St. Martin's Catholic Church to celebrate 100 years

St. Martin's Catholic Church History
1914-2014

Charles and Elizabeth Dolan were the first Catholics to settle in the Hazen area in 1883. Their daughter, Elizabeth, was the first white child born in Mercer County. The Dolans were followed by the John Gallaghers in 1884, John and Christ Isselmanns in 1893, Jacob Hoepfners in 1901, Constantine Giesen, Christ and George Gleason came in 1902, Pete Jacobs in 1904 and John McLaughlin in 1905 and Christ Mestel in 1909. These families became the nucleus of a Catholic congregation. Missionary priests served the Catholic settlers until the early 1900s. Father Goebel came from Bismarck to say Mass at the Gallagher home every couple months. After the Keeley Opera House was built in the new town of Hazen, Mass was held there the first Sunday of every month.

The first church was dedicated May 2, 1915, on property donated by Michael Keeley where the present church now stands. Father Goebel continued to serve as pastor of the church until 1916 and served again from 1917 until 1919. All the priests who served until 1921 lived in Bismarck and would travel to Hazen to celebrate Mass. In 1921, the Precious Blood Fathers began serving three parishes in North Dakota.

They were Hazen, Linton and Killdeer. The first full-time Hazen priest was Father Evarestus Olberding who served from 1921 to 1927.

Father Charles Bauer served from 1927 to 1937. Like many priests in the area, he spoke both English and German and gave the sermon in both languages each Sunday. The left side of the church was often referred to as the German side and the right side the English side. This was because after the priest gave an English sermon on the right side, he moved over to the other side and gave the sermon in German.

Father Heman Schmitter served from 1937 to 1941. Father H. Wibbels came to our parish in 1941. The Hazen priest would have Mass in Halliday when there was a fifth Sunday in the month and went to Zap one Saturday a month. Up until this time, Beulah was a mission church. The priest lived in Hazen and the 8 and 10 o'clock Mass alternated between the two towns. When we had the 8 o'clock Mass, then the 10 o'clock Mass would be in Beulah. The next Sunday, we would have the 10 o'clock and Beulah would have the 8 o'clock Mass. After Beulah had a resident priest, Hazen had two masses every Sunday. Father Raymond Gillozet served from 1949 to 1954. With the help of his brother, they built the parish house next to the church. Father Henry Barge served from 1954 to 1961.

Father Theodore Rath was here from 1961 to 1963. This was a very troubled time in our parish as we had to raise money to build the new church. Work had been started on the present church in 1962. The old church had been moved back to what is now our parking lot and used for services while the new church was being constructed. The new church was completed in 1963.

Father Robert Wuest was our priest from 1963 to 1974. He organized the parish council and recommended that the council consist of the four trustees, plus one more man, three women and one youth elected by the parishioners. It was decided that all committees and organizations of St. Martin's are responsible to the parish council.

Father Henry Hess came to our parish in 1974. After all the bills were paid for the new church, he had selected February 29, 1976, as a day on which our parish would celebrate its freedom from debt. He didn't get to celebrate here with us as he died a month earlier. Following his death, we were served by Father Sebastian Schmidt, Father Tom Welk and Father Bill Miller until we got a permanent priest.

Father Victor Kreinbrink served our parish from 1976 to 1981 when he became ill and he passed away in 1982. Father J. Biegler was sent to serve while Father Kreinbrink was ill and stayed till Father Anthony Ley came in 1982. On July 11, 1989, Father Ley was dressed and ready to leave the parish house to say Mass when he had a heart attack and died. Father Eugene Wehner then served from 1989 to 1990. Father James Reardon served from 1990 to 1998. Father Charles Zins served from 1998 to 2005. He helped build the fellowship addition onto the church while most of the work was done by our parishioners. Father Johnson Kuriappilil served from 2005 to 2013. He painted the murals on either side of the altar. Father Ken Phillips came in 2013 and serves as our current pastor.

All records of the Altar Society were destroyed when the basement of the church flooded one spring, but the Hazen Star stated an activity in the April 1915 issue. So, they may have been formed even before the church was built. A few years we were known as the Christian Mothers. The ladies job was to keep the church clean and all the altar linens washed and ironed. In the earlier days, the ladies took turns doing this. Later, circles were formed which not only made the cleaning more organized, but also made it easier to serve for weddings or funerals. There was always a Fall Bazaar with bingo, games, fancy work and a big meal served. This was prepared by the women and sometimes some men and then served by the girls of the parish. As in all organizations, some years enthusiasm is high and much is accomplished. Other years are down years and we need to renew the spirit of our early pioneer mothers.

After eight years as a club with St. Martin's in Center, members here decided to form their own Knights of Columbus Council in 1983. Father Lay was instrumental in getting the council started and served as our first council chaplain. The name of Fr. Hess-Kreinbrink Council was named for two of our late priests. The Knights of Columbus have donated thousands of dollars to various charities over the years.