



## History of St. Mary's

By J.E. Murphy, 1961

"The Catholic priest from Odanah held services in Paeske's Hall here last Sunday and regular services will be held hereafter".

The first Holy Mass ever held in the Hurley area, on November 1, 1885 rated the above three-line item in the Montreal River Miner, the issue of November 5, 1885. The first page of an old record book of the parish is a little bit more revealing. It states: St. Mary of the Assumption Church, Hurley, Wisconsin, first Mass in Hurley, November 1, 1885. First Mass in the new church, August 15, 1886.

The first Holy Mass of the Roman Catholic Church in Hurley took place only a year after the first pioneers came to the area. The nucleus of this community was formed about the fall of 1884. It was in that year that the first mining for iron ore took place, although explorations had revealed iron ore about thirty years earlier. It was on June 1885 that the first shipment of ore left Hurley from Germania mine for the Ashland ore docks. The success here and at Ironwood and Bessemer in Michigan proved that a rich vein of ore extended for miles. The miners sent for their families and homes soon replaces camps and boarding houses. The families felt the need for religious services.

It was a missionary priest, Rev. Father Chrysostom Verwyst, OFS, who made the first trip from Odanah to Hurley.

Although the news item in the Miner said that "regular services will be held hereafter," until 1886 the visits of the missionary were intermittent. He had a wide area to cover, some of it on snowshoes, canoe or horseback, and Hurley was not on his assigned itinerary.

It was in 1886 that the Catholic people in Hurley recognized the need for a Catholic Church. A request was sent to the Most Rev. Killian Flasche, Bishop of Lacrosse, whose large diocese extended into Hurley. The missionary priest at Odanah, known affectionately as Father Chrysostom, was instructed to add Hurley to his already for-flung list of missions. Father Chrysostom Verwyst, born in Holland in 1841, was Hurley's first pastor. When the Church was built in 1886 the name of the parish was changed to St. Mary of the Seven Dolors.

With the assignment of the priest to the Hurley area, the need for a church building was apparent. In the Spring of 1886 plans for the construction of a church were drawn up. A committee was appointed consisting of J.H. Carroll, Thomas Kielty, D.P. McNiel and John Hoyer. Bids were asked in the 'Miner' of June 10, 1886.

Although Father Chrysostom's pastoral flock was large, he found time to record 'history' in his own handwriting. In addition to attesting to the first Mass in Hurley being said on August 15, 1886, he recorded that the first baby to be baptized was Ellen Gertrude, child of Mary and John McHale, on November 29, 1885 and the sponsors were David Radcliffe and Emily Ellenora Kielty. The first recorded birth was that of Ellenora Vander Hoof, child of Elicia and Melinda Vander Hoof on June 24, 1884. The first recorded marriage to take place in the new parish was that of John Dube and Anna Dalbec on November 18, 1885. Finally, the first funeral service was that of Mrs. Muhlbauer on July 26, 1886.

### First Resident Pastor

It became apparent before too long in the late 1886 and the early 1887 that Hurley was no 'flash-in-the-pan'. New ore developments and an increasing population indicated the need for a permanent pastor. The Bishop at LaCrosse was advised of this need and in due time Hurley's first resident pastor was appointed. It was on June 26, 1887 that Reverend Father Gilbert Nuono was appointed to the St. Mart of the Seven Dolors parish. A great priest, he endeared himself to the people of the Hurley area. He served long and well. He died in 1908 after a short illness. His body rests in St. Mary cemetery.

Father Gilbert gave the infant parish strength and status in the eyes of the community and God. First, he organized the parish as a going organization. When this was done, he worked towards increasing the spiritual quality of the congregation. It was a wild and woolly town comprised of a most heterogeneous group. By work and example he brought piety and a 'fear of God' to many people. During his tenure he completed a church building, he erected a parochial school and there was constructed a paster's home. These and many more things pleasing to the sight of god were completed by his charitable and pious man, Father Gilbert.

in 1890, a building lot directly North of the first church was purchased and construction of a parochial school was started. It was a two-story structure that accepted 120 pupils on January 5, 1891. Father Gilbert had arranged for a group of Sisters from New York to staff the school, however, they found Northern Wisconsin too far from their Motherhouse, so in the end, Sisters from the Franciscan Order of Milwaukee took over. The Sisters instructed the children in the three R's and in their faith, so that First Holy Communion and holy Confirmation were administered by Bishop Flasche to the first class in June of 1891.

In 1894 the priest house was built on a lot East of the church, which served that purpose until the new rectory was constructed in 1955.

In 1905 the new Diocese of superior was created with the Rt. Rev. Augustin Schinner D.D. as Bishop. About this time there came a demand for a new church building. There were 400, or more families in the St. Mary parish and the accommodations of the church building were no longer adequate.

Father Gilbert, able and enterprising priest that he was, seized the opportunity to build a new church. He had been looking forward to the day, and he was ready with a plan and a project that was approved wholeheartedly by the congregation in 1906.

### Build A Church

In the Spring of 1906 the foundation was laid for the red sandstone structure, which today is still a handsome building. The laying of the cornerstone was a great and memorable occasion in more ways than one. For one thing, the occasion brought to hurley a personal friend of Father Gilbert, no

less a dignitary than the Apostolic Delegate to the United States, the Most Reverend DeMedio Flaonio. This ceremony took place on July 15, 1906 and it was one of the greatest days in the history of St. Mary Parish. Distinguished clergy and laity from a wide area came because of the presence of a hierarchy of the church. It was truly and literally a colorful event.

While the construction of the church proceeded wonderfully, the parish became grieved due to the illness of its pastor. Father Gilbert never saw the completion of the church building. He died at the Sacred Heart Sanitarium in Milwaukee on April 10, 1908.

It was apparent in July of 1907 that Father Gilbert could not continue his duties, so the bishop appointed a temporary administrator in Rev. Gregory Joseph Reuter. Father Reuter served here until January, 1908, a tenure of about six months.

Father John Klopp, whose name was to become synonymous with St. Mary parish, came to Hurley on January 16, 1908. The present church was completed very soon after he came to Hurley. J.E. Murphy, who knows Father Klopp well, says of him, "Father Klopp was a kind and generous man. His philosophy was pragmatic; his Christianity sane and practical."

He served for twenty years. After the church was completed, he improved it further with necessary additions. He beautified the grounds and constructed a permanent fence around the cemetery. He worked exceedingly hard to maintain the spiritual quality of his parish. Keeping the school going was a constant trouble, but he persevered. Perhaps the happiest occasion in his life came on December 28, 1917 when he celebrated his silver jubilee as a priest. He served here for ten years after that, until 1927. In that year infirmities of health compelled him to resign his pastorate. Prior to his leaving he had requested an assistant and the Bishop sent Father Ludger Gloeggler.

#### Father Meyer Comes To Hurley

A young and energetic priest who was to leave a lasting mark on the St. Mary of the Seven Dolors parish came to Hurley on November 21, 1927. He was Reverend Father Peter F. Meyer. A forceful, efficient and dynamic administrator, he set out immediately on his "master plan". It included physical improvements, but foremost it called for an 'elevation of the spiritual vitality' of the church. In this regard he was a 'one man gang'. He was feared and respected "a burning brand, a tongue of fire, a soul filled with divine unrest". During his tenure of nineteen years, he formed many church organizations.

Besides his purely spiritual chores, Father Meyer was a tireless "builder". In 1929 the cemetery was graded; all copings were removed and mounds leveled to present a more attractive landscape. Additional land for the cemetery was purchased in 1935. In 1930 new lights were installed in the church, and a year later a new array of candlesticks were purchased for the altar. A pipe organ was purchased in 1934. A new heating system was installed.

When the Bishop appointed Father Meyer to Hurley, he gave him a special commission to reopen the Catholic school and to keep it open. He did that and one more. He built a new school building.

In June 1933 the Bishop of Superior added three missions, those of Mercer, Winchester, and Winegar to the jurisdiction of the pastor of St. Mary Parish, to Hurley. To assist in administering to these, The Reverend Paul C. Boshold was sent as assistant to the pastor of Hurley. He remained until November 1937 when the Bishop appointed him to the Saxon Parish and sent Reverend Alphonse Kress as assistant pastor to St. Mary Parish in Hurley. Of the missions, Mercer shown has shown remarkable growth. In 1933 only about a dozen Catholic families could be found there, but as of

1961 it consisted of over 100 families. In 1937 a frame church, devotional and appealing in mission Style architecture, was erected, accommodating about 250 persons. It was solemnly blessed by Bishop Reverman in May, Decoration Day of 1938 and dedicated to the North American Martyrs, St Isaac Jogues and companions. In Winegar in 1938 the pastor purchased a lot with a story and a half house on it, which was transformed in to a neat church, dedicated to St. Rita. On May 10, 1940 the bishop added a new mission to St. Mary in Hurley, namely Boulder Junction, in Vilas County. Father Meyer sent his young and zealous assistant father Kress, to make a survey, and arrange for the care of the new flock. About a dozen families, scattered far and wide in the new territory were found. On Sunday, May 26, 1940, the first Holy Mass was offered up by Father Kress, in the Town Hall. A frame church was constructed there in 1947. Later a new church and rectory were constructed.

### New Parish School

During the golden Jubilee year in 1936, it was decided to erect a new parish school. Actually, Father Meyer had been working on the idea since he came to Hurley. A depression was on the nation and even in 1936 the plan had to be shelved for some time. However, the good and energetic Father was always putting away money. In 1940 he had accumulated \$30,000.00. Now was the time- assessments on the parish members were set. Bids opened on July 10, 1940, fifty years to the day after which Father Gilbert had announced plans for the erection of the first parochial school. The new school building was opened on Monday, March 3, 1941.

The booklet celebrating the dedication of the new school, published in 1940, concluded its narrative with the following expression of hope for the future: "The church must be redecorated. Already the ladies of the parish have begun to gather funds for the purpose. The sisters must be provided with provided with a suitable convent, the youth with a recreation center and gymnasium and a rectory with the proper facilities must be built."

Almost all that dream has been realized-and more. The realization of those hopes embodied in the last years of Father Meyer in our parish-and those who present pastor, the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Michael A. Prock. It is a story that will be unfolded word and picture in the remaining pages of this book.

### War Years

The years 1940 to 1946 were not highlighted by any dramatic accomplishments. The members of the parish were busy helping to win a war. A very large percentage of the boys who went away to the wars in Iron County were from the St. Mary Parish. The men, women and children worked to win the war and prayed that there would be an early end and that their loved would be spared.

### Father Prock Comes To Hurley

In 1945 the church was redecorated. The present manganese floor replaced the old hardwood. It was a large project and the last one completed under Father Meyer. About this time the Bishop already had his eye on the St. Mary pastor for a "big job" in another parish. It was on May 7, 1946 that Father Peter f. Meyer was elevated to the rank of Monsignor. A few months later he was given the appointment to serve as St. Joseph's Church in Rice Lake. On October 2, 1946 Father Michael A. Prock came to Hurley's St Mary Parish.

Father Prock was intent on sustaining the spiritual status of his new flock, and to increase the communions. In this he was immediately and eminently successful. In a quiet, unobtrusive manner he succeeded in getting new faces into the church. Some who had fallen away came back.

## Convent Constructed

There was a job to be done, too, to enhance the physical plant. the Sisters' home was a "must". Father Meyer had been thinking about this since the school was completed in 1940. He accumulated a little "nest egg" for the project. By 1948, Father Prock had raised additional money and the convent was started, ideally situated in the lot between the church and the school.

The convent building is a handsome structure, full of utility. The plans for the 23-room brick structure were made with the assistance of the teaching Sisters' Motherhouse in Milwaukee. A three-story building, it contains 12 bedrooms, a chapel, five rooms in the living quarters, and six rooms in the basement. the inside walls are of plaster and birchwood finish. It is a building which the parish can be proud. The teaching sisters, who play such an important role in the spiritual life of the church community, are comfortable, and better able to carry on with their difficult tasks in the St. Mary school, and the related duties as "brides of Christ!" The building was completed and blessed in February, 1949. In that year, too, the schoolyard was blacktopped and enclosed in a tall fence.

Up until 1948, the St. Mary Parish still had the four missions of Mercer, Boulder Junction, Winegar, and Winchester. in that year, Father Joseph Higgins was appointed the first resident pastor of Mercer and given the other three missions.

On September 8, 1953 a great honor came to the parish and to the pastor, when Father Prock was raised to the rank of Monsignor. for the second time, and within the space of a few years, His Holiness had honored the St. Mary parish by elevating its pastor to the status of a Monsignor. These acts indicated, too, the esteem with which the parish is held in church circles.

## New Rectory

It had been apparent for several decades already that the old rectory was obsolete and inadequate. There were virtually no facilities for two assistant priests. There were the poorest office facilities for service to the parishioners. The building had been constructed in 1890 and the convenience for those who had to live there were less than meagre.

Finally, after 65 years, a new rectory building was started in 1955. Construction started in May and the priest staff moved in on November 12, 1955.

It is a fireproof 17-room structure with the necessary three offices, a vault which connects the front office and the private office of the pastor.

The entire building is a credit to the parish and the community. It completes a physical plant that is necessary for a parish the size of that of St. Mary of the Seven Dolors.

Although the church had been redecorated in 1945 after the war years, its condition was very bad around 1955. A major redecorating job appeared necessary. It may have received its incentive in 1955 when the Altar society raised sufficient funds for a marble Communion railing. Several parishioners suggested that it needed a marble altar to go with it. They were willing to back up their suggestion with some hard cash. The Monsignor took it up from there. A call went to the parish and many of the members gave at least \$10.00. There were many who gave a great deal more than that. There were some very substantial contributions.

## New Altars

So, in the summer of 1959, workmen moved into St. Mary Church in earnest. The ornate altar gave way to three Bottacino marble altars to match up with the Communion railing. Most of the statues were removed and the church was repainted all in good taste, all in compliance with the new liturgical legislation. The finished job was one of great beauty, majest-simple but reverent.

The new altars were consecrated by his Excellency, Bishop Joseph Annabring on August 22, 1959. It was a solemn and impressive occasion. It perhaps was not a coincidence that the consecration took place on Monsignor Prock's ruby jubilee, on the 40th birthday of his priesthood.

Sir Knight J.E. Murphy

The Hurley parish of St. Mary of the Seven Dolours received an honor on the Golden Jubilee of the Superior Diocese that comes rarely to parishes, when one of its members was bestowed with one of the highest honors that can come to a Catholic layman. It was on August 17, 1955 at a banquet in Superior that the announcement was made the Joseph Eugene Murphy had been conferred with the title of Knight of St. Gregory by Pope Pius XII. With the title, Mr. Murphy became a member of the Papal household. He is entitled to a private audience with the Pope. His rank entitles him to hear Mass in the Sanctuary, which he has done many times since, attired in his green uniform, symbolical of his rank.

The Lay Apostolate

Over the 75 years of the existence of the parish of St. Mary of the Seven Dolours, quite a number of organizations have been started-with most of them being successful. A few of them have flourished and still active in the parish.

All of the pastors and assistants have worked hard to guide and inspire the societies to increase the spiritual scope of the parish. All of the organizations over the years have worked to provide funds to purchase those things necessary for the House of God and its related physical facilities. Much of the utility and beauty of the church, buildings and the school can be credited to the zealous work of men, women, and children in the parish-all lay apostles in the work of the St. Mary Parish.

The St. Mary's Catholic Women's Council was organized as the Altar Society in 1888 by Father Gilbert Nuonno. The Holy Name Society of St. Mary Parish was established in May of 1928. It had many members. The Home and School Association was started on November 3, 1953. It immediately took its place as an important organization in the life of the parish.

Saint Mary's Youth Club

In 1955, Father Roger Holup, O.S.B. successfully started a youth organization. The organization was to provide the social and spiritual betterment of the youth of our parish. In 1960 the youth club was re-organized and set up on a deanery basis.

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