

# St. Joseph's Ridge turns 130

## *Oldest parish in La Crosse County*

By Patrick Slattery  
Times Review Staff

**ST. JOSEPH RIDGE** — The oldest parish in La Crosse County, St. Joseph's Ridge Parish, marked its 130th anniversary Sunday, July 5.

Concelebrants at the anniversary Mass were Bishop John Paul; Bishop George Hammes, native parish son and retired bishop of the Diocese of Superior; Father Carroll Walljasper, chaplain of Villa St. Joseph; and Father Peter Butz, parish pastor.

On July 6 about 150 parishioners attended the anniversary dinner held at the Ridge View Inn that culminated the celebration.

St. Mary's Parish in La Crosse was the first Catholic parish in the county, established in 1855. It was the only parish in the city of La Crosse until 1870, when St. Joseph's Cathedral was founded.

St. Joseph's Ridge Parish dates its beginning to 1857.

Since St. Mary's was closed 25 years ago in 1962, St. Joseph's Ridge has the distinction of being the county's oldest existing parish.

The parish is located 12 miles east of La Crosse amid the scenic Coulee Region on Highway 33.

Father Galtier of Prairie du Chien was the first priest to come to this territory to celebrate Mass and confer the sacraments in the farm homes of the early German pioneer settlers. Other early priests came from Milwaukee, Eau Claire, Green Bay and even Dubuque, Iowa.

In March 1870, Bishops John Henmi and Michael Heiss, attending Vatican I in Rome, arranged to have established in La Crosse the community of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration with its motherhouse and novitiate.

Three years later a two-story stone school building was erected by Catholics on the Ridge and FSPAs came there to teach.

The first resident pastor, Father Florentine Zadziocski, OMC, was assigned to St. Joseph's Ridge in 1866.

Most pastors in the parish's early history had short tenures, averaging less than two years.

Two churches were built before the present church was constructed in 1901.

Standing high on a ridgetop, the red brick, Gothic church with its lofty tower strikes a

commanding presence. Its spire can be seen from several miles.

One of the most ambitious pastors in St. Joseph Ridge's history was Father John Pinion, pastor from 1935-49.

While at the parish he also served the mission parish of St. Mary's in Coon Valley, installed the pipe organ in the church, was chaplain of Villa St. Joseph for five years, and was bandmaster at Aquinas High School.

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Father Pinion was among the honored guests at the parish anniversary supper. Although retired today and living in Stanley, at age 86, he continues to serve as priest for St. Mary's Church of Czestochowa.

The present four-room, brick St. Joseph's Ridge School was built in 1929.

During the 1940s and '50s the parish owned and operated three school buses. In addition to transporting about 125 students to the elementary school, the parish also sent 30-50 students to Aquinas.

In 1969 the parish school was closed. At present a dozen high school and five elementary students ride the public school bus to classes at Aquinas and Cathedral schools respectively.

There are 115 students enrolled in the parish's CCD program, held in the old school.

The FSPA's influence on this parish has been great not only due to their role as teachers, but also because the congregation's retirement home, Villa St. Joseph, is across the street.

Sisters have long been active participants in parish life.

Pastor at St. Joseph's Ridge is Father Peter Butz, who also serves at Holy Cross Center as director of the diocesan Mission Office.

His predecessor, Father John Malik, also worked at the diocesan center as chancellor.

At present there are 200 parish envelope holders.

Two parishioners were commissioned in the most recent class of lay ministers, Lorraine Gay and Joseph Leuck.