leave for Alpena."

That was it. Fr. Patrick Murray came to Alpena to stay on May 11, 1866. He quickly decided that he wanted property closer to the Village than that acquired by Bishop Baraga five years earlier. For \$150, he bought from Gelos Potvin, two lots on Chisholm St., between Fourth and Fifth Streets, almost directly opposite the present St. Bernard Church. Fr. Murray moved swiftly on construction of a church, and said Mass there for the first time on November 7, 1866.

The first Catholic Church, named St. Bernard, was a harbor of worship in this community for all nationalities: Irish, German, French, Swedes and Polish. The Church Directory listing in the Alpena Weekly Argus, indicates that two Masses were said on Sunday: one having a sermon in English and the other in French. Jurisdiction was exercised by Bishop Baraga, who had established his See at Sault Ste. Marie in November of 1853, but then moved it to Marquette in October of 1865. Upon his death on January 19, 1868, the northern part of the lower peninsula was transferred to the Detroit Diocese. Bishop Baraga never seemed to have conferred Confirmation at Alpena. On June 21, 1868, Bishop Paul LeFevre came from Detroit and confirmed 47 persons at St. Bernard Church ranging in age from 11 to 52 years old. His successor, Bishop Caspar H. Borgess, confirmed 44 persons on August 13, 1871. A letter from Bishop Borgess to Fr. Murray is a memento to that visit: "The generous surprise, which your congregation gave me, seems to oblige me to express to them my gratitude. It is the first token of filial affection with which I have been honored by the flock entrusted to my care since my unction. I beg to apprise you and your congregation that I shall offer my humble prayers to Almighty God for them, that He, in his infinite goodness, may bless them abundantly."

Fr. Murray then turned to the needs of the Catholic children of Alpena. On August 16, 1869, he purchased from D. D. Oliver, a lot 66' x 132' on the south side of Chisholm St., across from the church and rectory. Mr. Oliver donated \$100.00 of the \$300.00 purchase price toward the new school. In 1869-70, a two story frame building, 24' x 48' was erected. Even before opening St. Bernard School in 1870, Fr. Murray worked at the instruction of parish youngsters, conducting a Sunday School from the start. He also ministered to the spiritual needs of Alpena's Catholic adults, who for the first time had a church and pastor.

Fr. Murray received an accolade for his achievements here in a letter from Bishop Baraga less than a year before the bishop's death saying: "I received your excellent letter of the 24th of February, which gives me great consolation. I am surprised to see that you did so much about the building of your church in so short a time. You are useful wherever you move. I am very satisfied with the improvements which you are continually making, and I hereby give you a general approbation of any improvements you may wish to make for the future. You need not ask my permission."

Fr. Murray was succeeded by Fr. William Taaken on November 1, 1871. In turning the pastorate over to Fr. Taaken, together with the church, school, rectory and graveyard, Fr. Murray rendered an accounting that showed the parish debt to total \$820.00. Fr. Taaken's three-year tenure was

highlighted by provision of a convent to house nuns who would teach in the school. On April 4, 1872, he acquired the lot on Chisholm St., just east of the school for this purpose. By the autumn of 1873, the small frame structure was complete, but no sisters were available as yet.

On May 17, 1872, Fr. Taaken also acquired the corner lot of Chisholm at Fifth, that is the site of the present St. Bernard Church. It was purchased from Rod McKenzie for \$800.00.

Beyond these facts, the record of his pastorate is slim, but his Hollander's stern and determined personality is indicated by a legend that comes down through the years. A certain parishioner had failed to pay his pew rent. After a due period of waiting, Fr. Taaken nailed a board across the entry to the pew. But the parishioner, a powerful man, ripped the board away and sat down. The following Sunday, the parishioner, finding that Fr. Taaken had caused the seat to be sawed out of the pew, went to a near-by hotel and brought back a chair, placed it in the pew and sat down, thereby winning that round.

On August 13, 1874, Fr. Taaken was succeeded as pastor by Fr. John Van Gennip. The school enrollment had grown from 100 students that first year in 1870, to 250 by 1875. Fr. Taaken, during his tenure, had prepared a convent for sisters to teach St. Bernard School, and had negotiated with the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati for their coming in 1875. In the late summer of 1875, three Sisters of Charity came, which would launch 65 consecutive years of devoted service to St. Bernard Parish.

Those first sisters were among the true pioneers of Alpena. They came carrying the torch of culture into the wilderness; they trudged through streets of sawdust on errands of mercy after school hours, drank water from a rough barrel hauled to their humble home on Chisholm St., and melted snow to obtain wash water as the drear of winter gripped the primitive town. They put up with all the rough ways of the time; but brought to this environment an inspiration and promise of better things to come. After those first three, came many others laboring in the same tradition of selfless service. Their influence upon the lives of thousands of people cannot be measured.

Fr. Van Gennip, in the two years of his pastorate, did not add to parish land holdings nor erect any buildings, but concentrated rather on strengthening the spiritual life of his people. His efforts in this direction earned for him the nickname "The Saint," as he was called by parishioners. Fr. Van Gennip held night prayers in the church every evening of his pastorate, and continually exhorted his people to attend, an urging to which they gradually responded. Succeeding pastors ascribe, at least in part, the deep and abiding faith of the people of St. Bernard to his ministry among them.

Fr. E. M. DeKiere was appointed to replace Fr. Van Gennip on November 15, 1876, the first of two short periods in which he was pastor. His double tenure totals nearly two and a half years, but he was absent from the parish for months at a time, particularly during his second pastorate due to ill health. There were now 300 families in the parish and 250 students in school.

When Fr. DeKiere left the parish for the first time in January of 1878, it was attended for about three months by Fr. Francis X. Shulak, a Jesuit priest from Chicago.

Fr. Shulak was well-known in the Alpena and Posen areas. Born on a small farm in Poland and receiving his education from his parents and the village priest, Fr. Shulak was ordained in the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in Krakow, Poland. In the year 1865, he was sent to the United States to further his English studies and to serve as a missionary to the Polish, Czechs and the non-Polish settlements in and around the area of St. Louis, Missouri. After establishing a few libraries in Missouri, he was

transferred to Chicago, Illinois in 1869. In Illinois he immediately commenced traveling and sailing to establish posts on the Great Lakes. He traveled all areas of Lake Huron in northeastern Michigan holding Forty Hours Devotion, preaching at Missions, holding Novenas, and visiting lumber camps. In his travels to Indiana and Branch County, Michigan, he informed the Polish foresters and woodworkers that there was land in northeastern Michigan that could be homesteaded. The Poles took the advice of Fr. Shulak and purchased homesteads in Presque Isle and Alpena Counties.

Fr. Shulak could speak, read and write in English, Polish, Latin, German, Czech and French, so wherever he went, his missionary assignments were well received and appreciated. In this area, he attended particularly the people of the Polish settlement in Posen, a point confirmed by Baptism and other entries involving that community and signed by him in the St. Bernard Parish Registry.

On June 15, 1874, Fr. Shulak purchased 40 acres of land adjacent to the present St. Casimir Church in Posen, from the State of Michigan for \$100.00. Under his direction, a log church was built in 1874-75. He continued to call at Posen until 1879, when Bishop C. H. Borgess of Detroit appointed Fr. Anthony Bogacki as first pastor.

Fr. Shulak is also given credit for establishing St. Ignatius Parish in Rogers City, Michigan, naming the parish after his father. He gave many missions in Alpena, Bay City, Cheboygan, Saginaw, Port Huron and other posts, as he sailed the Great Lakes in the role as a spiritual advisor.

By the year 1883, the city of Alpena had made much progress; electric lights had been installed on Main St., cedar blocks in the streets were a matter of pride, and a few brick buildings were beginning to compete with the prevailing frame structures. Some key industries had been established: Huron Portland Cement, a paper mill, and garment factory. With such a solid economic base, people were lured to Alpena, leading to the development of the town. The Polish people in Alpena, accustomed to hardship and struggle, contributed much to the growing community. One of their greatest contributions was to be St. Mary Church, now located on (Dock St.) Second Ave.

In May 1883, The Most Rev. H. J. Richter was installed as Bishop of Grand Rapids, and Alpena along with other northern areas, was detached from the Diocese of Detroit and placed in the Grand Rapids Diocese. As one of his first pastoral assignments. Bishop Richter assigned Fr. Thomas D. Flannery to St. Bernard, Alpena. Fr. Flannery came to St. Bernard on November 22, 1883. Fr. Flannery was joined at the original St. Bernard Rectory on December 9, 1883, by Fr. P. C. A. Winter, who was to form a parish of the French-speaking families. They lived together there for a time, while a settlement was worked out. Under its terms, Fr. Winter's congregation kept the church and rectory, which stood at the east corner of Chisholm and Fifth (site of today's Midway Market), while Fr. Flannery's congregation retained the parish name St. Bernard and took the lands at the south corner of Chisholm and Fifth, on which stood the school, convent, and the beginnings of the new church.

At this same time, the large settlement of Poles in Alpena wanted to preserve their Polish heritage and grow spiritually with effective praise to God in their native tongue. They wanted a parish of their own. They were determined that the young generation be brought up in their own environment.

With the help of Fr. Francis Shulak and Fr. Joseph Kucinski, another Polish Jesuit from Chicago, a committee of 150 families was developed, who strongly worked to purchase an unused Methodist Church on Dock St. (now Second Ave.), the site where the present church now stands. Negotiations were completed for the purchase of the building for the sum of \$2,000.00, and title to the proper-

ty, which was signed on July 2, 1883 and recorded July 3, 1883, was transferred from: "Trustees of the Society of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Alpena, Michigan, to: "Trustees of the Society of the Polish Roman Catholic Church of Alpena, Michigan (to be organized)." The Polish people had much work to do on their new church before it could be used for services, since the Methodists had only sold them the building. The bell, pews, and other furniture were removed for use in their own newly constructed church on Chisholm St. The Polish people worked strenuously gathering needed supplies and funds. Within six months, the needed renovations were completed.

The former Methodist Church was transformed into the Polish Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception, in honor of Mary, Patroness of the United States. On December 8, 1883, the first Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered in the renovated church. The first pastor was Fr. Candid Kozłowski. As there was no formal rectory, the pastor had to "rough it" by living in a room adjoining the sacristy. Fr. Kozłowski did not "rough it" for long. Shortly, he left for a new pastorate in Lemont, Illinois. With his departure, he was succeeded by Fr. Matthew Grochowski, but he, too, was quickly changed to St. Joseph Church in Manistee. Even the third pastor, Fr. Kolasinski moved rapidly, staying only a few weeks. From January, 1885 to October, 1885, there was no priest at the parish. According to the records at St. Bernard Church, most of the parishioners went there for services and the sacraments. Things seemed very unsettled indeed!

The period of vacancy ended when Fr. Augustine Sklorzyk, the fourth pastor, arrived in October of 1885. On February 21, 1886, St. Mary Church was officially dedicated. It was customary in the early Catholic Church, not to dedicate any buildings until the debt was fully paid. The Alpena Weekly Argus, in its issue dated February 24, 1886, relates the following in regard to the dedication: "The Polish Church, on Dock Street, was dedicated last Sunday. About nine o'clock in the morning, the men, belonging to the Church, formed in line in front of the edifice; and then, headed by the Germania Band, marched up Dock and Second Streets to Chisholm Street, and then to the French Catholic Church. As it passed the Argus office, we counted the men in ranks and found there were 156 Polanders in the procession. They bore three banners — the first being the Stars and Stripes and the other two being Polish flags — red and white. The procession was under command of Marshals mounted on horses. One of the Marshals wore a white coat and a handsome sash. The men marched well and presented a good appearance. The weather was not very agreeable, and snow was falling.

At St. Anne's Church, they were joined by 24 members of St. Jean Baptiste Society, and 18 Knights of St. John 16 of whom wore handsome uniforms. The procession, including the Band, now numbered over 200 persons, marched back to the Polish Church where the dedication services were held. The members of the French Church were then escorted back to St. Anne's. During the march, the members of St. John's performed several marching maneuvers."

The new pastor showed a sense of development when in 1888, he purchased lots 9 and 10 in block 83 and built a two-room school on lot 10. This little school, the first St. Mary Grade School, was staffed by himself and a lay teacher, Mr. Snick. This bright future was clouded by a terrible disaster that befell Alpena.

On July 11, 1888, a disastrous fire broke out on the north side of the Thunder Bay River, that destroyed St. Mary Church and rectory, as well as 200 neighboring houses.

The *Alpena Weekly Argus* gave this following account of the fire: "Wednesday afternoon, July 11,

1888, will long be remembered by the citizens of Alpena. Then it was the "fire fiend" swooped down on the north side, gathered a large portion of the residences in its fiery grasp, and in one short hour, had brought sorrow and destitution to from one thousand to fifteen hundred persons; had turned over two hundred families out of their comfortable homes, and left in its place, heaps of ashes, destitute families, and a hideous ruin.

On the banks of the Mill Pond, about one mile and a half from the mouth of the river, on the north side, is a small ravine 10 ft. deep. In this ravine, the edgings and other refuse from the lumber mill of H. R. Morse are burned. Last Wednesday, a gale of wind was blowing from the northwest, traveling at times at a velocity of 36 miles per hour. The wind traveled directly from the ravine, where the slabs were burning, towards the big sawdust heap, and then on to the residential area. Between the ravine and the sawdust pile, there is a road covered with sawdust, deposited by the mill carts. It seemed to observers, after the fire, that sparks from the burning slabs in the ravine must have set fire to the sawdust on the road, and then traveled to the sawdust heap.

A large fire commenced. The Fire Department was sent, and in addition, the steam fire engines, as the fire was beyond reach of the water works. The round-house caught fire, then the Morse Boarding House, and from that point, the settled part of the city, on the north side, begins. The fire traveled from Fletcher Street, to Walnut Street; then to I Long Lake Avenue and on to Pine Street. Fire was now breaking out in various places, and although the fire boys and residents worked nobly to gain control of the flames, they were unable to be at all places at once. Residence after residence became wrapped in flames, and then the citizens were forced to behold a great conflagration, and see a large part of the city doomed to destruction; and that the fire's onward course could not be checked until the Bay was reached. The march of the fire to the Bay, after it got under full headway, took but a few minutes. Sparks and blazing shingles were carried, by the fierce gale, for blocks, and new fires would start up and then work backward and side wise.

Desperate efforts were made to save at least part of household goods. In the center of the fire belt, houses were emptied of their goods, which were piled in the streets; but the fire came so quick, that the owners were forced to flee for their lives before they could remove their goods to a safe place. Very few of those, who lived along Miller and Lake Streets, saved anything except the clothes on their backs. Those persons who lived near the edge of the fire, on Oldfield and Clark, were more fortunate. As there was plenty of assistance, their household goods were removed to a place of safety. The scene along Oldfield Street was an excitable one. The Street was dotted with tables, chairs, beds, organs, stoves, iron frames of sewing machines, and broken crockery ware. Women and children were running about, some crying, some half-crazed. Mothers had lost their children, husbands were separated from wives, and many more were tormented with fear that loved ones had perished in the flames.

The tragic loss of their church and rectory did not deter the Polish congregation. Before the end of the year, they had built a new home for their pastor on lot 9. In March of 1889, Fr. Sklorzyk became ill and due to a misunderstanding with the people left the parish. He was replaced in October by a young energetic priest, Fr. Leopold Oprychalski, who imbued with zeal and concerned about the welfare of his parishioners, began planning the erection of a new church. Under his able guidance, many fund-raising projects were successfully undertaken.

It was a time of growth and anticipation. St. Mary Parish grew rapidly, with new families joining

constantly, determined to preserve the Polish heritage. It was obvious, that the increasing number of children, meant new demands for a better school. Rich Polish customs and traditions were becoming strongly entrenched among the people. Their needs could be met only by organized schooling and a staff of dedicated teachers.

Therefore, Fr. Oprychalski began a search for an order of religious sisters who would accept this responsibility to provide for the religious and educational welfare of the children and to preserve the Polish traditions and values of their parents. The pastor turned to the Felician Sisters of Detroit for help. Even though the school building continued to serve as a church, rectory, and school, the sisters were assured that proper accommodations would soon be provided. In 1889, the first Felician Sisters arrived by boat. What joy and royal welcome greeted the sisters! Even though their quarters were small and simple, the sisters made themselves comfortable and got ready for the opening of school.

Mr. Lad Filipiak, who attended the school from 1889-1892, recalls the first religious superior, Sister Mary Augustine.

When the fire swept down to Dock Street, blazing brands set fire to the steeple of the Polish Church, and soon that part of the structure was a mass of flames, and presented a striking sight. The steeple was on fire before the main part of the church, and looked like a pillar of fire shining through the smoke-clouds.

When darkness set in, the city on the north side of the river, from the Dam to the river's mouth, was illuminated by the burning fires; reflection of the light extending hundreds of feet high, appearing like a long luminous cloud resting above the city. When the fire finally went out, everything consumable was destroyed, and what wood remained on the ground, would not make an ordinary dray load.

In an hour, property to the amount of \$300,000.00 had been destroyed, over one thousand people rendered homeless, and hundreds left destitute; their only possessions were the clothes on their backs. The district burned was from 2 to 3 blocks wide, and 5 blocks long.

Thursday afternoon, the ruined district was visited by thousands who wandered over the desolate area. It was a sad walk for those who had been expelled from their homes the preceding night. The work and toil of years lay before them, a mass of ashes. The only death, from the fire, was that of Mrs. Ann McLean, aged 57 years, who had come from Buffalo to visit relatives."

According to Mr. Filipiak, who was born in 1879, the school was on the first floor of the building, and the church and convent on the second. School records indicate that the first sisters lived in two rooms on the second floor of that original frame structure that was later remodeled as a convent and served as such until 1956. Three sisters arrived in that first band.

Progress was being made not only educationally, but also religiously. On June 1, 1889, the first payment was made on the new church foundation, and the laying of the cornerstone took place on June 12, 1889. The Alpena Weekly Argus of June 12, 1889 reports the following: "The cornerstone of the new Polish Catholic Church, on Dock Street, was laid last Wednesday evening. There was an immense crowd present to witness the ceremonies. The stone bears the following inscription: "St. Mary Catholic Church, erected A. D. 1889." The church, which will be built of brick and stone, will be 106 feet and 2 inches in length, and the side walls will be 28 feet high. The width is 55 feet.

From the foundation to the top of the spire will be 132 feet. The stone work is about completed."

Fr. Oprychalski organized much in the parish, the Rosary Society in 1889 (still very active in the parish), a parish library with Polish literature imported from Poland and periodically enlarged. Much of the future success of St. Mary's depended not only upon a loving God but upon the gifts of this talented pastor.

Things were looking bright. On September 3, 1891, four sisters were assigned to the school: Sister M. Modesta, Principal, Sister M. Jutta, Sister Joanna Gorska, and Sister Valerie. The sisters were very excited and deeply impressed with the beauty and majesty of the entire area. Three sisters were to teach and one to do domestic work.

Fr. Oprychalski warmly welcomed the sisters, treating them to a tasteful supper at the rectory. Afterwards, he escorted the sisters to their simple and rather scantily furnished home. The sisters had to endure very poor and cold quarters in the garrets. There was no chapel. Like their beloved father, St. Francis of Assisi, the sisters had only the bare necessities, but they were happy to share in this spirit of poverty. They were willing to follow Christ even in His sufferings. A quotation from David Oliver's Centennial History of Alpena, with regard to the Sisters of Charity teaching at St. Bernard's School, could also apply to the Felician Sisters. He wrote: "If our dwellings in the spirit world are built up of the good deeds we do here to our fellow beings, and that each good deed is a separate piece of the structure, then we do think that the sisters own many of the best dwellings in the summer land, and many people, when they arrive there, will be surprised and disgusted at the shabby looking dwellings they have erected." Although he was not a Catholic himself, David Oliver did esteem the Christian witness of the sisters in Alpena.

The following Sunday, after the sisters had arrived, the pastor announced registration for school. A total of 74 pupils were enrolled, filling three classrooms. The children came from neighboring schools and understood English. However, to many of them, the Polish language was a challenge. Nevertheless, the children were eager, so in a matter of weeks, they were able to grasp the fundamentals and covered the first Polish reader without too much effort. The parents were delighted with their progress. The ambition and enthusiasm of the pupils encouraged the sisters greatly. Despite poverty, inconvenience and pressures encountered at home as well as at school, the sisters enjoyed countless pleasurable and pleasant moments. The year passed quickly. The sisters loved the people and their children, thanking God for the grace of serving Him through them.

At the end of June, the four sisters left Alpena for their annual retreat at the Mother-house, where they could replenish their exhausted energies and rekindle their spirits to be ready in mid-August to resume their work. Following the summer announcements, Sister Modesta, and three new sisters returned to their mission in Alpena, aware that a well-planned beginning will reap a grand harvest. That year of 1892-1893 saw the student body increase to 92 pupils, one class on the first floor and another on the second. The school house continued to serve as a temporary church, since the new church was not dedicated until October 1, 1893. The children were especially good and pleasant. Their outstanding virtues were simplicity and intelligence which they inherited from their parents, where generosity and concern were unforgettable. The parishioners treated the sisters as members of their own families, offering them farm produce and helping them in their household and school needs. This was natural, considering that there were 770 farms in the vicinity in 1893 with orchards comprised of at least 10,000 fruit trees.

The greatest moment in the short history of the Polish Church is well recorded in the Alpena Weekly Argus of October 4, 1893, when it reported that the dedication of the new (present) church, built at a cost of \$19,000.00, took place on Sunday, October 1, 1893. "A ceremony that was of great interest and attraction was that of dedicating the Polish Church last Sunday. The weather was in one of her best smiling moods and tended greatly to make the event more enjoyable. During the forenoon, a procession was formed near the Polish Church, and headed by a band, marched to the St. Bernard's Church; and being reinforced by the French uniformed Societies, marched back to the Polish Church. The procession was a fine and exceedingly attractive one, consisting of the band, followed by thirty boys and twenty-six girls, all the latter being dressed in white. Then marched the two uniformed Societies, St. John and St. Jean the Baptist, after which came the Polish Society, while the rear was brought up by the bishop in a carriage. In the procession were three U. S. flags, three Society banners, and a French and Polish flag.

On arriving at the Polish Church, the procession was formed in open order, reaching from the front of the church to the residence of the priest in the rear, and the bishop passed between the ranks and entered the church. The Societies children and spectators then massed in front of the church and soon after the bishop, in his gorgeous clerical robes, attended by the priests of the Catholic churches of this city, and numerous attendants, appeared at the front of the church. Then came the impressive dedication ceremonies.

In addition to the dedication ceremonies there were Confirmation exercises, and a large number of young people were confirmed. In the afternoon, there were Confirmation ceremonies at the other Catholic churches."

Life was difficult at the turn of the century. The school was still a part of the sisters' convent. The classrooms were downstairs, the convent rooms upstairs. The living quarters were very tight and extremely inconvenient. The only heat for the convent came from the pot-belly stove downstairs through a hole in the floor. The sisters used the church as a chapel. In addition to a regular school program, the sisters opened a sewing class after school. In it the girls learned sewing, knitting, crocheting, etc. making themselves helpful to their families.

So the years passed. Over five generations of teachers and students, parents and children, worked to make St. Mary's the largest parish in Alpena. They have all contributed time, talent, and treasure to build up a school that has for almost a century turned out fine, upstanding, and valued citizens of the Alpena community. These men and women have been and still are a credit to St. Mary's, to Alpena, and to the Catholic Church.

In order to see what was taught at St. Mary's in these early years, Sisters M. Eudoxia (interviewed April 15, 1961 at the Mother-house) who attended St. Mary's from 1896-1902, said there were four classes at the time. "Those who came for the first time to the school, went to the first class, then were promoted in the succeeding years to the following classes. Those who were not yet thirteen when they came to the fourth class, remained in that class until they were of that age required for First Holy Communion. Both Polish and English classes were held, varying with the classes and the teacher. In the upper classes, geography, U. S. history, arithmetic were in English; whereas catechism, Polish history, Bible history, were generally in Polish. There was also both Polish and English reading. The schoolrooms were heated by a "pot-belly" stove, fed by wood. Children sat on long benches. Water for drinking was kept in a pail and drinks taken by a ladle or cup. Singing

and needlework were important." Polish, at the time of Sister Eudoxia's attendance, was at a high level. Programs were all in Polish. (Sister's Uncle, Adolph Eisbrenner, was among the committeemen transacting the purchase of the Old Methodist Church in 1883.)

On June 16, 1899, the first native son of the parish was ordained to the priesthood. Fr. Julius Utecht served the Diocese of Pittsburgh faithfully for 42 years.

On January 2, 1900, Fr. Oprychalski left Alpena to be pastor of St. Joseph Church in Manistee. The people loved him. He was fatherly and concerned about the welfare of his parishioners. During his pastorate, the parish grew from 300 to 500 families.

Fr. Stephen Nowakowski, the sixth pastor, arrived in February, 1900. During his pastorate, he bought lot 4, block 85, (site of 8-room school building built in 1904) for \$750.00, which had a house on the property. The house was remodeled and used as the sisters' convent. The school records under 1900-1901, lists: "Klasa 1-14 long benches, 110 children; Klasa 11-15 long benches, 96 children; Klasa III-6 long benches and 5 short benches, 67 children; Klasa IV-12 benches- "old fashioned" for 4 children each, 49 children. Sister Eudoxia said she was in the fourth class that year and the year after that. The Felician Chronicles remark under school year 1902-1903 that it was tight in school and the sisters cells too were "tight like cages." There was already talk of building a new school."

In June of 1904, under Fr. Stephen Nowakowski, the first payment was made for the excavation of the new school. In July, the sisters home was sold for \$700.00 and moved from the school site. During the school year 1904-1905, no school was in session at St. Mary's, as the new school was being built. The children attended public schools. The former school was now remodeled into a sisters' convent and served as such until 1956. The remodeled convent was much more comfortable than the earlier one.

The new 8-room, two-story brick school was ready for pupils in September of 1905. It cost \$17,000.00. In 1905-1906, there were five sisters with an enrollment of 305 pupils. An impressive growth since the little band of three sisters arrived in 1889. In spite of set-backs such as the river flood at the end of March, 1907, the parish continued to grow. In 1906-1907, the school had five grades and six sisters teaching. The hearts of St. Mary's parishioners rejoiced in June of 1906 as they celebrated the ordination of two native sons to the priesthood. Fr. Julius Manteufel was ordained for the Diocese of Grand Rapids. The deep faith of the parishioners was producing abundant harvest for Holy Mother Church. In 1908, the parish family of St. Mary's gave another son to the service of God. Fr. Władysław Szczukowski was ordained to serve in the Diocese of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The year 1908 not only witnessed the great Metz fire but difficulties brewed at St. Mary's as well. Fr. Nowakowski experienced some serious problems at the parish, so serious, in fact, that his very life was endangered. The situation became so tense that a group of angry parishioners attempted to force him out of the rectory. After a struggle that resulted in the wounding of the leader, Fr. Nowakowski left the parish to take a position in Patterson, New Jersey in July 1909.

His replacement was Fr. Joseph Kamiński who arrived on August 14, 1909, as seventh pastor. During his ministry, he bought one-half of lot 3, which included the small cottage known as the "Domek." The Society of St. Elizabeth was organized during his tenure. In spite of internal tensions, St. Mary's continued to progress.

By 1910-1911, the school enrollment swelled greatly because of the policy of Pope Pius X allowing children to receive the Sacraments of Penance and Communion at an early age. Taking advantage of the change, 132 children received these sacraments. That same year, the school library was enriched by a large donation of books from Fr. Kamiński. Progress continued. In 1911-1912, the sixth grade was added, and in 1912-1913, the seventh.

With all this growth, the new school was becoming too small. Fr. Kamiński met the need by remodeling the "Domek" and equipped it for an additional classroom. Fr. Kamiński was a lively fellow who fostered patriotic fervor through various observances and programs. He showed great interest in the liturgical life of the parish by encouraging better church singing, participation in religious services, and hiring our first organist, Mr. Milewski. In January of 1914, Fr. Kamiński left St. Mary's for a parish in Grand Rapids. His healthy relations with the parishioners, his interest in education, and his many improvements in the parish, made him an important figure in the history of St. Mary's. He was a good choice after the dark tensions of the previous pastor.

With the departure of Fr. Kamiński, the new pastor arrived on January 21, 1914 — Fr. John E. Gatzke. Under his direction, the parish continued to show vitality. The school grew to an enrollment of 490 students utilizing 8 classrooms.

Continuing growth in the parish demanded more expansion. The school had an enrollment of 563 students and ten teaching sisters by 1920. The parish needed more space, and Fr. Gatzke needed more help. To deal with the problems of expansion, the parishioners started a fund to build a new school and sisters' convent. They knew they would have to save over a period of years to afford such a large and costly project.

In August of 1921, the bishop sent Fr. Leo Piaskowski, a native son of the parish, ordained in June of 1919, to assist Fr. Gatzke. The same year the parish rejoiced with Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Piaskowski when their second son, Fr. Victor, was ordained to the priesthood by the bishop of Grand Rapids. His brother, Fr. Francis, had been ordained in 1906. The parish gave their eighth native son to the service of the Lord when in June of 1922, Fr. Joseph Gorski was ordained for the Diocese of Detroit.

The parishioners of St. Mary's have always been generous. This was apparent when in 1923, two sisters came to Alpena from the Felician Mother-house begging for alms. The people generously shared what they had with the Felician Community. In spite of hard times, the parish grew. In 1924-1925, there were 11 sisters on the faculty teaching an overcrowded student body of 622 students. Because of the cold facts of need, the parish decided to drop plans for a convent and concentrate all financial resources on a school project.

After serving St. Mary's since 1921, Fr. Leo Piaskowski was transferred to Holy Rosary Church in Isadore, Michigan on March 9, 1926. He was replaced by Fr. John Grzybowski, who was shortly transferred to St. Adalbert's in Grand Rapids. On December 15, 1927, Fr. Walter J. Switalski was assigned as assistant. His appointment lasted only five short months, when he was replaced by Fr. Leo Oprychalski who had served as pastor back in 1889. Retired from active parish work due to poor health, Fr. Oprychalski came back to help all. Mary's because of a shortage of priests.

A sign of the vitality of the religious life of a congregation is its power to promote vocations. Earlier in July, 1913, two women offered themselves as candidates to the Felician Sisters. Stanislaw Skibinska and Veronica Izbrant. Now in 1928, three aspirants went to the Felician Academy in Detroit: Janine Filipiak, Agnes Kwiatkowski, and Bernadette Kowalski. In 1929, two more young

women applied: Hedwig Filipiak and Helen Kwiatkowski. St. Mary's was being blessed by God. All this was a sign of the spiritual vitality of the people. This vitality was obvious in October of 1929 when the parish had its first two week mission. The Franciscan Fathers of Pulaski, Wisconsin, Fr. Pawlowski and Dzialdowski preached the mission. St. Mary's was filled with zealous parishioners and outsiders as well.

With the coming of November, parishioners saw the rapid transfer of three assistants at St. Mary's. Bishop Pinten first sent Fr. Edmund Krystiniak to replace Fr. Oprychalski on November 1, 1929. This appointment lasted fifteen days when Fr. John Kucinski arrived to replace him.

The year 1930 marked the 75th Anniversary of the Felician Congregation. The sisters at St. Mary's celebrated by inviting the sisters from Cheboygan and the neighboring parishes to their Mass of Thanksgiving and a dinner. During this jubilee year, Helen Klamecka and Stanislova Fenska entered the Felician Academy. On February 20, 1930, Fr. Ben Roguszka was appointed assistant. He left the next year and was followed by Fr. Stanislaus J. Fron in March of 1931. On October 16, 1931, Fr. Leo Oprychalski, former pastor and assistant at St. Mary's died in Bay City. St. Mary's owed a great debt to Fr. Oprychalski for his contributions to the early formation of the parish. Because he was very poor and had no family, Fr. Gatzke had a beautiful funeral service at St. Mary's attended by Bishop Pinten and numerous clergymen. Fr. Szturmowski conducted the ceremonies. The whole parish was deeply touched. Fr. Oprychalski was buried in Holy Cross Cemetery in Alpena and will be remembered by the people of St. Mary's.

Even during the economic hard times of the Great Depression, St. Mary's showed signs of vigor. In February of 1932, the 200th Anniversary of George Washington's birth was celebrated with a program held in the school and then repeated at the Maltz Theatre (now State Theatre). Between 1934-1936, the parish progressed religiously and educationally. The work done in school was acclaimed by both the community and diocesan supervisors. On April 26, 1934, Fr. Stephen Kozak came to serve St. Mary's as assistant. In 1935, more property was acquired: lots 3, 4, 5, and 6 (Second Ave.). Fr. Gatzke moved into the old house on that property. The old rectory, purchased in 1918, was razed in 1936 and the present rectory with a three car garage was built for \$25,000.00. One outstanding event in 1935 was the Confirmation of 500 persons by Bishop Pinten. There had been no Confirmation for five years. It was also a year of fires. On January 17, 1935, one of the three school buildings caught on fire. Damage was placed at almost \$500.00. Within a week the building was restored and back in operation. Later that year, on Ash Wednesday at 2:00 p.m., the convent roof caught on fire. Although some hoped the place would burn to the ground so a new convent could be built, it was saved and restored. Another assistant came to St. Mary's on August 5, 1937: Fr. Casimir Walkowiak. With his coming, two new projects were started in September of 1938: teaching religion on Saturday morning to children attending public elementary schools and to young people attending Alpena High School Tuesday evenings. Fr. Walkowiak assumed responsibility for these activities. Education continued to be a great value at St. Mary's. On February 26, 1938, His Holiness Pope Pius XI separated 16 counties from the Archdiocese of Detroit and the Diocese of Grand Rapids to form the new Diocese of Saginaw. St. Mary's became a part of the new diocese; Most Rev. William Murphy became our new bishop.

On November 9, 1938, according to the wishes of the Superintendent of Catholic Schools, all Catholic Schools held their first Parents' Day. The parents visited the schools while classes were in

session. It was a gratifying experience for all. On May 16, 1940, a new Young Ladies Sodality was organized with the purpose of honoring the Blessed Mother in a special way on her feast days, culminating each year with the crowning of Mary during the May procession.

Another fire broke out on March 17, 1941, on the Feast of St. Patrick at 11:00 a.m. The fire burned much of one of the three school buildings occupied by the second and third graders. All the students escaped without harm to the main building. After major repairs and much renovation, the students returned to an almost new school annex. On April 28, 1941, Fr. Walkowiak was changed to Holy Rosary in Saginaw. Fr. Szturmowski remained as assistant. On May 17, 1941, after confirming 107 students at St. Mary's, Bishop Murphy attended a meeting at the Knights of Columbus Hall where he organized "The League of Catholic Women" for the City of Alpena. This successful venture united Alpena's Catholic Women into an effective active organization.

In April, 1943, Fr. Jurek joined the Armed Forces as a chaplain and was replaced by Fr. Camill Klos from Bay City. During the summer, Joan Jesiolkowski entered the Felician Academy. On March 16, 1945, Fr. Sigmund Haremski replaced Fr. Klos as assistant. He soon won the admiration of all students. October 25, 1945 brought happy news. At the request of Bishop Murphy of Saginaw, a number of priests of the Diocese of Saginaw were given the title of Monsignor by Pope Pius XII. Among them were two distinguished Poles: Fr. John Lewandowski, the pastor of St. Stanislaus, Bay City and Fr. John E. Gatzke of St. Mary's, Alpena. The honor could not come to a more deserving pastor. With his purple piping, Msgr. Gatzke was greeted solemnly in his church with well-wishers filling it to capacity.

The ranks of the clergy ordained from St. Mary's Parish swelled to 9 when Fr. Clarence Smolinski was ordained for our diocese at St. Mary's Cathedral in Saginaw on June 6, 1953.

On June 2, 1963, an era ended for St. Mary's. Regretfully, the much loved Msgr. Gatzke confirmed that his ministry as pastor would end on June 19th. He retired after having served his church 58 years, of which 49 had been at St. Mary's. On June 16, 1963, Msgr. John E. Gatzke's final remarks from the pulpit: "I wish to congratulate the members of St. Mary's for their continuous loyalty to the parish and their splendid co-operation in all spiritual and material affairs of the parish. Personally, the many beloved deeds by the people of Alpena, and their tolerance of my many failings, has made my days most happy — for which I gratefully thank you all." Fr. Vernon Sierminski also left to take up duties as pastor of Harrisville, St. Anne's.

Following Msgr. Gatzke as pastor was Fr. Raymond Mulka, a native of Rogers City and of Polish descent. Fr. Mulka had served as pastor at St. Anne in Harrisville and was installed as pastor at St. Mary's on June 20, 1963 with Fr. John Troester as his new assistant. Being the successor of a legend such as Msgr. Gatzke was hard enough, but to introduce the renewal required by Vatican 11 was to compound the difficulties. On January 13, 1964, Pope Paul VI, speaking to the cardinals at Vatican II, told of the coming changes in the liturgy of the Latin Roman Rite, St. Mary's was prepared for that restoration in the liturgical worship of the Mass by the beginning of Lent. The pace of incorporating all the liturgical renovations was worked out gradually. Trained lay lectors, song leaders and eucharistic ministers were functions in the renewal. With changes in the liturgical worship came changes in the interior of the church. Under Fr. Mulka's leadership, the renovation of the church began on July 27, 1964. The architect, William Wesolek, had designed all changes in keeping with the architectural lines of the church. The changes involved the sanctuary, two exits,

two confessionals, baptistry, lighting, painting and furnishings. The beautiful statue of Mary, the patroness, formerly on the main altar, became a part of an outdoor shrine on the lawn between the convent and the church.

As these changes were taking place, Msgr. John Gatzke, pastor for 49 years, died on August 22, 1964. The beloved pastor was buried from St. Mary's and laid to rest in Holy Cross Cemetery, Alpena. He was remembered as a man who worked quietly and humbly — a shepherd who knew his flock and loved by the people. Meanwhile, the remodeling of the church continued. On October 11, 1964, the renovation reached the stage to allow use of the new altar and communion stations. All Masses were now in English, facing the congregation, and Holy Communion was received standing.

Fr. Mulka and the whole parish were pleased to learn that Msgr. Gatzke had left \$48,000.00 in his will to St. Mary's. His bequest was earmarked toward the construction of the new school. It was typical of his quiet, unassuming personality, that Msgr. Gatzke would give of himself and his treasure to St. Mary's. He now returned to his parishioners much of the compensation they had given him over the span of 49 years of service.

On July 31, 1966 at noon, the groundbreaking and blessing of the new school site was well-witnessed by parishioners. Architects, Morris and Wesolek, presented the cost: \$422,298. This would include 8 classrooms, library, cafeteria, kitchen, multi-purpose room (gym), lounge and locker rooms. The general contractor was Gagnon and Sons of Alpena.

Fr. John Troester left and was replaced by Fr. Richard Seifferly in September of 1966. In September 1967, the new school opened. It was a moment of pride and joy for all the people.

The decade of the 1970's was a busy time for St. Mary's parish involving liturgical, pastoral, financial, and administrative changes. Fr. Lawrence Boks was transferred in January of 1970 to become pastor at St. Dominic Church in Metz. Arriving in his place was Fr. William Beitz. In May of 1970, the Saginaw Diocese reorganized its financial structure and introduced the Catholic Services Appeal. In the past, each parish was assessed a percentage of its income, and contributed in special collections. Now, the diocese asked each parishioner to make an annual contribution to support the activities of the diocesan and universal church. Consequently, many special collections were eliminated. Each parish was now given a quota each year to meet. This was the beginning of the C.S.A. in the diocese and still remains the means to finance the diocese and the universal needs of the church.

The year 1971 witnessed many important developments that touched the lives of the people of St. Mary's Parish. On February 11, 1971, Fr. Beitz left St. Mary's for St. Stanislaus in Bay City while Fr. Ron Gronowski replaced him as assistant. The lay people of the parish received greater voice in the administration of the parish through the formation of a parish council. In accordance with the wishes of Vatican II and the bishop, a Steering Committee had formed a constitution and by-laws for adoption by the whole parish membership. The council became the means by which the laity could participate in the administration and goals of the parish. Another development affected the school. Due to the rising cost of education, the inability to balance the parish budget, and a debt repayment program, the Parish Board of Education decided to close the 7th and 8th grades of St. Mary School and run grades 1-6. The parish debt stood at \$301,500.00. The inability of all four parishes to meet the mounting financial needs to conduct Catholic Central High School resulted in its closure in June of 1971. These two blows certainly disturbed the Alpena Catholic Community.

Another blow resulted when lightning struck the church steeple in March of 1971, resulting in the removal of the noble 82 year landmark, the largest of all city steeples. The steeple was removed and replaced by a squat all-wood shingle roof for the sum of \$10,000.00.

On June 20, 1971, Alpena became part of the new Gaylord Diocese. In its one hundred years of existence, St. Mary's Parish belonged to three different dioceses: Grand Rapids, Saginaw, and now Gaylord. In response to the concern of the Michigan bishops and particularly the initiative of Bishop Reh, the Holy See under Pope Paul VI formed a new diocese in northern Michigan called the Diocese of Gaylord. Bishop Edmund Szoka was installed as the first bishop of the new diocese. Bishop Szoka, a native of Grand Rapids, raised in Muskegon, was a man of strong faith, fully dedicated to the priesthood, and enjoyed a great capacity for work and service. To help him in this task, Bishop Szoka appointed Fr. Ron Gronowski to serve as Secretary to the Bishop. When Fr. Gronowski left, there was no assistant sent. The parish had only a single priest — Fr. Raymond Mulka. The shortage of priests was very evident in the new diocese.

St. Mary's had fostered religious and priestly vocations for years. In August of 1971 one of her sons, Msgr. Kenneth Povish, who was baptized at St. Mary's on April 27, 1924, became the Bishop of the Diocese of Crookston, Minnesota. Later Bishop Povish was transferred to the Diocese of Lansing in Michigan.

During 1972, the large debt loomed as the major problem. The parish goal was to lessen the school debt (\$300,000.00). The "Debt Fund" was the set-up to deal with the problem. Parishioners were asked to use the monthly "Debt Fund" envelope. In the midst of his difficulties, Fr. Mulka received timely help from Fr. Charles Klingshirn who arrived in March of 1972. Drawing on his experience as a builder, he volunteered to head a group to install the underlayment and carpeting in the church.

After 10 years as pastor at St. Mary's, Fr. Mulka was transferred to St. Francis Church in Traverse City, taking with him Fr. Klingshirn. "Here I am Lord, for you called." This verse from that Sunday's reading was quoted by St. Mary's Parish tenth pastor, Fr. Raymond Pilarski, when he arrived on March 15, 1973. Fr. Mulka described his successor as follows: "He is one of our most ablest and more efficient administrators, with extraordinary stability, practical judgment and common sense. It will be encouraging to see him use his genius at efficient administration to solve all the loose ends which I have left undone." Fr. Pilarski, a native of Rogers City, of Polish background, was ordained on June 4, 1955. Serving first as assistant at St. Stanislaus in Bay City, where aside from priestly duties, he taught in the high school and served as Athletic Director. His first assignment as pastor was to St. Michael Parish, Wilmot and mission church, St. Joseph Parish, Mayville from June 1960 to June 1968. He then served as pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Tawas City from June 19, 1968 to March 15, 1973. One of Fr. Pilarski's priorities was to deal with the high debt that burdened the parish. His first step was to initiate the "stewardship" and "tithing" programs within the parish. He presented the financial problem to the parish in clear terms: the parish was in debt \$251,000.00 and mandatory payments had to be made. Sacrifice and tithing were needed if St. Mary's was to meet its obligations. The people accepted Fr. Pilarski's honest challenge to face up to their financial responsibilities.

The physical needs of the parish were taken up by the new administrator. A complete report was given on all the parish buildings, the school being the biggest problem. Aggregate-faced panels on the outside walls were falling off, they had to be removed and replaced; masonry was cracking;

the cafeteria roof was sagging and a "pond" was forming on the roof. All these problems were repaired by the responsible parties: the architect, the contractor, the supplier and engineering firm with no cost to the parish. After the school was taken care of, the church needs were looked into. The redecoration of the church was completed in 1974 with all monies coming from the generous donations of the parishioners. A much needed cry room and rest room were built in the church with volunteer help. Many generous and gifted men gave of their time and talents to these projects. Fr. Pilarski adopted the theme of Time, Talent, and Treasures (Stewardship) as the theme of his pastorate. He was dealing realistically with the situation and the parishioners understood and cooperated. In 1975-1976, extensive renovations were made in the rectory and convent.

During all this time, Fr. Pilarski also worked to develop the faith commitment of the parish. With the expansion of the CCD program, new CCD quarters were constructed on the second floor of the school. CCD Co ordinators were hired to administer to the needs of the 500 children attending CCD Classes. Lay teachers now conducted regular evening classes every week during the school year, and a preschool program was once again implemented on Sunday. Much effort was concentrated on educational programs during these years. Adult education classes were arranged and teacher training courses were offered. Also, a Youth Group was introduced into the parish in 1974 to enable young people to become more actively involved in the parish.

The parish did not forget the deep debt it owed to the Felician Sisters over the years. October 20, 1974 was a grand day for the Felician Sisters at St. Mary's Parish. It marked 100 years of dedicated service in the United States. Special celebrations were held in their honor for serving continually for 84 years at St. Mary Parish. In those years, hundreds of sisters offered their services to generations of St. Mary's parishioners.

After the departure of Fr. Klingshirn, St. Mary's Parish had no assistant. Fr. Pilarski labored alone until Fr. Thaddeus (Ted) Kopek arrived on December 12, 1974. He was born in Gdansk, Poland, ordained in 1966, served as assistant in Gdansk, and later in Trenton, New Jersey. Fr. Kopek, a young red-headed Polish priest learned to love the people of St. Mary's, the American customs and English language. With his arrival, Polish liturgies were added — such as mass, homilies, and Gorzkie Zale.

The financial picture at St. Mary's showed great improvements. By 1974, the Stewardship program was working and the debt was being rapidly paid off. Income was increasing. After four years of trying to sell Catholic Central High School, a purchaser finally was found. The sale of the former Catholic school became a reality — the purchase price, 5250,000.00. St. Mary Parish would receive 1/3 of that amount over a ten-year period. In December of 1975 the parish received the first annual payment from that sale. Immediate debt reduction was made. The pastor's analysis of the Financial Report for January 1976 showed Tithing was working; all expenses and budget projections were being carried out. This financial progress reached its culmination when the Financial Report of January, 1977 brought great joy to the parishioners. The big news was that the \$300,000.00 loan from People Bank & Trust had been paid off! The loan, dating back to October 19, 1967 was liquidated. However, the parish still had a debt of \$100,000.00 owed to the Diocese of Gaylord. By June of 1978, all parish debts were paid off and plans for savings were immediately initiated. Another great project had been accomplished by the parish under the leadership of Fr. Pilarski.

Pastoral concerns were also paramount in the parish during these years. Boy Scout Troop, Council

265 of the Thunderhead District, became a part of St. Mary's Parish, established in 1974. In March 1975, a new proposed Parish Council Constitution was set up and ratified by the parish. At this time, four standing committees were revised and reorganized. The Children's Choir was initiated through the new Liturgy Committee. Children in grades 4 and 5 began singing at the 10:30 a.m. Mass. The Sister Chaplains began their ministry to the spiritual, mental and emotional needs of the aged and shutins of the hospital and homes. They began their ministry through the sponsorship of the newly reorganized League of Catholic Women with all four Catholic parishes participating. The Rosary Society was also reformed, younger members were urged to join.

St. Mary's Parish opened the first kindergarten in the Gaylord Diocese in September 1976. A total of 25 youngsters were registered in the initial class.

To aid the disabled, handicapped, and elderly, a wheelchair lift was installed on the entrance/exit on Miller St. in November of 1979. The youth of the parish became more deeply involved in the Sunday Liturgy with the initiation of the Youth Mass. A Youth Choir was started; youth ushers were organized; youth commentators served as lectors at the 9:00 a.m. Mass on Sundays. In 1980, we celebrated the "Year of the Family." Special liturgies throughout the year enriched family life.

While the parish was moving forward spiritually and financially, changes were taking place in personnel. Official word arrived from the bishop's office of the transfer of Fr. Kopek on July 25, 1979 to St. Joseph Church, Manistee. Fr. Ted served the people of St. Mary Parish for five years. To take his place, the bishop sent Fr. John Ladd. Fr. Ladd had spent some time in the Peace Corps and some years teaching school prior to entering the priesthood. The young people of the parish grew to love Fr. Ladd.

On June 1, 1980, Fr. Pilarski celebrated his 25th Anniversary of Ordination with an Open House at the school, a special mass in the church at 4:30 p.m., and a banquet at the KC Hall. There was much feeling of love and appreciation. The parish worked long and hard to make this a day to remember for Fr. Pilarski. In August, Fr. Pilarski received word from Bishop Szoka of his appointment to the Fall, 1980 session of the Institute for Continuing Theological Education at the Graduate Department of the North American College in Rome at the Casa de Santa Maria. He arrived in Rome on September 25, 1980 and returned home on December 13, 1980. The time was a moving grow in knowledge and love of the church.

Changes were in the air once more. On Friday, May 8, 1981, the Szoka at St. Mary Cathedral in Gaylord. Bishop Szoka was promoted to Archbishop of Detroit. Fr. Ladd was transferred from St. Mary's Parish on August 5, 1981 to become assistant pastor at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Traverse City. Fr. Ladd served faithfully and selflessly at St. Mary's for two years, working well with the young, caring for the sick, and giving inspiration to all. His place was taken by Fr. Richard Sitar, the present assistant. Fr. Sitar, a native of Detroit, and of Polish descent, was a late vocation. He was 52 years old when he was ordained in 1979. Fr. Sitar had been a Brother of the Holy Cross for 27 years and had taught school, both on the secondary and university levels. He brought a rich background to the service of the people of St. Mary's.

The Felician Sisters also experienced changes. Sister Mary Edwardine, principal at St. Mary School for five years left for Jackson. Her successor was Sister Firmine who served as principal from September of 1976 to June of 1979. St. Mary School's present principal arrived on August 7, 1979. Sister Paphnutia's jovial and happy disposition won the children's hearts quickly. November 25,

1980, marked the 125th year of existence of the Felician Sisters. The community was founded in 1885 by Mother Angela Turuskowska in Warsaw, Poland. Although the sisters changed their habits and customs, they never changed their spirit of dedication.

Among the recent events at St. Mary's that helped to contribute to the life of the parish was the "St. Francis Project" as Fr. Pilarski called it. The idea was to preserve the true meaning of Christmas by "Keeping Christ in Christmas." A life-size manger scene was built in 1981 through the generosity of personal donations and through many hours of donated labor. The manger has become a permanent fixture at St. Mary's during Christmas time.

There was sadness in the parish when it was learned that Fr. Kopek died on October 17, 1981. The parish mourned deeply of the loss of one of its former priests.

On April 25, 1982, Mrs. Florence Kowalski, our parish organist for 30 years, retired. In recognition of her service to St. Mary's Parish, she was honored at a special Mass, a "Retirement Party," and a very special gift from the parish — a trip to Rome and the Holy Land.

On June 21, 1982, the Parish Council decided to replace the furnace in the school. The old system was beyond repair. Among other developments in 1982, repairs and maintenance work took place in the church, rectory, and domek. Heat-saving measures were taken, caulking, window repairs made, storm windows put up, domek was re-sided and insulated. A new parish library and reading room was set up in the convent basement.

There have been change and challenges, sadness and joy, as the years have passed. Generations of pastors, teachers, students, parents, and children have worked to make St. Mary's the largest parish in Alpena. They have contributed time, talent, and treasure to build a parish that has turned out fine outstanding and valued citizens of the Alpena community. These men and women have been and still are a credit to St. Mary's, to Alpena and to the Catholic church.

So we come to the present, 1983, our Centennial year. The end of our written history. History now continues in our lives as we grow and mature in our loving service to God and our community.

Our parish can be compared to a living organism in several ways, having a birth and then growing into maturity. This has been the experience of countless Christian communities throughout the world since that first community gathered in Jerusalem and experienced the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As Christ was present in them, so He is present in the St. Mary Community in Alpena. We, today, continue the work started two thousand years ago — to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. This great task was carried out in the past by ordinary people, and it is ordinary people who continue the work in the Holy Spirit today. God works out His plan through the lives of people, through their joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments. God's plan is being realized in history, moving toward its ultimate completion when all the world will grow into the full stature of Christ. As the disciples of Christ, the people of St. Mary's, together with their priests, have been carrying out God's plan to reconcile all things in Christ. The way has had its successes and failures, but it still is incomplete. Today, as in the past, the present generation of parishioners, ordinary men and women, have the task to build upon their rich heritage, and press eagerly into the future toward the realization of the great design — the final victory of the reign of God in the world.