

# Jefferson St. Peter

St. Peter's Church has dominated the Jefferson skyline since 1891  
Article from 5/28/98

St. Peter's Catholic Church in Jefferson was first established in the Dakota Territory in 1857. There were other churches established by missionaries. The area was settled by several Irish and Frenchmen. When the parish was first established the first priest was Pierre Boucher, a native of Canada. He remained at the parish until October 12, 1879.

In 1899 the convent and the school were built. With the increasing number of families, a new church was decided on and the cornerstone was blessed on October 4, 1891. The church was complete July 4, 1892. The cost of the new church was \$14,224.

There are approximately 2,500 parish members buried in St. Peter's Cemetery. There are also 100 veterans from various wars. There have been approximately 25 priests at St. Peter's since it was established.

In 1874 the worst grasshopper plague ever known turned the prosperous farmers of Jefferson, into bankrupts in one hour.

Rev. Father Pierre Boucher organized a pilgrimage and erected three crosses near Jefferson in 1876, known for the last 122 years as the "grasshopper crosses."

In 1874 it was a quiet Sunday in early July and people were gathered in front of the church or visited on sidewalks someone looked into the northern sky and saw a dense black cloud. A wind sprang up and an old farmer recognized the oncoming mass of grasshoppers.

People hurried home, bolted doors, closed windows and prepared for the most devastating siege known in modern history. The invasion extended from North Dakota to Texas and from the Rockies almost to the Mississippi River, so Jefferson was not alone.

As one resident said, "It sounded like a continuous hailstorm. In one hour the field was stripped, the heads cut off and the bare stems left standing."

Then in May, 1876 came the year of the crosses. The Rev. Father Boucher organized the pilgrimage. A cross was set in the Nelson Montagne field, two miles west of Jefferson, and another at the Moran place, three miles north of Montagne's. The third was set in the church ground at Jefferson. All religious denominations from far and wide came to have a place to pilgrimage. The procession, a mile long, was led by the priest, who led in the singing of the litanies. They went first to the Montagne cross, then on to the Moran cross and finally back for the final service at the church.

The three original crosses have long since yielded to ravages of time and the elements, storms and prairie fires. Those standing today are reproductions of the originals in both size and shape.

Today there is a re-creation of that pilgrimage at the end of May or early June. The Parish members drive to the Moran Cross, then to the Montagne cross (Dale Chicone's cross) and then back to the church.

St. Peter's has about 200 parish members. The rectory is the oldest still standing since 1900. Fr. Andrew Swietochowski is a native of Poland and was recruited by Bishop Dudley 11 years ago.

They have mass on Saturday at 5:30 and on Sunday at 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Confession is 45 minutes before each weekend mass.

"I am helping look for the faith and to keep the faith up like when St. Peter's was first established," said Fr. Swietochowski.



# Elk Point St. Joseph

ST. JOSEPH CHURCH  
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ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH HISTORY: 1879 - 1884

According to earliest records, Bishop Martin Marty, Vanbton, established St. Joseph Parish of Elk Point, South Dakota in 1879. The new parish extended across the Sioux River into Plymouth county, Iowa. In 1880-81, a 7x55' frame church and rectory were built at a cost of \$5,000. The new pastor, Father Hennessy, shepherded a flock of approximately 40 families. The first marriage united Bridget Brown and Thomas Ryan on November 21, 1884.

It appears that after a mission at the church in 1890 some reorganization took place at St. Joseph's Parish, as indicated by the following record:

"On Sunday, March 16th, 1890, the Rt. Rev. Bishop Marty opened a mission in St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Elk Point, S. Dakota. The mission closed on Wednesday, March 19th, and was fruitful of good results. Crowds attended the church every day, and all the congregation of suitable age approached the holy sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion. Before the close of the mission, an election of trustees was held and the following gentlemen were elected:

Mr. Daniel White, Treasurer;  
Mr. F. W. Smythe, Secretary;  
Mr. Patrick Casey, Consultant;  
Mr. John Curay, Consultant

The new pastor of Elk Point, Rev. John F. Hogan will take charge of the Congregation on Sunday, April 28th, 1890. Received appointment from Rt. Rev. Bishop Marty, D.D. Feast of St. Joseph, March 19th, 1890."

In 1901, a new building replaced the rectory, and in 1921 a brick structure replaced the old church building, Father R. F. Salzman was pastor at this time. In September of 1956, the brick church suffered a great deal of damage to its foundations due to sinking of the soil on which the church was built. An effort was made to repair the damage under the direction of Rev. Dillon the pastor at the time.

On October 1, 1982, after much debate and consideration, Bishop Dudley of Sioux Falls made the decision that a new church must be built to replace the rapidly decaying brick structure in Elk Point. On January 3, 1983 Bishop Dudley appointed Rev. Anthony Opem as pastor of St. Joseph's. August 7, 1983 marked the last mass in the old brick church, with demolition beginning August 23.

The New St. Joseph Church and Parish Center was completed in June of 1984. First masses were held in the church on July 7 & 8, during Elk Point's Bi-Centennial. A very fitting beginning for a parish so rich in history. The new complex sits on the same historical block as the old brick structure, but more centered in the middle of the site, avoiding the previous Church's basement on the west and the previous rectory's basement on the south. With a special hauled-in structured fill of low-plastic clay, eight feet in depth and seven feet wider than the actual circumference of the complex, over-sized footings, spread-loads, light weight, and careful water prevention and drainage, the settling problem encountered with the old church should not be a problem again. The old structure had settled over 5" in the corners, creating a tremendous stress on the main beams which led to decay.

The present complex accommodates the parish's four needs very well: Worship, Education, Administration. Because prayer and the Sacraments are essential to the faith and life of a Catholic, the Church itself is central with religious education classrooms, administrative offices and social hall forming a semi-circle around it. The rectory is also contained in the new complex. To help bridge the gap between old and new, the stain glass windows, stations of the cross, statues, main tabernacle, altar and pulpit were kept from the previous church. The total estimated cost of the new Church and Parish Center is approximately \$710,000, with an additional \$15,000 for the main entrance parking lot on the west side.

# Dakota Dunes Blessed Teresa of Calcutta

## Meetings held on forming new Catholic parish in southern Union County

The first of three meetings to determine the support of establishing a new Catholic parish in southern Union County was held Sunday, September 27, at the Country Inn and Suites in Dakota Dunes.

Parish Development Coordinator Father Anthony Opem led the meeting, which was attended by over 50 area residents.

Father Opem gave his background, which includes a 30-year career as a priest. He was the pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Elk Point from 1985 to 1990 and helped oversee the construction of the parish's present church building.

Father Opem also told about participating in the old Southern Union County Development Council and saw back then the tremendous potential of the southern Union County area.

He quoted from the Shalom United Church of Christ brochure that there are 6 to 7,000 people in the southern Union County. "There's a Lutheran church, a Methodist church and a United Church of Christ," he said. "What's missing? -- a Catholic church."

attend Sacred Heart Church, accounting for 35 percent of that congregation's support. Father Opem said meetings have been held between the Sioux Falls and Sioux City Diocesan Bishops on the subject. In 1985, the Sioux City Diocese asked the Sioux Falls Diocese to wait at least seven years before moving into southern Union County due to fund-raising for a new Sacred Heart Church building at that time.

Some at the meeting questioned the timing of the study into a new parish and said the decision to look at a new parish was based on money and politics. They also cited the recent closing of St. Francis and St. Casimir churches in Sioux City and said the decision to close them was also based on money and politics.

Father Opem said the desire for a new parish is not to hurt either Sacred Heart or St. Peter's, but to serve the new, rapidly expanding area of southern Union County. He will take the results of the three meetings back to Bishop Carlson for further study.

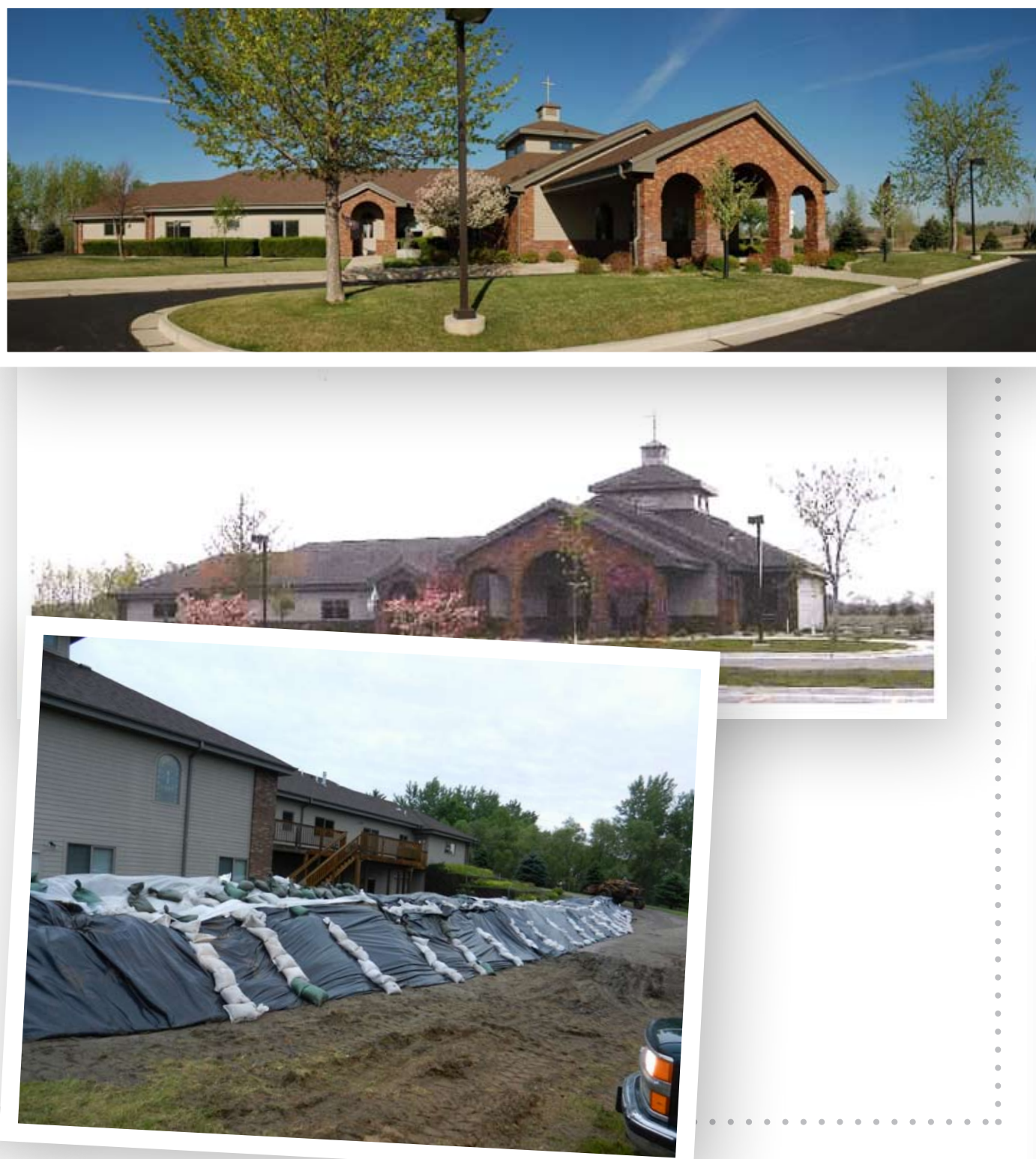
Meetings were also held at the North Sioux City Community Center and the Dakota Valley High School.

But the majority of the audience told Father Opem that they are happy attending church at Sacred Heart in the nearby Riverside section of Sioux City.

When Father Opem told them that southern Union County has been designated by the Pope and Rome as part of the Diocese of Sioux Falls, they questioned placing an arbitrary border of the diocese at the Big Sioux and Missouri Rivers.

Many said that when they moved to the area, they didn't know they were in a different diocese or what church they should be attending. They said that Sacred Heart welcomed them with open arms and they never heard from St. Peter's Church in Jefferson, the nearest Catholic church in the diocese.

The Sacred Heart parishioners also questioned how starting a new parish in southern Union County would affect the Sacred Heart Church. Currently, 236 families from South Dakota



# Vermillion St. Thomas More

## Newman Center Opens:

### Catholic Students Have Home at USD

THE BEGINNING OF THE FALL SEMESTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA saw the opening of the new Catholic Student Center. The Rev. Robert L. Flannery, the Center's director, offered the first Mass in the Center's Chapel on Sunday, September 26.

The new structure has been designed to serve the needs of the approximately 700 Catholic students on the University campus. The Chapel is fan-shaped, permitting the fullest participation of the student congregation at liturgical functions. Two Masses will be celebrated on Sundays and a 4:30 p.m. Mass is offered daily.

A LARGE CLASSROOM AND LIBRARY PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES for the Catholic students to grow in the knowledge of their Faith through classes, lectures, and discussion groups. Also included in the building are a spacious lounge, a large meeting room, office space, living quarters for the director, and an apartment for the housekeeper.

WITH THE OPENING OF THE UNIVERSITY CENTER, THE burden of the religious training of the Catholic students enrolled in the Vermillion school passes from the Rev. Hugh K. Wolf to the Center's director, Rev. Robert L. Flannery. Father Wolf, Pastor of St. Agnes' Parish in Vermillion, has died as Catholic Chaplain for the University students. When assuming the care of the center, Father Flannery noted that the efforts of the Center will be directed toward "the continuation of Father Wolf's able work in the Newman Apostolate during the past 15 years."

TWO CLASSES are available at the Newman Center each semester. One provides information for anyone interested in the background of the Catholic Church while the other is a marriage class where experts instruct classes along with the Newman Center staff.

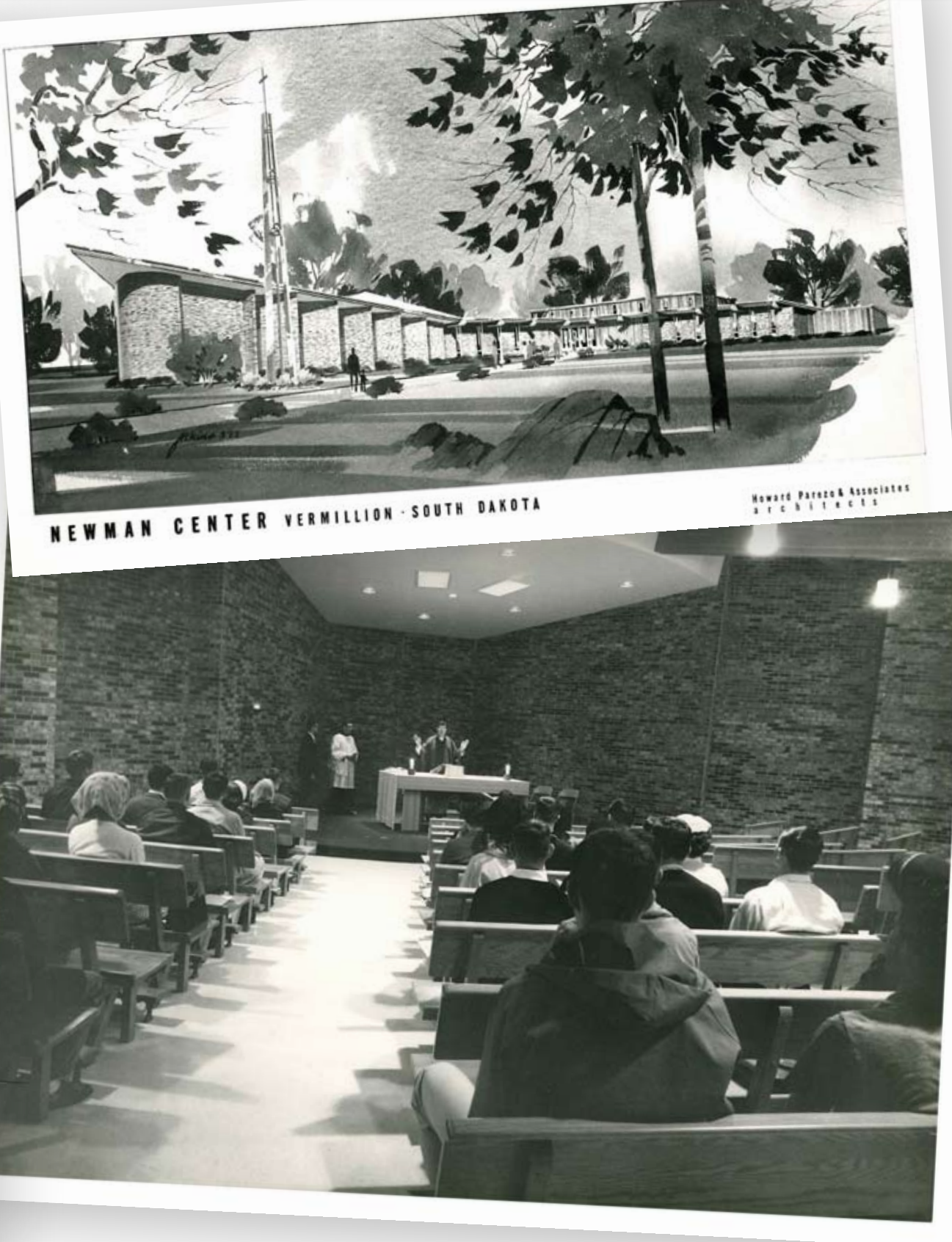
"In our classes we teach people how to think, not what to think," said Father Doyle, "and how to live with the truths they have learned."

Dorm discussions are an innovation this year which have proven successful. Father Doyle conducts informal discussions in the evenings at various dorms on topics ranging from mixed marriages to war. "The discussions reveal a vast reservoir of interest in religious topics," said Father Doyle.

Weekend retreats and movies are other Newman activities. On the schedule for January is Pella's movie "Knights of Cera" and two retreats are planned for second semester.

"WE ARE ENCOURAGED by the student's communal attitude," said Father Doyle. "This is the hungry generation in search of God. While the untrustables over 30 feel change is a threat to their security, most students welcome this."

Father Flannery also stated that the Newman Center staff has been impressed with the caliber of both students and faculty and with the way students will give of themselves.



# Vermillion St. Agnes

Vermillion (Clay County) St. Agnes

Report of Father Pierre Boucher in 1869... "Vermillion: I go there 12 times a year. They gave me ten plasters a trip, beyond getting me and bringing me back. They have paid me well in this place. They owe me only 25 pastas having paid me 75.... Catholics were well established in Jefferson, Fairview and Vermillion, with a resident priest at Jefferson... the Catholic Church had a slow start in Vermillion. Father James Mary Ryan of Jackson, Neb., in 1864 had crossed the Missouri River to look after Catholics in the Vermillion area. Two years later Father Felix M. McLaughlin from the same place baptized James Todd McHenry and others July 9, 1866. August Verzoni was baptized in Aug. 19 near Vermillion.

A Catholic Church erected in 1870 at Fairview 4 miles east of Vermillion among French Canadians, was also attended by Catholics of Sioux Falls... In 1877 Father E. Hennessy supervised the erection of a new and larger church in Fairview and dedicated it to the Assumption of Mary. It served the Vermillion area until 1881 when, at length, St. Agnes Parish was organized in Vermillion.

When Father D. V. Collins of Elk Point proposed to Catholics in Vermillion in Sept., 1884, that they erect their own church, negotiations with Cyrus Snyder resulted in the donation of a block of land as a site, provided they build on it an edifice costing not less than \$1,000. Local businessmen and farmers in the area responded with a subscription of \$760 in cash and \$100 in labor. The construction of a building 24x36 ft., was at once begun, but an early winter interrupted the work until the spring of 1885. On June 29 Father George Willard, vicar general of Dakota, dedicated St. Agnes Church. The total cost of the structure, with fixtures amounted to \$1,180. The condition being fulfilled, a deed for the site was issued to the church authorities.

The new St. Agnes Church was used for a mission by Father Willard. The Dakota Republican of July 2, 1885, reported that the three days of services were well attended... Father D. V. Collins was listed as the pastor, although Father D. J. Hogan is credited for having become the first resident priest in 1886. On the morning of June 19, 1889, St. Agnes Church was badly damaged by a tornado. Fortunately the little edifice had been insured in the Queens of London, and after a delay of 6 weeks, the insurance company settled with Bishop Marty for \$761. In August all the usable material of the wrecked structure was salvaged and new material added for the construction of a church. On Dec. 4, 1889, the new St. Agnes Church was accepted by the building committee since the parish was without a pastor. As soon as Father M. Kennedy was assigned to the parish, he arranged with Bishop Marty for the dedication of the church on Aug. 15, 1890. The bishop congratulated the parishioners who had turned a catastrophe into a blessing by erecting a better structure than the one destroyed. He suggested that a collection be taken on the occasion to wipe out the debt of \$65 still remaining. The sum of \$75 was contributed, thus making the church debt-free... Father Kennedy served St. Agnes and Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, until 1895.

In Vermillion Father James J. Heidegger filled the double role of pastor of St. Agnes and chaplain to St. Joseph's Convent & Academy. Because the parish church was in need of extensive repair and the Catholic membership small, the pastor proposed to merge the parish with the Benedictine community for religious services. His proposal was unacceptable to the Sisters, to the parish and to the bishop who found the idea impractical and unwise. However, no repairs were made on the church and parishioners frequented the convent chapel even on Sundays. Confirmation was to be administered to the children of St. Agnes parish. To put across his point, the bishop declined to have the ceremonies either in the delapidated church or in the convent chapel and had the children taken to Fairview for the administration of the sacrament. After this experience the parishioners restored their church building.

Vermillion had a sparse Catholic population. Before the opening of St. Joseph Convent in 1897, St. Agnes Parish was dependent on priests from other parishes; after 1897, the convent chapel in Vermillion also as parish priest. The relationship between the convent and parish depended largely upon the disposition of the priest. At times it was cordial, at others, strained. With the coming of Father T. L. Flood, who considered himself first of all pastor of the parish, the convent was dependent upon the services of the pastor. Father Flood -- with his sister Marie as housekeeper -- took possession of the little rectory built by Father Collins seven years earlier at a cost of \$700. Father Flood directed the parishioners to attend Sunday Mass in their own church, not the convent chapel. Ordinarily he offered weekday Masses at the convent for Sisters and lay people. Whenever it could be arranged, he celebrated one Mass on Sunday at the convent; at other times the Sisters assisted at the parish church. For this service the convent paid Father Flood \$15 a month... Having Fairview as a mission complicated matters for Father Flood. He found it necessary to rescind his order that parishioners not attend Sunday Mass at the convent. Hence, he welcomed Bishop O'Gorman's plan to annex the Fairview parish to St. Agnes in Vermillion. Although the bishop's decision created some dissension, Father Flood was able to smooth ruffled feathers and secured cooperation for the erection of a new and more spacious church building in Vermillion... brick edifice costing \$12,000. A subscription list circulated July 1, 1906, secured pledges totaling \$5,200. Building commenced in August, 1906, and was completed Sept. 21, 1907. Father Flood celebrated the first Mass that next day, Sunday. (GD)



An artist's sketch of the first "ST. AGNES CHURCH"



EXTERIOR ST. AGNES CHURCH 1974



INTERIOR PRIOR TO JULY 1949



INTERIOR 1973

