A blessed Christmas!

As we celebrate this season of peace and joy, KEM Electric Cooperative's pages feature some of the area's grand churches. Read more inside.

New steps lead to St. Mary's Church in Hague, where the oldest continuous German-Russian Catholic church stands.

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Celebrate Christmas safely
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Prairie churches capture God’s grandeur

With their ceilings soaring toward the heavens, awe-inspiring altars and faith-filled architecture, the Catholic churches in Strasburg and Hague are more than just buildings to Father Paul Eberle.

These are his boyhood churches, where Father Leonard Eckroth led the faithful of the parish for 22 years before retiring. Beginning in June, Father Paul now leads the faithful of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Strasburg, St. Mary’s Church in Hague and St. Michael’s Church in rural Linton.

Since his ordination June 2, 2005, Father Paul was the associate pastor at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck.

Then the bishop asked Father Paul about serving the Strasburg area.

“When the Bishop mentioned it, my first reaction was excitement,” Father Paul said. “Then, there was a little apprehension. I know most of the people well, and they know me well. However, the positives far outweigh the negatives.”

Father Paul now juggles a full schedule at the three churches, leading the youth and visiting with parishioners. Father Albert Leary, a retired priest, is able to assist with Mass at the Strasburg Care Center and when Father Paul needs assistance elsewhere.

Living in the rectory in Strasburg, Father Paul is close to his family roots. He points to the pews where his family usually sat in the Hague church and stops for a visit with his mother, who lives in Hague.

“Mom drops off some kneepha soup sometimes, too,” he laughed.

EBERLE FAMILY

Father Paul’s parents, Viola and the late Joseph M. Eberle, farmed near Hague until
the family moved into Hague after Joe’s health began to fail. The Eberles had 16 children, including twins Peter and Paul (Peter is eight minutes older). The 16th child, Luke, was stillborn in 1983. Father Paul attended several area schools, graduating from Strasburg High School in 1996. But even then, he was still pondering his future. Peter and Paul first discussed the priesthood while in junior high school and Father Paul still remembers the first time they talked about it with each other. “It seemed far-fetched, but we were open to what God might want us to do,” Father Paul recalled. Coincidentally, or miraculously, the phone rang a few minutes later. It was Monsignor Gerald Walsh, then the vocations director for the diocese. “I prayed about it a lot,” Father Paul said. The brothers both attended the Cardinal Muench Seminary in Fargo, but after two years, Peter made the decision to leave the seminary. “We talked about it for a long time,” Father Paul said. “It was the right decision for him.” Father Paul entered the Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis, Mo., for his final four years of religious studies. After two years, Paul felt he needed to take time to discern whether the priesthood was truly his calling. He moved back to North Dakota and spent a year working as a carpenter and for I. Keating Furniture World in Bismarck. “The priesthood is a big commitment,” Father Paul said. “I wanted to be sure I was doing what God wanted me to do.” He prayed about it, feeling that God wanted him to decide one way or the other. “Over that year, I felt a deepened sense of trust in what God was calling me to do, and I then could say ‘yes’ to the priesthood,” Father Paul said. Now, that calling has brought him back to his Emmons County room where he will minister to relatives, lifelong friends and people who have moved to the area. “Everyone has welcomed me and is being very supportive,” Father Paul said. “I am excited to be on this journey together in our faith.”

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The altar in Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Strasburg includes St. Peter, on the right holding a sword, and St. Paul, on the left holding the keys to heaven.

The stained glass window in the Strasburg church depicts the nativity scene.

**Churches have proud heritage**

St. Mary’s Church parish of Hague is the oldest continuous German-Russian Catholic parish in North Dakota. The church began with a small wooden church built in 1890 in Selz, about a mile west of Hague. In 1906, a brick church was completed in Hague, but fire claimed the building in 1929. Just a year later, the parishioners had built a duplicate of their original brick church. Oil paintings adorn the ceiling, and more than 100 statues and paintings of angels are found throughout the church.

Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church was completed in Strasburg in 1911. It was at the original church that Lawrence Welk was baptized in 1903.

Both structures are unique in North Dakota. “They don’t build them like this anymore,” says Father Paul Eberle. “Each one has its own gifts and challenges,” he says. Both listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the buildings have undergone remodeling lately to keep the historic structures intact.

“Our ancestors built these churches,” Father Paul says. “Faith was important.”

More than 100 statues grace St. Mary’s Church.

Fourteen scenes adorn the church in Hague, depicting the death of Jesus on the cross.