

**Holy Rosary Church, Isadore, Michigan:
Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, 120 Years of Faith**
Information supplied by Holy Rosary Church



Holy Rosary Church

In 2002, Holy Rosary Church in Isadore (Cedar), Michigan, marked 120 years since construction began on the first church building. Our forefathers would be proud to see that we have held fast to the faith that was their cornerstone as they built their lives in the "New World."

Let's take a look back at where it all began. . .

Our roots at Holy Rosary Parish began when the political powers of Russia, Austria and Prussia conquered the Slavic minorities during the 18th century. It was during this time that there was a mass exodus to America. Many of these Slavic and Polish people came to America to the cities of Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and Milwaukee.

Treaties with the Indians and the 1862 Homestead Act opened America's heartland to emigrating families. Milwaukee Poles steamed across Lake Michigan to Manistee and Leelanau Counties. In 1868, Stephen Niemczynski came into this area settling around Centerville Township. In a few years, more pioneer families arrived. They included the Stefaniak, Dezelski, Cychacki, Fleis and Peplinski families.

Amidst forested hills and valleys, pioneers cleared land for log cabins, wells and farms. They suffered untold hardships in providing for food, clothing and shelter. They agonized over their sick and dying children during the era of high infant mortality.

It was during this time, the 1870's, that traveling missionaries, Father Frederic Baraga and Father Ignatius Mrak, began visiting the families clustered at Isadore Corners named for Saint Isadore, the patron saint of farmers. (In 1890, when a postoffice was established, the settlement was officially given the name Isadore.) These missionaries brought the sacraments to the people of Isadore. The Holy Eucharist was celebrated in many of the homes, first at the home of Stephen Niemczynski and later at the Michael Gatzke, Sr., residence. The first Polish wedding took place in April of 1876.

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The community of Isadore, around the 1880s added many new people whose strong spirit, neither difficulties nor sacrifices could tarnish or crush. Additional families have woven their efforts and zeal into the new rising Mission Church. According to the old records, the list of families included: Jakub Glaza, Anton Leduk, Adam Poppa, Joseph Poppa (Popa), James Lolewcn, Francis and Thomas Flysse (Flis), John Flisse (Flis), John Szudrowicz, Stanislaw Prjanek, Joseph Zbonik, John Stefaniak, Joseph Odaj, Joseph Kiedrowicz, Anthony Dziedielski, John Szanowski, Leon Peplinski, Frank Kneter (Knitter), Paul Peplinski, Michael Gatzke, Jacob Rosinski, Francis Poppa, Michael Rays, John Flisse, Maximillian Rinski, John Mazurek, Vincent Pleva, John Jankowski, Andrew Skiba, Alozy Piotrowski, Stephen Poppa, Adam Malszowski, Adam Riclinski, Stanislaus Zientek, Stephen Niemczynski, Stephen Nowak, Gregory Chyacki, Frank Bodus, August Gierz, Leon Perzyk, John Perzyk, Antony Darga, John Bosynski, Contantine Kelinski, Joseph April, Adam Zbonik, Frank Stanislawski, Michael Miller, John Milkowski and Peter Mikowski. It was these families in 1882, February 13, who contributed the first gifts to begin the building of a new church.

On June 9, 1882, lumber was purchased to begin the new church. According to the first plan that land parceled from a farm now owned by Michael Maslowski was to be the site of the proposed building, but since this was very remote from most of the people, another plot of land was acquired. Upon the advice of Jacob Rosinski, a new and more convenient site for all the parishioners was agreed upon. Fortunately, John Szudrowski, who owned the present property belonging to John Miller donated five acres of land on which the present church now stands.

In November of that same year, Aloysius Piotrowski, with many volunteers began the construction of the first church. On its completion, the Rt. Rev. Ignatius Mrak, D.D., one of our first missionaries, dedicated the Mission Church, on August 16, 1883

For the next ten years, priest from Petoskey, Traverse City, Manistee and Provemont (now Lake Leelanau) brought the sacraments and celebrated the Holy Eucharist at least once a month. When there was not priest, the parishioners gathered in their church weekly to pray the rosary, sing hymns and proclaim the Word of God.

By 1892 the parish family grew and construction began on the first school. However, two years later the school burned down and another was constructed in 1896. Growing population stimulated by lumber mills and the railroad, prompted Bishop Richter to appoint Father Stephen Nowakowski in 1898 as the first pastor of Holy Rosary Church.

Prior to this time, while the community was served by visiting missionaries, the church records were first kept in Petoskey, and later in Provemont (now Lake Leelanau).

In February 1898, Father Nowakowski persuaded the Felician Sisters to teach and operate the Catholic School and 73 youngsters began school that year.



The first Holy Rosary Church Building

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In 1912 the post office was discontinued in favor of rural deliver from Cedar, so the current mailing address is Cedar, Michigan.

The heroic lives of these pioneer families enabled Holy Rosary Parish to grow by leaps and bounds. By the end of the First World War, however, disaster struck. An influenza epidemic occurred in the rural community. Father Stephen Narloch, a priest son of the Parish, arrived as the fifth pastor and turned pessimism into new hope as he persuaded the people to erect a new church in 1920. Father Narloch aroused the people in such a way that families hauled in field stones all summer. Stone masons, John Wirt, John Mikowski and Al Piotrowski worked all summer and fall in 1921-22, while many parishioners pitched in mixing the mortar and doing the carpentry.

On December 12, 1923, Bishop Kelly blessed the new Holy Rosary Church. The Roman-style edifice was beautified with 13 stained glass windows fired in Munich, Germany.

Fifteen years later (1938), Father John Klonowski became the seventh pastor. Because of his interest in Catholic education, Father Klonowski promoted the idea of a High School. The school was remodeled and in 1942 the first graduation took place. Untold sacrifices from parents, teachers and students kept the high school in operation for nearly 20 years as 168 students graduated.

Many persons can recall the sacrifices of their ancestors as they gave their time, talent and treasure to build the Catholic faith in this community. Some of the unwritten history can be found in the way they took time to cut wood from the parish woods to heat the school and church. During the summer, there was no vacation or rest, because the people gave their time and talent to have summer festivals to raise funds to educate and teach.

Under the pastorate of Father Herman Kolenda, and the supervision of Edward Fleis, a new convent was built in 1957. Again, the parishioners and students of Holy Rosary pitched in thousands of hours to provide a home for the Felician Sisters.

Father Al Ulanowicz, in the earlier 1960s, kept the faith alive by his calling forth families to work together. The church basement was remodeled for social purposes and the annual chicken dinners. Skilled laborers from the parish gave their time and talent to install a new boiler and heating system for the whole plant. Many hours were donated by Joseph Gersh (Giersz) for almost 30 years, where he shared his talents to assist with repairs and maintenance. When the rectory of 1899 burned in 1967, a new rectory was completed in 1969 under the direction of John Fleese (Flis) and many other parishioners.

Looking at the statistics of Holy Rosary Parish, we can reflect on the work of the whole community for the Lord. In the first 100 years of existence there were 2,641 baptisms, which also included First Communions and Confirmations; 610 celebrations of the Sacrament of Marriage and 758 funerals.

God loving families have nurtured the minds and hearts of their children. Since its beginnings the Holy Rosary Family has had 40 daughters listed in religious orders, and eight sons ordained priests.

Holy Rosary School provided a Catholic education for the children of the parish for 100 years, but sadly in 1999 the school ceased functioning as a provider of standard education classes. However, the spirit of our forefathers still remains, and although no longer a grade school, the school building provides a home for a flourishing religious education program in conjunction with Saint Rita/Saint Joseph of Maple City, with over 100 children enrolled during the academic year 2002-2003.

Our history continues as we give our time, talent and treasure to God and His Church.