

# Through Shepherd's Eyes



There is no picture available of me, the first of twelve former pastors to address you. As I oversaw completions of construction for then new ST. JOSEPH'S in RACINE, WI, begun May 12, 1875, I will let its' face represent mine. My name is Fr. Michael Beiter, ordained by Bishop Henni in 1847, four years after Milwaukee was made a diocese. After serving parishes in Milwaukee (Old St. Mary's), New Coeln (St. Stephen's by the airport), Addison (St. Anthony), Washington County (St. Lawrence), Potosi, Manitowoc (St. Boniface), Brighton (St. Francis Xavier), Jefferson (St. Lawrence), I was appointed first resident pastor of St. Joseph's on November 17, 1875. I inherited a happy, energetic Catholic family from Frs. J.A. Birkhaeuser and George Strickner, pastors of St. Mary's, who had helped open a school in 1868, followed by a dual church/school in 1870 on the far northern edge of Racine for a growing German Catholic population. While this ultimately meant they would lose some members to a new church up and over the Root River, they took their joy in faith's progress.

I offered the first Mass in the core of what forms your present church on Christmas Day, 1876. It did not have your large, ornate sanctuary or steeple; a simpler altar and domed cupola along with plain, clear glass windows & an elevated, canopied pulpit with a confessional beneath were our humbler beginnings. My stay was sadly brief as a shortage of priests in our then young Diocese made us move more frequently back then. I left St. Joseph's in spring of 1877 to become pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in St. Francis (1877-1883) as well as a professor at Saint Francis Seminary. In 1883, I retired to my native land, Bavaria, where I died in 1902 & am buried. Auf Wiedersehn!



My picture was recently rediscovered in an old school graduation picture. I am Fr. S. Victor, happy to have become the second pastor of ST. JOSEPH on April 17, 1877. I would so much have enjoyed speaking with you at some greater length, but after only four months here I became seriously ill and left St. Joseph's in August of 1877, wishing we had time to know one another better.

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I am pleased to stand before you and introduce myself as your third pastor, Fr. Anthony Foeckler. I arrived here in August of 1877 as ST. JOSEPH, afire with early love's enthusiasm, suffered the first of many setbacks that we have always risen above and grown from like Christ, Our Savior, Who rose from Death to new Life.

The late afternoon of May 18, 1883, was a day of tragedy as a cyclone roaring out of the southwest took a direct aim for ST. JOSEPH, tearing loose our cupola and dashing it into twisted wreckage at the northeast corner of St. Patrick and Wisconsin streets. No damage was done your former rectory, now ST. JOSEPH PARISH CENTER, as we did not build it until 1885! Our school, staffed by sisters of St. Dominic whose services replaced our lay teachers in 1877, was so luckily untouched. With wounded pride & resolve, we built the present steeple, including 3 bells acquired from the old Milwaukee County Courthouse and a clock. We also installed your present pipe organ, a joy to hear then which I am pleased to know you still enjoy. The larger sanctuary your altar now occupies was also an addition of ours and the site of my funeral as, while in service to you, I died on November 9, 1889 and am buried in the then Catholic Cemetery of Racine now along Kinzie Avenue. My monument is not the worn stone marker there; it is you, living stones, precious temples of God's Holy Spirit, each and every one of you.



It is so hard to succeed someone who dies in office and is considered a "saint" by those whom you are now asked to serve faithfully as new pastor. Such was my dilemma and challenge as I accepted becoming your fourth pastor in early 1890. My name is Fr. Charles Fessler. Not in difficulty or great debt was the parish, owing small sum of \$1,900.00 on outstanding projects. Our older church stoves were replaced with a modern, steam heat system; a club for young men was begun as well. Illness compelled my resignation as pastor in October of 1892. The parish was served by two Capuchins from Milwaukee, Fr. Cyrillus and Fr. Bernardus, until my successor could be found. I so wish I could have stayed longer and felt more at home with you here.



On December 15, 1892, I arrived as your fifth pastor; my name is Fr. John Friedl. I found you so very receptive, a warm, welcoming parish & I was so pleased to join you. Things went along smoothly for us until May of 1894 when I, like considerable numbers of pastors working alone in the growing parishes of my time, was suddenly, seriously taken ill and was forced to resign. A temporary pastor, Fr. John Bach, served ST. JOSEPH until a more permanent replacement for me could be found.

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With ST. JOSEPH having gone through a sudden succession of shorter-term pastors, I hoped my arrival on the scene might bring a stable familiarity that parishioners long for. My name is Fr. William Frantz & I became the sixth pastor here on August 1, 1894. When I took up residence here I brought along two nieces to serve as housekeepers for me in the rectory, knowing how busy the parish would keep me. Your understanding acceptance of our "family" was so affectionate & warm that both of my nieces found fine husbands among your sons. They had many children & their offspring are yet among your generous supporters. The Gothic high altar which looms behind the altar your present Eucharistic celebrations focus upon was our gift to you; the shrines to the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Mother are made of what remains of two side altars which matched it. Old kerosene lamps in church were replaced with

modern gas lighting in 1899, city water & hot water service were added to the rectory in 1900, and a convent for the sisters built in 1906. Poor health caused me to resign as pastor and retire to St. Mary's Hospital where I died on August 5, 1914. I am buried near Fr. Foeckler in the Catholic Cemetery of Racine along Kinzie Avenue.



I was called "Santa Claus Papa" when I arrived as pastor of ST. JOSEPH on September 30, 1908, the first pastor of this parish to have an associate priest. My name is Fr. Norbert Kersten. I am told that my facial hair couldn't hide my ready smile & easygoing manner, especially with children. The church needed a new roof, a redecoration, and two more doors in front alongside the central doors. These necessities done, I also arranged for replacement of our plain, clear glass windows with those of stained glass representing our St. Joseph's participation in the life & ministry of Christ as well as His Church. Things of beauty make a fine catechism on our faith & religion. However, I did not live to see them. On December 7, 1914, while waiting for a streetcar to take me on one of my home visits with Holy Communion for a shut-in, I died suddenly. I loved

being your seventh pastor.



The suddenness of good Fr. Kersten's passing had barely sunk in to the parish when I was appointed by Archbishop Messmer as your eighth pastor. My name is Fr. Wendelin Heder; I was told to report at once and to take charge. With a large school, projects to install electric light in the rectory & your present Stations of the Cross into the church pending, apparently an energetic, experienced hand was needed. I was ready & willing but difficulties with personal health intervened. I was forced to make a shorter stay with you than I would have liked, resigning as pastor of ST. JOSEPH on September 30, 1916.

From Saint Joseph's Parish, Racine 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program.

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I have been here before as a temporary helper while you were in transition between pastors. I know you as well as how to get things done here. I am Fr. John Bach and your ninth pastor, appointed to office October 1, 1916. I helped complete the modernizations of both church and people. In church, we added electric lighting and a new white Carrara marble communion railing which is still at side shrines you see to Our Lady & the Sacred Heart. We stopped using German at Mass, 95% preferring to speak as most Americans, in English. We ended the custom of pew rent for reserved seats in church, establishing a truly democratic church support & seating system based on each using envelopes to give their money and sitting wherever availability & choice decided. We thought of building a Catholic High School in Racine at St. Joseph and

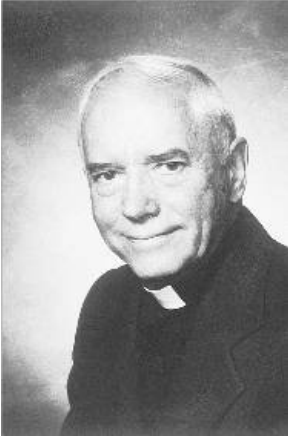
bought your big parking lot for that purpose, but the opening of St. Catherine's High School in 1924 has allowed it to remain a playground and parking for the many, more cars you own today than we did. As we were not in debt & our old school was in need of replacement, we undertook the building of what now forms the core of your present and beautiful school in 1929. Not I or any parishioners at the time could have foreseen the Great Depression. Debt due to building the new school threatened the existence of the parish itself. While the school cost \$135,000.00 to build, by 1933 we were \$140,000.00 in debt & sinking fast. Tired and frustrated, unable to earn the stipends which then made for pastor's salaries due to eye injury, I sued the parish for unemployment compensation. These were times when desperation turned us one on another. I wearied of fiscal worries and, in ill health, resigned as pastor on November 15, 1933, feeling unable to take a church I dearly loved through a time of crisis. A fresh outlook was needed along with new hands at the wheel. I knew and stepped aside.



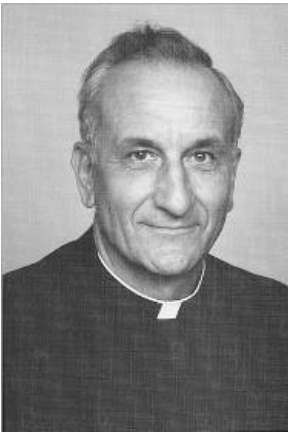
I was asked by Archbishop Stritch to undertake a rescue of sorts, the pastorate of the parish in Racine which is most adversely affected by the Great Depression. Calm & confidence I must radiate if these people are to recover their balance and blessedly continue as a parish. I am Fr. Henry Schmitt (made Msgr. in 1951), made the tenth pastor of ST. JOSEPH on April 11, 1934. I realized that the burden of debt was crushing us. For a long period I took no salary. If we were to survive, we were to "sink or swim" together. We began parish picnics to foster a togetherness to counter isolation which accompanies and prolongs most miseries. By July 22, 1945, we were fully out of debt, free again to chart a more certain future. We were able to keep up the buildings, start CCD classes and an Ushers club, provide a Catholic school education for 544 children, & make the changes expected by Vatican Council II in the Mass

as well as other areas of church life and organization. Having suffered a slight stroke during my pastorate, I was blessed with an abundance of priest associates, usually two together, my boys and I. A blessing that two of them, Frs. Boesch & Briske, were with me when I died suddenly on August 27, 1967, after a record 33 years of service to ST. JOSEPH PARISH.

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My homilies were short; so was my stay. My name is Fr. James Schlauffer, made eleventh pastor of ST. JOSEPH on October 3, 1967. My appointment to chaplaincy of newly established St. Monica's Home moved me from the parish just as I was getting to know you. The preservation & problems of an aging set of buildings were bequeathed to my successor. When I finally retired due to health disabilities, I first lived at Villa St. Anna, Racine, and then at St. Joseph's Home for The Elderly, Kenosha, until my death on August 22, 1998. As I was a priest- son of our neighbor-daughter parish, St. John Nepomuk, my funeral Mass was there.



I am the only living and second longest serving former pastor of ST. JOSEPH. I am Fr. Erwin Mogilka, assigned here on June 17, 1969 as your twelfth pastor, retiring in September of 1990 and now residing on Brown's Lake near Burlington, WI, 4321 Marine Drive, 53105, 262-767-0416. "We enjoy the present Jubilee of 125 years, but, in 1969 we could have been nothing but a memory . . . to destroy and move on. Thanks to the deep love of the membership and the hard work of hundreds of members who chose to stay and work five days a week on the church, school, rectory, but first the convent. Yes, they all needed much rebuilding. Five people stand out showing the spirit of St. Joe's. Bill & Jim Pier spent my first Fourth of July with me and, after intensive checking, indicated the buildings were strong and would outlast all of us . . . and they have! They led the rebuilding projects. Deceased Ben Kupper and Joe Beres (deaf) worked from the first day of my pastorate and had a hand in all the remodeling. Both were retired. Bernadette Myers, left with a family to become the first lady manager of a filling station after the death of her husband, offered glory to God in her music at the organ and she, like all others, did so for a simple 'Thank You.' Yes, we have a beautiful parish built on the history of wonderful, dedicated, unselfish people of the yesterday. May we today continue in that spirit."



I am Fr. Richard J. Stoffel, assigned here on October 23, 1990. (Fr. Raymond Adamsky, then associate pastor, was temporary administrator until my assignment here, my first as a pastor as I was ordained in 1979. I am your thirteenth pastor and the author of this history cast through the eyes of eleven men who occupied office of pastor and servant leader before Fr. Erv and me. As I was privileged to speak for so many others before me, I will await someone after me to speak kindly of these present days that we so much enjoy sharing together.