

St. Pius X Parish

40 Years of Grace
1960 – 2000

Researched and written
2017 - 2019
By Donna Omernik

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Foreword

September 30, 2020

In 2015, the Parish of Mary, Mother of the Church prepared to say farewell to the school building with its large metal letters: ST. THOMAS MORE. We held a School Legacy Celebration (Sept. 27, 2015) and a final Open House (Oct. 24-25, 2015); we remembered the blessings from the past which helped make us who we are today. This was our first significant step to our goals of Building Our Future Together: a new parish hall and religious education center attached to the church building.

Celebrating the Parish of St. Thomas More was recognizing only half of our story because our blessings also came from the Parish of St. Pius X when the two united April 9, 2000. So, as we included the theme of “Building Upon Our Legacy,” we invited some of the giants of the past who served at St. Pius X. They visited us and shared their memories at weekend Masses: Brother Michael Mandernach CSPX (July 25-26, 2015), Sr. Louise Rahe FSPA (August 15-16, 2015), and Father Bill Grevatch (Sept. 10-11, 2016).

In 2017, we gathered to share stories – for St. Thomas More and for St. Pius X – and to consider the value of a written record. When speaking with the “veterans” of St. Pius X, I showed them the only written history we had: a one-page summary in the 1990 St. Pius X Pictorial Directory. What a wonderful goal it would be to accomplish this heritage goal while we have people who lived those days!

Donna Omernik was in the group. She was a 3rd grade teacher at St. Pius X School in 1966-67 and a catechist for Religious Education (aka CCD) for many years, first in 2nd grade and then 3rd grade. In 2019, she received the Woman of the Year award as she concluded 38 years as a catechist! She was also noted for being a Lector (8AM Sunday Mass), sewing our Baptismal Garments, helping with PCCW activities such as Rummage Sales and Cookie Walks, AND I mentioned that she had been writing a History of St. Pius X Parish.

Here it is!

What a gift she has been! Researching, interviewing, drafting, and seeking edits and guidance. Many, many thanks to those who submitted stories and/or met with Donna! She received some help from a small group of people: her husband Jim, her daughter Christine Griese, Deacon Sage, Linda Schwartz, and me – of note, my “help” slowed her down as she waited patiently for input!

This really is a project of love from a gifted soul who loves Mary, Mother of the Church, who loves St. Pius X and, most importantly, who loves Jesus Christ. May God reward Donna!

As you read this parish history, personal memories, and biographies may God touch your heart. May you recall your own blessed memories – whether from St. Pius X or whatever parish or school you attended.

Yours in Christ,



Rev. Brian D. Konopa

Prologue

September 18, 2020

Writing the story of the history of St. Pius X Parish has been a journey for me as much as it was for the people who were on it. On the way I met those people who formed the beginning of the parish with their hard work under the leadership of Fr. Francis McCaffrey. I reacquainted myself with those members who supported each other on the journey to Holy Cross Seminary with Fr. Peter Butz. Under Fr. Bill Grevatch our parish grew into a family that sang together during the liturgies, ate together at many church dinners and potlucks, and played together. Finally, I saw and experienced with a mix of sadness and joyfulness how St. Pius X Parish joined prayerfully together with St. Thomas More Parish to become Mary, Mother of the Church with Fr. Joseph Rafacz.

During the process of researching and writing the history, I spoke with many people who contributed stories and pictures to make this project what it is. I want to thank everyone for their generous contributions. I am also sorry that not everything that was said and pictures received could be used in the story.

In gathering as much historical information as I could about St. Pius X Parish I read volumes of the bound copies of bulletins beginning with those of St. Thomas More – Fr. Mullen left wonderful notes with the bulletins – and those of St. Pius X; newspaper articles from both the Catholic paper – the Times Review – and the La Crosse Tribune; Pastoral Council minutes; items of interest from Ann Malin, who worked in the Diocesan Archives and passed on information about St. Pius X that she felt was noteworthy to the story; and details from all those people who answered all my questions when I needed it to complete a “picture” of an event in the story.

Know also, that errors may be found in the telling of this story. I tried to be as accurate as possible. Sometimes I found conflicting information in my research, and, as with any story, everyone has their own point of view of their experience.

I want to especially thank Fr. Brian Konopa for asking me to write that story and who felt that the story of St. Pius X needed to be written down and shared. I have written letters to my parents, my children, my friends and college class papers, but never anything like this project. It was a bit daunting. But with his encouragement and patient guidance, the story is told. But most of all, I want to thank Jim, my husband, for being at my side and supporting me through the time of researching and writing this history of St. Pius X. He made my journey of writing this story a lot easier by reading and commenting on what I wrote, helping me make the story come to life for those who had been there.

-Donna Omernik

St. Pius X: 40 Years of Grace

The people of God, the Israelites, followed Moses. They wandered from place to place for forty years until they came to the place God had ready for them, “the land flowing with milk and honey.” Like those Israelites, who followed a promise, the people of St. Pius X journeyed for forty years. Unlike the Israelites, the people of St. Pius X returned to the place where they began their journey.

The journey began at St. Thomas More Parish where a portion of the congregation was given a new charter called “St. Pius X Parish.” As a newly formed parish, St. Pius X gathered at Holy Cross Seminary before building their own church and school. Fifteen years later, the parish sold their new building and moved to Holy Cross Seminary again. Finally, through consolidation, they joined once more with the people of St. Thomas More.

The story of this journey is the story of a people filled with various emotions, thoughts and experiences: including disappointment, pain, hope, joy and celebration.

In the Beginning...

On June 16, 1960 Bishop John P. Treacy announced in a letter to the people in the Catholic Parishes of La Crosse that new boundaries would be set for all the parishes in the city as well as the formation of a new parish on the far south side. This new parish and school would be named St. Pius X. How appropriate to name this new parish after Pope St. Pius X, newly canonized in 1954, who was known to be a humble and virtuous man. He lived by the motto “to restore all things to Christ” and encouraged the frequent reception of Holy Communion, especially children at an early age.

The journey began.

To appreciate the journey of some charter members, it is worth looking back.

Due to the tremendous post-war housing growth on the south side of La Crosse, St. Thomas More Parish was established in 1946 – just 14 years before St. Pius X – under Bishop Alexander J. McGavick who appointed Rev. Joseph M. Wagner as its first pastor. Many of these families branched from the nearby Holy Trinity Parish. Many others who were moving into the area and building their homes were young, blue collar workers. A school was built first to educate the many children of St. Thomas More. Beginning in 1947, Masses were held in the school for 14 years until the church and rectory were built; the dedication of the church building and rectory took place on September 17, 1961.

However, the parish of St. Pius X was formed earlier, in 1960, before the dedication of the St. Thomas More Church.

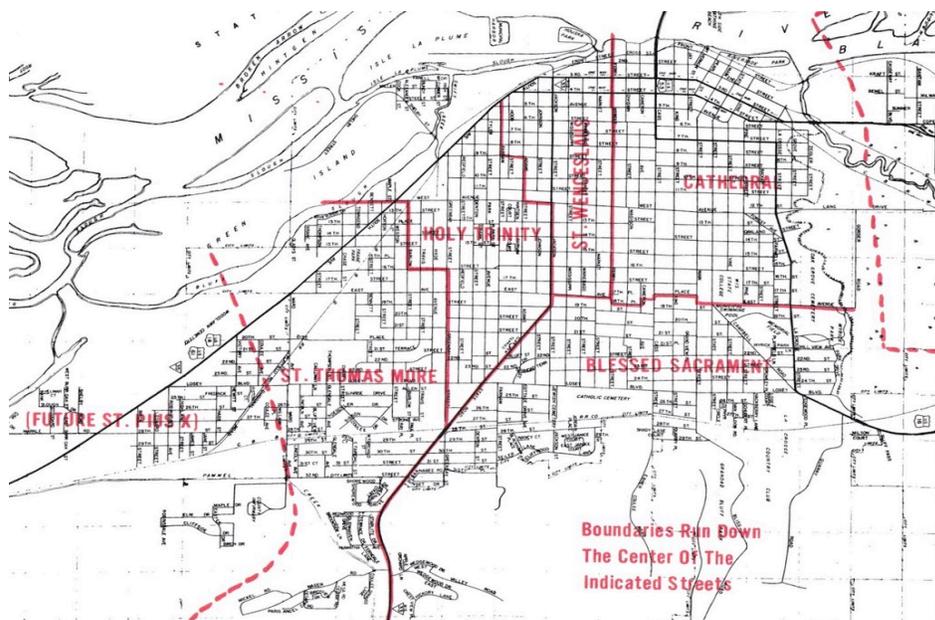
Now we can tell the story of St. Pius X Parish and the journey of the people who grew together spiritually and socially, forming a strong, faith-filled community.

The Announcement...

Until 1960, all city parishes were “national parishes,” except for Blessed Sacrament Parish. This meant Catholics could “cross parish boundaries” to attend a parish of their ethnic nationality, if they wished.

Bishop John P. Treacy saw the need to define the boundaries of the Catholic Churches in the city of La Crosse and create territorial parishes. The Vatican’s Sacred Congregation of the Council (currently known as the Congregation for the Clergy) granted three decrees to help the bishop accomplish this goal: First, St. Wenceslaus, which was the parish that served the Polish/Bohemian Catholics, would become a territorial parish, not a national one; second, Holy Cross Parish, of Polish origins, would be closed; and third, St. Mary’s Parish, primarily Irish, would be closed. The new boundaries in the city took effect July 1, 1960 and all Catholics were expected to observe the boundary changes. There would no longer be “national parishes.”

There were two reasons Bishop Treacy wanted the new boundaries. The primary objective had to do with the establishment of definite jurisdictions of the pastors regarding Catholic education. The second “powerful reason” concerned “pastoral care of the immortal souls.” In his letter to the faithful dated June 16, 1960, Bishop Treacy stated, “I am making each pastor clearly and finally responsible for every soul within the parish lines fixed for his parish.”



City of La Crosse Parish Boundaries

It was at this time that Bishop Treacy also announced the establishment of St. Pius X Parish with a proposed new school in the fast-growing area south of St. Thomas More Parish. Rev. Francis McCaffrey was assigned as the first pastor of the new parish. Bishop Treacy, Fr. Thomas E. Mullen, pastor of St. Thomas

More, and Fr. McCaffrey determined that Ward Avenue would serve as the boundary line between St. Thomas More and St. Pius X parishes. About two hundred and fifty envelope holders from St. Thomas More would now be members of the new St. Pius X Parish.

Church and School: Getting Started...

There was no church building for the new St. Pius X parishioners in which to worship. There was no school building for the children to attend for a Catholic education. A plan was needed to build a church and school for the parish. As St. Thomas More and so many other parishes had done, the plan was to build a school for the children and use it as a place of worship until a church could be built.

In a separate letter dated July 20, 1960 to the parishioners of St. Thomas More and St. Pius X setting the boundaries for the two churches, Bishop Treacy “encouraged Fr. McCaffrey to establish himself as soon as possible with a place to offer Mass for you and with a plan for a new school building.” This was an enormous mission for Fr. McCaffrey to complete, but the Bishop had faith in Fr. McCaffrey and faith in the people of this new parish to work together.

A plan was also outlined by the bishop at this time for the education of the children of St. Pius X before a school was built: 1. Two classrooms at St. Thomas More School would be made available for them, “thanks to the generous cooperation of Fr. Mullen”; 2. Also, two rooms, and possibly a third if necessary, would be used at the Holy Cross School, which was one of the schools closed because of the new boundary plan. Bishop Treacy expressed the hope that a new school building within the St. Pius X Parish boundaries would be ready by September of 1961 for the education of 300 grade school children who were expected to attend.

A flurry of activity concerning the establishment of the parishes according to the new boundaries began in July of 1960. Fr. McCaffrey spoke during all the Masses at St. Thomas More on July 10th, introducing himself and explaining what the new boundaries meant for the two parishes. Registration for those living within the boundaries of St. Pius X Parish also began at this time.

On Sunday, July 31, 1960 there was an announcement and a letter from Fr. Mullen for the people who would be the new parishioners of St. Pius X. These were significant announcements. The time had come for them to leave their home parish and begin in a new place together.

Holy Cross Seminary at 3510 East Avenue generously made Christ the King Chapel available to the people of St. Pius X. On Sunday, August 7, 1960 Masses would be offered for the parishioners at 6:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m. and noon. The Seminarians used the chapel between the first two Masses. Confessions would be heard on Saturday from 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and again from 7:45 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

In Fr. Mullen’s letter to the new St. Pius X members, he urged them “to cooperate loyally with Fr. McCaffrey in the difficult task of establishing your new parish...and to continue to demonstrate your Faith and Love for God and His Church in your new Parish.”

The new parish of St. Pius X was now fully established with Rev. Francis McCaffrey as their pastor and Holy Cross Seminary Chapel as their place of worship. Fr. Mullen gave the parishioners his blessing and it was now up to them to show their support of their parish.

And what about the school children? The start of a new school year is always an exciting time for children and parents and teachers, but 1960 – 1961 school year would be different for the

students as well as the parents of St. Pius X. There would be new faces and new teachers that were in different buildings because there was no school building for St. Pius X. Some of the children would be attending classes at St. Thomas More while others would be transported to the school of the now dissolved Holy Cross School. Eighty-two students in grades 3-4-5 would attend the Catholic schools; the children in the other grades would attend public schools. This arrangement would be used until the new St. Pius X School was built.

Building the New Church, School and Convent... Now the work of planning and constructing the building that would become the official site of St. Pius X began. Land needed to be purchased, a church-school-convent building plan needed to be designed, contractors needed to be chosen, and finally, to make it all happen, a fund drive needed to take place.

St. Pius X purchased a parcel of land on which to build a church-school-convent building. Many talks with charter members of St. Pius X Parish led to organizing a group called “the founding fathers.” They purchased a 9.3-acre parcel of land with a farmhouse from Leonard and Leona Gautsch for \$70,000 on Highway 14 (4439 Mormon Coulee Road), about one mile south of La Crosse city limits and across from the southeastern point of Holy Cross Seminary property.

The property also had a house on it that Fr. McCaffrey intended to immediately renovate at a cost of \$20,000 and use it as the parish rectory. The house would also have a small chapel on the enclosed porch for daily Mass. The parish office was also on the porch.



St. Pius X Rectory



Fr. McCaffrey "breaking ground" 7/16/1961

According to Jerry Roesler, “Father McCaffrey and my grandfather, Ernie Roesler, became good friends – strong German Catholics. Father McCaffrey came to my grandfather and said, ‘We have this parcel of land to build a school, a convent and a church which is full of locust trees. I want them cut down and the place cleaned up.’ So the Roesler family came with their tractor, wagon and chain saws and cleaned up the property. The group consisted of my grandfather, Ernie Roesler, my dad, Kenneth Roesler, my uncle, Robert Roesler and me, the sixteen-year-old grandson. My dad and grandfather had a well-drilling business and since there was no water on the property, they drilled the well and donated it to the church.”

Robert Hackner of Hackner, Schroeder & Associates was chosen as the architect of the building project. As of September 23, 1960, the firm was working on the plans for the church-school-convent complex with expectations of construction to begin that fall. The design plan called for the church to be on the lower level with a social hall and adjoining kitchen. Ten classrooms would be located on the upper level. The convent for the nuns, who would teach at the school, would have ten rooms as well as a kitchen, living areas and a small chapel.



Living quarters (cell) for each nun.

It wasn't until July of 1961 that contracts were awarded by the Diocese for the construction of the parish building. W. M. C. of Winona was named the general contractor of the project with a bid of \$271,984. The heating and plumbing would be installed by Bernie Buchner of La Crosse for \$75,512. Wettstein's and Sons were awarded the electrical contract with a bid of \$25,926. Fr. McCaffrey expected that construction would begin within a few days and completion of the building with furnishings was planned for August 15, 1962 at a cost of \$450,000.

The construction of the St. Pius X Church and School building would not be finished and ready for use until the 1962-63 school year. Therefore, temporary measures for educating students for the 1961-62 school year would be needed again. Second and third graders would be taught by lay teachers at St. Thomas More School; sixth, seventh and eighth grade classes would be held at Holy Cross School; first, fourth and fifth graders would attend five different public schools. About 155 children attended the Catholic schools and about 145 went to the public schools. The Catholic schools were already overcrowded, and this plan would ease the pressure in those classrooms.

Another year of challenges. But the parishioners and parents of school children were becoming accustomed to change and sacrifice. Soon their parish would have a new church and school and parish life could settle into a normal routine.

Raising the Funds...

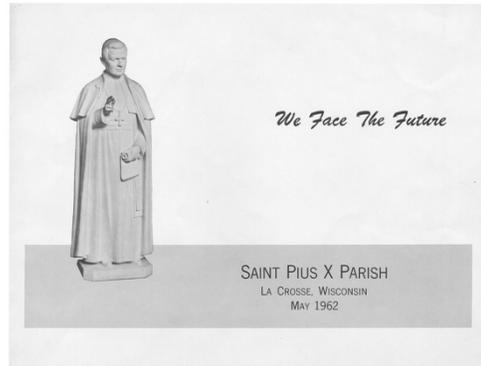
The next task that needed to be addressed was raising money to pay for the new church-school-convent *and* the operating expenses, staff salaries, furnishings and any other expenses that come with having a "new home."

Bishop John P. Treacy, in a May 1962 letter, addressed the pastor and the people of St. Pius X telling them that they had a special mission to accomplish: "Your special work under God is to build that new parish plant." He also sympathized with their leaving St. Thomas More and the building of that parish, and now the people had to do it again. Bishop Treacy went on to say that accepting this role would bring "many blessings and great happiness." He went on, "That

will be especially true if you happily give the best of your time, your influence and your wealth in the first year in your new building.”

Fr. McCaffrey, in his May 21, 1962 letter to the parishioners of St. Pius X, described the debt they would have for the building project, saying that it “is one that borders on the fantastic”: \$450,000 for the building and furnishings plus \$20,000 for the annual interest plus \$40,000 in operating costs. There were 365 envelope holders. It was enough to take one’s breath away.

However, Fr. McCaffrey had a plan that he laid out to the people of St. Pius X: 1. all Catholics within the parish boundaries must become members of our church family; 2. all members must use the Sunday envelopes; and 3. all parishioners must make a financial sacrifice as their responsibility. A fundraising and canvass of the parish that would increase the giving of the members of St. Pius X was put in action. “In giving we receive” was never truer than the case of church support.



Fundraising Program 1962

A Parish Canvass Committee was organized. “The canvass has for its initial purpose the raising of the level of giving in our Sunday envelopes,” according to guidelines that Fr. McCaffrey had sent to the parishioners. The members of the Parish Canvass Committee included:

Parish Canvass Co-Chairmen – Henry Boehm and Ernest Roesler

Canvass Committee Chairman – Dennis Gatling

Initial Gifts Chairman – John Foreman

Division Leaders – Robert Swing, Frank Hammes, Robert Ruetten, Robert Cassidy

Team Chairman – Emil Clements

Special Gifts Co-Chairmen – Frank Bakalars, LeRoy Juen Sr., Leon Kremenski



Parish Canvass Committee

Canvassers, working in pairs, visited and registered all the households in the St. Pius X Parish boundaries from June 6 – 16, 1962. They also welcomed the new parishioners to the parish, answered any questions about the parish and its plans for building, and solicited pledges to pay for the cost of the church-school-convent complex.

All monies pledged would go into the Parish Building & Development Fund according to Fr. McCaffrey. The Canvass Committee “projected a minimum of \$114,000 over three years to cover the first stage of development” – there was still the annual interest and parish operating costs to consider as well.

On Monday, June 6, 1962, a Loyalty Dinner was held at the Mary E. Sawyer Civic Auditorium, which was located on 6th and Vine, hosted by St. Pius X Parish. This was the last step in preparation for an intensive fundraising canvass. The event was attended by more than 440 parishioners who had an opportunity “to become better acquainted and develop a more unified family spirit in their new parish.”

Construction is completed...Celebrate!

On August 15, 1962, the new parish of St. Pius X worshiped for the first time in their new church. On August 28, 1962, the children of the parishioners attended their own new school. After one year of construction, St. Pius X Parish had their own church, school, and convent. It was an exciting time for everyone!

Fr. McCaffrey said the first Masses on August 15th (Feast of the Assumption) at 5:30 a.m., 7:00 a.m., and 9:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. The Masses for Sunday were scheduled for 6:00 a.m., 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.

St. Pius X School had 339 children enrolled for the 1962-63 school year. Eight of the 10 classrooms, located on the upper level of the building, were used for grades one to eight. In addition, the convent had two rooms that were used by the students for music. Two lay women and six nuns from the Order of St. Joseph of the Sisters of St. Francis in



*St. Pius X School-Convent-Church
Courtesy of La Crosse Tribune*



Church altar in lower level of school ca. 1963.

Stevens Point taught the students. Sr. Mary Elenata was the principal of the new school. Some of the furnishings for the school were new. However, the majority came from St. Mary’s and Holy Cross Schools after their closing due to boundary changes made by Bishop Treacy.

The church was located on the lower level next to the kitchen and lunchroom/social hall. Future planning called for the church area to be converted into six classrooms after a new church building was constructed on the north side of the school.

Father McCaffrey’s letter of encouragement...

As a result of building the church, school and convent and furnishing them, St. Pius X Parish sank into a deep debt that would be with them for many years. It was a burden that would cover the people like a heavy cloak.

Fr. McCaffrey wanted to help lift this cloak from the shoulders of the parishioners. So, he wrote a letter to them in February 1963 with the encouraging words from St. Pius X, patron of the

parish: "To restore all things in Christ." Fr. McCaffrey said, "It is important that all of us work for Christ. As parishioners of this parish we are to take a more active part in parish life."

He described the many ways the parish had begun to have more spiritual vitality. There was more active participation at Mass, especially with the altar facing the people and more opportunity to participate in the Mass; the Catholic school and the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis showed the love of Christ; the establishment of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) program and the High School of Religion for students enrolled in public schools; the parish census was completed; Catholic Family Movement (CFM) and a youth program were established. There was great spiritual and community growth in the parish with hope for more.

Fr. McCaffrey laid it out simply and succinctly. To have a church, school and convent fully furnished cost a lot of money. The bottom line was that the St. Pius X Parish had a total indebtedness of \$523,564. This was an eye-opening reality, especially when the income from the parish envelopes, collections, donations and gifts was less than \$55,000 for 1962.

Keeping in mind that a new St. Pius X Church building was in the future planning, Fr. McCaffrey wrote, "Crowded school conditions would eventually force us to vacate the present church facilities to provide more classrooms."

Fr. McCaffrey laid out a plan to begin preparing for this need. A weekly income of \$2600 was needed to pay for the expenses of running the parish and school and also making payments on the loans. There were 390 envelope holders; if each gave \$6.70 a week, it would take twenty-three years to pay the principal of the Parish debt: \$550,000. Every envelope holder was asked to increase their weekly pledge or continue with their pledge if they were unable to increase it. If the amount of the debt was overwhelming, so was the length of time it would take to pay it off – a generation of time.

Dedication of St. Pius X...

THE PRIESTS AND PARISHIONERS
OF SAINT PIUS X CHURCH,
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN
REQUEST THE PLEASURE OF YOUR PRESENCE
AT THE DEDICATION CEREMONIES
OF THE NEW CHURCH, SCHOOL AND CONVENT
ON MAY 5TH, 1963 AT 11:00 A.M.
HIS EXCELLENCY, THE MOST REVEREND
JOHN PATRICK TREACY, S.T.D.
DEDICATING PRELATE.

Dedication Invitation

The dedication of the St. Pius X Church, School and Convent took place on May 5, 1963 at an 11:00 a.m. Solemn Pontifical Mass. Bishop John Patrick Treacy was the dedicating prelate with Rt. Rev. J. Francis Brady preaching; Fr. Richard Rossiter and Fr. Delbert Malin, Deacons of Honor; Rt. Rev. John Paul, Rector of Holy Cross Seminary, Archpriest; Fr. Francis Heindl, Deacon, and Fr. Henry Lee, Subdeacon; Msgr. James P. Finucan, Master of Ceremonies Chancellor with Fr. Joseph Rafacz as his assistant. High School youth served Mass and the parish school choir sang, under the direction of Sr. M.

Raymond, SSJ. Dinner and an open house followed Mass. All the parishioners were invited to the ceremony.

Building the Parish...

Fr. McCaffrey had been serving St. Pius X for about 8 years, from 1960 – 1968. During this time, he established the new parish, built a church-school-convent complex, offered daily Mass as well as his duties of serving as the pastor to the people that were in the community of this parish. In March 1968, he formed the first St. Pius X Board of Education which included eight members, in addition to Sr. Damien, school principal, and himself. The purpose of the board was to set guidelines and regulations and act at an advisory committee for the school and its functioning.

A Pastoral Change...

In June 1968, Fr. McCaffrey was assigned by Bishop Frederick Freking to be pastor of St. Bridget's Parish in Ettrick. Fr. Peter Butz was selected to take over as pastor for St. Pius X. St. Pius X Parish was Fr. Butz's first official position as pastor of a parish. Previously he was Administrator of St. Mary's Parish in Keyesville and St. Killian's in Bear Valley.

Fr. Butz has been described as spiritual, upright and hard-working as well as a quiet and private man. He was also good at counseling and advising people when they came to him with their problems. He was good with people one-on-one. Fr. Butz was very welcoming and friendly to new parishioners.

Having inherited the responsibility to reduce the very large debt of St. Pius X, Fr. Butz's sermons often focused on tithing. He taught the people the benefits of tithing and encouraged them to tithe faithfully letting them know how it would positively impact their lives.

Soon after arriving Fr. Butz and Fr. Dennis Rader, Assistant Pastor, planned, proposed and organized a survey of all the homes, Catholic and non-Catholic, within the St. Pius X Parish boundaries. There were about 600 Catholic households in the parish. In an interview with The La Crosse Tribune in September 1968, Fr. Butz said, "There is no point in calling our parish a community if we don't even know one another."

Beginning around the middle of September 1968, about 100 teams from St. Pius X spent approximately two weeks visiting homes within the parish boundaries. In the end, the census teams visited more than 1,750 families, two-thirds of which were non-Catholic (those survey cards were given to their respective churches).

Upon completion of the survey, neighborhood groups were organized. Fr. Butz said, "Working in smaller subgroups at the grassroots level is the most effective way to create a lively community



Fr. Butz working with Census Committee

on the parish level...members of our parish not only are getting to know one another better, but they will be able to fulfill our responsibility as a parish to the larger community, the city of La Crosse.”

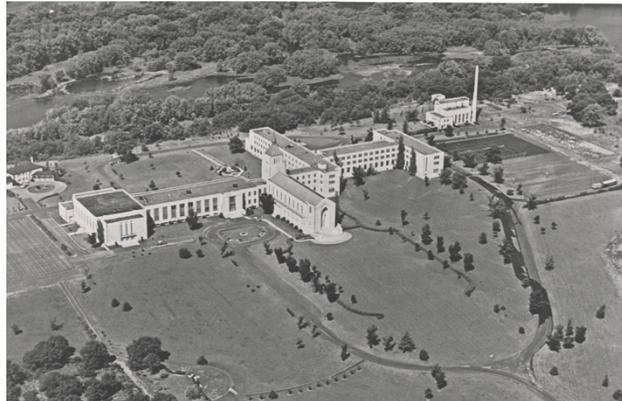
The skills of being spiritual, hardworking and thoughtful would help Fr. Butz and the parishioners deal with the debt problems and how the parish would be led in the next ten years. Fr. Butz handled the daily operations of the parish differently than Fr. McCaffrey, but how he approached the parishioners in regard to the debt would be important.

St. Pius X Church and School – Another Move...

In 1963 the total indebtedness of St. Pius X Parish was \$523,564.31. By 1970 \$37,612 was paid on its long-term debt and another \$15,000 was paid by March 1972. The property value in 1972 was listed as \$100,000 with the building and equipment as \$500,000.

Enrollment at St. Pius X School peaked in 1966-67 with 376 students attending grades one to eight. Unfortunately, this number dropped every year after with the 1971-72 enrollment at 278 students. Tuition may have been a factor for the decrease in enrollment. Parents with students at St. Pius X School paid \$180 per year, per child, with no reduction in tuition for additional children in the family. In comparison, other Catholic elementary schools in the city had a general charge of \$30 per pupil.

A contributing factor to the increased cost of tuition was the fact that religious sisters were no longer the main teachers of the children in St. Pius X School. There were three nuns and five lay women on staff at the school. Lay teachers were paid 2 to 2 ½ times the salary of nuns and priests at that time causing an increase in expenses for managing the school. Holy Cross Seminary closed in 1971 due to the decreasing enrollment of students interested studying for the priesthood. The building stood empty and needed some kind of use. The



Holy Cross Seminary - Aerial View

Diocese of La Crosse moved its Curia offices from the Hoeschler building on 5th Avenue to the seminary building. The priests would continue to use the northern half of the building, but the chapel, gym and classrooms on the southern end would receive little use. Moving the parish and the school to the vacant building would fulfill the needs of both St. Pius X and the Diocese of La Crosse if the parishioners of St. Pius X considered this offer.

At this time, the diocese began to hint that the St. Pius X property might be for sale. An additional financial advantage of the potential move included the sale of the current church-school-convent to the La Crosse Area School District. The La Crosse Area School District benefited as well with the purchase of the St. Pius X property as they could purchase a ready-

built-modern building on five acres of land at a lower cost than building a new school. By offering \$582,000, the district would save almost \$600,000.

The location of the property was not in the most ideal location, but it was in a location where major residential development was expected to grow over the next ten to fifteen years. Constructing a new school would remove property from the tax rolls, which is an important income source for the public schools.

School Board officials held three closed-door meetings, prior to the vote, to determine the feasibility of the purchase and the purchase price. School board officials met with both parish and diocesan officials, including Bishop Frederick Freking, Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse. In the end, the decision to make an offer was made because the school district was looking for sites for an additional elementary school in the area south of La Crosse.

In March 1972, the La Crosse Area School Board of Education voted to offer \$582,000 for the St. Pius X Parish property. The offer included the building, the kitchen equipment, carpeting, blackboards, bulletin boards, fire extinguishers, and other fixed equipment. Moveable school property remained the property of St. Pius X Parish. The offer to buy was good until June 1, 1972.

Getting the Information to the Parishioners...

This proposal by the La Crosse Area School District, given to St. Pius X Parish and the Diocese of La Crosse, certainly looked like a win-win situation for both parties.

Fr. Peter Butz and the St. Pius X Parish Council presented the plan to the parish. This was done first, by conducting a parish poll; second, by holding a series of meetings with the parishioners over the next two months to inform them of the proposal and obtain their response; and finally, by taking a vote on the proposal by the parishioners.

There was a lot of information to present to the parishioners. Fr. Butz knew his parishioners needed information to make a good decision. The council presented information that gave the parishioners a complete picture of the financial situation of the parish – its assets and its debt – and that Holy Cross Seminary would be available for the parish to use. The parishioners were also told the La Crosse Area School Board wanted to purchase the school to address increasing enrollment on the south side of La Crosse due to more houses being built in that area.

In May 1972, it was announced that the St. Pius X parishioners “overwhelmingly approved” the sale of St. Pius X Elementary School to the La Crosse Area Public School District. Eighty-five percent of the parishioners who voted in a parish-wide ballot had approved the sale. There were 690 families in the parish at that time.

Fr. Butz was grateful that the decision to move had overwhelming parish support.

A plan was in place that St. Pius X Parish would use the present school during the 1972-73 school year and then move to Holy Cross Seminary for the 1973-74 school year.

Bishop Freking and his advisors also approved the sale of the school.

The Fiscal Control Board of the La Crosse Area School District approved the purchase of St. Pius X School from the La Crosse Catholic Diocese for \$582,000 at their August 10, 1972 meeting. The Board of Education of the La Crosse Area School District had yet to approve the sale.

The teachers at St. Pius X School came together at their in-service on August 24, 1972 knowing it was the last time they would do so at this location on Mormon Coulee Road. The school where it all began ten years ago. However, the sale was not final, the contract was not signed. There were bumps in the road with the Town of Shelby which added another year to the process.

Bumps in the Road of the Sale...

At the September 12, 1972 meeting of the La Crosse Area School Board, an issue arose with ratifying the purchase agreement of St. Pius X Catholic School. The problem had to do with the construction of a new street through the property. The board voted 7- 0 to refer it for further study. The Board wanted less than the 60-70-foot easement regulated by the city through the 4.87-acre site.

One condition was added to the sale, according to the La Crosse Tribune on September 13, 1972, “the District Board of Education must agree to dedicate land between the school and the rectory for opening a street between South Avenue and Broadview Place” and relocate Markle Road on the other side of South Avenue. This recommendation came from the city planning and engineering departments. The Town of Shelby officials had informally agreed to the plan.

The city planner, Ron Bracegirdle, reminded the board that approval of the purchase depended on extending Broadview Place to connect to South Avenue-450 feet through the school property, using .63 acres. He also explained that this would improve both pedestrian safety and traffic patterns.

The board argued that the right-of-way came within 20 feet of the north side of the school building, playground space would be lost, and there didn’t seem to be a plan for sidewalks to be installed.

Then there was some confusion as to whether the board knowingly agreed to the right-of-way earlier. Eugene Balts, the Schools Superintendent, responded by telling the Board that the Common Council added the resolution as part of the purchase. The board wanted to take up the issue with the City Planning Commission, the Common Council, the Highways Committee and other officials before agreeing to the right-of-way through the property.

At the October 1972, meeting of the Fiscal Control Board of the La Crosse Area School District there was opposition to the street project with Shelby Town Chairman Ralph Lee leading the effort. The city attorney, John Flanagan said that the matter was closed saying, “If you disagree with the road you’ll have to vote against the school.”

The city planner, Ron Bracegirdle, said that the road could be built next to St. Pius X School without relocating Markle Road. Relocating Markle Road would have caused issues with the people living in that area.

The Fiscal Control Board voted 19-4 to buy the school from the Diocese of La Crosse. It also approved the right-of-way from Broadview Place to South Avenue. The school would change hands in June 1973.

On Monday, March 5, 1973, the La Crosse Common Council Committee-of-the-Whole approved a bond issue that was earmarked for the purchase of St. Pius X School as well as other school district expenditures. There was still opposition to the purchase of St. Pius X School because it might be outmoded due to new educational concepts and the closing of schools and busing of children to in-town schools. Three members had voted against the bond issue.

St. Pius X School Sale is Closed...

Finally, on Thursday, May 31, 1973 the purchase of St. Pius X School by the La Crosse Area Public School District became final. The Most Rev. Frederick Freking, Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, Eugene Balts, Schools Superintendent, and Rev. Peter Butz, pastor of St. Pius X Catholic Church made the transaction final.

A bittersweet moment.

A new beginning...again.

Building the Community of St. Pius X...

Developing an active community in the parish was important to Fr. Butz; working together to extend Christ's work. St. Pius X Parish had grown to approximately 700 families by 1978. Participation in the liturgy by parishioners with interests and talents to offer was encouraged: choir members, lectors, altar boys, lay ministers, ushers, and families to present the offertory gifts.

Within the parish community, the Parish Council was available to help the Fr. Butz make important decisions concerning parish activities. The Hospitality Committee focused on welcoming the new parishioners. The Sick and Shut-ins Committee consisted of teenagers and adults who visited parishioners in the nursing homes, hospitals and homes as well as arranging transportation for those in needed assistance. A nursery was available during Mass on Sundays for toddlers staffed by teens and adults. The Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) was available for the parents of the school children and a Girl Scout Troop for all the girls at St. Pius X.

The St. Pius X Men's Club, always an active group, raised money for the school and church through fundraisers such as pancake breakfasts, smokers' social evenings and donut sales.



*Mr. Eugene Balts, Bishop Fredrick Freking, Fr. Peter Butz at the sale of St. Pius X School
Photo Courtesy of La Crosse Tribune*

Fr. Butz is responsible for naming the kitchen at Holy Cross Seminary building. He named the kitchen St. Martha's Kitchen and Dining Room (after Martha in the New Testament) because the parish used it so much. The kitchen and dining room were used for parish dinners and gatherings, Men's Club breakfasts, the school hot lunch program and lunches for the priest and staff who worked and lived at the Diocesan Center.



Fr. Peter Butz & St. Pius Men's Club

Tithing was important to Fr. Butz. The bills needed to be paid, salaries needed to be met and supplies needed to be purchased. The parish needed money to run smoothly. He was known to say, "10% of nothing is nothing. If you can't give anything, then you can't. But if you can, you should." His message was clear in this regard.

When the St. Pius X Church-School-Convent complex was sold and before the parish moved to the Holy Cross Seminary building, Fr. Butz could be seen painting classrooms at 4:00 in the morning getting them ready for the teachers and children in anticipation of the new school year. He was a dedicated and hard-working pastor who wanted the best for the parish.

The parish paid off its loan and used the remaining money from the sale of the St. Pius X property toward renovation of the seminary building. Then the parish immediately took out another loan toward the completion the renovations that included air conditioning in the church and converting classrooms that were meant for young men into a school for children.

New Pastors, New Plan...

In June 1978, Fr. Butz was assigned to be pastor of St. Joseph's Parish on St. Joseph's Ridge and Bishop Frederick Freking brought Rev. William Grevatch and Rev. Peter Knippel to La Crosse to take the reins of leadership at St. Pius X. Bishop Freking asked a great deal more of these two priests. He wanted them to define their responsibilities as Co-Pastors. Fr. Knippel would still have his responsibilities with the Office of Divine Worship for the Diocese of La Crosse; therefore Fr. Grevatch would be responsible for the administration of the parish. They reassured Bishop Freking they would work as a team for the success and good of the parish, just as they had at their previous parish in Bakerville.

In a letter to Fr. Grevatch and Fr. Knippel, Bishop Freking briefly outlined the history of St. Pius X, describing it as "a comparatively young parish, both on the basis of its historical establishment and on the basis of having many young families who did not have the stability which one finds in an older, longer established parish."

Looking at the debt of St. Pius X, Bishop Freking noted some areas of some concern: With improvements to the seminary location, the parish took on a debt to be paid over a period of 20 years; unpaid high school subsidies to Aquinas High School; unpaid bills at the Diocesan Business Office; and unpaid bills to other suppliers. The debts seemed like an albatross around

the necks of the parishioners. On the plus side, there was an investment account of \$15,000 which Bishop Freking hoped the pastors would not need to use toward the debt.

Bishop Freking encouraged Fr. Grevatch and Fr. Knippel to establish with the parishioners a sense of responsibility concerning these financial matters and to be aware of the importance of contributing throughout the year.

Fr. Grevatch and Fr. Knippel were also directed “to become involved in interparochial activities of the La Crosse Catholic community.” This would involve the pastoral health care at St. Francis Hospital and Lutheran Hospital and nursing homes of the city. Hillview Nursing Home was within the territory of the parish and therefore a primary responsibility for their pastoral care.

Bishop Freking referred to their previous assignments at Columbus High School in Marshfield, Fr. Grevatch as principal and Fr. Knippel as teacher, and asked the new pastors to encourage parishioners to enroll their children at Aquinas High School.

He also wanted them to educate the people to become involved in the Deanery, the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Deanery and Diocesan Council of Catholic Women because it was important to establish “a total Catholic church.” It was understood by the bishop that this could be a challenge because St. Pius X Parish was made up of young families who were involved in establishing their own homes in a new area of the city.

Because St. Pius X was renting from the Diocese and parts of the building would be used by other groups, Bishop Freking asked that Fr. Grevatch and Fr. Knippel establish a good working relationship with Fr. Heindl, the Director of Holy Cross Diocesan Center who supervised the maintenance and schedules of the property.

The bishop’s final direction: do “continuous census work.” Bishop Freking understood the dynamic growth taking place on the south side.

Fr. Grevatch and Fr. Knippel appeared to have their work cut out for them in a parish that wasn’t even 20 years old and had grown to 700 families by 1978. Fr. Peter Knippel was only with the parish for one year when he was assigned to Viterbo College as chaplain in 1979, which left Fr. Grevatch as the sole pastor of St. Pius X.

Taking Up the Challenge...

One of the first actions Fr. Grevatch (Fr. Bill) took at St. Pius X was to establish good liturgical celebrations. To do that he sang with energy and he expected everyone else to sing too! At the first Sunday Mass, in his new parish, Fr. Bill announced the opening song from the back of church before processing up the aisle to the altar. The people were a bit confused—the choir sang, the people didn’t sing. But sing they did—haltingly at first, and not everyone joined. This was the beginning of many joyous and song-filled liturgies.

Fr. Bill and Rita Nowicki, head of the St. Pius X Music Committee, worked together to develop a music program to encourage vocal participation by the congregation. “Good liturgical celebrations foster and nourish faith,” she said, “and congregational singing is vital to a good celebration.” “Our goal was to get people to participate” and the choir and cantors were ready to help. Music ministry included a choir, a folk group, four cantors and the organists. Rita

Nowicki said, “everything that can be sung usually gets sung at St. Pius X, including all the responsorial psalms, acclamations and other hymns throughout the Mass.”

A lot of work and preparation went into planning the parish music program by Rita Nowicki and the Music Committee. The church seasons and biblical readings were the main resources used for song selection. She said, “a strong hymn at the beginning of the liturgy” really sets the tone of the Mass.

As a result of the Music Committee’s hard work, the choirs’ preparation and Fr. Bill’s support, the music had set the tone for the liturgy with people participating and even connecting with each other in a meaningful way.

And that was just the beginning of Fr. Bill’s plan for building an active and caring community at St. Pius X.



Rita Nowicki

Taking a Counting of the People...

At the same time liturgies became more meaningful to parishioners, Fr. Bill was planning to find out just exactly who was in this parish called St. Pius X. He believed their active time, talent, and treasure was essential for the development of the strength and health of the parish community.

In the next year, 1979-1980, a Parish Census Plan was developed. It included visits made by volunteer parishioners to the homes of all who lived within the St. Pius X boundaries, whether they were Catholic or non-Catholic. Every household was asked a series of questions, invited to become active in a number of ministries in the parish and asked the amount they would pledge to keep the parish running and in good standing with the diocese.

A lot of work and time went into the visits which now provided a clear picture of the parishioners of St. Pius X as well as the needs of the parish.

At the start of the Parish Census, there were 640 registered families in the parish. At the conclusion of the drive, 107 new families were added, but 59 families were lost due to various reasons. St. Pius X now had 688 families. There were 737 parishioners who volunteered for the liturgical ministries, educational ministries, social ministries, communications ministries, and other special ministries not listed on the cards. 336 suggestion cards were returned with suggestions and constructive criticism in the areas of finances, religious education, liturgy and social concerns.

Despite the annual amount pledged of \$173,500 by the 550 families during this drive, the parish still projected a budget deficit of \$30,000 for the year.

Not only did Fr. Bill have good information about the parish in terms of membership and involvement, but he also knew more planning was needed to address the budget and parish debt.

Growing the Parish...

In 1981—there were 35 Baptisms at St. Pius X.

In 1982—there were 70 new families registered at St. Pius X.

Sister Louise Rahe, FSPA, was hired as principal of St. Pius X in 1977 and later also took on the duties as the Director of Elementary CCD. She always put her teachers and school first. This was important to her. She ran an innovative school in regard to classroom space and teaching methods. Sr. Louise had been the Diocesan Superintendent of Schools before becoming the principal at St. Pius X School. This explained her up-to-date teaching philosophy. She retired in 1992 when the Catholic schools unified to become Coulee Catholic Schools. Her presence remains in the memories of the parents, teachers and students and all those at St. Pius X.

Brother Michael Mandernach, Brother of St. Pius X, was hired as Director of Religious Education at St. Pius X in 1979. He worked closely with the pastoral ministry in the parish, St. Pius X School principal and teachers, CCD grade school and high school catechists, the Sunday School program and the newly initiated Summer Bible School program. Just three years later he was leaving to further his education at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. His presence was felt throughout the parish.

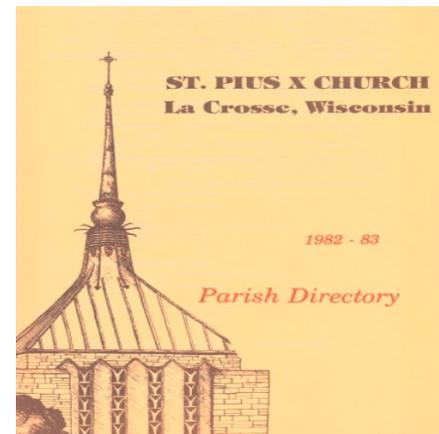
Hired as a new part-time Youth Minister in 1982 was Tom Thibodeau. He came with a rich background of Religious Education and Social Justice ministry. Not only did he work with the middle and high school programs, Tom gave inspiring talks to the parish during Advent and Lent. He also had a presence that had been felt throughout the history of the parish.

The First Parish Directory...

What better way to get information about the parish into each household than to publish a parish directory!

In 1982, after months of gathering information, the project was completed and in the hands of each parishioner of St. Pius X.

Fr. Bill wrote the opening letter: "our parish community has shown that it is strong and healthy." He also put forth some challenges that needed to be met. They included: welcoming newcomers; encouraging young and single people to become involved; developing lay leadership; and sharing financial responsibility of the parish.



1982-1983 Parish Directory Cover

The guide to this parish directory was in the form of a mission statement and it read like a prayer:

We of the Parish of St. Pius X are . . .

a faith community . . .

*united by our shared experience in the power of the Holy Spirit that
God is Father, Jesus is Lord.*

As a faith community we are Catholic . . .

*in witness,
in teaching,
in tradition.*

We celebrate . . .

*The Risen Christ's presence especially
in the liturgy and sacraments, but also
in the various parish gatherings.*

We nourish our faith through . . .

scripture, prayer, and religious education.

We care . . .

*by reaching out to meet the needs of those who are hurting, by showing
hospitality to one another and welcoming the various ministries within the parish
community.*

We have a mission . . .

to be Christ's presence in our community and in the world.

*As a faith community we share together the on-going struggle and renewal to realize the
vision of who we are as we journey to the Father, in Christ, through the power of the Holy
Spirit.*

The parish directory clearly defined this statement and how it was met in the parish community:

We celebrate: all the sacraments were named and defined. The community had the opportunity to take part in each one.

We nourish our faith: all manners of education available in the parish were listed: adult education and parish missions, Catholic elementary and high school education, CCD, Summer Bible School and the Sunday preschool program. All ages in the Parish were encouraged to learn more about their faith and share their faith with others.

We care: An abundance of liturgical ministries were available to serve others in the worshipping community as Ministers of Communion, as lectors, as altar boys, as ushers, as sacristans, and as musicians in one of the choirs or as a cantor or organist. There were also committees that planned the church decor and music for the seasons.



Lay Ministers (Bill Jaekel, Ann Malin, Julius Wetsch, and Adeline Wetsch pictured with Fr. Grevatch

A Diocesan Lay Ministry program was formed in 1979 for those interested in learning more about scripture and liturgy and in developing skills for participation in church ministry. Ann Malin and Julius and Adeline Wetsch were the first from St. Pius X to complete this two-year program. In 1981 a Diaconate Program was also made available for men throughout the Diocese, which included Deacon Richard Sage in its first ordination class.

There were numerous social events for parishioners to gather with friends and welcome new members: The Parish Family Feast, Fall Festival, Campout at Goose Island, Halloween Dance, Parish Feast Day in

August, Seder Meal and Catholic Schools Week.

Social Organizations met regularly: Men's Club, Parish Council of Catholic Women (PCCW), the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), Athletic Association, Boy Scouts, Brownies and Girl Scouts. These groups planned many activities which welcomed parishioners to help with preparation or simply to enjoy the activities with others from the parish.

St. Pius X Parish had grown into a vibrant parish actively involved in liturgy, in education and in social events. Indeed, it was a strong and healthy parish.



Seder Meal

Finally, the 1982 – 83 Parish Directory listed every family with their addresses and their telephone numbers. It was complete and made it easy to contact other members of the parish.

There was a unique feature in the directory. Ann Malin developed a map of parish boundaries and used pins to mark each household. There was a number in front of each family name that was listed in the parish directory. That number – 1 to 16 – corresponded with the district in which St. Pius X Parish was divided. Each district was a neighborhood. The purpose of these 16 districts was to facilitate hospitality and social support – a way to welcome new faces and meet up with old friends and neighbors. There would be potluck dinners in which households gathered to share in prayer and food. It was a good way to get to know your neighbors and fellow parishioners

An Ecumenical Movement...

When Brother Michael Mandernach of the Diocesan Brothers of St. Pius X left the parish to continue his education, he left the Summer Bible Program in the hands of Donna Omernik. There were teachers and helpers in all areas of the program willing to spend a week with children ages 4 – 11 years old to teach them more about Jesus and His work on earth.

The Bible School was scheduled for the week after elementary schools began summer vacation. The priests of the diocese planned to meet for their annual Priest Unity Days that very same week which meant the seminary building was off limits to the Bible School.

What to do?

It so happened that Good Shepherd Lutheran Church – located across Mormon Coulee Road from St. Pius X - held their Summer Bible School during the first week in August. In speaking with one of their program's directors, it was suggested that both churches join together as one Bible School. Fr. Bill wholeheartedly approved. It was decided to hold the program at St. Pius X because it had the school rooms to accommodate a larger program.

Two hundred children participated in the program – about 100 from each church. The program continued in this manner more than 10 years.

Why did it work?

It worked because the children knew each other from living in the same neighborhoods and going to school together. It worked because there was an open-mindedness about our neighbors. It worked because the teachers and assistants had a love of Jesus Christ that they modeled for the children.

Like an ecumenical flower, other ideas of how to bring these two churches together in a prayerful and social way began to bloom.

The PCCW started an Advent luncheon, inviting the Good Shepherd women to join them in prayer, song, a meal and socializing.

Also, the Men's Club and the PCCW started summer golf leagues with Good Shepherd Lutheran Church – a great social summer activity bringing these church members together.

These men and women lived as neighbors, worked together and had children who played together. They knew each other. But mostly, it placed them in faith communities which were willing to work together.

Celebrating 25 Years as a Parish...



St. Pius X Parish had grown over its 25-year lifetime. Growth happened, not only in the numbers of parishioners, but in all aspects of parish life. This growth was evident in the vibrancy of liturgical celebrations where singing and participation were stronger and in the social interactions where food and friendship were shared.

In 1985, plans were being made to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the founding of St. Pius X Parish. This celebration would highlight the faith community St. Pius X had become over the last 25 years.

The Guest List...

The parishioners of St. Pius X were the hosts and guests of the Jubilee. Bishop John Paul was the principal celebrant and homilist for the occasion. Special guests were Bishop Frederick Freking, retired bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, former pastors, Rev. Francis McCaffrey, Rev. Peter Butz, and Rev. Peter Knippel; and sons of the parish, Rev. John Swing, Rev. Mark Pierce, and Brother Jeff Hutson OSB.

Also invited to share the special day were the sister parish of St. Thomas More and the neighboring parish of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church.

The 25th Anniversary Program - June 23, 1985...

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 10:00 a.m. | Anniversary Mass
Homilist: Bishop John Paul
St. Pius X Choir
Director: Deacon Richard Sage
Organist: Judy Roraff |
| 11:00 a.m. | Former Pastors' remarks followed by the opening of the cornerstone from our first church/school.
Pictures of parishioners and friends attending the Mass, as well as chartered members. |
| 11:30 a.m. | Outdoor reception and planting of Anniversary tree. |
| 11:45 a.m. | Brunch in the cafeteria, music by Helen Hoskins. |
| 1:00 p.m. | Open House & Reception, including tours of the church. |

A special Parish Jubilee Prayer was composed that reflected the spirit of the people of the parish: *To hope to grow as a community, to share their traditions, to celebrate in the presence of Jesus Christ in the liturgy and sacraments, to grow in faith through prayer and to reach out to each other.*

Bishop Paul's Words of Encouragement...

In his homily, Bishop John Paul recognized how the parish had grown as a faith community in 25 years. He also told them "to focus on one image – that of a journey – as they look to the future. The image of a journeying pilgrim people is an early Biblical concept. This concept is one of a pilgrim people who have a love covenant with God. This covenant dictates a journey - not an aimless wandering, but a divinely directed journey - that is never completely fulfilled, because there is always another hope to be sustained, always another person to be loved."

Bishop Paul highlighted the patron saint of the parish, "Pope St. Pius X reminds us of the greatest treasure we have – the Eucharist." He said that he hoped that the parish "always value, treasure and live" the covenant of love with God in the Eucharist.

Then he paid tribute to Father William Grevatch for his leadership and said, "His liturgies are always a celebration."

Bishop Paul closed his homily with the final paragraph of the Parish Jubilee Prayer:

Father, be with us as we journey together, growing as a community, and sharing the vision of who we are. We ask all of these things in the name of your son Jesus, who lives and reigns with you in the power of your Spirit. Amen.

Bishop John Paul's homily was prophetic, though no one was aware of it at the time. The people of St. Pius X were a pilgrim people on a journey. It was their history. They did have a love covenant with God. Their journey would literally take them to another place in the future. And they would always have that love covenant with God.

Opening the Original Cornerstone...

After Mass, each of the former pastors spoke about their service to St. Pius X and how the parish had grown in so many ways since they were pastors at the church.

Then, with great anticipation, it was time to open the original cornerstone. In it were a number of documents: a letter from Fr. McCaffrey and a financial report about the status of the parish; an annual report that was mailed with the letter to all the parishioners of St. Pius X, listing about 440 names as well as their annual contributions; newspaper clippings concerning the establishment of St. Pius X Parish; a list of Religious Sisters working at St. Pius X; and the signatures of the school children.

All of it, in the original cornerstone, was a part of the history of St. Pius X and the beginning of its journey that was being celebrated 25 years later on June 23, 1985.



Fr. Butz, Fr. Bill, and Fr. McCaffrey celebrate the 25th anniversary with an outdoor Mass.

The Celebration Moves Outdoors, then Indoors Again...

The people of St. Pius X have a history of gathering outdoors as well as indoors for happenings in the parish. The 25th Anniversary celebration was no different. It moved outside for the reception and the planting of the Anniversary Tree. As the tree grew, it would remind everyone in the parish how they have been growing in faith together.

Then, something the parish often did together, it was time to share food. A brunch was held in the dining room. There was a guest book to sign as each family entered. Helen Hoskins, who was known in La Crosse for her piano and calliope playing skills, provided the background music on the piano.



Deacon Sage leading chapel tours.

After the brunch, tours were conducted of Christ the King Chapel. Parishioners and visitors were told about the architecture and the stained-glass windows. A special booklet about the chapel was prepared by Deacon Sage and was available to those who came for the tour.

An interesting note: The windows in the chapel are of people who were important in the history of the Catholic Church. One window was of Pope Pius X who was not yet a saint when Holy Cross Seminary was dedicated in 1951. Therefore, his name appears as Pope Pius X, not St. Pius X.

A Look Back at the 25th Jubilee...

The 25th Jubilee offered everything to the people who came to celebrate this occasion: A beautiful liturgy; the coming together of friends from St. Pius X and the neighboring parishes; and encouraging words from Bishop Paul.

It was a perfect day. Truly a memorable occasion.



Charter member of St. Pius X present bread, wine, stewardship commitment sheets and memorabilia at 25th anniversary Mass.

A New Cornerstone for St. Pius X Parish...



Russell La Frombois designed the outdoor memorial for the statue of St. Pius X and new cornerstone that would hold the time capsule, Burt Gregorson did the masonry work and Jerry Roesler was the groundskeeper at Holy Cross Seminary Building. The base was made of the same Winona stone as was the seminary building. Jerry Roesler found extra unused stone buried in the dirt in the back of the property behind the building and dug out what was needed. He and Burt cleaned the stone of dirt and mold with a pressure washer. It was then cut to size and put together to create the memorial wall for the statue. All three men were parish members.

A plan was made to celebrate Thanksgiving in November 1986 in a special way. A new cornerstone to hold the memorabilia of St. Pius X Parish would be the center of the celebration. The "Thanksgiving Stone" was engraved with 1960, the year of the charter of St. Pius X Parish. The original 1961 cornerstone that was part of the first St. Pius X Church-School building was opened at the 25th Anniversary Mass in June 1985 and returned to the building from which it came. A statue of St. Pius X was "loaned" to the parish by the Brothers of St. Pius X. This statue had been donated to the Brothers by Peter and Catherine Mandernach.

The Thanksgiving theme for the celebration was "Faith of our Founders." On Tuesday, November 25th at 7:00 p.m., the Thanksgiving Mass was celebrated. Special guests were the grandparents of the children of St. Pius X Parish.

After Mass, in the back of church, items placed in the time capsule included the original contents of the first cornerstone; coins from the Dan Stark Estate; documents from the 1986 Diocesan Synod IV; a copy of Fr. Grevatch's and Fr. Knippel's appointments to St. Pius X; a picture of Fr. Grevatch; Parish booklets; 1982 – 1983 and 1985 Parish Directories; ordination pictures of Fr. John Swing, Fr. Pat Umberger and Fr. Mark Pierce; Parish Booklet (Fr. Peter Butz, pastor); and items from the 25th Anniversary Celebration of St. Pius X Parish which included the Mass program, photographs, a June 23, 1985 church bulletin, La Crosse Tribune newspaper from June 23, 1985,

Times Review articles from April 4, 1985, 1985 Pictorial Directory, list of current chartered members, letter from Bishop John Paul, memo from Bishop Frederick Freking, the Jubilee Prayer and the 25th Anniversary Guest Book. The contents of the original 1962 cornerstone were also included in the new cornerstone.

The new cornerstone was blessed and sealed.

After the cornerstone ceremony, the parishioners met in the cafeteria for a social. Prayer, food and visiting – this is what drew the parish together.

The outdoor memorial holding the new cornerstone and time capsule with the statue of St. Pius X set on top was located outside the "back entrance" of the chapel.

The Journey Continues...

St. Pius X Parish grew in numbers and in spirit with a sense of community embracing the people. New members were continually being added to the rolls of the parish while the liturgy grew their faith.

Fr. Bill was the catalyst that made this happen. He said that he surrounded himself with good people. Things were happening at St. Pius X - liturgically and socially. By going to Mass people were drawn into the life of the parish.

The number of groups and committees at St. Pius X Parish grew out of a desire to help in some way. So, those who were not part of a committee or group were likely to be at the receiving end of the purpose of a committee or group. People could participate when and however they wished. There were times Fr. Bill called on a parishioner to take part in some way because he knew that person had the skills to fulfill the responsibilities well.

This is the legacy that Fr. Bill Grevatch established at St. Pius X Parish: Building community through liturgy, ministries, and social organizations.

Building Community through Liturgy

Fr. Bill said that good liturgy built good parish spirit and a good liturgy was made up of good music, prayers, the Word and the Eucharist. Anyone could participate by being a reader, altar server, Minister of Holy Communion, usher, member of the traditional choir or contemporary choir, sacristan or babysitter.



Contemporary Choir



Fr. Bill Grevatch and parishioner, Jerry Roesler, examine the Lenten cross. Made by Mr. Roesler the cross is 10'x6', weighs 200 pounds. It is made from a red oak tree from his father's farm. Photo courtesy of Times Review April 3, 1980

Lent was a time of renewal – a fresh start - and Fr. Bill gave everyone an opportunity to refresh their souls starting with Ash Wednesday services, Stations of the Cross and confession.

The Parish Mission, with guest speakers, was central to the time for renewal. This was food for the soul, but there was also food for the body. The Passover Meal was another connection to Jesus Christ and the Last Supper. Lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs and wine were served while readings for each serving were proclaimed. There was a potluck, too. Everyone shared something.

Holy Week was just that – holy. The week began with Palm Sunday, blessing of palms, and the reading of the Passion of Jesus Christ - peace; Holy Thursday, the Last Supper and the washing of the feet - humble; Good Friday, the reading of the Passion and veneration of the cross - solemn. At the end of the Good Friday service, while the congregation sat patiently and the organist played a quiet hymn, a parishioner, represented by a family or a child, carried an Easter lily and placed it in front of the cross. So quiet. So much hope.

The Easter Vigil came in darkness, but the risen Christ was the Light. The new Easter Candle was blessed, and the fire passed from one to another, bringing the light into the church. Then the Baptismal Water was blessed, and the joyous “Gloria” sung by all and filled the church. The white altar cloth was brought up the aisle by young women for all to see. They raised their arms and the altar cloth billowed above the altar – new and fresh. The altar was set with candles and the liturgy continued. It is the holiest of nights.



Tending the Easter Vigil Fire

Building Community through Ministries:

Parish Council and Finance Council: The men and women on these two councils advised Fr. Bill on the workings and financial standing of the parish. They represented the people of the parish as well.

The council also had Ex-Officio members, those who reported on the work of different committees within the parish: Family Life, Worship, Education, Social Justice, Men’s Club, Parish Council of Catholic Women (PCCW) and the Parent – Teacher Organization (PTO).

Social Justice Committee: This committee focused on collecting food for West Avenue Food Emergency Resource (WAFER). St. Pius X families were divided into groups and each group was responsible for bringing food items for the food pantry. The Hmong Clothing Center at Holy Cross Seminary was started when a need for clothing and furniture arose for the Hmong refugee families being “placed” in La Crosse.

Parish Districts: St. Pius X Parish was divided into 16 Districts, each having a leader to coordinate the activities of welcoming new parish members and organizing potlucks.

Vacation Bible School: Br. Michael Mandernach organized this summer program for elementary children. A few years later it became an ecumenical endeavor with Good Shepherd Lutheran Church with 200 children attending and 50 to 60 teachers and assistants volunteering from both churches making it a successful program.



Vacation Bible School

Sunday Preschool Program: Preschool children who came to the 10:00 a.m. Mass were given the opportunity to experience Jesus at their level with

teachers and assistants who taught a program for this age group.

Nursery Program: Mothers and fathers could participate in Mass without distraction and their young children could be watched by adults running the program and teenagers helping with the babysitting. There was no Mother's Room at Christ the King Chapel and the nursery was a good place for the children to play and receive care.

Church Environment: During all the seasons of the year, decorating the church and its entry with flowers, banners and seasonal decorations added to the atmosphere of the liturgical celebration.

Funeral Lunches: The parish served bereaved families by making desserts and salads to compliment the meal.

Deer Hunter's Mass: Deer hunters, not only from St. Pius X but also the community, could fulfill their Sunday obligation by attending the Saturday evening Mass at 7:30 p.m. Some hunters came directly from the fields dressed in blaze orange.

Building Community through Social Organizations:

Parish Council of Catholic Women (PCCW): All women of the parish were members of this group. They came together mixing prayer and social activities with fundraising. There were pie and bake sales, the church recipe book sales, Mother-Daughter Breakfasts, bingo at Lakeview Health Care Center, the summer golf league with Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, shared potlucks, donating money where needed for church items such as the altar breads, and hosting the Diocesan and Deanery Councils of Catholic Women Board Meetings. The PCCW gave the women of the parish many opportunities to get to know each other while serving the parish.

Men's Club: This group was open to all the men of St. Pius X Parish. They worked hard and played well. They were good at raising funds for the parish through pancake and homemade sausage breakfasts, Couples Smokers and Adult Fun Nights with games, cards and food. They held steak fries at the rectory and open gym night with basketball and volleyball. The Men's Club donated money for new worship hymnals, Walk for Values and other needs that arose in the parish and school. The summer golf league with Good Shepherd Lutheran Church was organized. The annual softball tournament at the end of August had its roots at this time. The meetings were



*Bishop Burke joins the students of St. Pius for their "Walk for Values"
Photo courtesy of Times Review May 1996*

productive and concluded with a social, always welcoming new members.

Family Fall Fest: This festival offered something for everyone. It began with a Jazz Mass before



Fall Fest

enjoying a roast chicken dinner or a pig roast. After dinner, everyone could go to the gym to buy craft items, quilts, baked goods and raffle tickets. The children played games at the Fish Pond and Ring Toss, winning a prize every time. The Cake Walk could get you the cake of your choice – if you won. There was musical entertainment provided by the school children and different musical groups. It was a great way to bring families together and raise some money for the parish, too.

St. Pius X Day Celebration: The feast day of St. Pius X is August 22, so the parish celebrated at the end of August with a Polka Mass, Chicken-que or pig roast, and an auction of donated items. It was held outside if the weather was good.

60+ Group: This was an active group of “older” people who would meet at church together on the day of their monthly meeting to pray the rosary, participate in Mass, then meet at the New Villa for breakfast. They would invite presenters to speak on subjects of current interest to them. They also planned bus trips to dinner theaters and sightseeing tours. They even met at the Franciscan Spirituality Center to celebrate the First Anniversary of public adoration at the



*60+ Group meets with Bishop Freking
Photo courtesy of Times Review*

Chapel in 1998. The 60+ Group had fun together with potlucks and Christmas parties. They also donated money to St. Pius X Parish where they felt there was a need. One passion the 60+ Group had was praying. They began a prayer group and a prayer chain and prayed for requests submitted by the parishioners.

Newcomer’s Welcome Dinner: Those who joined the parish were invited to a dinner arranged by the Welcoming Committee and served in the dining room at Holy Cross Center. The new parishioners met other new parishioners as well as some established parishioners who could be there to help them become familiar with the offerings of St. Pius X. This event was held twice a year.

Quilting Group: Women came together to sew quilts for the Fall Fest, and they looked forward to sharing time together as friends.

The Athletic Association: This group supported the parish grade school basketball program and set up tournaments at the Aquinas High School gym during the Christmas break with other Catholic grade schools.



Quilting Group

Mother's Group, Father's Group, Single's Groups: These groups met to pray, socialize and talk about issues important to them. They also supported each other and connected as friends.

Parish Campout: Parishioners got together to pray, play, share food and socialize at the Parish Campout at Goose Island or at Pow-Wow Campgrounds. Those who wanted to camp came and set up their campers in a circle around the main campfire. The children looked forward to playing ball and running around the campgrounds. Everyone in the parish was invited to the Saturday Mass celebrated by Fr. Bill and to join in the potluck that followed. It was a time to talk and laugh around the campfire, roast marshmallows and sing campfire songs.



Fr. Bill celebrates Mass at the Parish Campout

fun way to get together with friends in the parish. There were still more ways the people could build community: the Baby Jesus Shower – which donated items to Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and to the Family and Children's Center; the Crop Walk – walking to stop world hunger; Coffee Sunday – groups were



Mardi Gras Krewe

Halloween Dance: There was music, there was dancing, and there were costumes – clever costumes and group costumes – and there was food and refreshments. A



Halloween Party Parade

responsible for setting coffee and snacks after the Masses; Mardi Gras - each parish being responsible for raising funds for the Catholic Schools; delivering mobile meals; and coming together to clean the church.

Saying Goodbye...

In August 1991, thirteen years after Fr. Bill Grevatch became pastor of St. Pius X, Bishop John Paul appointed him pastor of St. Michael Parish in Wausau. Fr. Bill would be leaving within the month.

During these 13 years, Fr. Bill instilled in the parish ways to celebrate. Now one last time the parish celebrated with Fr. Bill: a farewell liturgy and a potluck followed by a reception and a social.

Sharing prayer, sharing food, and sharing friendship.

A perfect way to say farewell to Fr. Bill.

A New Pastor...

Father Joseph Rafacz (Fr. Joe) came to St. Pius X in a move by Bishop John Paul that involved two churches in the La Crosse Diocese. He came from St. Michael's in Wausau; the very parish Fr. Bill Grevatch became the new pastor. Fr. Joe was a guest pastor after Fr. Bill left on August 20th and was named as pastor-elect effective October 1, 1991, Deacon Richard Sage became the Pastoral Associate.

Father Joe took up residence in an apartment at the Holy Cross Diocesan Center. The apartment fit Fr. Joe's needs and proximity to his work as pastor of St. Pius X and Moderator of the Curia for the Diocese. In November, the St. Pius X Rectory was rented to a family from the parish which was later sold. This was the last piece of property that St. Pius X Parish owned.

St. Pius X was a parish rich in liturgy and community. Fr. Joe brought his own gifts to add to what already existed in the parish. He brought prayer and praise; he showed gratefulness and reverence; he had joyful celebrations and grew to love the people of St. Pius X and their faithfulness.

"Pastoral Sharings"...

From the time he arrived at St. Pius X, Fr. Joe shared his thoughts, teachings and kind words with the parishioners through his "Pastoral Sharings" section in each Sunday parish bulletin.

In his first "Pastoral Sharings", Fr. Joe told the parishioners his plan for managing the parish at this time. It included saying Mass during the weekday and weekends, his planned availability in the parish office, meeting with the Parish Council and Parish Finance Council as well as interact with the various groups and programs in the parish, visiting hospitals, nursing homes and making home visits, meet and teach St. Pius X school children as they participate in Mass and visit Religious Education classes on Wednesday as often as he could. Fr. Joe also held the position of Moderator of the Curia for the Diocese of La Crosse.

Father Joe and Deacon Richard Sage would work as a team, therefore Deacon Sage also put forth his list of goals. His plan was to be in the office regularly, assist and foster the work of the committees of the parish, to work closely with the Pastoral and Finance Councils, make visits to hospitals, nursing homes and shut-ins, be in the school classrooms for religion classes and work with the RCIA and prepare couples for marriage.

Both Father Joe and Deacon Sage were ready to make themselves available to the people of St. Pius X and work closely with them to maintain and enhance the liturgies, the programs and activities that had been put into place in the parish.

Rather than wait nine months to evaluate how things were going at St. Pius X, Bishop John Paul made the positions of Father Joe as Pastor and Deacon Sage as Pastoral Associate official on October 6, 1991.

Fr. Joe joyfully announced the decision in his “Pastoral Sharings” to the parishioners, “It’s official now, I am your Pastor! It’s official, Deacon Richard Sage is now your Pastoral Associate! We are delighted to serve you and thank you for the gracious welcome you have given us. It is truly a joy to be able to serve the great people of St. Pius X Parish.”

The parish could feel the smile on Fr. Joe’s face as he wrote those words.

Getting Down to the Work in the Parish...

Fr. Joe had just started to settle into the position of pastor of St. Pius X when the Fall Fest took place. He relied on the planning committees already in place to make sure the Fall Fest was a success. He announced that Fr. Bill Grevatch would be visiting as well as others from Wausau. A time for friends to get together.

An important task for Fr. Joe was getting to know the parishioners. There were so many parishioners, it would take months. It might seem daunting, but Fr. Joe wrote in the bulletin, “It’s great to be your pastor – I am really enjoying getting to know you all.” It was a pleasurable task for Fr. Joe.

Fr. Joe used his weekly “Pastoral Sharings” spot in the bulletin to pass along information and teachings about the seasons of the church year, the holy days, explain the importance of financially supporting the parish, encouraging everyone to make the Eucharist the center of the parish and encouraging the people to become active in the parish ministries and committees.

The Finances of the Parish Explained...

While Father Joe led the St. Pius X parishioners spiritually and as a community that cared for each of its members, Deacon Richard Sage explained the essentials of the parish finances. This was to give everyone a clear picture of where the parish stood financially and what each parishioner was asked to do to meet the budget set by the Finance Council. During the Lenten season in 1992, a Stewardship Renewal would take place. This program asked the parishioners to renew their commitments in the areas of time, talent and treasure to the parish.

Deacon Sage explained the parish income and expenses. The parish looked financially stable, but there was no wiggle room – Fall Fest made less than expected and school tuition payments came in slower than expected. As a result, two monthly rental payments were not made to the Diocese. The inherited debt of \$135,728 was large and growing. Deacon Sage said we needed to bring expenditures in line with income in order to stop the slide. At the time, the parish was not able to pay down any of the debt.

The reality of the debt brought back memories of past debt in the parish.

Looking at the 1992 – 1993 Budget...

There would be some changes with the Catholic schools that would have an impact on parish finances. The changes added \$11,000 in expenditures to support of the new Aquinas Middle School and increased salary base for St. Pius X teachers.

With the Stewardship Renewal program, every envelope holder received a letter from Fr. Joe explaining the importance of stewardship. By making a treasure commitment, the budget for the fiscal year of 1992 – 1993 could be met. Pledges to give their time and share their talent were also important. Committee memberships had to be updated with new lists of interested members and volunteer workers. When this Stewardship Renewal took place, there were about 780 envelope holders in the St. Pius X Parish.

The results of the Stewardship Pledge Renewal at the end of May 1992 showed that 400 completed forms were returned with financial pledges of \$264,044. Others who were regular contributors, but didn't return their pledge forms, were contacted and pledged an additional \$51,000. This was received as a positive response to the renewal program. It indicated "a deepened sense of commitment to and awareness of our parish as a community of our friends, neighbors, fellow sharers of faith," according to Deacon Sage. There was still a lot of work to do to reduce the debt and maintain the budget of the parish. Unfortunately, the parish would continue to struggle with increasing debt and loans for several years to come.

Father Joseph Rafacz-His Gifts to the Parish...

Father Joe was a kind and grateful pastor. He was grateful for all that the people did in the parish: liturgically, helping make the Mass and the Eucharist central to the parish; administratively, committees helping to run the parish; socially, organizations which gathered people in friendship; and outreach, serving those in the parish and the community.

He was proud of his Polish heritage. Fr. Joe sang a favorite Polish carol before the Christmas vigil began – in Polish. During the Advent season, Christmas wafers made of unleavened bread, called oplatki, were made available for the Christmas Eve family meal. Fr. Joe explained the Polish tradition: one member of the family would take the oplatki, break a piece off for oneself, then hand the wafer to another at the table, saying, "I wish you a happy nativity of Christ," and the reply would be, "and also with you," until all received a portion. Father Joe also added Polish sausage and sauerkraut to the Fall Fest menu of roasted chicken and mashed potatoes.

Many of Father Joe's most joyful moments came when he baptized the little babies and children. He would carry the newly baptized child down the church aisle as the choir sang, presenting this child to the parish. If there were two baptisms, he would carry one on each arm. If there were three, Deacon Sage was there to help. It was a joyful moment for everyone in that church.

Above all, Fr. Joe was prayerful. He prayed over the people and gave them opportunities to pray for others as well. He encouraged the reception of the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation. In his "Pastoral Sharings" in the bulletins Fr. Joe taught his parishioners about the seasons of the church, the stories in the Bible and the meanings of the parts of the Mass. He also printed prayers and meditations for the people to use during their personal prayer time. Fr. Joe also made the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament available to everyone once a month.

On Holy Thursday, the Eucharistic procession from the church to the crypt, where the Blessed Sacrament would be kept until the Good Friday Service, was prayerful and solemn. The choir led the parish in song, *Tantum Ergo*, as they made their way down the stairs to the small crypt located under the church proper. Then the room became quiet with prayer. Waiting and praying began.

Nine months after coming to St. Pius X Parish, Fr. Joe expressed his pleasure at being the pastor again, writing in the bulletin, "After nine months of celebrating the Eucharist each Sunday, marrying some couples, burying some of our parishioners, baptizing many babies, giving First Communion to this year's class, and celebrating great holy days with you, I'm beginning to feel I am one of you. It's great to be your pastor!"



Fr. Joe presenting a newly baptized member of the parish.

Celebrating Father Joe's 40th Anniversary...

On May 19, 1956 Father Joe Rafacz was ordained a priest by Bishop John P. Treacy, Bishop of La Crosse at that time. Father Joe was ordained at Christ the King Chapel of Holy Cross Seminary – what was St. Pius X Church at the time of his 40th Anniversary as a priest and of which he was also the pastor. His first assignment as a priest was as an instructor at Holy Cross Seminary teaching Latin and Greek to the seminarians. Forty years later, he came back as pastor to the place of his first assignment, still teaching, and on a 40-year journey of faith.

True to his mission as a priest, Father Joe remained humble and grateful. His celebration with his family and the parishioners was simple: Mass with good music, kind words from Deacon Richard Sage and Tom Thibodeau followed by a potluck picnic lunch held outside. Father Joe expressed his gratitude for all who helped make the day special, “Thanks for making the day enjoyable for my family; most especially, thanks for the St. Pius generosity!” He added, “My great joy is to be pastor at St. Pius, and I am most grateful for the support and love of the parishioners of this fine parish. I thank God for you all today and in a special way for the gift of the priesthood.”

New Happenings in the Parish...

Children's Liturgy: In September 1992, Father Joe announced that a special Liturgy of the Word for children would begin. Deacon Sage, Tom Thibodeau, Bob Lecheler and Father Joe took turns each Sunday to lead the children from the church to a classroom in the school where they would hear the Scripture readings and listen to a homily in a way that they could understand. The children came to look forward to their scripture time as a special time at Mass just for them.

Social Justice Committee: Projects were initiated to help people of the community. One commitment was to help the Salvation Army kitchen serve the evening meals on two Saturdays a month.

They also collected non-perishable food items from parishioners and made holiday food boxes for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. It was rewarding to be able to do these projects, but it was most rewarding to receive thank-you notes from those receiving the food boxes. One little girl told her mother that they must love her family a lot.

This group also set up an angel tree at Christmas time. Paper angel ornaments were hung on the tree with details written on them so parishioners could buy gifts for those who may go without presents under the tree.

Ecumenical Activities: An Ecumenical Breakfast was held on Wednesday morning during Holy Week of Lent with Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. Prayer, food and a speaker made up the program each year.

Additionally, both the Men's and Women's groups had summer golf leagues with Good Shepherd Lutheran Church.

St. Pius X Rummage Sale: Not only was this a fund raiser, it was a social event. It brought parishioners together to help set up display tables and check-out areas in the gym. They came to separate the donated items – clothing, kitchen items, tools, knick-knacks, and Christmas decorations. Others came to help on the day of the sale. All these donations and camaraderie made the sale a success.

Place of Grace: Catholic Worker House, The Place of Grace was started by a group of “people of good will” who saw a need to reach out and feed the hungry people of the community. St. Pius X volunteered to assist The Place of Grace by serving a meal twice a month.

Special Events: A group of volunteers provided a social with beverages and desserts served after special celebrations at St. Pius X. These events included First Communion and Easter Vigil socials and any other event that requested a social.

Sunday Coffee: After Mass coffee and snacks began once or twice a month and grew to every Sunday with the various groups within the parish providing the snacks and making coffee. These coffees provided an opportunity to meet and talk with those who were at Mass together.

Men's Club Breakfasts: These breakfasts made and served during the spring, fall and winter months by the Men's Club became routine and expected. Not only did those who came for the breakfast have a good time and get good food, but the men enjoyed preparing and serving the breakfast, making sure everyone got enough to eat.

St. Pius X Parish Mission Statement...

A new Parish Mission Statement was adopted by the Pastoral Council in January 1994 and it defined St. Pius X and its purpose:

St. Pius X parishioners are called to become the Body of Christ, formed by His Word and nourished by His Sacrament. We joyfully share our faith and gifts of time, talent, and treasure with one another. We are committed to reach out and serve all God's people in the building of His Kingdom.



*Palm Sunday blessing and prayer with Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Photo courtesy of Times Review 1994*

The Journey to Unification Begins...

The St. Pius X Parish Pastoral Council and Finance Council had been studying and doing some pastoral planning for the parish. In July 1996, they looked at the history, examined the situation of that time, and projected the possibilities for the future of St. Pius X. The purpose was to get a vision for the parish as the Third Millennium approached. A meeting was scheduled with Bishop Raymond Burke in July 1996 to obtain his guidance of the situation and for Father Joe and the Pastoral and Finance Councils to share their findings and concerns for the future of the parish.

Although many reasons may have contributed to the pastoral planning process, the shortage of priests to serve the many parishes of the Diocese of La Crosse appeared to be the driving force. This shortage was occurring due to the numerous retirements of older priests and fewer ordinations of new priests.

In May 1997, Bishop Raymond Burke met again with the Pastoral Council and the parishioners about the Parish Planning in reference to St. Pius X, St. Thomas More and Holy Trinity Parishes.

Bishop Burke explained that his view of parish planning was not to rebuild parishes, but to reconfigure Christ's community to be more complete and more accessible to its members. It would be a collaborative effort that would include all three parishes: St. Pius X, St. Thomas More, and Holy Trinity.

Around this same time, Bishop Burke also announced that Fr. Richard Fliss would be transferred out of the Deanery of La Crosse by the end of the year. St. Thomas More would be left without a pastor. Beginning in August, Fr. Joseph Rafacz would fill the vacancy and serve both St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Parishes. Additionally, Fr. Joe would also move from his apartment at Holy Cross Center to the St. Thomas More Rectory to make for a smooth transition. Eventually, Fr. Joe and Fr. Larry Berger, pastor of Holy Trinity, would be taking over the pastoral duties of the three parishes. An effort was being made to bring Holy Trinity Parish into the collaboration.

The bishop felt that St. Pius X and St. Thomas More were ready to proceed to work together, but that it needed to be a gradual and sensitive approach.

These announcements brought a number of questions for Bishop Burke from the parishioners in attendance. For example: How would special events and fundraisers be handled? How would funerals and weddings be scheduled among the three parishes? How would Masses be scheduled? Bishop Burke indicated that there would be no change at this time concerning these issues.

There was concern about integrating the Finance Councils of each parish and Deacon Sage serving all three parishes. The people were told that the Finance Councils would remain separate, but the bishop hoped Deacon Sage could serve all of the parishes.

The parishioners were assured that there would be no changes at any of the parishes with the exception of the Mass schedule, but that would probably not take place until later in the year.

Bishop Burke's final remark was: "This is a positive move, to make the Church in La Crosse more vital."

On August 5, 1997, Fr. Joe moved to the St. Thomas More Rectory. Mass schedules at St. Pius X and St. Thomas More would eventually change to allow him to be present at both parishes for the weekend Masses. In the meantime, Fr. Joe and a help-out priest alternated the weekend Masses between the two parishes.

After meeting with both Parish Councils and staff to get their ideas and input, Fr. Joe established the weekday and weekend Mass schedule for each parish:

Weekdays: 7:30 a.m. at St. Thomas More

8:30 a.m. at St. Pius X

Weekends: Saturday - 4:00 p.m. at St. Thomas More

Sunday - 9:00 a.m. at St. Thomas More

- 7:30 a.m. & 10:30 a.m. at St. Pius X

Small changes were beginning to happen in a movement toward the unification of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More.

Working Together...little steps...

The new Mass schedule effected the lay ministry schedules of both St. Pius X and St. Thomas More. Fr. Joe asked that cantors and choirs help out at St. Thomas More as well as at St. Pius X.

St. Pius X and St. Thomas More schools were beginning to plan joint activities together, such as the Walk for Values and the outdoor rosaries. St. Thomas More families began taking advantage of the St. Pius X CCD program, especially in grades 1 – 6.

In planning for the Third Millennium, Fr. Joe hoped to have parish committees and councils joined together. Tom Thibodeau suggested continued ecumenical focus with St. Pius X, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, St. Thomas More and Our Redeemer Lutheran Church for a possible shared Palm Sunday worship. There might even be the possibility of combined preschool and religious education programs with St. Thomas More in the future.

The St. Pius X PCCW invited the women of St. Thomas More to their dinner and meeting.

St. Pius X and St. Thomas More scheduled the Sacrament of First Reconciliation for the second graders together in December 1997.

In October the teens of the two parishes took part in a program of prayer, silence and a speaker.

Small steps...

Sharing the Way...

On Sunday, February 22, 1998, a new bulletin was put into the hands of the parishioners of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More. In bold, black, italicized letters, the heading read: ***Voices in Unison***. Written below in smaller print: *Come, Spirit of Love and Peace*.

This common bulletin had one column for St. Pius X, a second for St. Thomas More, and a third one for the common ground called *Unison* for news pertaining to both parishes. Fr. Joe wanted each parish to keep its identity and yet collaborate on joint endeavors.

Lent was beginning in a few days. This was a good time – Lent, a time of renewal and reconciliation – to share news and be welcomed in either parish for Lenten Masses or prayer services.

During the fourth week of Lent, a mini retreat called “Growing Together in Christ” was held at St. Thomas More for the parishioners of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More parishes, and included an invitation extended to Holy Trinity Parish. Each evening had a prayer service and a speaker. The Confirmation and RCIA candidates of both parishes attended the first evening with Tom Thibodeau as the speaker. On the second evening there was the anointing of the sick with Deacon Richard Sage giving the presentation. Sr. Margaret Michaud, OSB, spoke on Community the third night. On the final night, Bishop Raymond Burke celebrated the Eucharist and gave the homily. After each prayer service, refreshments were served.

Prayer each night – together.

Food and friendship – shared.

It almost seemed that this Lenten retreat was a precursor of things to come.

Conflicts and Challenges...

Moses, on his 40-year journey, encountered conflicts and challenges with the Israelites he was leading to the Promised Land: feeding the people, satisfying their thirst, hearing their complaints and dealing with impatience.

Fr. Joe, described by parishioners and parish and school staff as a kind and gentle man, had to face challenges and confrontations from parishioners at that time. This was something that was difficult for him. He had to be present and available for Masses, serve the needs of the two parishes and listen to what people had to say. For example, there were the negative comments about the consolidation of committees and councils of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More, but Fr. Joe felt that there were more positive comments than negative ones.

At the May 1998, St. Pius X Pastoral Council meeting, Fr. Joe looked to the Pastoral Councils of both St. Pius and St. Thomas More for “advice and input” because he was getting mixed signals from both parishes. According to a council member who met with Bishop Burke, the issue of the consolidation was left up to the members of the two parishes to decide. Fr. Joe felt it would take a year for people to accept changes. His motto of, “pray and play together” would be put to the test.

But rumors and speculation still circulated, causing ill feelings of dissension between the parishes of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More.

Fr. Joe looked to form a committee to study the issue of the parish schools. St. Pius X had 117 students and St. Thomas More, 113, in grades Kindergarten through Eighth. Teacher salaries were the lowest in the Catholic schools of La Crosse. The proposed committee would also study combining the religious education programs for the public-school children.

The Pastoral Council felt that Bishop Burke should be approached and suggested that he should make a public statement regarding plans for the Catholic schools in the city of La Crosse. A planning committee had already been developing a plan for the future of the Catholic schools. This could help quiet rumors that had been affecting the two parishes.

Bishop Burke had no plans at the time to consolidate the parishes. Looking to the Third Millennium, Fr. Joe proposed a goal of combining the Pastoral and Finance Councils and parish committees of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More and that they should meet jointly before the end of summer.

Fr. Joe was becoming stressed. The Pastoral Council suggested ways to ease his duties, giving him the help, he needed. They proposed a change in Mass times: Saturday - 4:00 p.m. at St. Thomas More; Sunday - 7:30 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. at St. Pius X; 10:30 a.m. at St. Thomas More. The plan was to ease the travel time between each parish. In the end, the original Mass schedule remained in effect.

Change wouldn't come for another year.

But there were other ways to help Fr. Joe. Ministers of Holy Communion were able to help Fr. Joe's schedule by taking Communion to the shut-ins at their homes. St. Pius X cantors helped St. Thomas More with their music program. The separate Pastoral Councils combined helping to ease the time Fr. Joe spent in meetings.

The question of the unification of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Parishes still remained unanswered: but open and possible. Even though no preconceived agenda for unifying the two parishes existed while sharing one pastor, it seemed to become a natural assumption to do so. Both parishes had financial issues. It was suggested that financially it would be more difficult to keep two parishes running than to unify them.

A Time of Transition...

Unfortunately, during this time the two parishes were receiving little communication or guidance from Bishop Burke in regard to the unification process. There continued to be uncertainty as to whether the unification process was even going to happen. This resulted in rumors and hearsay. As a result, both Parish Councils and Fr. Joe wanted to proceed slowly and cautiously. Fr. Joe wanted St. Pius X Parish to plan for the new Millennium and its 40th Anniversary. In August 1998, he requested that a committee be formed to plan celebrations during the Jubilee Year 2000 in both parishes while incorporating the 40th Anniversary of St. Pius X Parish. He hoped to include special monthly liturgies followed by a day of

intergenerational service in the community or Eucharist-centered work such as bringing the Eucharist to shut-ins.

The committee was never formed because the unification of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More became a reality over the next year.

Meeting with Bishop Burke...

On October 8, 1998, a meeting was held at St. Thomas More Church with Bishop Raymond Burke and the St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Pastoral and Finance Councils so that questions concerning the unification of the two parishes could be asked and comments that concerned the councils could be discussed.

The result of that meeting may have brought forth more questions than answers. Questions like: Why wasn't Holy Trinity involved with the Parish Planning as originally suggested? Would the schools be consolidated? If so, when? Is St. Pius X Parish closing in a year? Clear and more complete communication was needed from the Bishop to quell the rumors that rose to the surface after the meeting.

Fr. Joe did clarify that St. Pius X was chosen to consolidate with St. Thomas More because the parish did not own a building and that it was within one mile of St. Thomas More. Priest shortage was also an important factor when considering the decision that had to be made about unifying these parishes.

At the November 1998 St. Pius X Pastoral Council meeting, Fr. Joe said he didn't think consolidation of the two parishes was on Bishop Burke's mind until he could hear from the parishioners first. That did not ease the fear of the St. Pius X parishioners who were concerned that their parish would close. Even though there were no plans for the unification of the two parishes, some members felt it was the path that was indicated by the diocese.

Deacon Richard Sage and Tom Thibodeau felt that prayer was the only act that would bring the parishes together. "The issues facing the parishes are those of Lent: identity as two independent parishes are dying, and there is a sense of loss. But this will lead to 'resurrection' of one new, unified parish." Services for Lent in 1999 were in the process of being planned. The two churches would pray together.

They said there needed to be a commitment "as one parish to support Father Joe and help him in his ministry."

Fr. Joe reported that Bishop Burke told him that the St. Pius X Pastoral Council meetings would be held jointly with St. Thomas More as of January 1, 1999.

Bishop Burke had no communication with the parish or the council since the October meeting even though, he had promised a letter which would explain his plans for St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Parishes. That lack of communication from the bishop was disappointing and disheartening to the council.

Fr. Joe later talked to Bishop Burke about these concerns and reported to the council that a letter would be forthcoming.

Bishop Raymond Burke's Letter Arrives...

The anticipated letter from Bishop Raymond Burke dated December 12, 1998 and addressed "To Christ's Faithful of St. Pius X Parish and St. Thomas More Parish at La Crosse" had been received by Father Joseph Rafacz. It contained thoughts and plans for the future of these two parishes, grateful words for Father Joe and empathy for the changes the parishes had to endure. He noted that the process up to this time had taken two years.

The Bishop addressed the many questions that were being asked by the parishioners of both parishes. He felt that both parishes were "ready to come together in greater unity." That feeling made it easier to provide a pastor at a time in which there was a priest shortage.

With prayer being central to parish life, Bishop Burke wanted St. Pius X and St. Thomas More to continue "to pray and celebrate the sacraments together more and more."

St. Thomas More Church was the better setting as a place of worship "to become the church of the unified parish." It not only was beautiful, but it had adequate space in which the parishioners could gather.

St. Pius X Church "will become the chapel of Holy Cross Diocesan Center." It can be used for special celebrations: weddings, funerals or a school Mass; but once the parishes were unified, the agreement would be revised.

There was no deadline for the unification of the two parishes, but Bishop Burke wanted a plan from them by the summer of 1999. He welcomed suggestions for a new name for the unified parish, but the parish could also simply combine both names – St. Pius X and St. Thomas More.

Addressing the schools, Bishop Burke understood the importance of Catholic education of the children in the parishes. A committee had been formed to study and make recommendations for the organization of the Catholic schools. The elementary schools will become part of the Greater La Crosse Area Schools. As with Aquinas High School and Aquinas Middle School, all parishes will be responsible for the support of the schools.

It was Bishop Burke's intention to include Holy Trinity in the unification plan. It was still his intention to include them. However, he said he had "not been able to give sufficient energy to include Holy Trinity in the wider planning for your two parishes" at this time.

Bishop Burke expressed "deepest gratitude to your pastor, Father Joseph Rafacz, for his excellent leadership of your parishes." He went on to say, "I am confident that Father Rafacz will continue to give of himself tirelessly to lead your parishes as you develop an even greater unity of prayer, worship and witness of life."

Bishop Burke had made it known that he understood the difficulties this change had on the parishioners. He asked the parishioners to "accept the suffering that comes with change."

Closing with words of respect and affection for those of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More, Bishop Burke added: "You, your families and your homes will continue to be in my prayers as your two parishes become one."

Fr. Joe first sent a copy of Bishop Burke's letter to the St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Pastoral and Finance Councils so they could read and understand what the bishop's ideas and plans were for the parishes. After the councils had an opportunity to look at the letter, Fr. Joe was going to present the letter at the St. Pius X-St. Thomas More Parish Dinner on January 9, 1999. Finally copies of the letter would be read at the Masses and inserted in the bulletins of both churches on the weekend of January 9th and 10th.

Reaction to the Bishop's Letter...

The joint committees of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More met on January 14, 1999, for their regular meetings. Along with the regular business reports there was discussion about the letter sent to the parishioners of both parishes by Bishop Burke concerning the unification.

The Family Life Committee reported that there was "generally a positive reaction." Some members of the committees were not surprised by what Bishop Burke wrote. There were some negative comments but also it was said, "you can't please everyone." They felt that mostly there should be leadership, a plan to show the people, and a "probable" time frame for unification.

The Worship Committee suggested scheduling a speaker during Lent who had gone through the unification process. Deacon Richard Sage "feels everyone should try to focus on the positive issues of unifying the two parishes." Fr. Joe said it was "important that we pray well together."

The Catholic Education Committee realized they were working under three assumptions: that St. Pius X and St. Thomas More schools will be separate for the 1999-2000 school year; that both schools will participate in the Deanery school study; and the religious education programs of both parishes will be "jointly administrated" for the 1999-2000 school year.

When the Joint Pastoral Councils of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More met on January 21, they discussed Bishop Burke's letter.

Fr. Joe thought Bishop Burke was looking for the parish unification to be completed by the summer of 2000. Fr. Joe envisioned the population growing on La Crosse's south side; therefore, St. Thomas More Church had the space to accommodate that growth. He also felt that St. Pius X School could be rented and used for the upper grades of the unified school.

Barb Kruse thought it was "very important to keep the lines of communication open and strong, keeping parishioners updated on special details of the unification process; she suggested that Fr. Joe speak directly to the parishioners from the pulpit."

An issue of concern was the difficulty of supporting two schools which were not scheduled to be consolidated until a year after the parishes were unified.

These responses to Bishop Burke's letter showed there was a great deal of work to be done: to listen to parishioners; to gather information on what was important when forming a new parish from two established parishes; and to form a plan for unifying those two parishes.

In the meantime, the Pastoral Councils of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More had begun meeting jointly as the bishop requested. Liturgical and social groups reported on the activities occurring at each church. The Finance Councils met jointly for the first time in March. Even though the

two parishes had their own churches, their unification had begun to seep into these groups like small streams that flow into larger rivers. Unification of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More seemed inevitable.

Events and Activities Bring the People Together...

It was becoming a natural part of the journey to unification for St. Pius X and St. Thomas More to find ways to share time together, “to pray and play together” as Fr. Joe wanted to see happen with the parishes.

A combined parish dinner was held in early January 1999. The gathering had several purposes: reports given from the committees; the presentation of parish awards; and the distribution of Bishop Burke’s letter to the parishioners concerning his thoughts on unification.

On February 14th, a Valentine’s Day dinner was held for all couples at St. Pius X and St. Thomas More. Those who were married many years were recognized and those couples preparing for marriage were introduced. Fr. Joe blessed all those who attended.

The Lenten mini retreat in March 1999 focused on praying: praying with the Scripture; praying with Icons; and praying for healing.

St. Pius X and St. Thomas More came together at St. Thomas More Church for the Triduum liturgies during Holy Week: Holy Thursday Mass; Good Friday services; and the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday evening. Easter Sunday Masses were still held at each church.

In the weeks that followed Easter, both parishes joined in the celebration of the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion of their young people.

St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Catholic Schools invited the parishioners from both parishes to join them for a combined Walk for Values to show support for the parish schools.

The women of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More were invited to sign up for summer league golf at Hillview Golf Course. The Men’s Club sponsored a Fun Night for both parishes for the purpose of raising money and having a good time together. Both churches combined their WAFER collections and their funeral luncheon programs. The Social Justice Committees worked together to help the needy families in the area with food baskets for Easter. Committees from St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Parishes formed one committee for the Bishop’s Annual Appeal.

These were ways to get to know each other, to do good, and to pray together.

Planning the Unification...

In his December 12, 1998, letter to the parishioners of both parishes, Bishop Burke requested a plan for unification by the summer of 1999. A Unification Committee from each parish was formed to develop this plan. They gathered information and comments from the parishioners and the various committees of the Pastoral Council. With this information, the Unification Committee began to formulate a plan that would unify St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Parishes in a way that would be liturgically and socially satisfying for both parishes.

The process began with questions to the liturgical committees and social groups of the Pastoral and Finance Councils: What joys and gifts could be brought into the new parish? What concerns and needs are there? What contribution can each parishioner make? What is a good date to unify? What name would be given to the new parish?

The responses to these questions were thoughtful and provided ideas to weave what each parish did best when the new parish emerged. Good communication, organization, and active participation were important for the smooth transition into a new parish. It was also important to have training for the various ministries. Fostering a sense of parish-as-family, hospitality, and getting to know one another in prayer and at a social level was discussed.

Suggestions for a date to unify ranged from September 1st to Advent. There were a number of names for the new parish that were mentioned. In the end, Bishop Burke would select the name from a list of their suggestions.

As part of the unification, Fr. Joe said there should be changes to the Sunday Mass schedule – keeping the 4:00 p.m. Mass of Anticipation on Saturday, three Masses on Sunday – 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m. – which could later change to two Sunday Masses – 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.

Further plans of the Unification Committees were to have parish listening sessions on April 10th and 11th with a report of the findings and recommendations to Bishop Burke by the end of August. The two Unification Committees would also come together to form one Unification Committee before the August meeting.

Unification Committee Meeting with Bishop Burke...

Representatives from the Unification Committee of St Pius X and St. Thomas More Parishes met with Bishop Burke in April 1999, about the progress the committee had made up to this point. They told him that the combined unification meetings had been cooperative and productive. The committee also reported their communication with the parishioners through listening sessions and written comments that were solicited. A goal for the Unification Committee was “to provide opportunities for members of the two parishes to come to know each other better.”

Bishop Burke was interested in the Unification Committee’s efforts and wanted to be kept informed of their progress. Fr. Joe indicated that he was comfortable with the directions and work of the committee. This led Bishop Burke to give them his support for the unification process. He acknowledged that the task was a difficult one and he was available if they needed him.

The Plan for Unification...

A memo dated June 22, 1999, was sent to Bishop Burke. It was from Father Joe Rafacz; Tim Sawyer of St. Thomas More and Howard Voss of St. Pius X, co-chairs of the Unification Committee; Alice Kempton, St. Thomas More Committee Member; and Linda Kloet, Acting Secretary of the Unification Committee. Other members of the Committee were Tom Glodosky, Bill Jaekel, Norb Korger, Jeff Pederson, Monte Rentschler, Brad Sturm, Tom Thibodeau, and Deb

Wallerich. The Subject: "Recommendations concerning the development plan for the creation of a new parish, formerly comprised of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Churches."

The Unification Committee presented its recommendations to the joint Pastoral Council on June 10, 1999. The council prayed, studied and discussed the plan. They "modified and adjusted" some of the items "to meet the needs of the new parish." A "spiritual and realistic atmosphere" was present as the people "placed the needs of our new faith community above their own personal interests."

Bishop Burke originally directed the Pastoral Council to consider five questions when creating a plan for unifying St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Parishes. The Unification Committee used that guide for their Developmental Plan:

1. To find unity in celebration of the Holy Eucharist and prayer: September 4, 1999, was the date chosen to unify. Mass times would remain the same at this time with a 4 p.m. Saturday Mass, 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Sunday Masses. Ministry programs needed to be unified although the choirs were already combined.
2. School Unification: The study by the Greater La Crosse Area Catholic Schools was already working on this. The completion of the study of school unification was important to St. Pius X and St. Thomas More because each was supporting its own school. They hoped the area school unification would occur under the same time frame as the parish unification.
3. St. Thomas More Church buildings would become the site of the unified parish: The committee agreed that St. Thomas More Church should become the site for the new parish. Building improvements were needed and there were no funds available at this time to accomplish those needs.
4. Continued financial support of the Diocese of La Crosse, parishes and Catholic schools: Tithing and support had fallen behind in both parishes during the unification process and forming a Stewardship Committee was being discussed for the next fiscal year.
5. Names suggested for the new parish from the parishioners: All Saints; Christ the King; Gesu; Good Shepherd; Guardian Angel; Infant Jesus; Mary, Mother of the Church; Mother Teresa; Pax Christi; Pax and Bonum; St. Francis of Assisi; St. Mary's; and St. Mary Magdalene.

The Pastoral Councils "enthusiastically supported" this plan. The Unification Committee was glad for all the people's comments and responses which helped them form a plan and "to create a new parish that belongs to the people of these two existing parishes."

The decision to approve the work and the developmental plans of the Unification Committee was now in the hands of Bishop Burke. He was also responsible to choose a name that would reflect the character and image of the new parish.

The Final Steps Together...

Father Joe also said that holding Masses in one place does not mean that they were fully united. There were issues, such as a financial budget, that were necessary to resolve. The unification process should be a slow one, he said.

The Recommendations of the Unification Committee dated August 8, 1999, had been mailed out to the parishioners of both St. Pius X and St. Thomas More. Fr. Joe, Tim Sawyer and Howard Voss, co-chairs, had been approached by the Times Review and the La Crosse Tribune concerning the unification of the two parishes. Fr. Joe would not allow any interviews until all the parishioners had received the letters and were aware of the unification progress.

The joint Pastoral Councils met on August 17, 1999 to discuss what else needed to be done to bring the two parishes together. Father Joe said he would like to use the hyphenated name and keep it until the two parishes were fully integrated. He did not want a new name to become a divisive factor. Bishop Burke approved of the Unification Development Plan submitted to him by the Unification Committee, but still had to make a decision on the name of the new parish.

It was recommended by Dee Smikla and Father Joe that a new mission statement be written that stated the aim of the new parish. Also, a new Pastoral Council needed to be elected by the unified parish. Father Joe asked the members of the present councils to remain until January 2000 so that those interested candidates could come forth.

Fr. Joe explained that parishioners needed to re-register in the new parish. There could possibly be 1300 families – 693 from St. Pius X and 551 from St. Thomas More. A stewardship campaign and a census was being planned for later in the Fall of 1999.

All Masses were held at St. Thomas More Church on the weekend of September 4th – 5th, 1999. There would no longer be Sunday Masses at St. Pius X. The new parish was formed. It was now named St. Pius X – St. Thomas More Parish.

The Last Party at St. Pius X...

St. Pius X had become a “praying together” and “playing together” community. They shared food when having potlucks after praying together. And so that is what they did, as they always had experienced it, to say farewell to 40 years of being St. Pius X.

On August 22, 1999 the parish celebrated the feast day of their patron saint, St. Pius X, with cake and coffee after each Mass that Sunday morning. In the afternoon, the St. Pius X Parish celebrated their faith and the joy of their parish life with a social hour and a picnic supper. It was a time to share food and a time to share stories and memories of 40 years together. It was bittersweet. A time of sadness, but also a time to look forward to what could be. They were people on a journey. They had been doing this for 40 years.

In recognition of the 40th Anniversary of St. Pius X, the August 29th bulletin had a short history of the establishment of St. Pius X, listing the pastors who served over the years, noting the active parish committees advising those pastors, and recognizing the number of parishioners who completed the Diocesan Lay Ministry Program and the sons of parishioners who became priests. Fr. Joe wrote: “We are grateful for this opportunity to join the parishioners of St.

Thomas More Church...The final unification is scheduled to happen as we begin the New Millennium Year 2000. May God bless us, the new parish of the Diocese of La Crosse."

Bishop Burke's Decree of the Unification...

In the Decree that he issued in March 20, 2000 Bishop Burke declared that the parishes of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More were "suppressed" effective April 9, 2000. On that same date, the name of the new parish would be Mary, Mother of the Church and take the place of the two former parishes. The church building of St. Thomas More would retain its title and become the parish church.

The schools of these former parishes would merge to become Mary, Mother of the Church School in the Fall of 2000 according to the plan of consolidation of the newly named Coulee Catholic Schools, which eventually was re-named Aquinas Catholic Schools on July 1, 2009.

Finally, the Bishop also decreed that "all the assets of the suppressed parishes would become the assets of the new parish." The separate parish organizations – the Pastoral Councils, Finance Councils and the Parish Council of Catholic Women (PCCW) – were to be dissolve and reorganized with members from the two former parishes.

The Journey ends...

The people of St. Pius X wandered for 40 years before coming to the place where they all began. In 1960, they were expected to form a new parish under the leadership of Father Francis McCaffrey – and they did. Because of the debt that had accrued and the closing of Holy Cross Seminary, Father Peter Butz oversaw the sale of St. Pius X property and moved the parish to Holy Cross Seminary. Father Bill Grevatch guided the parishioners to grow liturgically and socially through organizations and activities in the parish. Father Joe Rafacz's ministry at St. Pius X added kindness and gratefulness and made it possible for the unification process with St. Thomas More to take place.

Moses had his struggles, but he led his people to Canaan through his faith in God and his determination.

It was never an easy journey for the people of St. Pius X, but they grew in faith by placing importance on the sacraments and prayer at their core, and they grew in their ability to adapt along the way.

Now they are part of Mary, Mother of the Church.

And the journey continues...

St. Pius X Parish — Our Stories
Compiled by Donna Omernik
2017-2019

Our Stories

I was so blessed when we relocated to La Crosse in 1992 to find the St. Pius X Parish! The minute I walked in the door, it felt like home! I met Sister Louise and Ann Malin. They both welcomed our family with open arms. I was offered the position of St. Pius X School secretary in August of that year. It was such a fun experience! I had the opportunity to work with an amazing staff, parents, and children of our parish for more than eight years.

Some of my memories include:

- Mark Halter's weekly bulletin wit
- Men's Club pancake breakfasts in the Diocesan dining room
- The introduction of Tom Thibodeau's famous turkey chili
- The beginning of the Scrip program
- Bishop Freking would come to pray in church in front of the Blessed Sacrament daily. It was not uncommon to find him sound asleep spending time with Jesus
- The retired priests and bishops interacting with the students daily
- Easter Liturgies in the Crypt Chapel
- Living rosaries on the Diocesan grounds
- Amazing parent and parishioner volunteers
- Choir – Mary Jo Schmidt, director.... Joe Hauser on keyboard

When we merged St. Pius X with St. Thomas More, it opened up so many doors for all of us! We have truly become one parish family; we share each other's blessings and reach out in times of need. I am so thankful and blessed to be part of such an amazing spiritual family!

-Linda Kloet

Parish Growth

The Early Days

I joined St. Pius X Parish when my mother moved in with me. My mother and I went to daily Mass held on the porch of the rectory. Sunday Masses were held in Christ the King Chapel, the seminary chapel.

When Father Bill Grevatch and Father Peter Knipple were assigned to St. Pius X, the rectory was remodeled by parishioners – men, women, and kids. Kitchen shelves were replaced with enclosed cabinets, the stairway was updated, and the entire house repainted. A drab and weary farmhouse was turned into a fresh and lovely rectory for the pastors.

Fr. Bill and Fr. Knipple carried out a census of the parish. Chris McIntyre, a seminarian who spent the summer at the rectory, and I put together a huge map in my basement of the St. Pius parish boundaries. The project took all summer. Chris visited every home in the district to determine if it was a Catholic home and on weekends he would come to my home and identify those Catholic families by placing a pin on the map for each Catholic household.

I had a word processor at my place of work and was given permission to use it after office hours for personal business. From the information gathered by Chris, I was able to compile a complete alphabetical listing of parishioners with the new internal boundaries of St. Pius X Parish. The word processor was the precursor to the present-day computer, and, without it, the listing of the new parish families would have been a humungous job! As it was, I spent many an evening at my office until 11:00 p.m.

Later, when all the families were identified, a committee was formed and couples from the parish went to visit each family to gather information, register them in the parish, ask for their involvement in parish activities and for a tithing commitment. The results of these visits gave a more complete picture of the makeup of St. Pius. Given the opportunity to participate in the church activities and liturgical celebrations was a personal touch that formed a strong community.

I was very involved at St. Pius. I was on the Parish Council, active in the PCCW. I was single, so was a natural for this ministry. I was in the first Lay Ministry program in the Diocese along with Julius and Adeline Wetsch. Richard Sage was in the same program as I for the two years of this program, but he then went on to study two more years in the Diaconate Program.

-Ann Malin

Getting Started: Mass & Classrooms

I grew up attending Mass in the basement of St. Thomas More School, and the early days of St. Pius X we had Mass in the beautiful chapel at the seminary before using the basement of the new church-school building on Mormon Coulee Road.

My dad spent many hours with Father Heindl painting the classrooms and church walls at the new St. Pius X Church and School. Many nights and weekends were spent painting those walls. They would make trips to Fort McCoy to buy army surplus paint. Some of it was pretty ugly. But it was cheap.

-Larry Fox

The Input of Parish Boundaries

With the establishment of the new parish of St. Thomas More in 1947-1948, my family was among the first to join. I was part of the first class of students in the new school, being there for grades 4 – 8. My husband's (George's) family moved into the area and joined St. Thomas More Parish after (George) finished eighth grade at Cathedral. When Bishop John Treacy set boundaries for the parishes of the city, my parent's house was one block south of the boundary line. This meant my parents (and I) now belonged to St. Pius X Parish.

George and I were planning to get married and wanted our wedding at St. Thomas More. Because of the new boundaries, Father Mullen said we couldn't be married at St. Thomas More. My parents were now members of St. Pius and that was where we were to be married. We were disappointed by this new ruling...but it all turned out just fine!

Our wedding day of April 20, 1963 at St. Pius X Church was beautiful, clear and sunny...and we were ecstatic. Father McCaffrey, the pastor of St. Pius, was a kind and gentle man and helped make us feel welcome at this new parish. Our families were there to celebrate our marriage, and my Dad cried when he walked his only daughter down the aisle. After the morning wedding Mass, there was a luncheon for the wedding party. Following that we had a traditional reception at the Knights of Columbus Hall, which was located in downtown La Crosse at that time.

George and I celebrated our 40th Anniversary April 20, 2003.

-Mary Ann Snapp

Growing Pains of Moving

Our oldest son started First Grade at St. Pius X School in the fall of 1963 (at Broadview Place and Mormon Coulee Road). The parish and school were about a mile down the dirt road from our house. So much of our life centered around church and school from then on. We had no church building – Mass was held in the basement of the school off the playground in the back. Many new families were moving into that area and our school and parish was really growing. After Holy Cross Seminary was closed and needed occupants, St. Pius was moved across the highway. We had to take our children out as they would need to cross the highway and the public school was closer.

-Virgene (Nixie) Oldenburg

Rectory Fire

I don't have any information as to how the fire started in the rectory in the summer of 1962. I found out when I went to register my family to become members of St. Pius X. The fire took place the night before. Father McCaffrey was not hurt and was moved to the Seminary. He lived there until the Rectory was made ready for him to live in again. St. Pius X Parishioners were going to Mass at Christ the King Chapel at the Seminary for weekend Mass until the lower level of St. Pius X Church was built. The school opened in the fall of 1962. St. Pius X was formed in 1960 by Bishop Treacy.

-Betty Koenen

Parish Life

Wedding Bells

We were married on July 15, 1967 at 12:00 noon at St. Pius X. It was a beautiful day – 90 degrees. Father McCaffrey performed the ceremony. Tom's brother Gary was the best man and my sister Carol was the maid of honor. Dad (Ray Springer) walked me down the aisle and when I looked at him, there were tears in his eyes. He wasn't sad, just emotional about his first daughter getting married.

St. Pius X Church was plain, but we knew that we wanted to get married and how the church looked didn't matter to us. Our families and friends were there for us. As bride and groom, we received both the Body and Blood of Christ for Communion. That did not happen otherwise. This was a special memory for us.

In those days, during the ceremony and before leaving the church, the bride went to the Blessed Virgin to say a prayer while a song was played. I placed a rose in front of the mosaic of the Blessed Virgin. That is what St. Pius X had, not a statue of the Blessed Virgin. We took most of our family and wedding party pictures outside on the parking lot after the ceremony. We also went to a studio for a few formal pictures.

-Diane and Tom Elsen

Parish as a Family

Marilyn and I moved back to La Crosse from Kentucky in May 1968 and moved into a house next door to Dick and Evelyn Wilhelm. Dick arranged for us to get this house.

Because we lived south of Ward Avenue, we were to belong to St. Pius X Parish, located at Broadview Place and Mormon Coulee Road. Attending Mass at St. Pius X was the most rewarding and friendly experience we have ever encountered. It was like the parish wrapped their arms around us and would not let go. The school was on the first floor and the church was in the walkout basement. There were so many young families with young kids that filled most of the pews in the church, and the church was filled. Father Peter Butz was our pastor. Leaving Mass on Sunday was like taking the message of the Gospel to our homes and our interactions with our neighbors. There was something like 30 – 35 people living in the nine homes in our neighborhood and almost all belonged to St. Pius X Parish. The support and caring prayers that we received from the parish and the school when our daughter Beth developed cancer at age seven was a blessing that we had never experienced before. Sister Louise and the teachers at St. Pius School went out of their way to keep Beth current with home schooling.

Father Peter Butz, on July 7, 1977, appointed Quinn Johnson, Mel Fox, James Thornton, Julius Wetsch, Dick Wilhelm and me as Lay Ministers of Holy Communion. We were formally approved by Bishop Freking to be the first Eucharistic Communion Ministers at St. Pius X Parish. As Ministers of Communion, we started taking communion to Bethany St. Joseph Care Center after Mass on Sunday. Father Joe Rafacz asked us to take Communion every Sunday to an elderly couple who were in their nineties. It was an amazing experience to get to know this

couple and we gained so much from visiting with them. Marilyn and I continue today to serve as Ministers of Holy Communion.

In 1983, when I first found out about the Diocesan Lay Ministry/Diaconate program, I expressed interest in entering the program. After discussing it with Father Bill Grevatch and my wife, I decided to proceed with it. I felt the need to serve the Parish and the Church at a different level. It was an excellent program that took us into Bible Study, Pastoral Ministry and Care, Church Music, Readers and other areas where lay people can better serve the parish and church. It changed my life.

Following completion of Lay Ministry in 1985, Marilyn and I became involved in working with engaged couples through meetings with them and facilitating pre-marriage programs. This has been one of the most rewarding ministries we have ever experienced.

Marilyn served for several years for the Fall Festival Dinners and was active in the PCCW. I'm not sure of the time frame, but Bishop Burke decided to merge St. Pius X Parish with St. Thomas More Parish. People from both parishes did not take kindly to this decision. I was asked to serve on the St. Pius X Team to facilitate the merging of the two parishes. At first it seemed like we were more focused on "if we should do this," rather than on "what are the issues involved in making this happen." The committee decided that we needed a new name for the parish, and it was decided that the name should be "St. Mary's." At the time we did not know that the name of the church building could not be changed. If we had known this in advance, I believe we would have left it as "St. Thomas More." Fr. Joe Rafacz was the pastor and he would say Mass at both parishes for several months during the transition. Each parish had its own "culture" and they were very different, so some level of conflict was to be expected and it was not easy for Father Joe. It took a good seven years before it finally leveled out and I believe today it is a vibrant parish.

In our lifetime, we have belonged to parishes in La Crosse and Kentucky and visited many churches in the Diocese, but have never encountered a parish so welcoming, so caring and so supportive at St. Pius X and it is good to see it in Mary, Mother of the Church Parish.

-Bill and Marilyn Jaekel

Jerry Roesler, Our Hero

Jerry Roesler and his crew of maintenance men at the Diocesan Center were always there for us at St. Pius X. Whether setting up for festivals, rummage sales, apple and pumpkin pie sales, celebrations for priests, craft sales, parish picnics and dinners or Christmas celebrations, Jerry and his team were always available to lend a helping hand and assure the success of the event. That included making sure there were enough tables and chairs, that the floors were sparkling clean, that the electrical system was functioning properly and that we had enough electrical outlets for all the necessary appliances. Jerry's team earned a reputation for going the extra mile, always with cheerfulness and readiness to help. To this day, we remember his helpfulness for the many caring duties he and his crew performed to assure our celebrations were beautiful and meaningful for everyone.

The women of the PCCW will never forget the “old root basement” where the organization stored bushels of apples they picked for free at area apple orchards. We could only take apples that were already on the ground, but admittedly picked a few from the trees! We stored them there to assure they stayed cool and fresh before we used them for baking apple pies sold in the PCCW fundraisers. To get to the cellar, we had to take the rickety old freight elevator. We were all frightened to take the elevator, afraid we would get stuck. One year, a couple brave souls volunteered to take the elevator down to the cellar. Sure enough that old elevator stalled on its descent to the basement! They were stuck! From up above, we yelled that we would “call Jerry Roesler to come to the rescue.” We called Jerry and were relieved to find him at home. He came right over and repaired the old elevator and rescued the ladies. We were never so happy to see Jerry!

With order restored and under the supervision of head baker Mary Jo Carl, we returned to the task of baking pies. We made and sold more than 200 pies that year-I think it was a record! In the minds of the ladies of PCCW that year: “Thank God for Jerry Roesler!”

-Bernadine Voss

New Members

Our journey to La Crosse, Wisconsin, began in December of 1990, when we (with our three children ages 3 months to three years) relocated here from the Twin Cities for Joseph’s new employment with PostalSoft; which interestingly was located in what we were to learn, was the former St. Pius X School/Church building. At first, we became members of Roncalli Newman Parish, where our children enjoyed their Pre-School Religion Classes during the Sunday morning Mass, and assuredly the donuts that followed! When our oldest was ready for Kindergarten in 1992, we then chose to join St. Pius X Parish in the Diocesan Building. Ann Malin helped us with our parish registration.

We remember attending our first parish dinner and being seated across from Fr. Joe Rafacz, the Pastor. We introduced ourselves as being new members, and then asked him how long he had been Pastor of St. Pius X Parish. He responded that he was new just like we were!

Many wonderful memories of our involvement with the Liturgy Committee, Joseph serving as a Lector, the Palm Sunday processions with our neighbors at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, as well as participating in Vacation Bible School with Good Shepherd, the Cub Scout and Boy Scout activities, the school Walk for Values around the Diocesan building, and more!

-Therese and Joseph van Oss

Priest Memories

Father McCaffrey, pastor (1960-1968)

On a Saturday afternoon, Father McCaffrey paid my family a visit. My father offered Father McCaffrey a glass of homemade-concord grape wine. It was my Grandma Schumacher's recipe. Father was impressed. He called it "One Mass wine." He liked it so much he used it for the Easter Vigil Mass that year.

-Deborah (Hottinger) Haldorson

Father McCaffrey was very easy-going and would have reminded you of your loveable grandfather. We never saw much of him around the school.

-Lorraine (Mrs. Check) Richter

Father McCaffrey was a sweet gentle soul. He was very good to the children and they in turn respected him. My contact with him was mostly at daily Mass and occasional classroom visits.

-Betty Koenen

Father Butz, pastor (1968-1978)

In 1976, Father Peter Butz would at times help dish out hot lunch at St. Pius X School. He would promote the food like sauerkraut to the boys by saying, "Have some, it will put hair on your chest!" Our son, Jeff, was 6 years old and in First Grade. One day, he met Father Butz in the hallway and asked him, "Do you have hair on your chest?" Needless to say, Father Butz, who could be a bit stuffy, didn't find that amusing. But Mrs. Slattery, the First-Grade teacher, did! She heard Jeff's question to Father Butz and relayed the story to us.

-Sam and Jean Skemp

Sometime in the 1970's, I had some information to deliver to the rectory. As I parked my car and headed toward the rectory, which was a house near St. Pius X School, I walked by a car in the driveway there. But wait! Whose legs are those sticking out from under the car? Yes, that someone slid out to greet me—it was Father Butz! He was in his work clothes being his own car mechanic! He told me where to put the information and back he went under the car!

-Jean Skemp

Father Butz was quite strict – never came to the classrooms. He did run the lunch program at one time and can remember him disciplining the students for putting their elbows on the tables in the lunchroom. Fr. Wirts was an assistant to Fr. Butz. I always thought he was a very educated man.

-Lorraine (Mrs. Check) Richter

My favorite priest possibly of all time is Father Peter Butz. I still think of him every Good Friday because of his reading of The Passion.

-Tim Konop

Father Peter Butz was a hard-working, thoughtful pastor. When we were still over at Old St. Pius for worship, he would sometimes bring Father Leon Tice, an elderly blind priest with other health issues to concelebrate Mass.

-Virginia Horstman

Sister Betty Reinders and Sr. Mary Rose Menting worked and taught school at St. Mary's Parish in Keyesville for about four to five years while Fr. Peter Butz was Administrator there. They also worked with him at St. Pius X Parish in La Crosse. They said that they relied on him more in the country setting of Keyesville than in La Crosse but noted that his character was the same in both places. Sr. Betty and Sr. Mary Rose described him as "a spiritual, upright, and straight forward priest—a person knew exactly where you were with him." They went on to say that "Fr. Butz was a very hard worker, disciplined, a man of his word, and very fair. He expected a person to do the job you were there to do."

Fr. Butz liked woodworking. He was said to have made a lattice back-drop behind the altar at the original church of St. Pius X and which was decorated with flowers.

He liked to cook, especially sauerkraut. When the Parish moved to Holy Cross Seminary after the sale of the property, he named the kitchen "St. Martha's Kitchen."

When Fr. Butz came to St. Pius X in 1968, he introduced himself to the parishioners on that first Sunday by saying, "My name is Fr. Peter Butz—like cigar butts."

-Sister Betty Reinders and
Sister Mary Rose Menting

We got to know Father Butz as a pastor when we worked and taught school for four or five years at St. Mary's in Keyesville, Wisconsin. When we came to work with him at St. Pius in La Crosse, only some things were different. For example, in La Crosse the rectory was located a short ways away from the church/school/convent building. We didn't bump into him or rely on his help as much in La Crosse as we did in the isolated country setting in Keyesville. That being said, however, Father Butz's character was the same in both places. He was a spiritual, upright, and straight-forward priest – a person knew exactly where you stood with him. Before becoming a Diocesan priest, he was a priest in an order located in Techny, Illinois. Father Butz was a very hard worker, disciplined, a man of his word and very fair. He expected a person to do the job you were there to do. He had a housekeeper whose name was Lee. She was very respectful to Father Butz and to us. She didn't socialize with the parishioners much – if at all. She was very good at being a priest's housekeeper.

-Sister Mary Rose Menting

Father Grevatch, pastor (1978-1991)

In 1989 my parents, Charlie and Betty Hottinger, celebrated their 40th Wedding Anniversary. Jerry, my brother, went with Mom and Dad to the 4:00 p.m. Mass. After Mass, Jerry invited Father Grevatch to the anniversary celebration and he said he would come.

Two cousins of my mother were also invited. I arranged the “bridal” table to include these two cousins. When Father Grevatch arrived at the celebration, he was speechless. My parents were sitting at the table between Bishop John Paul and Bishop George Hammes, my mother’s cousins. Father had no idea that they were relatives of my mother.

-Deborah (Hottinger) Haldorson

Father Bill Grevatch knew what he wanted, and he had good taste in decorating the church. I remember having made six long banners for Father Butz that hung at intervals down the center aisle of the church. When Father Bill arrived, these came down immediately. I did a lot of banners, bulletin covers and signs for him, as well as school annuals and parish directories. Mary Poellinger and I decorated the church, especially for Holy Week, for several years.

-Lorraine (Mrs. Check) Richter

Father Tice

One time Fr. Tice gave the homily and told us to learn to pray while you are well because when you are sick, it becomes a very difficult thing to do.

-Virginia Horstman

I fondly remember guiding Fr. Tice from classroom to classroom. He was blind and, in a wheelchair, and lived in the Seminary with other retired priests.

-Tim Konop

Father Cook

Father Robert Cook was like a part of our parish family. He lived at the Diocesan Center, and I believe he was in charge of Vocations when Father Grevatch was our pastor and he would sometimes offer Mass in Father Grevatch’s absence.

-Virginia Horstman

Father Wirtz

Father Wirtz lived over in the seminary building – we are not sure when he came on board as an Assistant Pastor. He was very personable, smiled a lot. He visited parishioners in their homes. He most likely had more duties than that, but that is what we remember him for – “wearing out the shoe leather,” as he sometimes put it. He was very knowledgeable and was always around when we had our Religious Education classes at the seminary. He would walk around, be visible to the kids and visit with us when we were in our office over there.

-Sr. Mary Rose Menting

Father Rafacz, pastor (1991-2000 and 2000-2002 at Mary, Mother of the Church) Father Joe Rafacz who smilingly told of walking down the hallway of the school and a little kindergartener looked up at him and said, "Hey, I know you. You go to our church!" Obviously, his family went to Mass each Sunday. We had good attendance at all Sunday Masses and one of the duties of the ushers was to find space in pews for people who arrived a little late.

-Virginia Horstman

When recollecting memories of St. Pius, the first thing that comes to mind is the Triduum. Our Pastor at the time, Father Rafacz, lived with the retired priests at the Diocese and would regularly invite them to sit near the altar and take part in the service. On Holy Saturday Night, I can recall as many as half a dozen retired priests that would be there. During the whole service, but particularly, the prayers of the Eucharist, I felt so privileged to witness the bond that these men had with one another and see their sincere expression of faith. On the flip side, I recall when the Men's Club had scheduled a poker night during Lent. Father Rafacz was something less than pleased, but nonetheless did not cancel the event. I think that Father Joe placed unity of the Parish as a higher priority and would not be a source of division. In the end, I am confident that all asked for forgiveness and it was granted.

-Brad Sturm

While setting up a quilt raffle display in the seminary dining room, Father Joe Rafacz came by and viewed the quilt. He remarked how he liked the design and that it would look good on a vestment in gold. Some of the quilters got together to design and make Father Joe a vestment of that same design, Double Irish Chain, and in the gold color that he suggested. Jo Sinniger hand quilted it. Father Joe was thrilled. The quilters also made a matching stole for Deacon Sage.

-Bea Gilles

I also taught when Father Joe Rafacz was pastor at St. Pius. He lived in one of the rooms down the hall from our classrooms in the seminary. He raised beautiful geraniums in the windows in the hall across from his room. You always knew he was around by the smell of his cigar smoke in the hallway each morning. He was very compassionate and loved the children. I believe he went through a lot of anxiety during the unification of the two parishes.

-Lorraine (Mrs. Check) Richter

Through the years

Father Peter Butz came to St. Pius in 1968 and was instrumental in our selling of the church – school property to the La Crosse Public School System under the direction of Bishop Freking. Father Butz was with us in the move to the Seminary. With the move, all the materials, desks and chairs were put in the gym according to classroom while work was being done to the study halls of the Seminarians to be designated as "our classrooms." The two study halls were divided into two or three classrooms on the first floor with a library in the center. There were dividers (no inside walls) as the "open concept" was the new role of classroom education at the time.

Through the years walls were put in for “voice control.” Father Butz was a profound disciplinarian. He did not tolerate any “out of order” activities. At our first meeting with him, he said he would handle all problems. I don’t recall him coming to the classrooms, but he was always around when the children came to or left school. He was also in the cafeteria helping with lunch and making sure table manners were used. He did not abide with “elbows on the table” or running the stairways!

Father Bill Grevatch and Father Joe Rafacz were both wonderful, gentle priests with their daily Masses. They allowed the children to participate with the readings, gifts, and as servers (starting in Fourth Grade). All School Liturgies would be with one class being the leaders in all areas, including the music led by Sister Louise Rahe and later Mrs. Regina Chihak. All celebrations were a highlight to everyone who came to Mass. Sometimes only one grade would have Mass for the day. Those were “special” as the priest would come and give the homily just for them. He would talk to them and question them sometimes and there was always laughter from answers!

Father Bill and Father Joe, as they were called, had wonderful personalities in all that they did with the faculty and students alike. They loved the banners in the church for special occasions that Mrs. Lorraine Check designed and the floral arrangements in front of church throughout the year. There were special occasions when Mass was held outdoors during the week or on the weekends. Children loved bringing their “pets” to be blessed on St. Francis of Assisi Feast Day! It was quite a singing chorus! Lots of parish activities were held, picnics, cafeteria dinners, breakfasts, camping at Goose Island, to name a few.

We had assistant priests through the years. One that comes to mind is Father Fred Wirts. He was with Father Bill for a few years. Father Wirts came into the classrooms for Religion class and had daily Mass with the students. Father Kunz was with us after Father Joe and also had daily Mass and shared in Religion classes.

-Betty Koenen

Making Connections

First Impressions

One summer in the early 1960's, my husband Jim and I had come on a vacation to Wisconsin from Southern California to visit family and other relatives on St. Joseph's Ridge. Jim's brother, Ken, invited us to a ground-breaking ceremony for a new church in La Crosse. It was on the corner of Mormon Coulee Road and Shelby Road. The name of the church would be St. Pius X. We went, but there was no connection.

Little did we know that ten years later it would be our parish church, nor did we know that we would have four children, and all would attend the church school. In addition, never did I imagine that I would spend about nine years teaching at St. Pius X School. So many memories of St. Pius X on that corner and in the Seminary building. Now we have a connection.

-Gloria Servais

Ecumenism – Advent Luncheon

Father Bill Grevatch started the Advent Luncheon at St. Pius. It was something to look forward to during the year. One day Father Bill said to the members, "You always work so hard for this Advent Luncheon. Why don't we invite the women from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church?" We agreed that it would be a nice gesture. It turned out to be a great success with a large turnout. In later years, as Mary, Mother of the Church, we also invited the women from Our Redeemer Lutheran Church. The luncheon continues to this day.

-Bernadine Voss

I have participated in the Ecumenical Advent Luncheon for years. It is always a great "kick-off" of the holiday season! And it is always fun to see my friends from other churches and our parish. I have been asked to decorate for the occasion for many years because people know I have a lot of "stuff" to use! I also have such fun thinking of a theme we can work around, asking the ladies what they think and deciding what sounds good to use. There's a lot of talented people in our parish and they are always willing to share their time, talent, and resources!! It is nice to work with people like that. Good friends, good food, good décor and good faith—it is great to be able to pray and play together and give thanks for the time we spend together.

-Betty Mullenbach

Ecumenism – Palm Sunday

In later years, on Palm Sunday, St. Pius X Parish and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church would alternate meeting at each other's church grounds for the blessing of palms – a sight to behold! St. Pius parishioners carried palms while marching down the hill from St. Pius, altar servers held candles, and Father Joe's white garments flowed in the breeze and hundreds of parishioners marched across busy Mormon Coulee Road with a police escort. Father Joe Rafacz and Pastor Jarvis Mattes blessed the palms in front of the St. Pius and Good Shepherd assembly followed by a brief prayer service. Following the blessing and prayer service, the parishioners of St. Pius began the procession back up the hill to St. Pius to continue with Palm Sunday Mass. Pastor Mattes and his congregation returned to Good Shepherd to continue with their Sunday Service.

-Bernadine Voss

Hmong Clothing Store

I was in my late teens (circa 1980) when Everett Kuhn and Deacon Richard Sage asked me to come and visit them at an office at St. Pius X Church. They asked me if I would be interested in managing the Hmong clothing center in the lower level of the church. Being full of energy at that time, I said "yes."

In the weeks immediately following the center's conceptualization, generous parishioners donated huge boxes of clothing.

Through community outreach, we got the word out that we would be open every Saturday at 8:00 a.m. I was there bright and early on the first day to greet them. To my surprise, none of the 50-plus visitors on that first day spoke English. But through hand gestures and anything else I could think of to communicate, I managed to help them find suitable and needed clothing. After a few weeks, I couldn't help noticing they often didn't select the nicer clothing. I had to find out why. I got my answer when I held up a nice article of clothing and a man said, "No. No holes. Spirits in the clothes can't come out!" So, I received my answer and learned to respect their sacred customs.

Another poignant time came during the winter months when children would often arrive without socks and other cold-weather essentials needed for surviving the cold Wisconsin winters.

For years, our Hmong friends came to St. Pius every Saturday morning to receive something we all take for granted. Most of the time, with arms full when they left. The smiles of the young children, teenagers, parents and grandparents always made my Saturdays a little brighter.

-Peter Voss

Hospitality

Father Bill Grevatch saw the need for parishioners to get acquainted, so hospitality was started after the Sunday Masses with coffee, juice and pastries in the Diocesan dining room.

-Virginia Horstman

Newcomers

Jim and I moved our family to La Crosse in 1990. We had four children and desired a Catholic education for them. At that time, the public-school district would only transport students to the Catholic school nearest the public school that they would otherwise attend, so for our children that meant St. Pius X School. Furthermore, because there was a reduced tuition for parish members, it made sense for us to join St. Pius X Parish.

I recall our first Sunday at St. Pius. We drove up to the church. It's not a church, it's a complex!! We drive around the building. There were so many doors. Which one should we use? Of course, we chose the wrong door, and just WHERE is the church? As we were wandering around the building, an older woman (in retrospect, she was then about the age I am now!!) with a heavy accent came to our rescue. Her name was Rosa Wittenberg, an "Italian war bride". Having been a newcomer to La Crosse once herself, she befriended me and became a quasi-grandmother to our children.

-Patty and Jim Kirchner

Causeway

Causeway was a program that began as a neighborhood project when two women on the north side of La Crosse thought it would be nice to visit the elderly in their area. One woman was the minister at Olivet Lutheran Church and the other, a social worker at Bethany Lutheran Homes. People volunteered from the different churches on the north side of La Crosse and would visit the elderly in their neighborhoods.

Lucille Wilcox, a member of St. Pius X Parish, was in the Ministry program at Viterbo in La Crosse and explained that she needed an internship as part of the program. Causeway was the perfect fit for her. When Lucille's internship ended after a semester, she was asked to take over as the first Director of Causeway. She remained in that position for four years.

The Causeway program had grown to include both La Crosse's north side and south side neighborhood churches and took more time to run than the organizers could offer. They needed Lucille Wilcox's help. What started out as a neighborhood project eventually became one of the projects for Bethany-Lutheran Homes.

Each participating church needed a coordinator whose role involved recruiting volunteers, helping make matches, and attend meetings. Bernadine Voss was the representative from St. Pius X Parish for 15 years beginning in 1986. About 30 churches of all denominations were involved in Causeway at that time.

Bernadine Voss says, "I began recruitment and promotion of the services to fellow parishioners at all Masses. I invited them to meet me after Mass if they were interested in volunteering. On that first day, 20 adults signed up to volunteer, which I considered an overwhelming response. As weeks went by and after many telephone calls to recruit more members, we totaled 53 volunteers. It was truly a miracle to have that kind of response. It was a testimony to St. Pius X's giving and generous parishioners."

-Lucille Wilcox and Bernadine Voss

Ecumenism – Joining the Church

When we moved to La Crosse in 1985 with our two young daughters, I still followed the Lutheran tradition that I had grown up with. Brad and our girls were Catholic and our youngest was baptized by Deacon Sage following a Mass one Sunday. This provided my Lutheran parents a comfortable way to be part of the baptism.

I valued the relationship St. Pius had with Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and we attended services at both churches. I remember the Palm Sunday processions that the two churches participated in together, the ladies Advent lunch, and the joint golf league for men.

The congregation at St. Pius was always so welcoming to me and I felt very much a part of the faith family. The worship services were sacred and meaningful. I joined the Catholic faith prior to the parish's merger with St. Thomas More. Faithfulness, hospitality, and acceptance are words that come to mind when I think of our time at St. Pius.

-Lynn Sturm

Parish Groups

PCCW Baking

During the time that Father Bill Grevatch was our pastor and when Mary Jo Carl was the PCCW president, we had bake sales three weekends in the fall. An apple orchard owner allowed our retired parishioners to pick drops at no charge. (This practice continued for a couple of years until someone said we could no longer use drops as they could pose a health concern and after that we had to purchase bagged apples which cut into our profit margin.) We made apple, pecan, pumpkin and cherry pies. Everything was made from scratch and the pie crust (Mary Jo's recipe) was so popular that we would sell balls of pie dough – enough for double-crust pies – several times throughout the year. There were also weekends where we made and sold cinnamon rolls, Danish and decorated sugar cookies. The ladies of the parish donated a lot of the ingredients for our bake sales, which greatly increased our profits.

We were also asked to prepare a luncheon for the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women's conference with the Bishop in attendance. We made breakfast casseroles as well as a pink champagne salad which were a big hit.

Around this time, the Diocese remodeled the kitchen and the huge floor mixer was taken out to be sold. Father Bill called Mary Jo at work to ask what we wanted to do about it. She told him not to let them get rid of it, and, if necessary, our parish should purchase it. It was placed in the basement and we used it to do all the mixing of our baked goods. Mary Jo insisted this mixer was worth its weight in gold.

-Virginia Horstman

PCCW Events

My memories of St. Pius X Parish revolve mostly around the very active PCCW in the early 1980's. Being a relatively new parishioner, I joined this group as a way to get to know other women in the parish. In the next two years I served as the treasurer, and then as president. It was hard to say "no" to ladies like Fran Hutson and Bernadine Voss, who were doing so much for the PCCW and the parish at the time!

Like the PCCW does today, we organized many events that either enhanced the life of the parish or raised money, or both. The Mother-Daughter Breakfast was started at this time. It was held in the dining room of the seminary building on a Sunday in the spring. The very first one had a clown theme with pastel-colored decorations and balloons. There were prizes and "Snowflake the Clown" was the entertainment after a breakfast served by the Men's Club. Annual Mother-Daughter Breakfasts were held in the years following.

Another project was a style show. Members of the PCCW and their children modeled clothing from the Cherry Tree store and desserts were served. We didn't make as much money as we would have liked, but it was a fun effort.

A profit was realized from the sale of the St. Pius cookbook, "Heavenly Dishes," in 1982. I am not sure how many hundreds of books were published or sold, but I know there are still copies in many local kitchens today. The recipes contributed by our parishioners have stood the test of time!

Aprons were made and sold with the profits going towards paying for the education of seminarians. "SOS" was the logo on the front, which stood for "Save Our Seminarians."

-Pat Shepherd

St. Pius X Men's Club – Memories from the Past

I have been a member of the Men's Club for approximately 45 years. I got involved with Men's Club with a personal invitation from a very good friend of mine, Dick Wilhelm. Dick had been a member of Men's Club for many years and was always recruiting new members for the organization. Dick worked at Trane Company and I was employed at the Trane Credit Union. Every time Dick stopped in my office; he would extend an invitation to come to Men's Club.

After my many refusals or excuses not to attend, he came in on a first Wednesday of a given month and said, "We have Men's Club tonight and I am going to be in your driveway at 6:30 to pick you up, so you better be ready." I couldn't say "no" this time, so I went with Dick to my first Men's Club meeting which I enjoyed very much. After the first year, I was nominated by Dick for the Office of Treasurer which I have retained ever since. I guess Dick's thinking was that if we elect him to an office of the Men's Club, he will have to attend every meeting from now on which I have done. I have witnessed the growth of our Men's Club over the years and appreciate my association and participation with this great group of guys.

Another fond memory I have of Men's Club are the Fun Nights we used to sponsor. Fun Nights were a fund-raising event for the Men's Club. We always had two of them each year, one in the Fall and one in the Spring. They were held at the Diocesan Center Dining Room. Fun Nights consisted of games of chance, card playing and good camaraderie. Food and beverages were always available. They were held on a Friday night and were always well attended.

The Men's Club also sponsored a Pancake and Sausage Breakfast after the 8:00 and 10:00 Masses on Sundays. They were usually held in October and in December, then another one on Super Bowl Sunday, and usually one in late March or early April. These also were well attended events. These breakfasts were not held as a fund raiser but specifically for social events for the parish members, friends and relatives. Anyone could attend. They too were held in the Diocesan Center Dining Room and later in the Mary, Mother of the Church school gym (St. Thomas More School basement).

-Fred Monk

Groups for Kids and Adults

We had Girl Scout troops at the original St. Pius, also Cub Scout Packs and Boy Scouts. We lacked for nothing and my kids remember it all. They even talk about it yet!

Our Ladies Groups (we called them neighborhood Circles) met once a month in the homes. When there was a funeral and if it was someone who lived in our area, our circle furnished the desserts and sometimes salads. Our ladies' groups were very active. Later they were called Parish Council of Catholic Women (PCCW) under the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women (DCCW) and the more advanced National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW).

A bunch of guys started a golf league as our children got older and so a bunch of us "golf widows" decided to start a league at Hillview and later branched out to Valley High near Houston, Minnesota, Onalaska, Maple Grove and Pine Creek in La Crescent. When Hillview closed, we went to Walsh's and Forest Hills. Not many of us originals play anymore but Ann Malin and Jean Wiegel played into their 90's.

I remember our Men's Club Casino Nights and couples bowling tournaments, but that all finished when we joined St. Thomas More.

-Virgene (Nixie) Oldenburg

In Service to Our Parish Family

We joined St. Pius X in 1975 and have never regretted it. Our older children, Jennifer and Patrick, were ages four and one. Most of our best memories are about activities we did with children. In the late 70's there were no organized activities for pre-school children. I taught Sunday School for 4 and 5-year-olds for several years, rotating months with Dorothy Lenard, Sandy Thompson and others. We followed standard, generic curriculum. Patrick was one of my students and Jennifer helped occasionally. I also taught in the Vacation Bible School for a couple of years and was amazed and inspired by the insights of the students.

We also established a nursery during the early 1980's in the basement of St. Pius X at the Diocesan Center when our youngest son, Peter, needed it. The nursery was used by parents with small children while they attended Mass. It was staffed by parents with help from high school students.

Phil was part of the St. Pius Men's Club. The Men's Club sponsored youth baseball. Phil coached a baseball team for two years. It was innovative because there were girls on the teams. The Men's Club also sponsored four pancake breakfasts every year. The Men's Club also participated in an ecumenical golf league with Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. The league is still active more than 25 years later.

-Nancy and Phil Steinhoff

Stitch-A-Bit Quilters

In the mid-1980's, The Company Store donated 1500 pounds of fabric pieces to St. Pius X PCCW. Roger and Virginia Horstman and several others went to The Company Store Outlet to bring it all back to the Horstman's garage. Horstman's poor car dragged all the way back. Cardboard was put on the garage floor and we unloaded the fabric there. Of course, we could not leave it there on the garage floor, so we loaded it up again and placed it in the basement of Holy Cross Seminary.

This is the time the Stitch-A-Bit Quilters was formed. Some of the original members were Virginia Horstman, Toni Weise, Mary Jo Schumacher, Clarice Wuensch, Mary Calkins, Gloria Biesen, Bea Gilles, Mary Servais, and Anita Olson. About six of us are still actively sewing quilts together.

Over the years, we made quilts for four quilt raffles at St. Pius and many, many quilt raffles at MMOC. We also made a "Heart Quilt" for a fund raiser for a young man, Terry Hansen, who needed a heart transplant and another fundraiser quilt for Lori Obert who was battling cancer while pregnant.

We also made 100+ lap quilts for residents in nursing homes and those in their own homes. These lap quilts were distributed to them by Sister Kathy through the Ministry with the Elderly and Sick. We made 12 twin quilts for a Catholic Charities home in Minnesota. We made three or four Green Bay Packer/Wisconsin Badger quilts for the MMOC Men's Club and hundreds of table toppers for craft sales.

-Anita Olson

Quilting

There was a notice in the church bulletin calling for those who like to sew to come and join a quilting group that would meet during the summer in a classroom of S. Pius X School. This was in the late 1980's. I like to sew and only made appliqued baby quilts for my two nieces, so I was interested in learning a new skill. I think there were about 5 or 6 of us who showed up. Almost all of us had lots of sewing experience – especially in making clothes for our children. But this would be a different experience.

Jeanne Papenfuss was an experienced quilter. She had a good eye for color and pattern and a fine hand with the needle for hand quilting. She had a plan to make a quilt for a raffle at St. Pius X. Jeanne showed us some basics of quilting and sent us home with pattern and two pieces of fabric – one blue and the other cream colored. We were to construct 9" squares that would be pieced together to make a quilt top.

I'm not sure what Jeanne was expecting, but our squares were not all the same size or had straight edges! But she took them all home and sewed them together to make a beautiful top.

The next part was the layering. First stretching and tacking the backing onto a quilt frame, then smoothing the batting on top of the backing and finally, stretching and tacking the quilt top over the first two layers. It took teamwork – now this was something we were all good at! Hand stitching the quilt came next. This was before machine quilting became popular. Because none of us ever hand quilted before, we had to be taught and Jeanne showed us how. The needles were so small and short and sharp! Thimbles came out to protect our fingers. We threaded our needles with special quilting thread, put a thimble on one finger and pushed the needle down through the layers of the quilt and up again. That wasn't so hard. Then we looked at how Jeanne quilted – stitches so tiny and so evenly spaced. Ours – not so tiny and so evenly spaced! We pulled out our stitches and tried again, and again! Jeanne was so patient in showing us how to be successful. And finally, we did it! Maybe our stitches were not as small and evenly spaced as Jeanne's, but they were acceptable. In the end, the quilt turned out to be very beautiful.

Our group went on to make an Advent quilt that hung in the entryway to the church. Some of us have even gone on to make quilts for our children and others. I thank Jeanne for bringing us together and for being such a good teacher of quilting. To this day, sitting at my sewing machine and piecing together a quilt is one of the most satisfying things that I do.

-Donna Omernik

Liturgy

The Experience

On Sunday mornings, we would sit in the first pew in front of the ambo with our three little ones to encourage them to love the liturgy as deeply as we did. What drew us to St. Pius X Parish was the participation of the parishioners in the Sunday liturgy, everyone sang! We remember Dee Smikla's beautiful voice leading us in song, the ensemble of piano, guitars, tympani, and blending voices, the liturgical dance, profound Holy Week celebrations; and with Fr. Joe's prayerful presence and wonderful and inspiring homilies, we felt an assurance deep within, that we had found our parish family in La Crosse!

-Therese and Joseph van Oss

Emphasis on Music

I remember Father Bill Grevatch and Father Peter Knipple arriving and really emphasizing music in our liturgies. Father Bill made singers out of a lot of us. He always said, "If I can sing out anybody can!! God gave me this voice and I'm just giving it back to him, and so can you." And we did!

-Virgene (Nixie) Oldenburg

Prayer through Music

Music was always a big part of our liturgical celebrations at St. Pius, and I had joined the choir early on in our parish membership. Music and song allowed me a deeper personal prayer life, and I was thankful that we had pastors (Father Grevatch and Father Rafacz) that supported that notion. Mary Jo Schmidt was the choir director as she had just completed her degree in Liturgical Music from Viterbo, and she was on fire to share with us how to use music to enrich the celebration of the Mass. Some might say she was a taskmaster, but I think, more so, she wanted the prayer to be perfect. Although I had participated in church choir before St. Pius, it was the first time that I understood how much a song or psalm selection can support the gospel and homily being preached. When it all came together it was difficult not to experience solemnity. One example, at the end of the Good Friday service that was thoughtfully and prayerfully completed, a somber mood was felt. Father Rafacz led us all to kneel. As the hymn, "Jesus Christ is Risen Today" played very softly in the background, David Pankratz walked up the middle aisle holding an Easter Lily and placed it at the foot of the altar. That memory of holding the angst of the Passion simultaneous with the joy of the Easter to come will stay with me a long time.

-Brad Strum

Holy Week

Holy Thursday, Eucharistic adoration was held in the basement crypt. The Easter Vigil was a beautiful liturgy. After the service, there were all kinds of goodies that were made and served by the choir members.

-Virginia Horstman

Musician Memories

Wayne and I moved to La Crosse in late 1966 and joined St. Pius X parish in 1967. When Father Bill became our pastor in the late 1970's, he asked that a music and liturgy committee be formed. I was a member of those committees, along with other interested parishioners. The goal of our music committee was to develop a music program that encouraged the congregation to participate more fully in the liturgy. We all believed in the importance of music and how it would enhance our liturgical celebrations. We had cantors, a folk group and a 20-member choir. Judy Roraff and I were the organists for the choir and cantors and played for all funerals and weddings.

I loved playing the beautiful pipe organ (in the Christ the King Chapel in the Seminary) for the choir and the cantors but my favorite memory is of the Children's Christmas Eve Mass. The first graders would lead the singing and do the readings and would also enact a short play. They dressed up as shepherds, the three kings, wise men, angels and, of course, Mary and Joseph. After Communion, the lights in the church were dimmed and I played the organ softly. The nativity scene was at the top of the steps near the altar. As I played, Santa came in and reverently knelt and prayed in front of the nativity set. I could hear the little children in church whispering loudly, "Mommy, Santa is here," or, "Look, Santa." It was so exciting for the little ones and I just smiled as I played "Lovely Infant." After a minute or two, Santa got up and quietly left. I still remember those Children's Masses every Christmas.

-Rita Nowicki

The Contemporary Choir

St. Pius had a vibrant "folk group" when Chuck Kulas joined as a guitarist in 1983. At that time, Jim Harriman was "leading" the group, which included Joe Hauser on piano, Diane Hadsell on flute, Rick Bielke on bass fiddle with singers including Ann Hutson, Nancy (Molzahn) Johnson, and Wally and Jennifer Cernak. The group, positioned at the front of the church on the right side steps, provided contemporary music in an upbeat tempo. About 2 years later, I became part of the group, and our director was Mary Jo Schmidt. Our group was small but grew and others that joined were Greg Martin on guitar, Therese van Oss taking over bass fiddle, and more singers including Debbie Hauser, Rick and Robin Wilson, Mariellen and Jan Janiszewski, Cherie Nigl, Steve and Peggy Manson, and Kim and Paul Lansing. Younger voices of Polly (Kulas) Berendes, Jake Janiszewski and Rachel (Manson) Kaiser joined along the way. The Lansing girls, Lauren and Caelen, were included before they could sing. The choir moved to the steps behind the altar with the musicians off to the right, near the organ.

The Contemporary Choir had its favorite songs with many by composers Marty Haugen and Michael Joncas. We even gave our director the nickname "Mary Jo Haugen-Schmidt" for her choices consistently including Haugen's work. We learned Psalms, and parts and how to "read" music and sing together. Many current Psalms we use in liturgy are familiar from those days. An easy camaraderie and friendship developed within the group. We felt a part of the liturgy and prayer, adding meaning to our ministry. We felt appreciated when at the end of Mass "applause erupted from the pews."

Our rehearsals were casual and friendly. Most couples in the group brought their children along, who played in the St. Pius “nursery” and were watched by the oldest of the children. A real bonding took place, and it happened during practice, when rehearsing music brought to mind some other “secular songs,” and jamming and impromptu diversion from our real rehearsal lead to something else. In fact, a musical trio, “Eddy and the Mosquitoes” (Joe Hauser, Greg Martin and Chuck Kulas) grew out of these impromptu moments. That group performed at several parish functions during those years, including dances and the Fall Fest. Let it be noted, that our Deacon Richard Sage did cameo appearances with them! Rick Wilson performed, too.

Extra and longer rehearsals were part of our routine for the Christmas Liturgy and Holy Week and Easter as well. Some of the best memories of being together as a musical group were during those annual Holy Times. Often we reminisce with our friends about the Holy Thursday Crypt Chapel experience.....one of the most solemn and spiritual times for many of us. The song, “Who is That Man,” was haunting and meaningful, followed by personal prayer time in that secret space. These times enhanced our personal lives.

As time moved forward, many others moved in and out of ministry roles with this group. Our parish priests were encouraging of the St. Pius music program, especially Father Bill Grevatch and those in the congregation gave approval easily. Often our time together included prayer for our group, our parish and each other. Support for each other was felt in many ways through our choir. The experience of “church” at St. Pius was made more bold, more personal, more real through our being part of the small group called Contemporary Choir.

-Mary and Chuck Kulas

Choir Family

The St. Pius X Choir was like an extended family for us. We had several couples who sang, I hesitate to name them because I’m sure I’ll miss someone, but Claude and Coleen Deck were members for years, as were Harry and Gerry Nunemacher and their son, Mark, and Brad and Lynn Sturm, to name a few.

Mary Jo Schmidt was our director for years. She was a nurse but went to Viterbo and got a degree in Liturgical Music. Her classmates Earl Madery and Jay Nelson would come to assist the choir at times. Jay played the trumpet and Earl helped with the vocals.

Mary Jo got quite sick and some of the choir members went to her home to sit with her in the evening to give her family a little respite time. As I said, the choir was like extended family.

-Ruth Dolan

Resurrection Choir

One time, during a Parish Council meeting in 1993, one of the topics brought up by Father Joe Rafacz was about having a choir to sing for the funerals in the parish. He asked me to get one started. We began with about four members; I don’t remember who they were, but we were called the Resurrection Choir. We grew to about 10 – 15 members that sang at funerals at St.

Pius X. When the Bishop moved us to St. Thomas More, we merged with their funeral choir. We had more than 30 members and decided to change the name of the choir. We didn't have any ideas for a new name. One Sunday Father Rafacz had a sermon and mentioned "new life." Pat Fitzpatrick suggested we call the choir "New Life." A vote was taken and the choir that sang for the funerals was called "New Life."

Our first organist for the funeral choir was Emmie Frey. When she retired, Pauline Cornell from Blessed Sacrament came to help us out until Judy Roraff could join us. She is a very good organist.

The members of the choir are dedicated and faithful and I am very proud of them. They do a good job. God has blessed us.

-Dee Smikla

Music Ministry Memories

In 1977, Phil and I and our family moved back into La Crosse and joined St. Pius X Parish. It wasn't long after that I received a phone call from Rita Nowicki asking me to please help her out with playing the organ for the Masses at St. Pius. The church was in the Seminary Chapel. She graciously offered to introduce me to the "King of Instruments."

WOW!!! It was the mighty Kilgen organ complete with three manual, many, many stops, 24 – 26 ranks of pipes, a full pedal keyboard, pistons, and more! I became overwhelmed by all of this and I didn't think I could accept this invitation as I had only been playing church music for about three years. Playing that organ is like being totally within one's own private world. The organ has been rebuilt in recent years and is sometimes played when the TV Masses are recorded in Christ the King Chapel.

During the years we had several fine choir directors and Richard Sage (he wasn't a Deacon yet at that time) took his turn at being our choir director. He introduced us to some very beautiful old, rare and valuable music, some of which I still play for preludes at Mary, Mother of the Church. He is a great organist and he was also the Director of the Diocesan Choir.

Another favorite memory is the one when I was to play the organ for Christmas Eve Mass and it was already below zero. I remember driving up the driveway to the St. Pius Chapel and seeing all the candle-lit luminarias lining the driveway. It was an awesome sight to behold and I felt that THIS IS TRULY A HOLY NIGHT.

One more Christmas memory is that of our son Paul Anthony walking down the aisle as The Little Drummer Boy playing his drum on Christmas Eve. There were also the Parish Chicken Q's, the auctions, and a picnic at Oehler's cave. New and lasting friendships were made there. Dee Smikla and I became best friends when she sang, and I played the organ at many Masses and weddings.

-Judy and Phil Roraff

Music/Choir

I was in the traditional choir for years. I made many great friends in that group. It was a pleasure to be able to sing with them. We had many different directors through the years and every one of them had a different style of how they lead us and how they had us sing the songs. It was interesting to learn it all and it was wonderful to be part of the Mass in song. We would have many practices when learning new music and to follow the liturgy, especially on the special days like Christmas and Easter. I am now only in the New Life Choir. It's hard when you have to sing for a friend's funeral – the tears come and your voice cracks – but we support each other through it all. It is always nice to see that in a group. The families of the deceased thank us many times for our singing.

One year the choir was asked to be the entertainment for the Fall Festival at the dinner and the bazaar. We got together and decided we would be called the "Singing Minstrels." We chose some Italian songs that were favorites to sing – like love songs. We also thought that we should all be dressed alike and decided on white blouse and shirts with long black skirts and pants. I made red cummerbunds for belts and red ribbon ties for under our collars. We looked like professionals, like on the Lawrence Welk Show!

Our choirs always had great parties, picnics and outings, too. We always had fun and of course we would end up singing together before we left. We even sang at the parish campouts at Goose Island. Father Bill would come, say Mass outside, and then we would have a campfire. Linda Kuehl would play her guitar and sing all the old songs we loved—what fun we had around the campfire after dark.

-Betty Mullenbach

Decorating the Sanctuary

Decorating the church for Christmas was a lot of work and a lot of fun. Father Bill liked a decorated church and a group of people worked to get it done. Real trees and greens and sometimes real candles were used. There were always lots of poinsettias that were memorials to loved ones placed in the sanctuary. Donna Omernik headed up the committee with help from Jerry Roesler and his crew and many others. The Men's Club donated money to help purchase the garland and wreathes used to decorate the church.

Trees were usually donated as someone knew someone that wanted to give the church a tree from their yard. When the time came, some guys with a chain saw and a truck would get the tree for the church. The owner got a tree removed for nothing and the church got a tree for nothing. Can't get a better deal than that.

There was always a large group of volunteers helping to get the decorations in place. Trees had to have lights, garland had to be hung and flowers put in place. Many hands made light work. We could not use nails or tape to secure anything, so we used wire – lots of wire and never scratched the walls of the church. After the decorating was finished, everyone was invited to our home for wine, cheese, and stories.

It was decided at another decorating planning meeting that lighted candles on the support columns would be nice for Christmas Eve Mass. Jerry Roesler made sconces from wood with a little shelf to hold a candle with a glass chimney. Greens were added for a seasonal look. These sconces were hung on the ten columns in place of the stations.

The candles were to be lit before the 6:00 p.m. Mass and remain burning for the late Mass. I was volunteered to light the candles. I began lighting about a half an hour before Mass began. This should have been enough time to get it done before people came in for Mass. That didn't happen. I had no idea how long it took to get on a ladder, remove a chimney and light a candle. As more and more people came to church, I got a lot of offers of help. With this extra help, all the candles were lit before Mass started. That is the only year candles were used.

Another year, someone, probably Father Bill, thought it would look nice if the big tree outside in the circle in front of the Seminary had lights. Everyone agreed. It would be beautiful but how could we do it. It was a really big tree. As with anything at St. Pius, someone knew someone that had a high lift (cherry picker) that we could use to string the lights on the tree. It got done and it was beautiful!

As the saying goes, what goes up must come down. After the Christmas season was over, the church decorations were taken down. The lift we used to put the lights on the outside tree was not available. So we'll do it later. Later never happened. A few years later, I was curious to know if those lights were ever removed from the tree. I looked at the bottom tree branches and the lights were hidden by new growth, but they were still there! Much later the lights were finally removed – when the tree was cut down!

-Jim Omernik

Christmas Decorating

Do you remember the Christmas trees in the sanctuary at St. Pius X at the seminary?

Do you remember the hanging of Advent Wreaths?

Those were the days of the past and we will never see them again. The very large evergreen tree that was 20 plus feet in diameter at the base of it. They were very heavy to handle and very difficult to get through the double doors (which are no longer there) under the steeple at Christ the King Chapel. We built winches to help stand the trees in an upright position. The winches were located in the lighting chase next to the roof.

The trees came from parishioners or farmers who donated them to the parish for Christmas. We used hay wagons, trucks, chainsaws, and a lot of help to cut and load the trees on the wagon and haul them to the church. We had struggled to get them through the doors and up to the altar. We then used tall stepladders and poles to install the lights on the trees. There was a lot of hassle by others who were putting up garland, wreaths, and the large Nativity set. Then came clean-up time. The floors were trashed with pine needles and wet snow, garlands and wreaths. When we were done sweeping up, it was with a feeling of a job well done. We could then enjoy the fruits of our hard work. The church looked beautiful and was ready for parishioners to celebrate the season at the Christmas Masses.

-Jerry Roesler, Maintenance, Diocese of La Crosse

Nursery

St. Pius did not have a “crying room” but a babysitting service was provided during Sunday Masses in one of the nursery school rooms down the hall in the Seminary Building. It was staffed by volunteer mothers and older kids who helped with the care of the littlest members of the parish.

-Pat Shepherd

Special Liturgies

We remember outdoor Masses and May Crowning both in front and in back of the church. We had an ecumenical pastor exchange with Good Shepherd and enjoyed a sermon by April Ulring Larson, Bishop of the ELCA.

-Nancy and Phil Steinhoff

Holy Communion

Father Bill Grevatch was instrumental in getting Parishioners to assist him in the distribution of the Eucharist at Mass. He asked the teachers to do this with daily Mass and then proceeded to get parishioners to volunteer for Sunday Mass. At first, we had to wear the long white robes when we were Eucharistic Ministers, but then he decided that regular attire was okay. I have been a Minister of Holy Communion since being asked when I was a teacher.

-Betty Koenen

The Easter Fire

Since the first year of our marriage, Joe and I would light an Easter fire at noon on Holy Saturday using a magnifying glass to light the spark that created the fire. We would tend this fire all day and into the evening and then transfer the light to a kerosene lantern and bring it into the house for the night. On Easter Sunday we would use that light to light our candles for the Easter meal.

In the mid-80's we brought our Easter fire tradition to St. Pius. Together with our young family we lit the fire at noon, in the back of the Diocesan building, behind the statue of Mary. Many parishioners, especially families, would join us throughout the afternoon, tending the fire, roasting hot dogs and marshmallows, playing games on the expansive property, visiting, laughing, and sometimes just being quiet. To me, those hours were sacred time, there was always a feeling of expectation and waiting. The sense of community was strong. Someone would be with the fire until the Easter Vigil. When it was time, when everyone was gathered outside around Father, Deacon, the servers and the Easter Candle, Joe would carry the firelight to the fire stand holding the wood waiting to be lit. He would light the dry wood shavings and the fire would flame up big. The beautiful fire ritual would continue and before long the Easter Candle was lit, and everyone present would be holding a candle on fire with the light that came from the sun earlier that day.

This tradition continued until the parishes merged, probably until the early 2000's.

-Barb Kruse

Worship Memories

This past Easter Vigil my priest at Roncalli Newman, Fr. Matt Marshall, shared in his homily that the Triduum is a time to remember our past and where we came. It is a time to remember what brought us to the place we are in now. What were the experiences of our past that brought us to our current jobs, vocations, and relationships, most importantly our relationship with God? It was not hard for me to recall the very many cherished memories I have as a young girl growing up at St. Pius. My family's involvement at St. Pius had a huge and lasting effect on my current faith life and current life's work. It is the reason I was sitting in the pews at Roncalli Newman, in my twelfth year serving the parish as Youth Minister.

I have so many fond memories of my years at St. Pius but what stands out most to me is in fact the celebration of Easter Triduum. I specifically remember one year I was so excited that my birthday fell on Holy Saturday. I knew that this was a day of great celebration. We gathered at the back of the church, near the statue of the Blessed Mother around noon and lit a campfire using only the sun and a magnifying glass. We spent the day in celebration as families came and went, bringing a dish to pass, sharing in some food, singing songs, and telling stories. Sometime in the afternoon we would gather in the church for a brief blessing of the Easter baskets and other Easter food. We would leave sometime late in the afternoon to dress and prepare for the Vigil Mass. Then once again, gathered at the back of the church, in the dark of the night, around the fire we would begin the holy celebration, lighting candles from that very same fire started eight hours before. There was a sense of awe and wonder as we processed into the darkened church and illuminated it with our tiny candles. I also remember being asked to be one of the young girls to dress the altar. We would wait for what seemed like hours in the hallway, dressed white server robes, holding tight to the altar cloth, waiting to be told that it was time. We would then enter the church to the sound of the Gloria sung and accompanied by trumpets. We would approach the altar, left bare by Good Friday and let the white altar cloth billow above it before laying it to rest on the altar and preparing it with candles and flowers.

That one celebration is just a brief snapshot into the beautiful memories that fill my heart of St. Pius. What all of my memories have in common are the wonderful people who helped influence my faith life. Certainly, too many to name! St. Pius was a wonderful church community to grow up in. The people I encountered pushed me to grow and develop on my own personal faith journey, they saw in me and called for the gifts I had been given that would help me one day serve others in parish ministry. They supported and loved me through monumental occasions in my life: First Communion, Confirmation, marriage, and the death of my father. I am forever grateful for the gift of being able to have the experience of belonging to such a wonderful community whose mission still lives on today.

-Kristen (Krocker) Johnson

Parish Events

Fall Fest

Peter and I were chairpersons for Fall Fest in the early to mid '80's. I remember most of the festivities were held in the gym. The cake walk was very popular. People donated lots of cakes and they were displayed on tables in the gym. Many tickets were sold to participate in the cake walk. Lucky people went home with multiple cakes and had to be limited to the number of times that they won. It seems that the children walked off with multiple prizes. There also was a man in the parish that donated jars of shelled hickory nuts to be sold at the craft and sundries table. Have you ever tried to shell hickory nuts? I have. I bought most of the jars of hickory nuts and saved myself hours of frustrating work.

-Sharon DiCicco

Seder Meal

We held a Seder meal each year in the dining room. There was wonderful attendance and it always featured the 2nd graders who would be making their First Holy Communion that year. There was a recipe the ladies used to make the unleavened bread.

-Virginia Horstman

Parish Campout

I remember that St. Pius X would have summer weekend campouts at Goose Island. Many families from the parish would set up camp on the south side of Goose Island campground. Most would arrive Friday night, set up and have a big cookout. For the kids, Saturday was spent playing softball. All the kids would divide into two teams and we would play all afternoon in the field at the edge of the campground. It was a lot of fun because it was neighbors, boys and girls, all playing together. We would then have Saturday evening Mass outdoors. This was always fun because it was outside, we sat in lawn chairs and we could wear shorts and t-shirts – the only time I could wear shorts and a t-shirt to church!

-Christine (Omernik) Griese

Picking Apples for Pies

The kids remember picking up apples at La Crescent orchards and bringing them back in Mel Fox's pickup and putting them in the big coolers at the Diocesan Center. I'd bring my older daughters and they would help peel them, stir them up with sugar and cinnamon and a little nutmeg. Then they would put the apple mixture in the pie crusts and bake them in the great ovens in the kitchen at the Seminary. Mary Jo Carl mixed all our pie crusts and we never had pies left over. We even sold two crusts in a package separately. Real teamwork.

-Virgene (Nixie) Oldenburg

PCCW Pie Baking

I have a lot of good memories of the old PCCW at St. Pius X, but my fondest memory by far are the pie bakes. We would get together and prepare pies to be sold after the three Masses that weekend under the direction of Mary Jo Carl, who had everything figured out to the exact amount of ingredients we would need for X number of pies we would make. There would be different stations that a group of us would work at. I can still see Mary Jo using this huge industrial mixer to mix up a batches of pie dough – one after another. It would then be divided among the stations where we would either roll out the dough for the tins, mix the filling or bake up the pies. We would have some pies baked and some unbaked. We also sold pie dough as well, which was always a good seller.

The camaraderie among the women was great. We would talk and laugh until the pies were all done. Some of the women would return to sell the pies after the 4:30 p.m. Mass on Saturday. The rest of the pies were saved for the next day to be sold after the Sunday Masses.

-Arian Arens

Christmas Eve

A memory we will never forget is when we attended our first Christmas Eve Mass at St. Pius X after being married. Just before the Mass was done, Santa Claus came into church and up the main aisle and knelt before the baby Jesus and said a prayer...you could just hear the children's gasps! It was so perfect and beautiful! It really made our Christmas!

-Kerry and Sue Groetsch

Youth Canoe Trips

I remember the canoe trip as being a fun time with friends from the Youth Group. Tom Thibodeau would take the teens on a canoe trip down the Kickapoo River in the summer. I remember being excited for this trip because my family would canoe down this river, so I was familiar with the river. It was a shallow river and it was always a fun time to just canoe lazily down the river and stop on sandbars along the way. The weekend of our Youth Trip was a sunny day and it was exciting to go canoeing again on the Kickapoo River without Mom and Dad! It was a trip with my friends. We got to the river and it was very high! It had rained that week, so the river rose a lot. It was not the usual shallow river I was used to. The river was also flowing a bit faster than normal. Deep water also meant that we did not get stuck in the shallow areas. One canoe tipped over and sunk. Nobody got hurt and everyone got to shore safely and they then shared rides in other canoes.

-Christine (Omernik) Griese

Halloween Dance

There were many ways for the people of St. Pius X to get together when Father Bill was here. One of them was the Halloween Dance that was held in the gym on or close to Halloween. It was encouraged to come in costume and many people did. The first year, my wife, Donna, made Mickey and Minnie Mouse costumes for us. These were realistic – we were covered from head to toe, faces painted, ears on our heads and with three-fingered gloves on our hands. We

decided that we would not talk to anyone at the dance so we wouldn't be recognized. We arrived later so other people coming wouldn't see Mickey and Minnie getting out of our car! At the dance, we didn't talk, and people didn't know who Mickey and Minnie were for a long time until Donna laughed, and Paul Bueltel said, "It's Donna!" We were discovered! Toward the end of the night everyone in costume marched around the floor and received a nice round of applause from everyone else.

-Jim Omernik

Parish Picnic

I do remember at least one St. Pius X picnic that took place at our farm during the early years of the parish. The parish opened in 1960 and the first picnic took place probably a couple of years after that. The school opened in the fall of '62 when I was entering the 7th grade. I am thinking that the picnic may have been that following summer, but I am not sure.

I remember not being too happy about all of us having been recruited to the pasture that Sunday morning after Mass to scoop up cow pies – and there were plenty. Dad didn't want people slipping in them as they got out of their parked cars in the pasture. We had only a few hours to clear the place. I think that even Mary Kay was forced to join us. I remember it was a wet morning, making the pies even soupier. It was a crazy scene and I remember us having fun just because it was so crazy. We called it a "platter party!"

The men of the parish joined Dad to barbecue the chicken on huge barbecue pits. Daddy oversaw the operation as they used his special barbecue chicken recipe which was always a hit. I remember he had huge amounts of ingredients – including mounds of butter and beer and the "magic spices." I'm pretty sure that there was an ice cream truck giving out Eskimo Pies, which I thought was nifty for a church picnic. Father McCaffrey was the pastor at the time and I remember him walking around, mingling with and enjoying the people. The picnic was well attended – the pasture was full of cars – and I would guess that we had at least a couple hundred people, maybe more.

-Margaret (Swing) Clifford

Grand Slam Softball Tournament

Deacon Sage came to me to organize the \$10,000.00 Grand Slam Men's Softball tournament. It was originally held two weeks after Labor Day with our annual Fall Fest. The tournament included teams from each parish in town and including St. Joseph Ridge, St. Mary's in Coon Valley and St. Charles in Genoa. We bought insurance to cover the \$10,000, in case someone actually hit a grand slam. The year it began was 1992. We held the tournament on the Diocesan grounds using both the baseball diamond and the girls' softball field. It was Jim Arens who convinced the Men's Club to move the tournament to the week before Labor Day because of daylight and warmer temperatures. We served hot dogs, brats, burgers and beverages. Then in the evening we had Eddie and the Mosquitoes play music. We also had Dude Strasser play other years. In the beginning we had a 6th grade volleyball tournament with the local parish

schools and after a few years that was discontinued. We moved the tournament from the Diocesan fields to the Erickson ball fields. As the tournament grew, we needed more fields. Because of our relationship with Shelby Baseball, we moved the tournament there. The Shelby fields had three fields, the concession stand and equipment we needed to run the tournament. We have held the tournament at that location on the weekend before Labor Day ever since. It is now called the Mike Pederson Tournament.

-Bob Klar

Pancake Breakfast

Some of the great memories were the times spent with the Men's Club putting on pancake breakfasts and fun nights when St. Pius was at the Seminary.

-Larry Fox

Community Building

St. Pius has always been a very close-knit and caring community. As a parish, we had many social gatherings including picnics, parish dinners, auctions, pancake breakfasts and a few dances, as well as campouts at Goose Island. Sometimes we would have 20 or 30 campers in a circle and parishioners from town would also come out to visit and socialize. Father Bill would come to Goose Island Saturday evening and celebrate Mass and then, of course, stay for a cookout and a campfire. Many times a sing-along followed. As a result, we have made lifelong friends through our parish activities and always felt a strong sense of community in our parish.

-Rita Nowicki

Parish Meals

In addition to singing, our other talent at St. Pius was eating well. There were any number of delicious Parish dinners that were prepared and devoured accompanied by lots of conversation. The Chief Cook and Bottle Washer was Richard Sage.

-Brad Sturm

What the Kids Remember

I asked my kids what they remember most about old St. Pius. They loved the campouts we had at Goose Island, Tom Thibodeau setting up the volleyball nets and playing volleyball, our Saturday outdoor Mass set up in the campground and visits from other campers to Mass and the Mother – Daughter Breakfasts. They also remember the Pancake Breakfasts with the dads serving them and our church dinners at the seminary.

-Virgene (Nixie) Oldenburg

Mother-Daughter Breakfast

I had great fun thinking up a theme for each of the Mother – Daughter Breakfasts and getting people to help with the decorations, set-up and tear-down, and making the room pretty and welcoming. I never thought of it as work – just good fun. The PCCW is a group of such nice ladies who are hardworking and always ready to help with anything.

-Betty Mullenbach

Pig Roast

I remember Dennis Poellinger and Tom Poellinger roasting a hog in the back of the seminary for the Pig Roast and Fall Fest for a couple years. Mary Poellinger and I made many of the crafts for those fests. We prided ourselves on the fact that we made more money on those crafts than was made on the meal one year!

-Lorraine (Mrs. Check) Richter

Pie Sale

One year I helped out with the Women's group making apple pies to sell. Mr. Fox was the Keeper of the Ovens and I ended up being one of the apple peelers. My hands were so sore after that, but I really enjoyed helping out!

-Kathy (Olson) LaBeause

CCD Memories

Tom Thibodeau

I first met Tom Thibodeau when Jim and I accompanied our oldest daughter, Christine, to her Confirmation interview. To be perfectly honest, I do not remember what was said in the course of the conversation that took place, but we left with such a good feeling that the formal religious education of our daughter, and the two that would follow her, was in very good hands. When Tom taught the Confirmation students, he had them face their faith, ask questions, and begin to have their beliefs take form so that when the chrism oil was placed on their foreheads, they had a good idea of beginning their adult life in the Catholic Church.

Tom did the same thing throughout the years when he spoke to us as parishioners during the 15-Minute Scripture after Mass, at Parish Lenten Retreats, and at our CCD teachers' meetings. Our faith and service to others grew, not just from what he said, but inspiring us and challenging us to grow our faith and our community – to take it a step further – sometimes beyond our comfort zone and into the world around us.

Tom has had the respect of our parish community from the time he stepped foot into St. Pius back in 1973. We have always looked forward to the messages he brought to us when he spoke. You could always count on a smile and a warm welcome as well as Tom asking about the family whenever you met him. That is how Tom Thibodeau works – by example and by word.

-Donna Omernik

CCD Teachers

Evie Wilhelm, Dee Smikla, Mary Foley, Donna Omernik, myself and others took many classes at the convent and other places so that we could get certified by the Diocese. Then the Brothers of St. Pius X came to our aid and helped with the teaching, enjoying the camaraderie and parties with us.

-Virgene (Nixie) Oldenburg

CCD Memories

At St. Pius X Parish, we worked with the people who taught religion to the students who attended public school during the school day. We helped the teachers to teach their religion classes – we did not teach any classes. We did not work with any of the Catholic school religion teachers. If I remember right, the children came to St. Pius for religion class after their day school classes at the public school. I dealt with teachers and children in Grades 1 – 6; I think Sr. Mary Rose had some responsibility for Grades 7, 8 and possible high school.

One time (cannot remember the year) the SSJ – TOSF Sisters with whom we lived were all transferred to places out of town. As a result, Sr. Mary Rose and I were living alone in the convent at the original St. Pius complex. I remember that, due to lack of classroom space (classes were kept small to make it easier for non-professional people to teach), some of the empty bedrooms on the second floor of the convent were used for teaching the after school religion classes. My bedroom was down the hallway from the “bedroom” classes. One, when I was sick and in bed, I could hear the entire religion class as it was taught. It gave me a good chance to find out if the teacher was able to put into practice the religion teaching techniques that I had suggested!

At some point after the SSJ – TOSF Sisters had left, the department for the Diocesan Office for Religious Education moved into the bottom floor of the convent and had their office there. Fr. Dennis Stanchik, who was the head of the Diocesan Office of Religious Education, lived in the guest section (a bedroom, a bathroom and a sitting room) of the bottom floor of the convent. Sr. Mary Rose and I had our living area up on the next two floors.

During the last part of our years in La Crosse, the parish sold the entire complex – school, church and convent - to the La Crosse Public Schools. The parish church and school moved across the highway (I think it was Highway 14) and into the seminary building which was no longer used as a seminary. Sr. Mary Rose and I moved into an upstairs apartment on Losey Blvd., which was only a couple of minutes from the seminary where our office was located. At that time, Sr. Trinette Schweitzer, SSSF, joined us in La Crosse and lived with us in our apartment. Sr. Trinette was hired by the parish to teach religion classes at St. Pius School. The principal of the parish school was a La Crosse Franciscan – a different order from the Milwaukee SSSF Franciscan and SSJ – TOSF orders. Her name was Sr. Louise Rahe. As I recall, she ran a quite innovative school with regard to classroom space and teaching methods. Sr. Mary Rose and I thought it was a very good school and set up.

-Sister Mary Rose Menting

Biographies of St. Pius X Parish

St. Pius X — Pope 1903–1914...

Pope St. Pius X was born Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto in Riese, on the Venetian Plain in Italy, on June 2, 1835. He was the second of ten children. He was Pope from August 4, 1903 until his death on August 20, 1914.

Giuseppe Sarto was ordained a priest on September 18, 1858. Pope Leo XIII made him a Cardinal on June 12, 1893. As a Cardinal, Sarto devoted his time to social works and guiding people to be obedient to the Pope.

Papal Election

On July 20, 1903, Pope Leo XIII died and the Conclave of Cardinals met to elect his successor shortly thereafter. It wasn't until the fifth ballot on August 4, 1903 that Cardinal Sarto was chosen as the new pope. It was reported that at first he declined the nomination because he felt unworthy. He was asked to reconsider and after praying in solitude in the Pauline chapel, he accepted and took the name of Pius X as his papal name. The traditional coronation took place on August 9, 1903.

Pontificate

"To restore all things in Christ" became the motto of Pope Pius X during his papacy. In his first encyclical, *E supremi apostolates* (October 4, 1903) he stated: "We champion the authority of God. His authority and Commandments should be recognized, deferred to, and respected."

Pope Pius X's humble origins became clear right after his election when he wore a pectoral cross made of gilded metal on the day of his coronation saying that he always wore it and brought no other with him. He also invited friends to dine with him, doing away with the custom of eating alone as established by an earlier pope.

"I was born poor, I lived poor, and I will die poor."

Church Reforms and Theology

As Pope, Pius X promoted a number of things he deemed important to increase devotion in the lives of the Clergy and Laity.

Holy Communion

He encouraged daily communion for all Catholics saying that "Holy Communion is the shortest and safest way to Heaven." Pius X is most known for having children who have reached the

“age of discretion” also receive Holy Communion. In 1910, in his decree *Quam Singulari*, the age of reception of Holy Communion was changed from 12 to 7 years old.

Mary

In his encyclical in 1904, *Ad diem illum*, Pius X viewed Mary as the mother of us all, that we are her children and she should be revered like a mother.

Gregorian Chant

Within months of becoming Pope, Pius X announced the return of the Gregorian Chant in ecclesiastical music over the Classical and Baroque styles of composition that had been used.

Catechism

In 1905 Pius X ordered that there be the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (Catechism Class) in every parish in the world. The catechism of Pius X was simple, plain, and brief for uniform use throughout the whole world. It was issued in 1908 in Italian.

Activities in the United States

In 1908 Pius X recognized the growth of the American Church and not only lifted the missionary status, but created fifteen new diocese and named two American Cardinals during his pontificate.

Other important events:

Ten individuals were beatified and four others canonized by Pius X.

Pope Pius X published sixteen encyclicals during his Papal reign.

Death/Burial

Pius X suffered a heart attack in 1913 and had poor health thereafter. Then on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, he fell ill and could not recover. The events of World War I (1914-18) further distressed the Pope. He died on August 20, 1914 of a heart attack.

After his death, Pius X was buried in the crypt below St. Peter’s Basilica in a simple and unadorned tomb. Large numbers of Pilgrims came to visit the tomb almost immediately after his death.

Canonization

A monument in memory of Pius X was erected in St. Peter's Basilica in early 1923. This marked the beginning of the canonization process of Pius X. The coffin containing Pius X's body was exhumed on May 19, 1944 for the canonical examination. The examiners found "all of the body of Pius X was in an excellent state of conservation" even though he died thirty years earlier and had made it clear he was not to be embalmed. After the examination, Pius XII bestowed the title of Venerable Servant of God on Pius X. Pius X's body was exposed for 45 days before being put back in his tomb.

Now the process towards beatification could begin. Investigations by the Sacred Congregation of Rites (S.C.R.) into miracles that occurred because of Pius X now began. The S.C.R. recognized two miracles: a nun cured of bone cancer during a novena when a relic of Pius X was placed on her chest; and another nun cured of cancer when she touched a relic statue of Pius X during a novena. Two more miracles attributed to Pius X were recognized by the S.C.R. after the beatification and another one after canonization.

The beatification of Pius X took place on June 3, 1951 at St. Peter's before 23 Cardinals, hundreds of bishops and arch bishops and 100,000 faithful. Pope Pius XII referred to Pius X as the "Pope of the Eucharist" during the ceremony.

On May 29, 1954, less than three years after beatification, Pius X was canonized before a crowd of about 800,000 faithful and Church officials at St. Peter's Basilica with Pope Pius XII presiding.

August 21st is the Saint's Day for Pope St. Pius X.

Namings

A large number of parishes, schools, seminaries and retreat house in the western world bear the name of St. Pius X because he was well known and because the growth of population after World War II led to significant new construction in cities. The Church was growing.

Bishop John Treacy drew the boundaries for the parishes in La Crosse in 1959 and founded a new parish to accommodate the growing population on the south side of the city. He named the parish St. Pius X in honor of the newly canonized saint.

There was also a religious order of brothers founded by Bishop Treacy. In 1951 he chose Blessed Pius X as the patron for the Brothers of Blessed Pius X. The name changed to the Brothers of St. Pius X after the canonization in 1954.

The name of St. Pius X was a perfect choice for both the new parish in La Crosse and the religious order of Brothers because of their humbleness and the importance to "restore all things in Christ."

The Most Reverend John Patrick Treacy, D.D. — Bishop 1948– 1964...

John Patrick Treacy was born on July 23, 1891 in Marlborough, Massachusetts. He was the only child of John and Ann Treacy. He attended the College of Holy Cross in Worster and studied at Harvard Law School. He then enrolled at the Catholic University of America in Washington D. C. where he graduated in 1912.

John then studied at St. John's Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts. In 1918 he was ordained into the priesthood for the Diocese of Cleveland where he served in parish work for 12 years. Father Treacy then served as Director of the Society for the Propagation of Faith in 1931, was elevated to domestic prelate by Pope Pius XI in 1934 and named by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to a committee for a good-neighbor mission in Latin America in 1939. In August 1945, Father Treacy was appointed coadjutor bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, Wisconsin and named titular bishop of *Metelis* by Pope Pius XII. He received his episcopal consecration on October 2.

Upon the death of Bishop Alexander Joseph McGavick, Bishop Treacy became the fifth Bishop of La Crosse on August 25, 1948. He served as Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse for 16 years. During this time Bishop Treacy founded Holy Cross Seminary, oversaw the construction of the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman, and established 47 churches, 43 convents, and 42 schools. He had attended two sessions of the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1963. Bishop John Patrick Treacy died on October 11, 1964 at St. Francis Hospital in La Crosse.

The Most Reverend Frederick W. Freking, J.C.D. — Bishop 1964–1983...

Frederick W. Freking was born on August 11, 1913 in Heron Lake, Minnesota. He was one of 18 children of August and Rosa Freking. His early education was at the parochial school of Sacred Heart Church and at the Heron Lake Public High School. He earned his undergraduate degree at St. Mary's College in Winona, Minnesota, in 1934. He went on to complete his studies in philosophy and theology at the Pontifical North American College, Rome, where he was ordained to the priesthood July 31, 1938.

Father Freking returned to the Winona Diocese to serve in parish work, secondary Catholic education and re-establish the diocesan newspaper. He continued his studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. earning his doctorate in Sacred Theology of Canon Law in 1948. He returned to Winona to serve in the Chancery Office and was appointed Chancellor in 1952. In 1953 Father Freking was appointed Spiritual Director of the North American College in Rome.

Pope Pius XII appointed Freking as the fifth Bishop of Salina, Kansas, in October 1957 and he received his episcopal consecration on November 30 in Rome and was installed in the Salina Diocese in January 1958. On December 30, 1964 Bishop Freking was appointed as the sixth Bishop of La Crosse by Pope Paul VI and installed February 24, 1965.

Bishop Freking attended all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965. He came back to establish diocesan commissions in the areas of liturgy, priestly and religious life, education, communications, missions, ecumenism, and the laity. Enrollment at Holy Cross Seminary was decreasing, and the Diocese of La Crosse could no longer support it, so the seminary was closed in 1971. In 1973, St. Pius X Parish sold their church and school and rented the Chapel and classrooms from the Diocese. In 1974, the Diocese of La Crosse occupied the office spaces to become the Diocesan Center. It also began to serve as a home for retired priests.

While serving the Diocese of La Crosse, Bishop Freking was able to reduce the debt of the diocese from \$11 million to \$4 million. He headed the National Catholic Rural Life Conference from 1964 – 1966. In 1975, he established the first laity training program in the United States. He was quoted “...the whole mission of the Church is shared responsibility...We all share in that responsibility through our vocation in Baptism as Christians.” Bishop Freking oversaw construction of 14 churches, 15 rectories, seven elementary schools, 22 religious education centers, five convents and Newman Center. He was also responsible for supervising 36 church renovations and expansions. Fifty-nine priests were ordained while he was bishop.

He was instrumental in working with the Lutheran Church in La Crosse to establish Bethany – St. Joseph Care Center for the elderly. Bishop Freking retired as Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse May 10, 1983. On November 28, 1998, he died at the Franciscan Skemp Medical Center in La Crosse at the age of 85. Bishop Frederick Freking is interred in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel at St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral.

The Most Reverend John Joseph Paul, D.D. — Bishop 1983–1984...

Bishop John Joseph Paul was born on August 17, 1918 to Roland and Louise Paul in La Crosse. He was the oldest of 10 children. He attended St. Joseph Elementary School and Aquinas High School in La Crosse. He received a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa, and a Bachelor of Sacred Theology Degree from St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland. John Paul's ordination took place in Maria Angelorium Chapel of St. Rose Convent in La Crosse on January 24, 1943. He then went on to receive a Master of Education Degree from Marquette University, Milwaukee, in 1956.

Father Paul's first assignment was as an assistant pastor at St. Patrick Parish in Eau Claire. He also taught and was the Athletic Director at St. Patrick High School from 1943 until 1950. In 1950 he took the position of principal and oversaw the building of Regis High School. Over the years, Father Paul served as third Rector of Holy Cross Seminary in 1955, was given the title of Right Reverend Monsignor by Pope Pius XII in 1956, named Vicar General by Bishop Frederick Freking in 1965 and named Rector of St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral in 1966. He was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of La Crosse in 1977.

Bishop Paul was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse in October 1983 when Bishop Freking retired. In 1986 he convened the Fourth Diocesan Synod which called for commissions to be established around the themes of sacred worship, family life, justice and peace, and education. The synodal decrees were published as *The Bishop With His People*. Bishop John Paul resigned his position as Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse in 1994 and acted as diocesan administrator until Bishop Raymond Burke, his successor, was installed in early 1995.

Bishop John Joseph Paul, Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of La Crosse died on March 5, 2006 at Franciscan Skemp Mayo Health System in La Crosse. A Mass of Christian Burial was held on March 10, 2006, at the St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral. The Most Reverend Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, was the main celebrant. The Most Reverend Jerome Listecky, Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, and other archbishops, bishops and priests of the Diocese of La Crosse were concelebrants.

Bishop John J. Paul is interred in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel at St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral.

The Most Reverend Raymond Leo Burke, J.C.D. — Bishop 1995–2003...

Raymond Leo Burke was born June 30, 1948 in Richland Center, Wisconsin. He was the youngest of six children born to Thomas and Marie Burke. He attended St. Mary's Parish School in Richland Center. In 1962 until 1968 he attended Holy Cross Seminary in La Crosse.

Raymond Burke studied at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. where he received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1970 and a Master of Arts Degree in 1971. From there he went to the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome to study for the priesthood, receiving a Bachelor of Sacred Theology Degree and a Master of Arts Degree in 1975. He was ordained into the priesthood by Pope Paul VI at St. Peter's Basilica June 29, 1975.

Father Burke's first assignment after his ordination was as assistant rector of St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral in La Crosse. He also taught religion at Aquinas High School.

In 1980, Father Burke returned to Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome to study canon law, receiving a licentiate in canon law in 1982 and a doctorate in canon law in 1984. He returned to La Crosse, being named Moderator of the Curia and Vice Chancellor of the Diocese of La Crosse. In 1989, Pope John Paul II named Father Burke to the highest ecclesiastical court of the Catholic Church; he returned to Rome.

When Bishop John Paul resigned as Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, Pope John Paul II named Monsignor Burke to replace Bishop Paul in 1995.

Bishop Burke facilitated the unification of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Parishes in 2000 and named the parish Mary Mother of the Church at St. Thomas More. Other parishes in the diocese went through a similar process.

In 2004, Bishop Burke was assigned to the Archdiocese of St. Louis. He was consecrated a cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010. Cardinal Burke, as a prominent canon lawyer, has served various roles in the Church in Rome ever since.

Reverend Francis V. McCaffrey — Pastor 1960–1968...

Rev. Francis V. McCaffrey was born on March 29, 1916 in Pittsburgh PA.

Fr. McCaffrey attended St. John's Seminary, Collegeville, MN, and was ordained on April 24, 1948 in St. Joseph's Cathedral, La Crosse.

He began his priestly career by serving as assistant pastor at Sacred Heart, Eau Claire; St. Patrick, Sparta; St. Charles, Chippewa Falls; St. Rose, Cadott; St. Joseph, Boyd; and St. Patrick, Eau Claire. In 1957, Fr. McCaffrey was appointed as Administrator of Immaculate Conception Parish, Alma Center. He remained there until June of 1960 when he was assigned as the first pastor of the newly formed St. Pius X Parish in La Crosse. He became pastor of St. Bridget's, Ettrick and St. Ansgor, Blair in 1968. His final assignment was to St. Peter's Parish, Middle Ridge. Fr. McCaffrey retired and granted status of Senior Priest in October 1984.

Fr. Francis McCaffrey died at St. Francis Medical Center on November 19, 1985. The Mass of Christian Burial was concelebrated by Bishop John J. Paul, Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, Bishop Frederick Freking, retired Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, and Bishop Mark Schmitt on Friday, November 22 in St. Peter's Church, Middle Ridge. He is entombed at St. Bridget's Catholic Cemetery, Ettrick.

When Fr. McCaffrey was appointed as pastor of St. Pius X Parish, he had the job of establishing a new parish. After the purchase of land for building a church and school, Bishop John P. Treacy told Fr. McCaffrey to establish himself as soon as possible with a place to say daily Mass. He started to do that by renovating the house that would become the St. Pius X Rectory for many years to come. It was there that he offered daily Mass. Bishop Treacy made Christ the King Chapel at Holy Cross Seminary available for Sunday Masses. But uppermost in Fr. McCaffrey's plan was the schooling of the children of the parish. From 1960 – 1962, the children attended St. Thomas More (2 rooms), Holy Cross (which had recently closed but usable for classes-today it is the property where St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral School is located), and a number of public schools. In 1962 Fr. McCaffrey's mission was accomplished with the completion of St. Pius X Church-School-Convent complex.

His flock was all in one place now.

Reverend Peter Butz — Pastor 1968–1978...

Rev. Peter Butz was born on January 12, 1919 in Chicago, Illinois. He attended college at Sacred Heart Mission House in Girard, Pennsylvania, and St. Mary's Seminary in Techny, Illinois, for theology, where he was ordained a priest in the Society of the Divine Word on August 15, 1945. His first assignment was as an Assistant at St. Nicholas Parish in St. Louis, Missouri, from 1945 – 1947.

Fr. Butz had hoped to be assigned overseas as a missionary. He joined the Society of the Divine Word hoping to fulfill this dream. But because he attained high marks in Greek, Latin and mathematics, he was assigned as a professor of Classics and Math at Holy Ghost Mission House Preparatory Seminary in East Troy, Wisconsin.

Fr. Butz joined the Diocese of La Crosse first as an assistant at Holy Rosary Parish in Lima where he taught religion at Sacred Heart High School. In March 1951, he was given a dispensation of his religious vows from the Society of the Divine Word with the intention of being accepted as a clergyman in the Diocese of La Crosse. In July 1952 he became an assistant at St. Joseph Parish, Menomonie; and in the fall, chaplain of the Newman Center at Stout State University. The probationary period ended in March 1954 and Fr. Butz was now incardinated into the clergy of the Diocese of La Crosse. In August 1955, he was named Assistant at St. Wenceslaus Parish in La Crosse. Fr. Butz became Administrator of St. Mary's Parish, Keyesville and St. Killian's Mission Parish, Bear Valley in September 1958.

In June 1968, Fr. Butz assumed his first official pastorate at St. Pius X, La Crosse. He became pastor at St. Peter's Parish, Middle Ridge, ten years later. At the same time he was appointed Diocesan Director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, a mission close to his heart since he was young, and where he was totally dedicated to the collection of funds and assigning preachers to parishes. He also kept in constant touch with Fr. Ed Penche and Fr. Robert Flock in Bolivia and Fr. Joseph Walijewski in Peru.

As director of the Propagation of the Faith, Fr. Butz said, "Since 1978, I have been privileged to serve as Mission Director of the Diocese of La Crosse. The past twelve years have been the most satisfying in that I have learned and witnessed the deep Mission-mindedness of all the people, young and old, of the La Crosse Diocese."

Remaining at St. Peter's for only two months, Fr. Butz became pastor of St. Joseph's Parish, St. Joseph Ridge in August 1978. In December 1983 he was also named Defender of the Bond in the Matrimonial Tribunal. Fr. Butz retained these three positions until his death.

Fr. Peter Butz died suddenly on September 30, 1991 at St. Joseph Rectory, St. Joseph Ridge. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, St. Joseph's Ridge by Bishop John J. Paul, Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse. He is entombed at the St. Francis of Assisi Mausoleum in the Catholic Cemetery in La Crosse.

Reverend William Grevatch — Pastor 1978–1991...

William Grevatch was born in Stevens Point to Ernest and Helen Grevatch on July 10, 1938. He had one younger sister, Mary. He graduated from P. J. Jacobs High School in Stevens Point and went on to Holy Cross Seminary in La Crosse, Wisconsin in 1956 until 1960 and then graduated with a degree in Theology from St. John's Seminary in Boston in 1964. His ordination took place at St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral in La Crosse on February 8, 1964. In 1972, Father Bill received his Master's in Education Administration from Catholic University in Washington D.C.

Father Grevatch's first assignment from 1964 - 1971 was as an Associate Pastor at St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church and as a Religion teacher at Aquinas High School in La Crosse. At this time, he earned his degree in school administration. In 1970, when St. Wenceslaus closed, he served as an Assistant Pastor at St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral and continued teaching at Aquinas. He was then assigned as Principal of Columbus High School in Marshfield and co-pastor with Father Peter Knippel at Corpus Christi Parish in Bakerville in 1971. Father Bill's other assignments included Pastor of St. Pius X Parish in La Crosse from 1978 – 1991, Pastor of St. Michael Parish, Wausau in 1991 until 2006 when he was assigned as Pastor for both St. Michael Parish and the Church of the Resurrection in Wausau. In 2015 he was granted status of Senior Priest.

Father Grevatch held various positions in the Diocese of La Crosse while he was pastor. He was Diocesan Vicar General and Dean in the La Crosse and Wausau Deaneries, Diocesan Consultor, and Chair of Clergy Personnel Board. Father Bill also initiated the St. Vincent de Paul Ministry and Store in the Wausau area.

Because of his active role in the Diocese of La Crosse, Father Bill received several awards: the Iverson Freking Ecumenical Award in 1990; Newman Catholic School's Cornerstone Award in 2015; and Catholic Charities "In His Name" Award in 2015.

My St. Pius X Story--by Father Bill Grevatch...

Homily at Mary, Mother of the Church on September 10 – 11, 2016 as we celebrated Building Upon Our Legacy

We all like stories, don't we? But in our fast-paced society we don't take enough time for them. We want to get right to the point and move on, but this isn't the nature of a story. Stories take time to unfold and be told. This is true of our own stories and Jesus' stories, too. In today's gospel, he told a couple of short stories: The shepherd searching for the lost sheep and the woman searching for the lost coin. He also told a longer story about the prodigal son. They are wonderful stories and carry with them a powerful message of love, forgiveness, and healing. They remind us how much God loves and forgives us and how we are called to do the same to one another. Our God is there for us no matter how much we mess up.

I have my story of Faith and you have yours and together we are part of a bigger story of Faith, the story of our two Catholic parishes here on the south side of La Crosse: St. Thomas More and St. Pius X (now known as Mary Mother of the Church). It's a good story but like all stories it had its ups and downs, its twists and its turns.

I was privileged to be part of this story for about 13 years as Pastor of St. Pius. St. Pius was formed as a parish by Bishop John Patrick Tracy in 1960, the announcement surprised everyone. Shortly afterwards the new parish began building a combination church and school on Mormon Coulee Road and only 12 years later in 1972 the building was sold and the parishioners found a new home in our Diocesan Center. The felt like wandering Armenians in the Bible and there was a lot of mumbling and grumbling. Six years later in 1978 I became Pastor and through the grace of God and a wonderful staff, which included Deacon Richard Sage, Tom Thibodeau, Brother Michael Mandernach and Sr. Louise Rahe, the Parish continued to thrive and grow. As you well know, the parish covered a very large area. So, with Ann Malin's expertise we divided the parish into districts so we could get to know one another better. We met for home Masses and sharing. It worked well and the mumbling and grumbling began to subside and a greater sense of pride and community began to emerge. It wasn't perfect, nothing is, but it was very good. A Vatican II Spirit began to develop – a spirit where everyone baptized and ordained share a common mission to serve as Jesus served. As He Himself said, "I come not to be served, but to serve."

It was during this time that Bishop John Paul published a small but insightful document on Consultation in the Parish. It consisted of guidelines for Pastoral and Finance Councils and outlined the four key areas of parish life: Worship, Catholic Education, Social Justice and Family Life. We as a parish took this document very seriously and tried to implement it as best we could. Let me give you a few examples:

**In the area of worship, we encouraged all parishioners to be involved and to participate according to their gifts and talents. Maybe it would be music, maybe it would be the environment or some other Liturgical Ministry.

**There was great support for our school with its fine faculty as well as Aquinas High School.

**We had a great Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Program for our young people.

**We reached out to the elderly and shut-ins and those who were hurting by participating in such community programs as Meals on Wheels, the Jail Ministry and Causeway, an Ecumenical Program for shut-ins and elderly.

**And, of course, we played and had fun together. There were 60+ gatherings, golf outings with our friends at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Campouts on Goose Island with an outdoor Mass, Fun Nights with games of chance, after all we were a Catholic Parish, picnics and outdoor Masses at Oehler's Cave, and, of course, celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and the parish Feast Day on August 21st.

All of which built community and were fun!!

We as a parish were especially proud of celebrating two ordinations and first Masses for Fr. John Swing in 1970 and Fr. Mark Pierce in 1981. Both are Pastors and serving their people well. I look back on my 13 years of priestly ministry at St. Pius X and I see them as a gift from God. They taught me to be a better Pastor, to see that we are all called, Baptized, and Ordained to serve one another in the Spirit of Jesus. It was a very special time in my life. I love St. Pius and the City of La Crosse, but as happens in the lives of all of us, God had other plans. In 1991 Bishop Paul asked me to go to Wausau and become Pastor of St. Michael's where Fr. Joe Rafacz was pastor for a number of years. It wasn't an easy move for me but I found a new home and have retired in Wausau. Fr. Joe followed me as Pastor of St. Pius and eventually the two south side parishes were united under his leadership. The new/old parish is named Mary Mother of the Church.

So, in the last 56 years you have come full circle and it is quite a story of Faith. I believe you are in a wonderful place, perhaps the best place you have been since the beginning of your journey. You have not only born the heat of the day, but you have born it well and with grace, both God's Grace and yours. You have a wonderful Pastor and pastoral staff and you have enriched one another with a variety of gifts and are building a strong story – our story – has a great future. It really does. The success of your Capitol Campaign is an awesome sign of this. As we all know, good parish facilities are a blessing. They help build a strong faith community where everybody is welcome and where good ministry is encouraged and found.

Finally, just a little sage advice from one of the "old" pastors: Don't let some of the hurts and pains of the past keep you from being the servant parish Jesus wants you to be. Love, forgiveness, and healing are what Jesus taught, not only in today's Gospel, but all through His life.

It's not always easy, and I speak from experience, but can we who call ourselves Jesus' disciples do anything less?

Prayer
God Bless

Reverend Joseph James Rafacz — Pastor 1991–2002...

Rev. Joseph Rafacz was born on February 4, 1929 in Wausau, Wisconsin.

Fr. Rafacz attended St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee, St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland, and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He was ordained on May 19, 1956 at Holy Cross Seminary in La Crosse by the Most Rev. John P. Treacy.

The first assignment given to Fr. Rafacz was as an instructor at Holy Cross Seminary in La Crosse in 1956, which he held until 1968. He was then appointed Pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Cassel and Administrator of St. Patrick Parish in Halder. Fr. Rafacz also taught Latin at Newman High School in Wausau during the 1968 -1969 school year. He was appointed Pastor of St. Matthew Parish in Wausau in September 1970. In 1974, Fr. Rafacz was appointed Pastor of St. Michael's Parish in Wausau. He served there until 1991. In July 1991, Fr. Rafacz was appointed Moderator of the Curia and in October 1991 he was also appointed Pastor of St. Pius X Parish in La Crosse replacing Fr. Bill Grevatch who was assigned to St. Michael Parish, Wasusau. They switched! In 1997, Fr. Rafacz was released from his responsibilities as Moderator of the Curia and was also appointed as Pastor of St. Thomas More Parish in La Crosse and as Director of the Diocesan Mission Office. Fr. Rafacz remained Pastor of both St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Parishes until 2000 when the two parishes came together as one - becoming Mary, Mother of the Church Parish. He served Mary, Mother of the Church Parish until he was appointed Pastor of St. Agnes Parish in Weston in 2002. He remained at St. Agnes Parish until 2010 when he was granted status of Senior Priest in October of 2010.

Fr. Rafacz died on August 27, 2013 in Wausau. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at St. Michael Church in Wausau on Tuesday, September 3, 2013. He is entombed at St. Michael's Parish Cemetery in Wausau.

Deacon Richard Sage — Deacon 1983–present...

When Deacon Richard Sage sees someone with a need, he finds a way to help that person, whether it concerns the basic need of food, shelter or a listening ear. He finds his purpose in life through helping others by doing “small things with great love” (St. Theresa of Calcutta). Richard was one of six children, three boys and three girls, born to Lawrence and Helen Sage of Onalaska. He attended St. Patrick’s Catholic School and after graduating from Onalaska High School, Richard went on to Western Technical College where he earned an Associate Degree in Accounting. He later attended Viterbo University and majored in Business Administration. Richard also earned his Master’s Degree in Servant Leadership from Viterbo. These degrees would pave the road in Richard’s professional career and his philosophy of helping others. In 1983 Richard Sage was ordained a deacon as a member of the first diaconate class in the Diocese of La Crosse. He was one of eleven men to be ordained by Bishop John Paul at St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral. Deacon Sage had a desire “to serve people in a more formal way.”

Deacon Sage was assigned to St. Pius X Parish where he served for 16 years helping plan liturgies, especially the Holy Triduum and preaching homilies, coordinating the Marriage Pep Program, serving on the Social Justice Committee, and assisting the Finance and Pastoral Councils. Having a background in accounting, he was especially valuable in helping the parish with their finances. With his musical background, having a tenor singing voice and playing the organ, Deacon Sage helped the parish choirs – Traditional, Contemporary and Funeral choirs. In 1975, he led the Diocesan Choir; a position he held for about five years.

In January of 2011, Deacon Sage was assigned to St. Charles in Genoa to fill in between priest pastoral assignments. While there, he also acted as Principal for St. Charles Catholic School for five teachers and 35 children in Kindergarten through Eighth grades. Deacon Sage stayed at St. Charles until June 2012 when a new pastor was assigned at St. Charles. Deacon Sage’s financial background included working in the Finance Office of the Diocese of La Crosse for 17 years and as the Chief Financial Officer for the Family and Children’s Center for 13 years.

He then took the position of Executive Director of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse. In Deacon Sage’s nine years in that position he made some changes that promoted his philosophy about helping the poor and disadvantaged. In his words, Deacon Sage said he changed Catholic Charities “from a clinical type of model to one that was more on the street – in touch with the poor.” Even though there were still clinical services, Catholic Charities became “more of an agency to reach out to the poor, the disenfranchised, and the marginalized.” The Catholic Charities Warming Center, located in downtown La Crosse, was one of the ways of reaching those on the street. This is a place that provides warmth on cold winter nights, showers to refresh, laundry facilities, free clothing and food brought in by volunteers.

The Warming Center also includes St. Lawrence Community Services to help people with basic needs of rent, utilities, groceries and shelter. There is an Immigration Department to help those from other countries acclimate to the area. Whatever help a person needs, the Warming Center gives it. In addition to the La Crosse Warming Center, Catholic Charities also founded Sojourner House in Eau Claire – a 48 bed homeless shelter that operates year round – and the Wausau Warming Center that operates very similar to the one in La Crosse. Deacon Sage says that operational funds for these programs come mostly “from the goodness of people.”

As another way of serving the poor, Deacon Sage is one of the co-founders of the Place of Grace Catholic Worker House founded in 1996 where meals and fellowship are provided. Packaged food and basic necessities are also available to those who need them.

Deacon Richard Sage has been recognized for his good works in the community. In 2010, he received the prestigious Iverson Freking Award. In 2015, he was honored with the Pope St. John XXIII Award from Viterbo University. In 2017, he received the Bill Medland Faithful Servant Award at the annual La Crosse Catholic Charities Lenten Luncheon for his compassionate outreach and service to the community, in particular, by establishing three homeless centers in the Diocese of La Crosse.

In 2014, Deacon Sage retired as Executive Director of the La Crosse Diocese Catholic Charities. He continues his humble service in the community and at Mary, Mother of the Church. Richard and his wife, Mary, have been married over 50 years and have three children, Jennifer, Tom and David and three grandchildren, Alicia, Jacob and Cody.

The people who made the journey...

St. Thomas More to St. Pius X to Mary Mother of the Church...

Donald and Joan Anderson
Willis and Lucille Becker
Lorenz (Bud) and Louise Bischel
Wally and Joan Blenka
Amelia (Robert) Cassidy
John and Elizabeth Dayton
Harold and Bernette Faas
Philip and Shirley Fanello
Helen (Gail) Follansbee
Melvin and Mae Fox
John and Marilyn Grabinski
Mary Helen Gerhard
Herbert and Janet Gundlach
John W. and Verneda Hackner
Marilyn Hammes
Kenneth and Elizabeth Herold
Jeanette Hill
Charles and Elizabeth Hottinger
Laura (William) Johnson
Jennings Jolivette
Le Roy Juen Jr.
Le Roy and Mary Juen Sr.
Lorraine Keil
Louis and Olivia Krajewski
Frances Kreibich

Catherine (Robert) Larkin
Donald and Irene Leith
Marilyn McCabe
Leon and Marian Kremenski
Dorothy Pierce
Kenneth and Irene Roesler
Wilfred and Marian Roesler
Ione Ross
Robert and Joyce Ruetten
Lester and Helen Schlicht
Helen Schye
Erma Schroeder
Patricia Seubert
Robert and Mary Sexauer
Thomas and Joan Sinniger
James and Elvena Slattery
Bernard and Marion Strasser
Le Roy and Patricia Strasser Jr.
Rudolph and Delores Strasser Jr.
Robert and Lucille Swing
Marguerite Talle
Willard and Evelyn Werner
Dorothy Wuensch
Dorothy E. Wuensch
Patrick and Beatrice Zielke

Pastors and their Assistants...

Rev. Francis McCaffrey 1960 – 1968
Rev. James Bailey 1962 – 1964
Rev. James Coke 1964 – 1964
Rev. James Lesczynski 1964 – 1964
Rev. John Nemmers 1965 – 1965
Rev. Charles Leisle 1966 – 1968
Rev. Dennis Rader 1966 – 1971

Rev. Peter Butz 1968 – 1978
Rev. Dennis Rader 1966 – 1971
Rev. Robert Kampine 1969 – 1971
Rev. Thomas Rudolph 1969 – 1969
Rev. Frederick Wirts 1971 – 1977

Rev. William Grevatch 1978 – 1991
Rev. Peter Knippel 1978 – 1979
Rev. James Mason 1981 – 1981

Rev. Joseph Rafacz 1991 – 2000

Sons and Daughters – Called to Serve in Ministry...

Rev. Msgr. Mark Pierce, son of Franklin and Dorothy Pierce
Rev. John Swing, son of Robert and M. Lucille Swing
Jeff Hutson, son of Tom and Fran Hutson
Patrick Umberger (1950 – 2010), son of Odell and Mary Ann Umberger
Sr. Lucy Slinger, FSPA

St. Pius X Commissioned Lay Ministers

*Ann Malin – 1982
*Julius and Adeline Wetsch – 1982
William Jaekel – 1985
Delores Smikla
Sharon Haczynski
Evelyn Wilhelm
Diane Hadsell
*Richard Sage – entered the Diocesan Diaconate Program, ordained as Deacon – 1983

*These parishioners were in the first Lay Ministry program begun in the Diocese of La Crosse in 1979.

St. Pius X School Story. . .

History

In 1960 the parish and school of St. Pius X was formed under Bishop John P. Treacy. Rev. Francis McCaffrey was appointed as its first pastor. He was to create a working parish with a school where no buildings existed. People registered as members of the new St. Pius X Parish, attending Sunday Mass at Holy Cross Seminary, and then enrolled their children to attend school.

It was hoped that a school would be built and completed within a year. It was estimated that approximately 300 children lived within the St. Pius X boundaries and would be attending this parish school.

In the meantime, without a building, the children attended different schools. In 1960 – 61, according to a letter from Bishop Treacy and an interview to the La Crosse Tribune on August 16, 1960 by Fr. McCaffrey, the first and second grades would be taught at St. Thomas More in one classroom. The third, fourth and fifth grades would be transported to Holy Cross School which was closed due to the newly established parish boundaries in the city. Students in sixth, seventh and eighth grades were integrated with the St. Thomas More students at St. Thomas More School.

The construction of the St. Pius X Church and School began in July of 1961. This modern building would have 10 classrooms, a convent, and a temporary church in the lower level.

In an interview with Fr. McCaffrey in 1962, second and third graders were taught by lay teachers at St. Thomas More Catholic School; sixth, seventh and eighth grade classes were held at Holy Cross Catholic School; and the children in first, fourth and fifth grades attended five different public schools during the construction of the new St. Pius X complex.

The building was completed in August of 1962 and the children were able to attend the new school that year. Six Sisters of St. Joseph (SSJ) from Stevens Point and two lay teachers taught the children. Sr. Mary Elenata was the first principal of the new school. She remained for two years. 339 students were enrolled that first year with 33 graduating at the end of the 1962-63 school year.

The enrollment remained steady around 340 children attending St. Pius. The school's enrollment peaked during the 1965-66 school year at 376 children. The 1982-83 school year was the first time enrollment dropped to below 200 children.

Principals

1962 – 1964 Sister Elenata, SSJ

1964 – 1969 Sister Mary Damien, SSJ

1969 – 1972 Sister Esther Romalke, SSJ

1972 - 1974 Mr. Robert Kerska was assistant principal in 1971 -1972 and then became principal the following school year;

1974 – 1977 Mrs. Lorraine Check and Mrs. Margaret Grelle were co-principals;

1977 – 1992 Sister Louise Rahe, FSPA

1992 – 1996 Mr. John Stellflue

1996 – 2000 Mr. Charles Burnett

Teaching Staff

During the first two years of enrollment, 1960-1962, the St. Pius X students attended various locations depending on their grade level. Some attended public schools, some attended class at St. Thomas More, and still some were bused to the Holy Cross School, which had recently been vacated due to school closures.

When the new 10-room St. Pius X School opened in 1962 – 1963 with 339 students, the teaching staff consisted of 6 nuns from the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent in Stevens Point and two lay teachers. In general, more religious comprised the faculty than lay faculty until the 1970 – 1972 school year. At this time, more lay teachers began to make up the teaching staff. This trend continued until 1992 – 2000 when the entire staff was made up of lay teachers. During this time, the shortage of religious personnel available to teach resulted in the shift to lay educators for the Catholic schools.

1968

In March of 1968, Father McCaffrey formed the first School Board of Education to help guide him with decisions about school policy, hiring and financial considerations. The members of that first school board were James Thornton, Don Cremer, Thomas Hutson, Walter Earhart, Joseph Lehnen, George Plunkett, Douglas Oldenburg and Ervin Calkins. Sister Mary Damien, principal of St. Pius X and Father McCaffrey were also a part of the school board.

1969 – 1970

In the 1969 – 1970 school year, St. Pius School changed how parents paid the cost of educating their children. No longer would the “book bill” be used to pay for schooling. The parents were expected to support the church and school through a program called “Minimum Giving.”

The first PTA was formed, bringing parents in to help support the teachers and school through projects and fund raising.

Finally, the eighth-grade class of 1970 was the first graduating class to complete all eight grades at St. Pius X.

1971 – 1972

The computer age came to the children of St. Pius X School. Patricia Oldenburg facilitated the time-sharing computer system with University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.



First Computer Class

1972 – 1973

The first student handbook was made available to parents and students of the school.

1973 – 1974

In 1973, the Parish moved to the Holy Cross Diocesan Center. The Seminary had been closed for two years by this time. St. Pius X School moved into renovated rooms on the first and second floors of the building. The classes were larger due to fewer classrooms than the original St. Pius School had available to them.

The first offering of a Kindergarten class was made possible. The parents now had their children being educated at the Catholic school from Kindergarten through Eighth grade.

1974 – 1977

Lorraine Check and Margaret Grelle acted as co-principals of St. Pius X School. Lorraine Check had been teaching at the school since 1966 and Margaret Grelle, since 1972. According to Lorraine, the two of them taught their classes all day and then met in the office after school. There they wrote and posted daily bulletins of all the schedules, activities and events for the following day at school. It was their way of communicating with the staff on a daily basis and keeping everyone at the school on the same page.



Margaret Grelle



Lorraine Check

1977 – 1992



Sr. Louise Rahe, FSPA

Sister Louise Rahe, FSPA, took over the reins as principal of St. Pius X in 1977. She had been an educator in schools throughout the Diocese of La Crosse and most recently served as a Director of Schools in the Diocesan Office of Education. Her experience brought fresh ideas of educating children at St. Pius X School. Sister Betty Reinders, SSSF, and Sister Mary Rose Menting, SSSF, who worked as Religious Education Coordinators at St. Pius X, remember that “she ran a quite innovative school with regard to classroom space and teaching methods.” Sister Louise retired in 1992.

1992 -1996

In 1992, Aquinas Middle School was formed with an attendance 185 seventh and eighth grade students from the city parishes. St. Pius X School staff was comprised of teachers who taught from Kindergarten through Sixth grade as well as specialists in Physical Education and in the Library. John Stellflue served as the full-time principal and then as a part-time principal in 1995 – 96 when he shared time with Cathedral School.

This was also the first time an After School Care Program was offered to the parents with children at St. Pius X School. The children were provided with snacks, a place to do homework and play until the parents picked them up after work. Tami Feuerhelm was the coordinator of the program.

1996 – 2000

Charles Burnett took over as principal of St. Pius X School when John Stellflue transitioned to his role as full-time principal of Cathedral School. Mr. Burnett served in that position until 2000.

During that time, Bishop Raymond Burke formed a committee to study the possibility of the unification of the Catholic schools in the city of La Crosse. An earlier study had taken place in the La Crosse Deanery in the late 1980’s but was never completed. In 1992, Aquinas Middle School was established in the Aquinas High School building. Parish schools, except for St. Patrick’s in Onalaska, became K – 6 schools.

In 2000, Bishop Burke announced plans that called for the Coulee Catholic Schools to be unified. The plan merged St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Parishes and Schools under the name of Mary, Mother of the Church. The Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Center would be located at the St. Thomas More School building and Grades 1 – 6 at the St. Pius X School and Holy Cross Diocesan Center.

Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD)

The Religious Education Program for children in the elementary grades and in high school who did not attend Catholic schools had been important to Pope Pius X. In 1905, he ordered there be the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) in every parish in the world. His catechism was simple, plain and brief for all to use. It was issued in 1908.

The Religious Education Program at St. Pius the X was taught by the religious nuns, parish volunteers and the teaching staff at St. Pius X School throughout the forty years that the parish existed. Those who served as Religious Education Coordinators worked closely with the pastor, school principal and school staff, the CCD teachers and the Religious Education Committee. They brought their own philosophies and talents to the program. Those who served over the years were:

Sister Betty Reinders, SSJ, and Sister Mary Rose Menting, SSJ, were hired in 1971. Sister Betty was hired by St. Pius X and Sister Mary Rose, by the Diocese of La Crosse. In an agreement with the Diocese Office of Education and St. Pius X, the two would work both jobs – Sister Betty doing the majority of her work with St. Pius X and Sister Mary Rose doing the majority of her work with the Diocese. They supported those teachers who taught the religion classes, but they did not teach. In 1977 they moved to a parish in Appleton to work as Religious Coordinators.

Brother Michael Mandernach served as a Religious Education Coordinator from 1979 – 1982. One of his contributions to St. Pius X was bringing the Vacation Bible School program to the parish. It was a long-lived program that never lacked for volunteers or children.

Tom Thibodeau, 1982 to 2018, shared his vision for educating the children and teens of the parish. This vision was based on his philosophy of serving others. He brought this philosophy to the students every time he stepped into the classroom.

Lorraine Check served at the CCD Elementary Coordinator from 1996 until 2000 bringing her understanding of children and leadership skills to the program.

Those who taught the children in the CCD classes were volunteers - some came with teaching backgrounds and some not. In the 1980's, the Diocese Office of Education wanted all CCD instructors to be certified. Therefore, the Diocese arranged for classes and speakers to provide the teachers with the background and knowledge to help them become better instructors of the Catholic faith.

CCD elementary classes met on Wednesdays after school at 3:45 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. at St. Pius X School; those students in grades 6 – 12 met from 7:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.

Endowment Fund

In 1987, the La Crosse Deanery received a gift of \$150,000 from Mr. and Mrs. Robert Franke for Catholic Education. Rev. William Grevatch, Dean of the La Crosse Deanery, said that it would be used in two ways. The La Crosse Deanery School Endowment Trust of \$102,000 was set up for those families who needed help with tuition for their children in grades K – 12. Cathedral, St James, Blessed Sacrament, Holy Trinity, St. Thomas More and St. Pius X would each receive \$8,000.

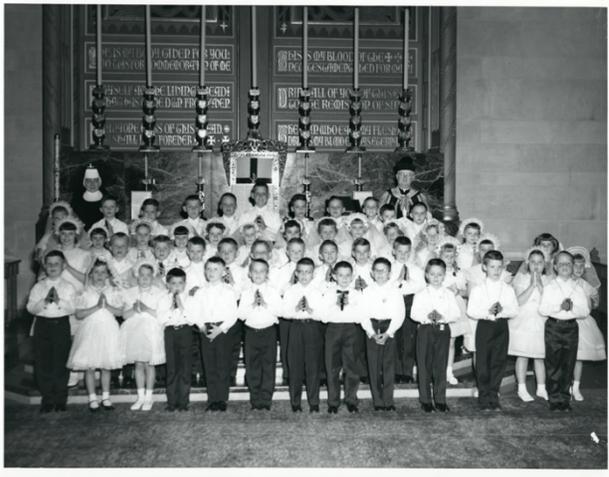
St. Pius X set up an endowment fund with the money gifted to them and sought additional money to build up the base of the fund. It was noted that only the interest of the fund would be used each year. Upon the establishment of the St Pius X Endowment Trust, a number of St. Pius X parishioners donated to the fund.

In August of 2000, the combined funds of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More Endowment Funds had a market value of \$200,000.

Since the merger of St. Pius X and St. Thomas More, the trusts of both parishes have been combined under the Mary, Mother of the Church Endowment Trust.

School Memories in Word and Picture

Our "First" First Communion and 8th Grade Graduation



First Communion 1961 – Christ the King Chapel



First Communion 1961 - St. Thomas More



Eighth Grade Graduation 1961



Graduating Class 1962



First Communion 1963

35 Years of Memories

After having taught for seven years in Crawford County, we built our home in La Crosse. We had been members of St. Thomas More (Connie was baptized there) but spent most weekends on the farm in Eastman which we purchased from my parents. When St. Pius was formed and everything south of Ward Avenue became St. Pius X Parish, we became a part of St. Pius X Parish.

The spring of 1966 there was an opening at St. Pius School. I had an interview with Father McCaffrey which consisted of "You want a job; you have a job!" So, I started teaching 3rd grade that fall. I taught in all eight grades during my 35 years of teaching.

I taught under the following principals: Sr. Damien, Sr. Esther, Bob Kerska, Sr. Louise Rahe, John Stellflue, and Charles Burnett. Something stands out with each one. Sr. Damien was from the old school strict, but I remember her falling asleep during classes. What a thing to remember! Sr. Esther was like your grandmother, just a sweet lady. Bob Kerska was only principal for a couple years, if I remember correctly, it was during our transition to the seminary. Sr. Louise was our Diocesan Superintendent before she became our principal. She always put her teachers and school first. Your welfare and that of the students was important to her. John Stellflue was half-time (Cathedral School being the morning half) and was there only in the afternoon. He always called our location "St. Elsewhere." Charles Burnett did double duty some of the time – teaching and principal duties.

When Father Peter Butz was our pastor, Peggy Grelle and I became co-principals for two years. I don't recall if it was to save money or some other reason. Peggy and I would teach our classes all day and then meet in the office after school to do anything needed and to write the bulletin containing schedules, activities, events, etc., for the next day. This was posted in a bulletin signed by all the teachers as they came in the next morning. That was one way we knew everyone was on board that morning. Peggy and I attended all principal meetings for Diocesan principals.

At what I call "Old Pius," (Mormon Coulee Road) several of the classes were divided because of enrollment. When we moved to the seminary in 1970 our class sizes were larger - in the upper 30s. The move to the seminary that summer was a lot of work for both the janitors and the teachers. The janitors moved everything over into the gym and we had to sort and move it to our rooms.

How did we feel about the move and losing our parish property? We felt rather disheartened when the picture of Father Butz was in the Times Review handing the check over to the bishop and our parish had to start all over again!

I began as CCD Elementary Coordinator about four years before I retired and stayed on two years after. I got involved when Father Joe and Tom Thibodeau were waiting for me after school one night and asked if I would take the position.

I loved every year I was a part of St. Pius X Parish - wonderful people, wonderful parish!

-Lorraine (Mrs. Check) Richter

New Year, New School

When I was going into second grade my parents, Joyce and Bob Ruetten, bought their first home. This meant that I would be leaving Holy Trinity and start school in second grade at St. Thomas More. I don't remember this bothering me. I was seven, so I did what Mom and Dad said! Sometime during that year, the Bishop decided that the parish of St. Thomas More was too large and so the most southern part of La Crosse became St. Pius X Parish. But we had no church or school.

So, I went to Holy Cross School for third grade. This was a very old building that was going to be torn down and later be the site of Cathedral grade school. We were allowed to use two classrooms. There was a 3rd/4th grade classroom and a 4th/5th grade classroom. Probably 30 – 40 kids in each room, taught by one sister teaching 3rd and 4th and one teaching 4th and 5th. I remember three things from third grade: 1. On my birthday in March there was a bad snowstorm and lots of kids didn't make it to school so I got to treat the "whole" school. 2. Another memory was my Mom dying my First Communion dress green for a spring concert we all performed in. 3. The last memory is every day on the playground at noon they rang the bells for, I think, the Angelus.



Special Visitor

I'm not sure why but for fourth grade I attended Emerson School. Going to public school meant I got to ride the bus with all my neighborhood friends. And it also meant I went to CCD. I think it was on Saturday mornings at St. Thomas More.

Finally, St. Pius X completed their building that housed classrooms for eight grades on the first floor and a lunchroom and church in the walkout basement. I was able to attend St. Pius X from fifth through eighth grade at the new St. Pius X Parish School.

I don't remember it being difficult to go to a different school every year until 5th grade. There were always some friendly faces because a lot of families were in the same situation. But finally staying at the same school, with mostly the same kids, and continuing on to Aquinas with most of them was a good experience.

-Roxanne (Ruetten) Karl

Helping Hands

My parents received a call from the Sisters who would be teaching at the new St. Pius X School asking for assistance in getting the classrooms ready for the opening day of school. My friend, Charlene Johnson, who lived across the street, and I went over to the school every day for about two weeks. We covered stacks and stacks of books and assisted with putting up bulletin boards. I do believe others were involved with this adventure because there were eight classrooms to get ready.

- Deborah (Hottinger) Haldorson

A Lifetime of Teaching Memories

I have many fond memories of my teaching years at St. Pius X-MMOC. (Too many to recall.) The students were very good, well-disciplined, and polite.

My teaching career at St. Pius X began in the fall of 1962, Father McCaffrey hired me as the fifth-grade teacher with a class of about 45 – 50 students. He wouldn't divide the class unless there were 60 students. Mrs. June Galstad and I were the only Lay Teachers. The Sisters of St. Joseph from Stevens Point made up the rest of the faculty through 1972. I taught mostly in grades two, three, and four and retired with 38 years at St. Pius X – Mary, Mother of the Church in 2002, after which I subbed quarter or semester terms until 2005 when the school closed. I had class sizes of 25 – 30 students, but one year only 11! Parents were always involved and volunteered in many capacities such as library assistants, tutoring one on one, coaching various sports, lunchroom and playground assistants, office volunteer, etc.

Brother Michael Mandernach and Brother Steven Simms, from the Brothers of St. Pius X, and Sister Mary Rose Menting and Sister Betty Reinders were with us as Religious Education Directors in the 1980's and 1990's. Their influence in teaching Religion classes and CCD was very much appreciated by the parish and faculty. It was a joyous reward to have them with us. Deacon Richard Sage, Tom Thibodeau and Earl Medary were outstanding in knowledge. We have had great rewards from their sharing their faith with us.

Lorraine Check, Elvena Slattery, Peggy Grelle and I were all with St. Pius X School and Parish from the 1960's through to our retirements with the exception of Mrs. Grelle going on to the Aquinas Middle School when it opened to all Catholic school students in seventh and eighth graders.

Some days I still miss the interactions of teacher – student – parents. As the saying goes, "Once a teacher, always a teacher, wherever life leads you." Many times, I see former students and parents and the comment is "St. Pius was a great school!" and we miss it.

I want to thank everyone from ST. Pius X – MMOC who were always there for me in my teaching career and still are there for me in my parish life today. God bless you.

First week of school – 1962

Being a convert, I was not up to, should I say, “Mass Etiquette.” The bell rang for Mass, so I told the children to line up according to classroom seating. The boys and girls lined up and we went into the church which was on the lower level. Father McCaffery and Sister Elenata were shocked to see them come in as they were - boys and girls mixed and some of the girls did not have on a head scarf or veil. To say the least, the next time we went to Mass, all the girls sat together, wearing a head cover, in front of the boys. All the boys had a belt on and with shirts tucked in and sat in back of the girls! Lesson number one learned: Always ask for guidance!

One month into school – 1962

I had desks on runners (slats of wood) and had an extra set of five not used. One morning I asked some strong fifth grade boys to take out the extra set as we needed space to walk around. The boys did what I asked and Mr. Brockel, the janitor, came to my door with Sister Elenata and asked what I was doing? I could still get more students. I already had 45 – 50 students in the room! Lesson number two learned: Never take anything out of the classroom without asking!

Reconciliation

My husband and I went to confession on a Saturday, which being a convert was also new to me. John and I were in line and I went into the Confessional, which had a curtain. I told Father my sins and then got up to go as he didn't say anything. When I got up to leave, Father McCaffrey pulled the curtain aside and said in a loud voice, “I'm not done with you yet!” I knelt back down. When I left the confessional, I was totally red from embarrassment and so was John! Lesson number three learned: Always wait for “Go in Peace, your sins are forgiven” from the priest!

Discipline

Father Butz said he would take care of all discipline problems. I was in charge of playground supervision one noon hour. Some of my students had an argument and were hitting one another. The problem couldn't be solved so I sent the five that seemed to be the instigators to the rectory to Father Butz. Classes started and they came back with a letter to me which said that I apparently did not send the right students to him from what the students had said to him. He ended his letter with “I will now return to my nap!” Lesson number four learned: Never wake a priest from his nap!

Walls

Father Steve Kachel came to St. Pius after leaving the Conventual Franciscan Friars of Marytown in Libertyville, IL. He was the teacher in fourth grade in the same room with me. He had a very loud voice! Father Bill could hear him teach all the way to his office down the hall. Father's remark was, “How can such a thin man have such a loud voice?” I was able to contend with it, but at the end of the year I asked Jerry Roesler, the Diocesan Maintenance Man, if a wall, floor-to-ceiling, could be put in? I got a call that summer from Sister Louise Rahe, our principal, asking me to come to the school and tell Jerry where I wanted the wall. I got my wall! Lesson number five: Ask and you will receive!

Principals and Secretaries and Faculty

I felt all our principals were outstanding. They were very understanding of the children's needs. In fact, sometimes I think students would do something out of order so they could go "visit" the principal in their office.

We also had many office receptionists – secretaries that kept everything in the office in order for our needs. Additionally, many good teachers have spent few or many years at St. Pius X. Our faculty was always a close-knit family and relationships were formed that I still consider close to me today.

-Betty Koenen

Elementary Memories

I attended St. Pius X School in first through eighth grades. This would have been from 1966 to 1973 or so. I remember walking to school on those cold winter mornings with Hillbilly bread wrappers covering my shoes inside my boots, just to keep my feet dry. I remember Mrs. Slattery, Mrs. Koenen, and Mrs. Check, my teachers. I remember Mrs. Omernik teaching us how to make life-sized Easter bunnies when I was in First Grade. Then I remember Sr. Catherine. One weekend my brother and I were running around the backyard and crashed into each other – forehead to forehead. I had this giant green and purple bump pulsating for everybody to see. Sr. Catherine sent me home because, as she told me, "I am sorry, but I cannot stand to look at you."



Pumpkin Patch

Then there was Sr. Sandy, the first of the nuns that did not wear a habit.

The big kids got to play on the lower playground, and I got in trouble for kicking a kickball on top of the roof of the school.

When we moved to the seminary, I remember Mr. Buege, Mrs. Atchison and Mrs. Grelle. Mr. Kerska was also there when I was in sixth grade. He was one of my favorite people of all. The first real computer person of the day!

-Tim Konop

A Salute to Teachers

St. Pius X School and its great "old-school" teachers, the likes of Betty Koenen, Peggy Grelle, Jeff Novak, Lorraine Check and Rosemary Atchison, prepared our children well for their high school days at Aquinas High School. We cannot thank them enough.

-Patty and Jim Kirchner

Food, Library, Racoons, and Girls Named Kathy

One thing I remember about St. Pius X School were the cooks in the kitchen, Mrs. Faas and Alice. I used to help out at lunchtime serving food. I would get out of homeroom so I could go downstairs and help get everything ready for lunch.

When we moved to the seminary building, it was definitely a lot larger than the previous building. It had marble steps, very heavy doors to open and urinals in the girls' restroom! Going downstairs to the locker rooms was a bit scary. We used to run through the halls to get back upstairs because everything echoed and our minds would play tricks on us thinking someone was following us.

I remember that the church in the seminary was so dark where the other church had a lot of windows which made it very bright. We could look out at the parking lot if we got bored!



Christmas Photo

The library at the seminary was large and there was a window that looked out towards the front of the school. With it being on the second floor, you could stand or sit up there and daydream. Mrs. Potoracke made sure that we behaved. For a little lady she was very intimidating. Sister Trinette taught Religion. She had a lot of stories about Honduras and her mission work there. It made you realize how good we had it. Mr. Pollard taught math. I remembered him because when we had chicken for lunch, he would eat the chicken bones. He said where he

came from, it was an insult to the cook if you didn't eat the bones. He also gave me a Bible to read that I still have to this day. Mrs. Grelle taught science. One day Jeff Check had brought a raccoon in a huge cage into science class. All of a sudden, everyone noticed that there were spaghetti-like worms coming out of the raccoon. I never saw a cage removed from a room so fast!

My class consisted of only 12 girls and six of them were named "Kathy." Everyone had to have a nickname or else we would all turn our heads at the same time if someone said "Kathy."

-Kathy (Olson) LaBeause

Drapes

In the summer of 1973, a group of young mothers got together each Wednesday from 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. at the seminary dining room to sew drapes for all the classrooms. We brought along our ironing boards, irons, sewing machines and all accessories and our kids. Several high school girls volunteered to do childcare all afternoon each week while the mothers worked on the drapes. Some ladies returned at 7:00 p.m. to continue our project into the night.

All the drapes were finished and hung for the opening of school in the fall.

-Bea Gilles

Exploring on the Seminary Grounds

I remember finding crayfish in the river behind the school and collecting leaves and seeds from all the big trees around. The school had real windows that opened up. One fall, the boys dangled a scarecrow out the window and down into the classroom below. I also remember the fossil that is in the limestone on the backside of the building. I remember running around the drive that circled the building as many times as we could for fun. I think it was $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. And one evening after a friend and I had finished running around the building, we got the crazy idea to knock on Bishop Freking's door. He was so gracious and even invited us in and gave us a tour!

-Former St. Pius X Student

Teaching the Faith

We were blessed to have so many good, good teachers: Mrs. Atchison, Mrs. Check, Mrs. Grelle, Mrs. Koenen, Mrs. Servais, Mrs. Slattery, Mrs. Wold, Mr. Novak, Mr. Voss, Sister Mary Ann, Sister Mary Rose, Sister Betty, Sister Louise, our principal and many others. Years later, we realize that they not only taught the Catholic faith, they lived it!

-Former St. Pius X Student



Pet Blessing

Involved Teacher

Our class was made up of 24 boys and only 9 girls for pretty much the full 9 years of grade school. One time when in 5th grade we were playing a baseball game at the Diocesan field. Our teacher that year was Mrs. Wold. She was working late after school and stopped over to the field on her way home. Our team was in the outfield, but when we saw her, the entire team came running over to greet her behind home plate and the game was temporarily halted. She was one of the many great teachers we had. I also remember having a dance in the gym for parents and students when we were in 7th or 8th grade.

-Former St. Pius X Student

An Unexpected Letter

Sister Louise Rahe, our principal, ran a tight ship – we thought! One time when a friend and I got in trouble and had to write papers about our misdeed, we were a bit nervous about going home to face our parents, but nothing happened. It was only after I was married that Sister Louise, retired, was going through her old files and found the paper I had written. She mailed it to my folks and asked them to give it to me. She said she learned about “gleeking” through our papers. It was then that I realized she had a sense of humor and was a softie at heart.

-Former St. Pius X Student

School Activities and Events

Linda Kaiser and I organized a Girl Scout troop for our daughters and their friends at St. Pius School. One fall, the local electric company ran a poster contest with the theme of saving energy. We decided to enter the contest and our poster won first place! The award brought smiles to all the girls’ faces. Other activities included going on field trips, working on badges, selling cookies and spending an overnight at Rochester Council’s summer camp near Houston, MN.

Sandra Wheat was the orchestra instructor for the school. She gave lessons to any student who wanted to take lessons on any instrument in the orchestra. She was a hard worker and very tolerant of misplayed notes by the students. We had fall and spring concerts for the parents. There was always lots of applause supporting the efforts of the students.

Then there was the May Crowning of the Mary statue behind the school and the blessing by Father Bill Grevatch of the animals on the feast of St. Francis. The animals mostly consisted of cats and dogs brought in by the parents. My children wanted me to bring in their horse—there are limits to what can be done!

-Sharon DiCicco

Walk for Values

I remember St. Pius’ annual “Walk for Values.” It was a very exciting day for the students, teachers and also the parents. The very first walk included some of the Catbirds basketball team, the mayor, a La Crosse firetruck, prizes, and of course Rosa Wittenberg’s car trunk filled with candy that she passed out to the students as they came around to her station. The Walk started in the morning and went all day with everyone continually walking around the Seminary. It was a very fun day for everyone.

-Kathy Houlihan

School Day Memories

There were too many great memories of St. Pius X Grade School to narrow it down to just one: Movie time in the cafeteria, I remember seeing *Lord of the Flies* (black and white version). Being taught how to square dance in the gym (I liked to dance with all the girls). Pizza served for lunch (had to be quick on my feet to get seconds). Earned extra money stuffing envelopes (think that may have been after school). Mrs. Slattery teaching me how to hold a “fat” pencil (and not run in the halls). Class skits that we put on for the other grades (our air band rocked Alice Cooper, it was the late 70’s). And, of course, walking home from school because I missed the bus (which was because I had to stay after school for goofing off). Lastly, every teacher saying, “another Morrison boy?” (I was the last of seven boys to grace those halls).

-PJ Morrison

A Nurturing Environment

Our children attended St. Pius X School in the Diocesan Building where Linda Kloet assisted us with our school registration. The principal at the time was John Stellflue, and then later Charlie Burnett became principal. We were grateful for the exceptional teachers at St. Pius X School over the years: Geri Wettstein, Earl Medary, Sarah Heiderscheit, Suzanne Murray, Betty Koenen, Jeff Novak, Cami Pietrek, Julie Wagner, Laura Wagner, Regina Chihak, Arlene Thornton, Lorraine Check, and more. . . Our children were nurtured through school Masses, religion classes, music programs, the school library, superb classroom learning environment, and the compassionate care of their teachers.

-Therese and Joseph van Oss

Lifelong Memories and Friends

We joined St. Pius X when my husband, Bob, retired from the U. S. Army in 1966. My two daughters, Sandy and Donna, went to school at the old building on Mormon Coulee Road and Broadview Place (1966 -1967). Later we moved to the Seminary building.

I did a lot of chaperoning on yearly trips with the St. Pius X classes. The classes went to Villa Louis and the medical office in Prairie du Chien...and the bus broke down!! When we went to Valley Fair in Minnesota (with the class of Tierney, Konop, and Feuerhelm), they all rushed to the Flume and got so wet. They had no change of clothes and stayed in the bus all day playing cards. It was cold outside. Then there was the trip to the House on the Rock with my grandson Mike’s class. It took them only 20 minutes to go through the house, they were more interested in playing baseball in the park! I had to go back to the House on the Rock later on to see it better!

My grandson, Mike, moved with his father from Indiana to La Crosse and started 4th grade at St. Pius X. Every Wednesday was the children’s Holy Mass. I never missed one. Some of us mothers and grandmothers (like me) met at Burger King for friendship coffee!

My favorite yearly sport event was the Brains and Brawns. My grandson was very good in basketball. He made a half-court shot and got 54 Whopper Sandwiches as a reward from Burger King, who was the sponsor of the event. Guess who got them? ME! So for the next few weeks most of my friends got a treat from me! (I still like Junior Whoppers!)

Another special time for me was the Walk for Values around the Seminary building. One of my grandkids walked the whole route 30 times. Me...once...then I gave out candy to the children who were walking around the building.

I made lifelong memories at St. Pius X with many other friends.

-Rosa Wittenberg

Father Mark Pierce

I was born August 15, 1955 in La Crosse and baptized at St. Thomas More Parish the following week.

While my parents, Dorothy and Franklin Pierce, lived in Onalaska for the first years of their marriage, by the time of my birth they had relocated to the Town of Shelby home (now in the City of La Crosse) where my folks lived the rest of their lives (4000 Riverview Drive).

When the new St. Pius X Parish was being formed, our family were some of the original members. Kitty-corner from our house was that of Jim and Elvena Slattery...also life-long members at St. Pius, with Elvena being an "epic" teacher of 1st graders.

My first year of schooling was in a one-room school house (then called Wilson School...now a bed and breakfast on Highway 14 about a mile to the east of the juncture with WI 35). I suspect I am one of the few adults of my generation to have that experience. As I remember, there were thirty or forty kids in eight grades...with my first grade being the largest class with seven children. There was one teacher and a part-time aide. Not sure what, with all the various things going on, how we learned.

As the school at St. Pius was ready, I was part of the initial 2nd grade class...with forty-plus (the number 48 sticks in my head) children and one teaching sister. Once again, I am not sure how we learned anything with all the activity going on.

I remember Fr. McCaffrey coming to hand out report cards. I did well academically (except for C's in handwriting), but always got demerits for "lacking self-control." Some things never change.

I don't remember a whole lot about learning (I regret to say)...but I do remember in the older grades being one of those who raised the flag at the start of the day, and lowering it at the end of the school day...and learned to run the film projector for the various classes.

We worshiped in the lower level of the Pius X building, with low ceilings and a great bank of clear glass windows to the east. My parents, like all families of the time, had "their own" pew...fourth or fifth from the front on the right side.

Fr. Butz was pastor when I thought I would take a try at Holy Cross Seminary. He was good enough to offer me a job for a couple summers during high school to assist the janitor during his summer cleaning efforts.

After my sophomore year, Holy Cross Seminary closed, and I went on to Holy Name Seminary in Madison along with Jeff Hutson, another St. Pius member. So I was far away during the years that the parish moved to occupy the Diocesan Center.

I graduated from Holy Name in Madison, and started college in Madison...working in Madison those summers, and so don't have a lot of memories of things at St. Pius from 1972 on. My father, Franklin, died of what we would today call COPD as I started major seminary (1977). Fr. Bill Grevatch and Fr. Peter Knippel, relatively new pastors at St. Pius X, did a wonderful job in presiding over his funeral, including their suggestion of something rare for the time in La Crosse...hosting the wake in the Christ the King Chapel that was used by our parish.

Some years later, Fr. Bill extended a further kindness to me and my family by hiring my mother to cook part-time in the rectory (near the original Pius X building). Fr. Bill was in some ways like my father, in being something of a tease. Being the Fr. Bill's cook provided my mother income, allowed her to experiment in cooking from the library of cookbooks she had acquired (her children were quite limited in their tastes), and in general helped her through the loss of her husband, our father.

My junior year in college took me farther away from La Crosse, as I moved from college in Madison to St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, where I finished my college degree, and then started my four years of major seminary education, graduating in 1981. I was ordained on May 30, 1981, at St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral by Bishop Frederick Freking. Fr. Bill was my pastor during my ordination and helped host a wonderful Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Pius X.

My assignments took me to Chippewa Falls and Stevens Point as an associate, then two years of further studies in Boston where I did work in Scriptural Studies, and then as a pastor at the University Parish in Stevens Point, Roncalli Newman in La Crosse, Notre Dame Parish in Chippewa Falls, and now as the new pastor of St. Michael and the Church of the Resurrection in Wausau, a pastorate that Fr. Grevatch and before him another St. Pius X pastor, Fr. Joseph Rafacz, have held over the last thirty-plus years. Gratefully, my whole priesthood has been bound up with leaders from St. Pius X.

Biographies of St. Pius X School

Sister Elenata (Helen) Hejna, SSJ-TOSJ — Principal 1962–1964...

Sr. Elenata Hejna, a Sister of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis, was born on May 12, 1912 in Chicago, Illinois, to Frank and Sophie Hejna.

Sr. Elenata was received into the novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis on August 5, 1930. She was a teacher or principal in the parochial schools in Wisconsin for 59 years. Sr. Elenata was the first principal of the new St. Pius X School in La Crosse in 1962, serving for two years. She later retired to the St. Joseph Congregational Home in Stevens Point in 1990.

Sr. Elenata was a sister for 71 years when she died on February 28, 2001 at St. Joseph Congregational Home in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Funeral services were held at the St. Joseph Convent chapel with Rev. Robert Greatorex officiating. She is buried in the St. Joseph Convent Cemetery in Stevens Point.

Sister Mary Damian Peplinski, SSJ-TOSJ — Principal 1965–1969...

Sister Mary Damian Peplinski, a Sister of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis, was born on April 2, 1927 in Winona, MN. The former Celeste Frances Peplinski was born to Peter and Catherine Peplinski. She was one of seven children and grew up on the family farm in Trempealeau County, WI.

She had been employed as a secretary at the Courthouse in Winona prior to entering the convent in Stevens Point on August 29, 1947. Sister Damian professed her perpetual vows on August 10, 1955.

Sister Damian earned her Bachelor of Science Degree in Education from St. Norbert College in DePere, a Masters of Education from Marquette University, and an Advanced Certification in Catechesis from the Diocese of La Crosse. She was an educator for 35 years in various Catholic schools in Wisconsin. In the Diocese of La Crosse she served as teacher/principal at St. Peter and St. Stanislaus in Stevens Point, St. Pius X in La Crosse, Sacred Heart in Cashton, St. Francis in Ellsworth, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. Stanislaus and Holy Family in Arcadia.

She served as teacher/principal at St. Pius X School in La Crosse from 1965 until 1969.

In 1985 Sister Damian moved to Galesville to be a caregiver to her elderly mother, secretary at Marynook Retreat Center, and typesetter for the Courier-Republican newspaper. She retired at St. Joseph Motherhouse in 2009 and was devoted to prayer ministry.

Sister Damien died on July 23, 2015 at Ministry St. Michael's Hospital in Stevens Point. A Mass of Christian Burial was held at St. Joseph Motherhouse Chapel on July 27, 2015, with Rev. Todd Mlsna officiating. Sister Mary Damian is buried in the St. Joseph Convent Cemetery in Stevens Point.

Sister Esther Romalke, SSJ-TOSF — Principal 1969–1972...

Sister Esther Romalke, SSJ-TOSF, was born March 1, 1918 in Polonia, Wisconsin. She was the 14th of 16 children born to Stanley and Francis Wyrozumialski.

Sister Esther was received into the novitiate of the Order of the Sisters of St. Joseph – Third Order of St. Francis on August 5, 1935. She pronounced her perpetual vows on August 4, 1942. After graduation from Alverno College, Milwaukee, Sister Esther served as a teacher and principal in Catholic Schools in Wisconsin and Minnesota for 35 years. She served in many schools in the Diocese of La Crosse including St Pius X in La Crosse. Sister Esther also taught at Mt. Mary of Mount Carmel in Francher, St. Michael in Junction City, St. Florian in Hatley, Sacred Heart in Dodge, St. Stanislaus in Arcadia, and SS Peter and Paul in Independence.

During the following 28 years, Sister Esther served her community as coordinator of the then Motherhouse in South Bend, Indiana, St. Joseph Motherhouse in Stevens Point, and Marymount Congregational Home in Garfield Heights, Ohio. She retired in 2009 but continued to offer supportive services to her community.

She died January 11, 2017 at the Motherhouse in Stevens Point. She was a Sister of St. Joseph – Third Order of St. Francis for 82 years. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on January 16, 2017 at the St. Joseph Motherhouse Chapel in Stevens Point with the Rev. Todd Mlsna officiating. Sister Esther is buried in the St. Joseph Convent Cemetery in Stevens Point.

Robert Kerska — Principal 1971–1974...

I was born and grew up in Coon Valley, Wisconsin. I attended Coon Valley Elementary School and graduated from Westby Area High School in 1962. Growing up in Coon Valley, I attended St. Mary's Catholic Church. After high school I attended UW-Stevens Point for one year and then transferred to UW-La Crosse where I graduated in 1967 with a General Science major and a Math minor. My first teaching job was at Longfellow Junior High School in La Crosse, where I taught General Science and Math from 1967 – 1969. In the fall of 1969, I was hired to teach Mathematics at Holy Cross Seminary, where I taught and coached from 1969 – 1971, when the Seminary closed. I was then hired to teach at St. Pius X, starting in the fall of 1971. I taught General Science and Math in 1971 – 1972, was teaching principal in 1972 -1973 and principal in 1973 -1974 when the move was made to the Seminary building.

My time at St. Pius X was very enjoyable. We had a great staff and great students, with small to average class sizes. I also continued to live at the Seminary, so I was very close to my work, especially when we moved to the Seminary building!!

Father Butz was the pastor and Father Wirtz was the assistant pastor. I remember that Father Butz taught the religion classes.

In my first two years at St. Pius, the eighth-grade class wanted to take a field trip in the spring. One year we went to the Twin Cities and the other year to Milwaukee. We raised money by having bake sales and other fundraisers. Parents helped out a lot with the bake sales and I can remember that my mother made quite a few loaves of bread and brought them to the bake sales also.

I don't know the year that the donut sales started, but I believe it was 1973 when we moved over to the Seminary building. We worked out an arrangement with Mr. D's Donuts and they would deliver the donuts to the church on Sunday morning and we would sell them in the hallway outside of the Chapel doors after Mass. It was a fundraiser for the Men's Club, who were the direct supporters of the St. Pius X athletic programs. At some point later on, we started frying our own donuts in the cafeteria kitchen and would sell those. The pancake breakfasts were another Men's Club fundraiser and were always fun to do, with many men and students volunteering to help out.

The move to the Seminary building during the summer of 1973 was a huge undertaking. Once the decision was made to sell the St. Pius X Church and School buildings, contracts were signed with contractors to install air conditioning in the church and in the classrooms at Holy Cross Diocesan Center. There was a lot of painting to do and also carpeting to be installed in the lower grade classrooms. All the classroom supplies and materials from the old building had to be moved over and new classroom materials were also purchased, especially in the Science and Language Arts areas. All of this material was stored in the gym until it could be moved into the classrooms. Parishioners of all ages helped during this move and Father Butz was the hardest worker of all, doing a lot of painting and other remodeling work.

I also worked a little with the football program at St. Pius, but I was mostly involved as the Athletic Director. Together with Burger King and 7 – UP, we began the “Burger King/7 – Up” Holiday Basketball Tournament as a fundraiser for the St. Pius X Athletics. The tournament was for 7th and 8th grade boys and brought in local teams as well as teams from Prairie du Chien and Eau Claire and was very successful for a few years in the mid 1970’s.

One thing that was very unique at St. Pius was a summer Computer Education program in 1972. It was open to students from the other Catholic Schools in the city along with the St. Pius students. We contracted with UW – La Crosse and their LACE (La Crosse Area Computers in Education) network. We had a separate phone line installed in the St. Pius School office and the University came and installed the computer, which was basically a teletype terminal with a keyboard, a big roll of paper that you could type on and print out on. Their system used the BASIC programming language and students learned how to write out programs they could then execute and have printed on the big roll of paper. There also was a smaller roll of paper on the side of the terminal that ran through a device that punched small holes in the paper. This was how the students saved the program they had written. After the program was saved, they had a long thin roll of paper with a lot of holes punched in it. When they wanted to re-enter the program in the terminal, they would feed the paper with the holes punched in it through a device that could read and interpret the holes and the program would be available to be used again. The one-year contract was not inexpensive, and I believe it was funded through the parish with the support of the Men’s and Women’s groups (but I am not positive on this). We discontinued the program after one year, due to the cost.

When I left St. Pius X, I taught for two years at Onalaska middle School and then, in the fall of 1976, was hired to work and teach in the Westby Area School District where I was the Title I Coordinator, the Technology Coordinator and also taught Computer Science and Math. I remained at Westby until my retirement in 2002. I am now retired and am presently serving on the Westby Area School District Board of Education.

Lorraine Check — Co-Principal 1974–1977...

After having taught for seven years in Crawford County, we built our home in La Crosse. We had been members of St. Thomas More (Connie was baptized there) but spent most weekends on the farm in Eastman which we purchased from my parents. When St. Pius was formed and everything south of Ward Avenue became St. Pius X Parish, we became a part of St. Pius X Parish.

In spring after we built our house (1966) there was an opening at St. Pius School. I had an interview with Fr. McCaffrey which consisted of “You want a job, you have a job!” So I started teaching 3rd grade that fall. In the following 35 years I taught at one time in all of the eight grades.

I taught under the following principals: Sr. Damien, Sr. Esther, Bob Kerska, Sr. Louise Rahe, John Stellflue, and Charles Burnett. Something stands out with each one. Sr. Damien was from the old school, strict, but I remember her falling asleep during classes. What a thing to remember! Sr. Esther was like your grandmother, just a sweet lady. Bob Kerska was only principal for a couple years, if I remember correctly, it was during our transition to the seminary. Sr. Louise was our Diocesan Superintendent before she became our principal. She always put her teachers and school first. Your welfare and that of the students was important to her. John Stellflue was half-time (Cathedral being the morning half) and was there only in the afternoon. He always called our location “St. Elsewhere.” Charles Burnett did double duty some of the time – teaching and principal duties.

When Fr. Peter Butz was our pastor Peggy Grelle and I became co-principals for two years. I don't recall if it was to save money or some other reason. Peggy and I would teach our classes all day and then meet in the office after school to do anything needed and to write the bulletin containing schedules, activities, events, etc., for the next morning. That was one way we knew everyone was on board that morning. Peggy and I attended all principal meetings for Diocesan principals.

At what I call “Old Pius,” several of the classes were divided because of enrollment. When we moved to the seminary in 1970 our class sizes were larger – in the upper 30's. The move to the seminary that summer was a lot of work for both the janitors and the teachers. The janitors moved everything over into the gym and we had to sort and move it to our rooms.

How did we feel about the move and losing our parish? We felt rather disheartened when the picture of Fr. Butz was in the Times Review handing the check over to the Bishop and our parish had to start all over again!

The priests: Fr. McCaffrey was very easy going and would have reminded you of your loveable grandfather. We never saw much of him around the school.

On the other hand, Fr. Butz was quite strict – never came to the classrooms. He did run the lunch program at one time and I can remember him disciplining the students for putting their elbows on the tables in the lunchroom. Fr. Wirtz was an assistant to Fr. Butz. I always thought he was a very educated man.

Fr. Bill Grevatch knew what he wanted and he had good taste in decorating the church. I remember having made six long banners for Fr. Butz that hung at intervals down the center aisle of the church. When Fr. Bill arrived, these came down immediately. I did a lot of banners, bulletin covers and signs for him, as well as school annuals and parish directories. Mary Poehlinger and I decorated the church, especially for Holy Week, for several years.

I also taught when Fr. Joe Rafacz was pastor at St. Pius. He lived in one of the rooms down the hall from our classrooms in the seminary. He raised beautiful geraniums in the windows in the hall across from his room. You always knew he was around by the smell of his cigar smoke in the hallway each morning. He was very compassionate and loved the children. I know he went through a lot of anxiety during the unification of the two parishes.

I began as CCD Elementary Coordinator about four years before I retired and stayed on two years after. I got involved when Fr. Joe and Tom Thibodeau were waiting for me after school one night and asked if I would take the position.

I remember Dennis and Tom Poehlinger roasting a hog in the back of the seminary for the Pig Roast and Fall Fest for a couple years. Mary Poehlinger and I made many of the crafts for those fests. We prided ourselves on the fact that we made more money on those crafts than was made on the meal one year!

I loved every year I was part of St. Pius X Parish – wonderful people, wonderful parish!

Margaret (Peggy) Grelle — Co-Principal 1974–1977...

Margaret Grelle was born on Flag Day, June 14, 1944 in Prairie du Chien and was known as “Peggy” to her family and “Mrs. Grelle” to her many students at St. Pius X and Aquinas Middle School from 1972 until 2005.

She graduated from Prairie du Chien High School and later from the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse with a degree in Education. Peggy married John Grelle in 1964 and they had two sons. During her teaching years Peggy and Lorrain Check were co-principals for two years at St. Pius X and when Aquinas Middle School was formed, she went to teach there until retirement.

Peggy died in February in 2008 after a serious illness.

Sister Louise Rahe, FSPA — Principal 1977–1992...

Sister Louise Rahe was born on March 1, 1919 on a farm in New Vienna, Iowa, the fourth of six children of John and Clara Rahe. She attended St. Boniface Grade School and High School. After graduation in 1938, she came to St. Rose Convent in La Crosse, professing her vows in 1941 and taking the name of Sister Freda. When the Franciscan Sisters made it possible, she changed her name back to her given name at birth. During her time at St. Rose Convent Sister Louise attended Viterbo College and later received her Master of Arts Degree from the University of Detroit.

Her career of over 50 years in the field of education took Sister Louise to Catholic elementary schools in Iowa and the Diocese of La Crosse in Wisconsin, including St. Ann's in Stanley, St. Mary's in Big River, and St. Wenceslaus in La Crosse. From 1967 – 1977, Sister Louise was the Director of Education for the Diocese of La Crosse. She then served as Principal and teacher at St. Pius X School in La Crosse from 1977 – 1992. It was in 1992 that Sister Louise retired from her professional life in education.

The people of St. Pius X recognized her dedication to her religious life and to the families and children of the St. Pius community saying, "We will always be grateful to Sister Louise for her dedication, presence, and example of religious life. Her accomplishments are many, but we particularly recognize the attention and importance she placed on celebrating children's liturgies."

The feeling was reciprocal. Sister Louise expressed her gratitude to the community of St. Pius X saying, "As I leave St. Pius X after 15 years of ministry in the parish school, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you for your kindness, support and friendship. I will always have fond memories of the staff, students, parents, and parishioners of St. Pius X." Sister Louise was given a trip to Europe as a gift from the people of St. Pius X for her unselfish service of educational leadership to the Parish.

In 1997 Sister Louise retired to St. Rose Convent after being a retired volunteer for five years. At the Convent she served as a receptionist and later as a Chapel Tour Guide.

Sister Louise Rahe was an avid Chicago Cubs fan. She would listen to the game on the radio and then spend time in the Chapel of Adoration instead of going to bed and also took the 11 – midnight prayer shifts twice a week. She said she was a night owl at 84 years of age. Prayer was a vital part of Sister Louise. She saw prayers being answered often. She did "not call them miracles but an extension of the gifts of adoration."

In 2016 she moved to Villa St. Joseph where she lived until her death. Sister Louise celebrated her 75th Anniversary as a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration in 2016 and summed up her life by saying, "God has blessed me with a long and grace-filled life. This has been a memorable journey. The many students, parents, sister companions and friends who have crossed my path

have given me much inspiration and joy. My heart is filled with gratitude. May all of us continue to love and praise our good God.”

Sister Louise Rahe was asked to speak at all the Masses when Mary, Mother of the Church was celebrating their feast day. She was grateful to be asked to share her memories as St. Pius X principal and was received very warmly by the people. “Not only will the smiles and standing ovations be in my ‘bank’ of good and lasting memories but every aspect of my time there will be among them.” She spoke of the bond in the St. Pius community and the support everyone showed each other.

Sister Louise pointed out the importance of relationships and “the interest in and concern for others” by telling a couple of stories of the children.

First story: St. Pius students were invited to participate in the liturgy once a month at Bethany-St. Joseph nursing home. The classes took turns. On one occasion, one of the seventh grade students asked to make an announcement before leaving for the nursing home. His message: “We must be very careful when we shake the hand of the residents at the Sign of Peace. Some of them are arthritic and pressing the hand too hard would cause them a lot of pain. So, be very gentle.” To which another student added, “And when we wheel them back to their room we have to go slowly so they don’t fall forward and land on the floor and get hurt.”

Second story: One very cold winter morning, one of the eighth grade students was in my office having delivered materials from his teacher. He happened to glance out the window and spied a very small first grade girl trudging up the driveway from the bus stop. The student dashed out of the office, picked up the girl, carried her into the building and would not leave her until he was sure she was taken care of. Sister Louise also told the story of how the first Mardi Gras and its importance for the Catholic Schools in La Crosse began: “...the Mardi Gras celebration had its origin at St. Pius School. Jerry Berns (Superintendent of the Coulee Catholic Schools) approached me over lunch one noon and asked how I felt about St. Pius hosting a Mardi Gras celebration on a yearly basis. I agreed whole-heartedly about the prospect. We held the first one on the St. Pius School grounds. It was simple, but lots of fun for starters. It consisted of races and outdoor games. As you well know, Mardi Gras has grown to become a huge annual social, fund-raising event in which all the La Crosse Catholic schools participate.”

Sister Louise died on Friday, March 30, 2018 at Villa St. Joseph at the age of 99. Her Mass of Christian Burial was held in Mary of the Angels Chapel. She is buried in the Gate of Heaven Cemetery in La Crosse.

Sister Louise ended her talk with her feelings of gratitude: “I wish to take this opportunity to express my sincerest appreciation for your kindness, your friendship, and your loyal support during my fifteen years at St. Pius. ‘Twas, indeed, a good time and place to end my teaching career because of the experiences which have, and continue to supply me with good and lasting memories. Thank you!”

Charles Burnett — Principal 1996–2000...

I was a new teacher at St. Pius from 1983 to 1987, fresh out of UW-Eau Claire. Sister Louise Rahe hired me and mentored me. I left St. Pius to discern at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary from 1987 to 1991. I returned to St. Pius in 1991.

I became principal of St. Pius X School in 1996. Fr. Joe Rafacz and Tom Thibodeau were instrumental in encouraging me to take administrative courses in order to serve in a leadership role. I finished my Masters degree in school administration at UW-Superior in 1998 while principal at St. Pius. I gratefully recall Fr. Joe including graduate credit tuition costs in my contract during those years.

I was principal at St. Pius X from 1996 to 2000. In that year the school unification occurred and St. Thomas More and St. Pius X Schools became Mary, Mother of the Church. I served as principal of MMOC for another four years. In 2004 I accepted a position as middle school science teacher at St. Patrick's School in Sparta, where I am today.

I remember fondly the great staff and warm parish family at St. Pius. Both Fr. Bill Grevatch and Fr. Joe treated me like a son. Sr. Louise was a tremendous mentor. Betty Koenen, Lorraine Check and others were always so supportive. I worked with our parish contemporary choir and loved that. I recall putting on "Tales of Wonder" by Mary Haugen with the great musicians at St. Pius.

I taught half time those first four years as principal. This was only possible because of the excellent work of Linda Kloet as school administrative assistant.

My educational background includes a B. S. degree in Elementary Education from UW-Eau Claire, a Baccalaureate degree in theology from St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, and a Masters degree in Administration from UW-Superior.

St. Pius holds a special place in my heart...the whole parish experience.

So, I was far away during the years that the parish moved to occupy the Diocesan Center.

I graduated from Holy Name in Madison and started college in Madison...working in Madison those summers, and so don't have a lot of memories of things at St. Pius from 1972 on.

My father, Franklin, died of what we would today call COPD as I started major seminary (1977).

Fr. Bill Grevatch and Fr. Peter Knippel, relatively new pastors at St. Pius X, did a wonderful job in presiding over his funeral, including their suggestion of something rare for the time in La Crosse...hosting the wake in the Christ the King Chapel that was used by our parish.

Some years later, Fr. Bill extended a further kindness to me and my family by hiring my mother to cook part-time in the rectory (near the original Pius X building). Fr. Bill was in some ways like my father, in being something of a tease. Being the Fr. Bill's cook provided my mother income, allowed her to experiment in cooking from the library of cookbooks she had acquired (her children were quite limited in their tastes), and in general helped her through the loss of her husband, our father.

My junior year in college took me farther away from La Crosse, as I moved from college in Madison to St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, where I finished my college degree, and then started my four years of major seminary education, graduating in 1981.

I was ordained on May 30, 1981, at St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral by Bishop Frederick Freking. Fr. Bill was my pastor during my ordination and helped host a wonderful Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Pius X.

My assignments took me to Chippewa Falls and Stevens Point as an associate, then two years of further studies in Boston where I did work in Scriptural Studies, and then as a pastor at the University Parish in Stevens Point, Roncalli Newman in La Crosse, Notre Dame Parish in Chippewa Falls, and now as the new pastor of St. Michael and the Church of the Resurrection in Wausau, a pastorate that Fr. Grevatch and before him another St. Pius X pastor, Fr. Joseph Rafacz, have held over the last thirty-plus years. Gratefully, my whole priesthood has been bound up with leaders from St. Pius X.

Biographies of Religious Education Coordinators

Brother Michael Mandernach, CSPX — Religious Education Director 1978–1982...

Brother Michael was the third of 13 children born to Peter and Catherine Mandernach in St. Martin, Minnesota. They named him Wilfred. His parents owned a 240-acre farm and all the children helped with the farm work. He attended Grade School #22 in St. Martin for eight years. But for high school Wilfred went to St. John's Preparatory School in Collegeville, Minnesota, where he boarded with students from a number of other states.

When Wilfred graduated, he came back home and helped on the farm for five years until he saw an announcement in the Catholic newspaper about a new community of brothers being formed in La Crosse, Wisconsin. He read it once - only once - and he knew this was what he wanted to do in life.

In the fall of 1951 Bishop John P. Treacy had formed a religious order of brothers. The new community was named Brothers of Blessed Pius X after the pope whose motto was "to restore all things in Christ." Blessed Pius X was canonized a saint in 1954 and the Community then became known as the Brothers of St. Pius X.

On June 12, 1953, Wilfred became a candidate along with four other novices; he chose the name Brother Michael. He was sent with the four other novices to the Trappist Monastery near Dubuque, Iowa, for retreat to prepare for his investiture.

It was no challenge living in a community after coming from a large farm family. All the chores, the rules and the various personalities were not much different than his family.

Brother Michael Mandernach served at St. Pius X Parish as the Religious Education Director from 1978 – 1982. During this time he also worked closely in the pastoral ministry with Fr. Bill Grevatch, alongside Sr. Louise Rahe and the school staff, the CCD teachers of the grade and high school programs, the Sunday School teachers, the Bible School teachers and the Religious Education Committee.

By 1982 there were only two brothers of St. Pius X remaining - Brother Michael Mandernach and Brother Charles Bisenius. Bishop John Paul asked that they not accept any new candidates and to continue as they were. Brother Michael is now the only Brother of St. Pius X.

After graduating with his Master's in Theology from St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, Brother Michael became the CCD Director at Roncalli Newman Center in La Crosse in 1984. He remained there only a year when Bishop Paul asked him to become the Pastoral Associate at Sacred Heart Parish in Spring Valley and St. Luke's in Boyceville.

From 1994 -1996 Brother Michael was called again by Bishop Paul, this time to minister with Fr. Leon Powell at St. Antony's in Cazenovia, St. Mary's in Keyesville, Sacred Heart in Lone Rock,

and St. Kilian's in Bear Valley - small country parishes in the far southeastern corner of the La Crosse Diocese. He also taught at St. Anthony's small parish school. During this time Brother Michael tended to the business of selling the property owned by the Brothers of St. Pius X in De Soto, as well as teaching CCD in neighboring parishes and the RCIA program at St. Charles in Genoa.

After the property was sold, the people of Sacred Heart Parish in Spring Valley invited Brother Michael back. He had spent a total of 17 years in Spring Valley when he retired. Brother Michael moved to the Holy Cross Diocese Center to finish writing a book about the history of the Brothers of St. Pius X. He then returned again to Spring Valley to live and to help minister in the parish.

Brother Michael may have been at St. Pius X only four years, but he left his mark of prayfulness, kindness, and caring on each person there. He lives the ideal of his Community of Brothers, "to restore all things in Christ," the motto of Pope Saint Pius X's papacy. And the closest to his heart were the students. Br. Michael said in his farewell thank you note those at St. Pius X Parish: "Each one of you is very precious and special to me. God has given you all a gift in making you His child whom He loves very much."

Sister Betty Reinders, SSSF — Religious Education Coordinator 1971–1977...

I grew up in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin – a suburb of Milwaukee. I had one brother, Jerry, who was 3 ½ years younger than I was, and no sisters. My dad's name was Jack (officially Aloysius John – but everyone called him Jack); my birth mother's name was Monica (called Mona) Hirschboeck who died when I was three. My dad married again – I must have been around four or five – and this was the person I knew as my mom. Her name was Arleen Shea.

I attended Christ King Grade School, taught by the Notre Dame Sisters and Holy Angels High School (an all-girls' school), taught by the BVM Sisters. After graduating from high school, I went to Dubuque, Iowa, with the intention of becoming a BVM Sister – like those I had during my high school days. But within a few months I became sick and had to go back home to Wauwatosa. So I went to Marquette University for two years, after which I still felt that I was called to become a Sister. This time I checked out the School Sisters of St. Francis (SSSF), the Motherhouse (headquarters) was in Milwaukee. That happened in September 1955. While in the SSSF formation program, I attended Alverno College, staffed and owned by the School Sisters of St. Francis. In 1959 I finished my college degree at Alverno College. I was professed as a School Sister of St. Francis on June 21, 1958 and given the name Sister Magdalaine and told to bear it in a worthy manner!

In August of 1958, after my Profession, I was assigned to teach First Grade at St. Patrick's School in Fremont, Nebraska. After teaching there for three years, I was sent to teach Third Grade at Holy Trinity School in Winsted, Minnesota. After one year there, I was sent to St. Therese Parish in Kenosha, Wisconsin. The school was a new school and had only first, second and third grades in the first year, but added one more grade each year after that. I taught Second Grade there for two years. Then I was sent to St. Mary's Parish in Keyesville, Wisconsin – a small country parish not too far from Richland Center. Father Peter Butz was the Pastor of the Parish. The Parish had a school – Madonna Grade School. I taught first, second and third grades (all in the same room) for five years. After my first year, the other three Sisters that had taught and lived there, were all transferred to other places, and three new Sisters were sent in their places. One of the new Sisters was Sister Mary Rose; she taught seventh and eighth grades and was the Principal of the school and the Superior of the other Sisters living and working there. Father Butz was assigned as Pastor of St. Pius Parish in La Crosse in 1968. During our years at Keyesville, fewer Sisters were assigned each year to minister there. Sr. Mary Rose and I were the only two Sisters remaining and the La Crosse Diocese made a decision to close the school after the 1969 school year.

Our School Sisters of St. Francis Provincials (leaders) called Sister Mary Rose and me and asked us to consider going to Graduate School to get a degree in Religious Studies and then change jobs from teaching to Religious Education Directors. Instead of teaching children, we were asked to help teachers to teach religion. Parish priests were asking religious Communities to send Sisters to help their lay teachers to teach religion. The method of teaching Catholic

religious truths was changing and teachers needed help. So Sister Mary Rose and I decided to do as the Provincials had asked. (The method of assigning Sisters to places by the Superiors of Orders was beginning to be replaced by the Sisters having a say in where we would go and what we would do.)

Sister Mary Rose and I both went to Mundelein College in Chicago, Illinois. (It was run by the BVM Religious Community – the same Community that had taught me in high school and its campus was right next to Loyola University.) We attended Mundelein for a year and three summers after which we received our Master Degree in Religious Studies.

Sometime in the years before I went to Graduate School, our Religious Community told that if we wanted, we could change our religious names. I changed my name back to “Betty” which is the name I had before my Profession as a School Sister of St. Francis.

When Sr. Mary Rose and I finished a full year and one summer at Mundelein College, we were hired by the Diocese of La Crosse to help religion teachers – especially those who taught religion to children attending the public schools. We lived in the Convent in Tomah with a group of Racine Dominican Sisters for one year and travelled about the La Crosse Diocese helping Religion teachers. Then Father Butz, who was the Pastor at St. Pius X Parish in La Crosse, asked us to move to La Crosse and help the Religious Education teachers of St. Pius who taught the children attending public schools. So we did. Sr. Mary Rose was contracted and paid by the La Crosse Diocese, but worked in Religious Education part time at St. Pius while I was contracted and paid by St. Pius Parish but worked part time in Diocesan Religious Education. We lived in the Convent at St. Pius with the Sisters of St. Joseph from Stevens Point who taught in the St. Pius Grade School.

After six years at St. Pius, Sr. Mary Rose and I felt that we needed to move closer to our parents who were sick and getting older. We also wanted to be closer to our Community Headquarters in Milwaukee. We applied for positions at St. Thomas More Parish in Appleton and were hired as Religious Education Directors for that parish – Sr. Mary Rose, for grades seven, eight, and high school and I, for Pre-school through grade six. We lived in the Convent with the Franciscan Sisters from Manitowoc until they no longer ministered in Appleton and the Convent needed to be leveled. As a result, we moved to a nearby duplex.

We spent 38 years at St. Thomas More, working as Religious Education Directors for almost half of those years and changing work descriptions for the other half. I became a Pastoral Associate. In my years in that position, I helped direct the Liturgical Music Program, visited the sick and dying, helped to prepare weekend and holy day liturgies, helped people with funeral liturgy planning, did wedding practices, directed Children’s Liturgy of the Word, helped to train Altar Servers and was present at all the weekend and holy day Masses. Each Pastoral Associate’s job description varies according to the Pastor’s preferences.

In the spring of 2015, Sr. Mary Rose and I decided to retire – with the help of the Holy Spirit! Sr. Mary Rose had been sick during 2014 – 2015 and had been in the hospital several times during

those years. The Sister who is the Life and Ministry Director for our Community asked us if we had ever thought of retiring! Sr. Mary Rose was 86 and I was 80!) We prayed about it, thought about it and made our decision to retire. On September 30, 2015, we moved to Milwaukee to begin our retired life. We have a nice two-bedroom independent living apartment here at Sacred Heart – a retirement home for our Sisters which is on the campus of our Motherhouse. This is where we are now enjoying our busy retired life!

Sister Mary Rose Menting, SSSF — Religious Education Director 1971–1977...

Sister Mary Rose Menting was the 9th of 14 children born to Albert and Rose Menting. She grew up on a farm in the village of Phlox, Wisconsin. She attended St. Joseph Catholic Grade School in Phlox. At the completion of 8th grade, she, along with her cousin, Johanna, entered St. Joseph Convent in Milwaukee to prepare to become a religious Sister. She completed high school at St. Joseph Convent and was received into the School Sisters of St. Francis on June 13, 1945. She was given the name of Sister Rosebia which was later changed to Sister Mary Rose. After two years of spiritual and professional training, she professed her vows on June 21, 1947.

Sister Mary Rose's first teaching assignment from 1947 – 49 was at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Aurora, Illinois; followed by one year, 1949 – 1950, at St. John the Baptist in Johnsbury, Illinois. From 1950 – 1965, she taught at St. Peter School in St. Peter, Wisconsin. In 1965, Sister Mary Rose was transferred to Keyesville, Wisconsin, as Principal and teacher at St. Mary's. It was there that she began her years of ministry with Sister Betty Reinders. St. Mary's Parish School closed in 1969. Sister Betty and Sister Mary Rose were asked to go to Graduate School for a Master's Degree in Religious Studies.

After a year of schooling, in 1971, the Diocese of La Crosse hired Sister Betty and Sister Mary Rose as Religious Education Directors. They worked in the Diocese for seven years. Most of Sister Mary Rose's time was spent working on the Diocesan Team, going to parishes in the Diocese to help train teachers of religion. Sister Mary Rose was also in charge of providing teachers with resources to use in preparing high school students to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Sister Betty coordinated the religious education program for the St. Pius X School and CCD programs. During this time, Sister Mary Rose and Sister Betty lived with the Sisters of St. Joseph from Stevens Point.

In 1977, both Sister Mary Rose and Sister Betty were hired by St. Thomas More Parish in Appleton, Wisconsin, where Sister Mary Rose was a Religious Education Director for several years. She also was involved in Adult Education, Pastoral Bereavement Ministry, RCIA Director and several Parish Commissions, especially the Worship Commission. Working to enhance Liturgy was always a priority for her.

In 2015, after 38 years of ministry at St. Thomas More Parish, and at the age of 86, Sister Mary Rose, along with Sister Betty, decided to retire. Both she and Sister Betty now live in Milwaukee at Sacred Heart Retirement Center. In 2020, Sr. Mary Rose celebrated 75 years as a School Sister of St. Joseph.

Tom Thibodeau — Youth Minister 1982–2018...

Tom is the oldest of six children and graduated from Assumption High School in Wisconsin Rapids. In 1973 he graduated from St. John's University in Collegeville with a BA in Psychology and English. His first job was with Frontier Apostolate, a lay ministry organization in the Diocese of Prince George in British Columbia, Canada.

In 1976, Tom took a position at St. Michael's Home for Children located on the south side of La Crosse on East Avenue and Mormon Coulee Road. He worked there until the Children's Home closed in 1982. In 1978, while still at St. Michael's Home for Children, he completed his Master's Degree in Social Ministry at St. Mary's College in Winona, Minnesota.

Tom followed Brother Michael Mandernach as the Youth Minister for the high school students at St. Pius X in 1982, and continued to direct the Confirmation Program at Mary, Mother of the Church until 2018. He also worked in the local Upward Bound program before joining Viterbo College in 1983 as an Associate Professor teaching a prayer and spirituality course.

Janice Gerlach, Tom's sister, described Tom as someone who "is always more concerned with global issues and how he could help his world." Tom lives by his motto of the 11th Commandment: Thou shalt not stand idly by!

And Tom followed that path when he helped found the Master's Program in Servant Leadership at Viterbo University. It is the only program of its kind in the nation.

Tom continues to follow the path of servant leadership as one of the founders of the Place of Grace, a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality where meals are served on site to many needy in the community as well as providing food and necessities for them to take to their homes. He also serves on advisory boards of various organizations in La Crosse and the around the country.

As a talented speaker, Tom gives presentations on Servant Leadership throughout the United States. Tom loves a good story. He likes to hear stories and he likes to tell stories. He teaches by telling stories. His excellent story telling is probably the best-known attribute of his career.

Tom has received recognition for his work as a servant leader in the community. In 1991 he received the prestigious Iverson Freking Award. In 2000, Tom and his wife, Priscilla, were chosen as Rex and Queen of the Mardi Gras Carnival held annually in La Crosse to raise funds that support programs at Aquinas Catholic Schools. Tom was Man of the Year in 2008 at Mary Mother of the Church, an award that recognizes men in the parish who have unselfishly given their time and talent to the parish. He was also given the honor of being the 2009 La Crosse Oktoberfest Torchlight Parade Marshall leading the night parade of lighted floats and bands. In 2014, Tom received the Bill Medland Faithful Servant award given by the La Crosse Catholic Charities at their annual Lenten Luncheon to recognize individuals putting their servant leadership into action.

Tom is a husband to Priscilla, a father to three daughters, a grandfather, a teacher at Viterbo University, a speaker, a cook at the Place of Grace, and part owner of a country tavern. With all that, he still has time to model the values he believes in - servant leadership.

Additional Biography

Bernette A. 'Bernie' Faas — Head Cook 1966–1985...

Bernette was born on January 8, 1921, in Genoa, Wisconsin to Albert and Eveline Schubert and was the youngest of their 12 children. She married Harold W. Faas in 1937. They had four children, nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Bernette managed the kitchen for St. Pius X School hot lunch program and prepared meals for the priests living at Holy Cross Seminary from 1966 until 1985. She was a member of the Active Adults of the Riverland Girl Scouts since 1958. From 1986 until 1996, Bernette volunteered at the Surgery Relative Room at Franciscan Skemp Medical Center, at the La Crosse Area Hmong Mutual Assistance Association starting in 1987, at the Causeway Inter-Faith Volunteer Caregivers from 1992 until 1997, and in 1995, began with the Community Wide Volunteer Center. She was dedicated to helping others.

As a member of the St. Pius X Parish, Bernette was an active member of the St. Pius X Altar Society.

Bernette Faas died on Tuesday, August 26, 2003, at Bethany-Riverside Nursing Home after enduring a lengthy illness with Alzheimer's. A Mass of Christian Burial was held on Friday August 29th at Mary, Mother of the Church Parish at St. Thomas More Church. Father David Kunz officiated. Bernette is entombed at the St. Francis of Assisi Mausoleum, Catholic Cemetery.

Sources for the St. Pius X Story:

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Parish Mission Statements – Directories
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St. Pius X – St. Thomas More Joint Pastoral Council Minutes
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Charter Member list of St. Pius X 1960 – 1995
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