

Peter Engel, he was a fine priest. He used to go around in a buggy, Rosary in one hand and reins in the other.

The parishioners remembered their pastor's anniversaries. Fr. Christopher Bayer, OSB, thanked the parishioners for remembering his silver jubilee:

I wish to speak my deep gratitude for the program tendered to me last Thursday to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of my priesthood. It was intended to be a gathering of the entire parish, but the sub-zero weather made it very bad, the side-roads risky, for some people to get out. There was a pleasant gathering, and the group that came brought great sacrifices in coming. May the good God reward you, and I wish to repay you with more painstaking service toward you in my position as pastor. I had not expected that you get up a purse for me; the two that canvassed had to "rough it" on that very cold day. And certainly the gift of \$26.25 from the parishioners and \$5 from the Credit Union made me feel happy as an expression of your goodwill and the kindly feelings you entertain toward me. Mr. Leo Lauer, who presented the purse, said I had the abbot's permission to accept it and said that I should use it if I make a trip next summer. When I mentioned the affair to the abbot, he said: "That trip will be taken care of" and suggested I look up the poor of the parish, which I am going to do. But, again, I felt happy to think that my parishioners were so kind and thoughtful.

*Vocations*

Encouraging the young to consider a vocation to the priesthood or religious life has been a concern of every pastor of the Collegeville parish. For example, Fr. Rembert Bularzik, OSB, announced: "We Benedictines are hoping for vocations among the boys of the monastic life in our order

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and for the work God has given us to do for him. (*February 26, 1956*)\*

Despite the parishioners' observance of the monastic life through their weekly gatherings for worship and work with the monks, to date only three sons of the parish have joined the abbey. Fr. Godfrey Diekmann and Br. Felix Neussendorfer, OSB, still serve its apostolates, as did Fr. Conrad Diekmann, OSB, until his death in 1973. Two sons of the parish are now priests of the St. Cloud Diocese — Frs. Jerome Reisinger and Bernard Lenarz.

Seventeen daughters of the parish have joined the Sisters of St. Benedict in St. Joseph or the Sisters of St. Francis in Hankinson, North Dakota. The late Sisters Theora Dillenburg, Amalia Eich, Crescentia Eich, Bonaventure Theisen, and Carmel Fruth, OSB, belonged to the St. Joseph Benedictines. Now serving that motherhouse are Sisters Romelda Eisenschenk, Frances Lorraine Eisenschenk, Leonia Eisenschenk, Raphael Ann Eisenschenk, Beatrice Eiyneck, Genevieve Fruth, Elmer Reisinger, Berchmans Zwilling, and Marie Zwilling, OSB. Sr. Elizabeth Klein, OSF, serves the Hankinson motherhouse. Sr. Georgiana Klein, OSF, and Sr. Macarie Neussendorfer, OSB, also served several years in the convent.

Poverty is a part of the Rule of St. Benedict and it was often the rule of the parish. Mrs. Gertrude Meyer describes the pattern of the weekly collection:

For as many years as I can remember, there was only one usher in our church, Sebastian Meyer. Collections were only taken up at high Mass which was at 10:30 in winter and 10:00 in summer. Early Mass was at 7:00 in summer and 8:30 in winter. Not many people came to the early Mass; only those who had to stay with the home and smaller children during the high Mass. A Joseph Rupp took up the collections when Mr. Meyer was absent, which happened very seldom. When Sebastian Meyer, because of age and poor health, felt he should not continue this job, he retired, and

*Ushers*

Mathew Reisinger, who was only four years younger, replaced him.

Leo Lauer thought that younger people should be doing this and he promptly did something about it. He organized the Young Ushers Club. Some members were: Leo Lauer as head usher, Al Gretsche, Robert Oswald, Leo Thielman, Andrew and Edwin Brinkman, Lawrence and Walter Goerger, and Robert and Alfred Pflueger.

As the boys came out of the eighth grade, most of them joined the club, so there were always enough ushers. By that time many people came to early Mass, too, and at first collections were taken up by the Mass servers at that Mass, but then the young club took over.

The people were often reminded of their duty towards the Church:

Church support: it is your obligation. All those who are too poor to pay, please come and make some arrangements with me. All other arrangements are no good from this day forward. (*July 14, 1940*)\*

Often the "other arrangement" was donating wood. For example, Frank Kremers in 1901 paid his pew rent by delivering ten cords of wood for \$14.01.

The annual pew rent was important, as sometimes the general collection was scant:

It is an unfortunate thing that a pastor has to mention money in church, but it is necessary sometimes so that the expenses can be met, etc. The collection last Sunday amounted to \$7.24. (*September 14, 1936*)\*

Sometimes a little stronger force was needed. Fr. Timothy Majerus, OSB, on September 14, 1936 said:

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Next Sunday, the collection will be taken up. I myself will go around with the collection box and write down names and what each has given. The workers in the monastery should also contribute something. No one should give less than \$.50.

Fr. Alexius Hoffmann, OSB, rated the importance of the "penny collection" in the area parishes:

*Penny  
collection*

Sunday collections were pitifully small, in our eyes at least. As late as 1900 I saw penny collections of \$2.00 on Sundays in a prosperous farm community. The people in the first place had very little money in the early years. Again, they took the penny collection too seriously and would not part with more than a penny at a time if they could help it. Although they made no "bones" about paying 5¢ for a glass of beer. At the same time that parish offered many a hundred dollars annually for Masses. One priest whom I know was intent upon creating a building fund in preparation to the building of a brick church. Once he became irritated over the pennies and told the people that he expected every head of a family to drop a dime into the collection box on Sundays and explained why he wanted them to do so.

Stipends also helped the priests meet their personal expenses. As Father Alexius wrote:

Before 1864 the honorarium for a low Mass was 25 or 50¢; the former were stipends perhaps from France through *Oessore de la Propagation le Foi* (Lyons); they were sent to the French priests (e.g., Rev. Ledon and J. Fayalle, the former at East Minneapolis, then St. Anthony Falls; they sent stipends to very Rev. Demetrius di Marogna at St. Cloud as early as January 1857 — probably had too many and gladly passed them on to



*St. Rose Mission Circle in 1954. Colletta Eisenschenk, Mrs. Lawrence Eisenschenk, Mrs. Alphonse Reisinger, Mrs. Joseph Eisenschenk, Marie Huschle, Mrs. Walter Goerger, Mrs. Mary Schwegel, Catherine Huschle, Fr. Rembert Bularzik, OSB, Mrs. George Dullinger, Clara Reisinger, Mrs. Max Loeffler, Pauline Schwegel, Mrs. Eugene Schwegel, Mary Murphy, Marcella Eisenschenk, Rose Marie Reisinger.*

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the Fathers. The 25 or 50¢ stipends ceased in 1864, when the Provincial Council of St. Louis decreed that \$1.00 was to be the stipend for a low Mass. In some parishes, the people paid the stipend in produce. The priest at Richmond got three bearskins in lieu of cash; for Masses. That was unique. Money used or circulated during the Civil War era ('61-65) was mostly paper "greenbacks" – dollars, 50, 25 and 10¢ pieces, and 1 and 2¢ copper pennies . . . but many cents make a dollar and many dollars make a "pile" – support was paid directly to the priests or the trustees and accounted for.

The Collegeville pastor, like pastors elsewhere, had a congregation from various walks of life and different education and skill levels. Fr. Valerian Thelen, OSB, reflected:

I had three classes of people when I was pastor, professors and their families, the parishioners who were farmers, and visitors. The priest, of course, is pastor of them all.

The scene in 1975 is much the same.

Despite the many different personal feelings of parishioners regarding each other and the pastor, without any doubt, the pastor, until the 1970's, ran the parish organizations completely. The pastor assumed that it was his duty to oversee everything, including every parish organization. At times these organizations planned projects, such as the erection of a statue, but the pastor was not duly informed. The minutes of the St. Mary's Society of May 6, 1953, read:

. . . special meeting was held . . . to decide what kind of statue and what size we would get for the proposed outdoor shrine. Nine voted for the Lady of the Rosary, three voted for the Queen of Peace . . . so the Lady of the Rosary will be ordered. Two bouquets of flowers

*Society  
projects*





*Collegeville Community Credit Union picnic, August 1940*

*St. Benedict Men's Society*



*Fr. Clemens*

*Fr. Alfred*



*Fr. Sever*





were shown, one made of fiberwood and one of seashells. The majority voted to get the seashell bouquet to be enclosed in the shrine.

The pastor did not favorably regard this society's good deed. Its members violated one of the worst rules a society could have done in the 1950's; the pastor was not informed. Father Rembert reflected:

. . . I became worried especially about the mission circle groups in the parish. No one ever invited me to attend a meeting until this present one. One group has been quite faithful in this regard. From another I received a kind of summary. A third just the other day sent in a belated report. Another, and perhaps the most notable instance of by-passing the pastor by members of his flock, was the erection of the Marian Shrine to the public without his knowledge. . . . As to freedom in the matter, it has already been said that an action taken by Catholics is not yet Catholic. . . . Not a word was breathed to the pastor regarding the shrine until the time of dedication. Then he was asked to bless it. That of course he did, lest it appear that he was opposed to the venture . . . activities they take upon themselves are to work hand-in-hand with the pastor, their spiritual father.

The social life of the parish was generally simple but varied — gatherings of parish organizations, house parties, wedding dances, basket socials, etc.

*Social life*

House parties were the cheapest type of party. Someone would say: "Who is going into town?" — for any reason. "Pick up a keg."

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If you had a half of barrel of beer, someone would say: "Let's have a dance."



There were parties for the sake of parties, to celebrate one's name day, or just a surprise party. Sometimes one would come home and see a party going on in his home:

We had a dance in Avon one night. All the old-timers were there. We got home at one o'clock and they had all the furniture out of the house and they were dancing in the house — you know, everything was out of two rooms and they were dancing!

"Tonight, card and basket social." "Card party tonight, bring pie." Parties and raising money were part of parish life.

A tradition which has died in the St. John the Baptist Parish is the basket social:

We did not auction them off because it caused too much hot blood in the parish. The ladies bring lunch in a basket and whoever gets the basket eats lunch with that girl. One time we put all the names in a bag, and when you came in there, you grabbed a bag to see what name you got. Whatever person you got you had to put them on a scale and pay so much a pound. "Mrs. Fruth," I said, "Don't forget to be there. We need you." She was fat.

The socials were also good for courting as it was a fine opportunity for the young men and women in the parish to meet each other. Tensions ran high when two men bid for the same basket.

*Weddings* wrote: Weddings were major parish events. Father Alexius

Marriages. Banns were duly proclaimed. On the day preceding the marriage, the parties would make the final preparations, confessions, etc. On the day of the marriage, the contracting parties with their witnesses were seated in the first pew on either side — the bride-





*First double wedding at St. John's, February 3, 1891. Back to front, left to right: Alois Meyer, Mary Locnikar, Matthew Reisinger, Anna Reisinger, Xavier Meyer (groom), Walburga Reisinger (bride), Hironymus (Jerome) Young (groom), Maria Reisinger (bride).*

*Joseph Pueringer and Laura Gretsch, April 26, 1915. Back row: Adrian Sauer, Amalia Gretsch, Peter Gretsch, Gertrude Reisinger.*







*Joseph Eisenschenk and Mary Deisenrieder*

*Nick and Mary Thielman*



*Alphonse and Rose Reisinger, 1925*







*Top to bottom, left to right: Unidentified, Sebastian Locnikar, George Meyer, unidentified, John Knoblach, Frank Rass, Sebastian Meyer, Simon Groetsch, Victor Himsl.*

*Meyer Band: Gilbert, Ralph, Simon and Delphine Meyer*





groom and the best man on one side, the bride and bridesmaid on the other. The marriage and the ring, usually of gold, were blessed by the pastor before the Mass. In many places, the pastor bade the two spouses to join their right hands and then wound his stole around them, or laid the end upon them and pronounced the words: "*Ego conjungo vos*" – by which the church expresses his satisfaction of the contract. The people used to say "Father married them," but they really meant or were supposed to mean that the priest functioned as the Church's witness, since the "knot" is really tied by the parties themselves and the priest only blesses the union. (Later "two ring" marriages became the vogue). They received Holy Communion at the foot of the altar.

After the Mass, they went to the priest's house and settled; i.e., paid the fee and had the marriage recorded – divorces were, and are, very rare. Many subsequently had very large families – 12 and over. And they were proud of their families. Since there is scriptural sanction for a marriage feast, the event was duly celebrated by a "banquet" for which the priest was invited also, although he could not remain long. If the younger folks indulged in a hop, it must not be accounted as a fault to them – they come together so seldom for diversions. The only vulgar feature was the shivaree when it was dark. Mischievous men and boys would serenade the newlyweds with sleigh bells, tin-can rattles or wash boilers with stones in them, or whistles and horns for a dismal hour or so and only stopped when they were regaled with a keg of beer or a lunch.

Brides still wore white dresses (on their first marriage) long white veils and a wreath of artificial flowers or green. They did not carry a bouquet of flowers when they went to the altar – as they do now. Widows wore