

**SAINT JOSEPH'S
CATHOLIC PARISH**
Renovo, Pennsylvania



ST. JOSEPH - - OUR PARISH PATRON

1869



1969

- CENTENNIAL -

May 23 - June 1, 1969



First Church of St. Joseph's Parish 1870

HISTORY of St. JOSEPH'S ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

Many of the town's earliest settlers were Irish and German, a large portion of whom were Catholics. Thus Catholic services were held in Renovo from the very start of the town, which was incorporated in 1862. The pioneer priest was Father Gilligan who came up the river by boat to conduct services in private homes and temporary buildings.

In 1869, St. Joseph's Parish was organized under the Harrisburg diocese by Bishop Shanahan with Father Kaelin, who remained here as the first pastor until 1870 when he was replaced by Father Edward Field.

Some of the first parishioners as listed in Renovo Old Home Week Publication dated 1908 were: Edward McConnell, Patrick Kelley, James O'Hagan, James Murphy, Thomas Tierney, Thomas McCann, Anthony Dwyer, Stephen Ryder, William Walsh, George Burgess, Patrick Walls, Felix McCabe and James T. Condon.

Father Field's first step was to build on Larch St. a 75 ft. by 25 ft. wooden frame structure to serve as a place of worship and on Ninth St. a rectory on the six lots acquired from the Philadelphia and Erie Land Company at a cost of \$1,027.00, deed recorded April 6, 1869. The wooden structure was used later as the first Parochial School building where the pupils used desks attached to the pews and supported by portable braces.

In the weekly published Renovo Record dated January 4, 1872: "The Catholic congregation here is quite large, they have built a fine Chapel and a beautiful residence for their pastor. They have secured

an eligible plot of ground on which they mean to build a large and elegant church." The first Men's Choir was formed about this time.

In 1871 Father T. J. Reilly served the parish and organized the St. Joseph's Beneficial Society, which was credited with presenting the first lectures in Renovo.

Father Reilly was one of the first citizens in Renovo to be stricken with smallpox which left him in ill health and, because of this, he was replaced in 1872 by Father Schmidt who remained as pastor until 1877. To Father Schmidt goes the credit of organizing the first Parochial School. The first school consisted of nine grades in charge of Thomas Egan, Mary Hogan Weymouth and Gilbert Benton, who was the first man from the parish to enter the priesthood and later achieved the title of Monsignor and served in the post of Vicar General of the Harrisburg diocese.

During the year of 1875 Father Schmidt supervised the building of a combination Church and School. The contract for this building was awarded to T. F. Singer, May 20, 1875. The building 36 ft. by 64 ft. had two wings, 12x18 for an altar and 9x12 for vestry. The first floor would seat 480 persons and the gallery exclusive of organ and choir to seat 100 persons. The brick work was to be 32 ft. high with Gothic gables facing Huron Avenue and Ninth Street. The school wing would be separated by a hall and contain three rooms, 9x24. The cost was \$12,000.00.

On October 19, 1876 this Church was consecrated by Bishop Shanahan in the presence of a large assemblage of people.

In response to Father Schmidt's request, four Sisters of Mercy were assigned here to teach and took up residence in the present Kuller home on Ninth Street.

On November 9, 1876 they opened classes in the newly erected building with an enrollment of seventy one pupils. The enrollment increased so rapidly that in October 1877, with an enrollment of two hundred sixty pupils, it was necessary to again use the original frame building. An observant citizen declared the Parochial Schools are "under efficient management and are in prosperous condition".

The Blessed Virgin Sodality was organized in the school in 1877 and remained in existence until the close of our High School in 1967.

Also organized at this time was The Society of the Sacred Heart and Saint Patrick's Beneficial Society.

It was in 1876 that the five acre Drury's Run Cemetery was acquired from James Murphy and wife, at the cost of \$500.00. On June 6, 1881 Bishop Shanahan came to Renovo to administer Confirmation to one hundred persons and at 3:30 P. M. there was a procession to Drury's Run Cemetery at which time it was solemnly consecrated.

Father McIlheny took charge of the parish November 23, 1877 and remained until October, 1878, during which time he worked zealously to reduce the debt he found had been contracted in previous years.

When Father James Igoe assumed the responsibilities of the congregation in 1878 there was considerable sectarian feeling here, but with the help of Father Barr he was able to dispel this feeling and equip a pioneer corps which was long remembered.

Father Igoe commenced construction of the original Convent building located on Ninth Street. A third story was added to this structure in 1882 and was used until the present Convent was constructed in 1961. The high school department occupied the southern front rooms of the Convent from 1877 to 1883.

Father Matthew Ig. O'Reilly was sent here as Administrator on October 15, 1887 and took up the task of reducing the debt incurred in the building of the Church and Convent.

Father O'Reilly was a great advocate of total abstinence and worked energetically to organize Father Matthew's Total Abstinence Society which was in existence for many years.

The newly consecrated Bishop McGovern made his first visit to Renovo June 17, 1888 and administered Confirmation to one hundred seventy persons.

On May 21, 1883, Father J. J. Gormley was appointed pastor and to him goes the credit for building our present Church building and improving the convent, rectory and school buildings.

On August 15, 1892 the corner stone of the Church was laid with fitting ceremonies presided over by Right Reverend Bishop McGovern. This was a day to be long remembered. Excursion trains were run from Kane and Williamsport. Bishop McGovern arrived on the Fast Line accompanied by Rev. G. L. Benton. Three Masses were celebrated. Confirmation was administered to one hundred seventy people and a parade with all Catholic Societies was reviewed by Bishop McGovern.

This solemn service began with the reading of prayers assigned by the Church and the blessing of the Cross, which was placed where the main altar in the completed Church would be erected. Bishop McGovern, wearing the Episcopal Robes, with a golden trowel placed some mortar on the foundation where the corner stone with a tin box containing church data was to be placed, and with a bar put the stone in position. He then proceeded around the Church blessing the foundation and upon his return to the platform gave the Papal Benediction to all present.

Reverend G. L. Benton was the celebrant of the Solemn High Mass on January 27, 1897 when the new Church was dedicated by Bishop McGovern. It was considered the most magnificent in the state and at one time was the only building in the United States of this type built without pillars, permitting an unobstructed view of the altar. The original cost was \$45,000.00.



The large Pipe Organ made by A.B. Felsingaker of Erie, Pa. was placed in the gallery and for the past fifty years the official organist at St. Joseph's has been Miss Johanna Donley. "The Name of 'Josie' Donley is seldom heard outside the St. Joseph's parish, but to the people who can recognize a great achievement there is a feeling that if there is an indispensable person in the church, she is it." (Renovo Standing Ovations, 1966.)

In February, 1891, Renovo Catholic Lyceum was organized. Its purpose was for the moral and intellectual advancement of its members.

Because of the burdensome building debt, in August 1892, Father Gormley found it necessary to petition the Renovo School Board to accept the students for the fall term. The board was amazed and after much negotiation and no solution for accommodating these pupils, Father Gormley notified the board that he would reconsider and continue to operate his school. This decision was welcomed by the public school directors and the congregation. Once more the community was impressed as to the important part the Parochial School was playing in our town. The first School Board was formed at this time (1892), with Mr. John Russell as its chairman.

St. Joseph's Parish became a part of the Altoona Diocese in 1902 which also meant a change in the teaching staff of our school. The Sisters of Mercy who had served for twenty-six years (1876-1902) were replaced by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The Knights of Columbus were organized in 1900 and are presently an inactive organization of our parish.

Father John J. Ludden became pastor in 1906. He found the congregation had grown, there being three hundred pupils in the grade school and fifty in the high school. The brick building that was being used could not hold all the children so he proceeded to build our present three story brick school.

The old school was torn down to make room and while this work was being done the pupils were taught in the Knights of Columbus rooms and the Renovo Borough building. The corner stone for the new school was placed in 1910 and the building was opened for use in 1911.

The Catholic Daughters of America, a national organization dedicated to promoting unity and charity among all Catholic women, was organized in our parish in 1909, and remains active with a membership of 103 women.

Father Peter Fox became our pastor in June, 1912. The people were impressed with his zeal and earnestness and worked tirelessly to help him reduce the tremendous building debt contracted during the previous years. Through his assistance, entertainment by the Lyceum for the benefit of Catholic Boys was developed. These were the days of home talent shows in Renovo and second to none were the productions of St. Joseph's Dramatic Club.

In 1913 the first basketball team, and later in 1913 the first football team, was formed in the parochial school.

Father Fox's Men's Choir is fondly remembered and acclaimed by all who sang in it or heard it.

It was during this time that the murals in the interior of our present church were painted.

During World War I, Father Fox was instrumental in organizing St. Joseph's Chapter of the American Red Cross, through which the ladies of the parish were able to aid our soldiers in many ways.

To this day the women of the church are contributing their time and talents to the maintenance of the church and altars through their efforts in the Altar and Rosary Society, which was formed in 1913.

Father O'Connor served as pastor from 1924 to 1932. A complete scouting movement was formed in 1929. Known as Troops 4 and 5, which consisted of Cub, Boy and Sea Scouts. They used a house on Tenth Street for their meeting place.



First Convent, Second Church-School
Rectory, Third Church—1908

The bell which peals forth each day was added to St. Joseph's Church in 1924. This fitting memorial was a tribute donated by his family in honor of William G. McCrea, who lost his life in the service of his country. This bell was made by the McShane Bell Foundry Co., Baltimore, Maryland and measures 46 inches wide at the base and is 38 inches high. Both the bell and the clapper move enabling the ringer to control the tone.

The Hycer Cemetery was purchased from Mrs. Molly Farwell Estate on September 25, 1925 for \$2,500.00. It consisted of forty acres.

When Father Gill became pastor in 1932 he thought the closing of the school might be necessary because of lack of funds, but again the earnestness and sacrifice of the parishioners made this unnecessary. It was learned that the public school teachers voluntarily donated one day's wages a month to aid Father Gill in maintaining the school, because they realized the added burden the increased enrollment would involve.

The "Thirty-six Flood" waters reached the front doors of the Church but no water entered the main floor of the church.

The Holy Name Society for the men of the parish was organized in 1937 and remains active with 31 members.

On December 8, 1939 a fire in the rectory caused considerable damage and while it was being rebuilt the Murphy residence on Fourth Street and Hazon Avenue was used as a rectory. Father P. J. O'Don-

well is credited with saving the life of Father Paul Carroll who was painfully burnt in this fire. The fire was confined to the back portion of the building and fortunately no church records were lost.

St. Joseph's School Band under the direction of Robert Nicholas was formed in 1938 and they received their "natty" uniforms in 1940.

The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine work which was carried on at this time was conducted by Father Howard Miller who served as pastor from 1943 to 1953.

A capsule view of the Parish taken from Renovo Old Home Week Publication dated July 1946:

"St. Joseph's Roman Catholic, the largest of Renovo's churches, has over 600 families in its fold. Rev. Howard T. Miller is the pastor and Rev. Vincent A. Luther, his assistant. They also serve a mission charge in Bitumen with 21 families. The church supports its own elementary school and senior high school. A progressive adult study club and a Parent-Educators group are under the leadership of the parish priests. The church property includes a fine school and convent as well as a rectory and church."

The Parent Educator Organization, which is still active under the name of Home-School Association, was organized in 1942. Its initial purpose was the financial aid of our school.

Father Miller conducted regular novena services for our military men during the time of World War II.

St. Joseph's Athletic Association was formed by the men of the parish in 1948 to aid in the financial support of the athletic program in the school. It remained in existence until 1967 when our high school was closed.

Father Albert Berthold served the parish in 1953 as Administrator, to be followed by Father Charles Hipp who served as pastor 1954 to 1958.

Father Hipp supervised the redecorating of the inside of the church including new lighting fixtures. It was during this time that the furnishings in the school were renewed and a Cafeteria Facility was started for the benefit of the school children. The rectory was also renovated under Father Hipp's supervision.

The Lighting Tableau, a tribute to all veterans of the area, was dedicated in 1956.

The need for a new convent was realized and it was Father John J. O'Toole who initiated the campaign for a \$100,000.00 building fund.

The lots 32 and 33 on Huron Avenue and Tenth Streets were purchased from James Hayes, December 19, 1958 at the cost of \$10,000.00. The contract for the building was awarded to Sergeant Construction Co. of Nanty Glo, Pa. for \$105,000.00.



(Present) School, Rectory, and Church.

Ground breaking ceremonies took place on July 12, 1961 and under the administration of Father Richard Conti this building was completed and occupied by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on January 31, 1962. Father Conti also supervised the updating of the present school building by the installation of efficient fire escapes and modern lavatories.

Father Oeler, our present pastor, joined us in 1962 and one need only look at the present status of the parish to realize the earnestness of his efforts.

Father Oeler supervised the installation of new lights and painting of the interior of the school, a new heating system in the school and church facility, paving the parking lot, complete renovation of the 70 year old organ bringing it up to modern tonal standards, cleaning of the outside brick and stonework of the church building, cleaning and refurbishing of the stained glass windows, installation of new storm windows and changes in the altar and sanctuary.

In 1963 the Legion of Mary was organized through which members of the parish carry on local missionary work.

It was with great regret and reluctance that our pastor found it necessary to close our High School in 1967 because of lack of teachers. The St. Joseph's Teen Club was organized shortly thereafter.

For about five years the young boys of our parish enjoyed the participation in a group called "The Little Singers", which delighted the congregation with group singing for church and public functions.

Their activities were ended when their beloved director Father Joseph J. Bender was transferred to another parish in 1968.

In 1967 the parish proudly celebrated the 75th Jubilee of the present church building.

St. Joseph's School Board was reorganized in 1968 and continues to aid our grade school attended by 194 pupils.

Statistics of the past century as taken from church records:

First Baptism:

"I baptized on the 16th day of May, 1869, Pius Mulvahil, a son, born on the 13th of May, to Daniel Mulvahil and Bridget Russel. Sponsors were: Patrick Russel and Sara O'Day." Rev. Joseph Kaelin.

First Marriage:

"January 18, 1870 I joined in matrimony Martin Nealon and Bridget Fitzpatrick, in presence of witnesses: Anthony Dwyer and Eleanor McCarty." Rev. John Beatzkes, officiating.

Number of Masses	100,000
Number of Communion	2,500,000
Number of Baptisms (includes 800 from Bitumen)	7,400
Number of Marriages (includes 100 from Bitumen)	1,600
Peak Number of Families (1922)	900
Number of Families (January 1, 1969)	423
Number of Souls (January 1, 1969)	1,675

As the new century begins, St. Joseph's Parish can look back at the last with interest and satisfaction; interest in what those who went before planned and accomplished by their efforts and persistence; satisfaction in the results of their work. Realizing that we cannot stand still, the parish looks forward with confidence and determination toward the next century, confident that the parish will continue on the foundation laid by those who have served the needs of the people, determined that their efforts toward that end shall succeed. We salute those who have contributed and those who will contribute toward this end.



MSGR. J. DONALD WAGNER

Graduated from St. Joseph's School— July 18, 1918
Ordained St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome — December 22, 1928
Present Location:
St. Mary's Rectory
Altoona, Pennsylvania



REV. CLIFFORD HEALY

Ordained for Diocese of Kansas City, Mo. — April 30, 1933
Present Location:
Seven Dolers Church
Easton, Missouri



REV. JOSEPH D. TOMKO

Graduated from St. Joseph's School — 1927
 Ordained in Cathedral of Blessed Sacrament Altoona —
 June 15, 1935
 Present Location:
 SS. Cyril and Methodius Church
 Windber, Pennsylvania



REV. JOSEPH W. BROPHY

Graduated from St. Joseph's School — 1928
 Ordained by Bishop John Mark Gannon — May 6, 1937
 Present location:
 St. Peter's Church
 Joplin, Missouri



REV. RICHARD E. CONTI

Graduated from St. Joseph's School — 1944
 Ordained by Most Rev. Richard T. Guilfoyle—May 19, 1951
 Present Location:
 St. Gregory Church
 Johnstown, Pennsylvania

PASTORS OF ST. JOSEPH'S PARISH
 1869 - 1969

Father John Gilligan—Missionary	.....	-69
Father Joseph Kaelin—Pastor	.....	1869-70
Father Edward T. Field—Pastor	.....	1870-71
Father Thomas J. Reilly—Pastor	.....	1871-72
Father F. X. Schmidt—Pastor	.....	1872-77
Father William F. McIlhenny—Pastor	.....	1877-78
Father James Igoe—Pastor	.....	1878-87
Father M. Ig. O'Reilly—Administrator	.....	1887-88
Father John J. Goemley—Pastor	.....	1888-06
Father John J. Ludden—Pastor	.....	1906-12
Father Peter Fox—Pastor	.....	1912-24
Father Michael T. O'Connor—Pastor	.....	1924-32
Father James J. Gill—Pastor	.....	1932-43
Father Howard T. Miller—Pastor	.....	1943-53
Father Albert J. Beethold—Administrator	.....	1953-54
Father Charles H. Hipp—Pastor	.....	1954-58
Father John A. O'Toole—Pastor	.....	1958-61
Father Richard E. Conti—Administrator	.....	1961-62
Father Gerard J. Oeler—Pastor	.....	1962-

MAY GOD BLESS THEM ALL FOR THEIR GOOD WORKS



St. Joseph's Convent, Renovo, Pa.—1959

The Parishioners of St. Joseph's, Renovo, wish in this humble manner to express our gratitude to all Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who have served our parish in any capacity. Without their prayers, help, and co-operation we could not have operated our school. We regret that personal mention of these numerous Sisters is impracticable.

MAY GOD BLESS THEM ALL

CENTENNIAL EVENTS

May 23—June 1	Exhibits
May 23	Teen Age Dance, St. Joseph's School
May 24	Adult Dance, Elk's Ballroom
May 25	School Children's Movie and Party
June 1	Open House, St. Joseph's Church Hall 1:30 till 3:30 P. M.

Mass celebrated by Bishop James J. Hogan — 4:00 P. M.

CENTENNIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

Father Gerard J. Oeler	General Chairman
Mrs. Jane McConaghay	Contributions
Mr. Patrick Simon	Finance
Mr. William E. Brunner	Finance and Publicity
Mrs. Doris Mayers	Publicity
Mr. Neil O'Brien	Publicity
Mrs. Rosemary House	Social Events (Adult)
Mr. Arthur Jones	Social Events (Adult)
Mrs. Marybelle Burnier	Teen-Age Dance
Mrs. Janet Stone	Children's Party
Mrs. Sylvia Kurutz	Kitchen
Mrs. Ann Greene	Kitchen
Mrs. Gertrude Paulhanus	Historian
Mr. Ramolo Malizia	Souvenirs
Mr. Vincent O'Connor	Souvenir Booklet
Mr. Joseph I. Grotzinger	Souvenir Booklet and History

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MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

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MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

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MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

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John E. Kelley Family

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Mr. and Mrs. John Paceni
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Mr. and Mrs. Francis Pagnotto
Mr. and Mrs. Michael Pagnotto
Salvatore Parini
Mr. and Mrs. Blair Paul
Pa. Dept. of Forests and Waters
Samuel Perri
Mr. and Mrs. John F. Perry
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Mr. and Mrs. Howard Pflugfelder
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Mr. and Mrs. Julio Pizzino
Mr. and Mrs. Albert Poletto
Charles "Chuck" Poletto
Mr. and Mrs. Charles J. Poletto
and Ann Marie
Mr. and Mrs. Frank Poletto
S. Sgt. John G. Poletto
Marian Poletto
Michael A. Poletto
Mr. and Mrs. Francis Pompili
Mr. and Mrs. Louis Pompili
Mr. and Mrs. L. Poletto Rathack
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Domenico Richichi
Gerald Renehan
Mr. and Mrs. Martin Rocco
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Rooney
Joseph Ropyak
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The Ryan Family
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Mr. & Mrs. Rudolph Sackarnoski
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Sportsman Hotel	
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John Biemel	Lullo Family
Joseph and Sophia Bochkey	John Matty
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Mary E. Fantaske	George Watach
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MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

To all our friends and fellow parishioners, we the Planning Committee, wish to express our thanks for your co-operation and support in making this occasion so successful.

MAY GOD'S BLESSINGS BE SHOWERED ON YOU
A HUNDRED FOLD