

The Development of Holy Souls Parish – St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Pampa

By Mrs. Edwina Boyd

In 1926 the trend of development of the Panhandle oil field seemed to be in a northwest to southeasterly direction with Pampa a town of about 1200 inhabitants, situated near the center of this trend. The first good well of this field was brought in on the Wilcox Lease on the Combs-Worley Ranch southeast of Pampa, followed by big wells brought in from the Bowers Pool, and then the big rush was on. People in every phase of the oil industry flocked into the area.

Among the first arrivals of the Catholic faith were two brothers, Martin and Tom McGarrity. Martin set about introducing himself to everyone with an Irish name among the newcomers, and in this way discovered that many of them were Catholics. There had been only three Catholic families here before the influx of oilfield workers, the L. H. Sullins, Wm. Flaherty, and Mrs. A. R. Sawyer households. Martin McGarrity was in Pampa's new Masters Cafe late one night during the month of April, 1926 and saw there a man in a dark suit and Roman collar. This man was Father J. H. Krukkert, pastor at St. Francis, Texas. Father had been called by Dr. Brunow of Pampa to administer the Last Sacraments to a dying man, a worker from the oilfield south of town.

During his conversation with Martin, Father became aware that there were Roman Catholics here without Mass and agreed to come over to Pampa once a month if a suitable place to hold services could be found. Mrs. Sawyer offered her home, at the corner of Gray and Browning Streets, where Mass was offered four or five times. Crowds then became too large for her home to accommodate. Permission was obtained through the Commander to use the American Legion Hall, which is now Fire Station No. 1. This was used from September through December of 1926, when a new Commander was elected. It seemed that it rained every Saturday in 1926, and dances were held each Saturday night in the Hall. On Sunday morning a few faithful souls used garden hoes they had purchased to scrape mud from the floor, and obtained unsold newspapers from the publisher to spread there in order to kneel. Our vestments were given to Mrs. Lynn Boyd by relatives of a deceased Priest in Oklahoma, who wished them to be given to some Mission, as Pampa was at that time.

In January, 1927, Father Krukkert asked us to invite those interested in planning for a Church to meet in the offices of Sykes, Rast and Boyd Lumber Company. Seven people and Father Krukkert were present. These were appointed members of the first Church Committee: Mr. P. J. McNamara, H. L. Pohl, Martin McGarrity, P.B. Mooney, Frenchy Clavelle, and Mr. and Mrs. Lynn Boyd. Mr. McNamara was appointed Chairman and Mrs. Boyd, Secretary and Treasurer. Her duties were to meet and record the names of the people coming to Mass. to collect offerings,

and to find suitable property within Pampa city limits for a building. Suitable property meant that zoned so that no surface installations such as flow tanks, drilling equipment, etc... could be placed on the lots before building was begun. This had happened in other towns. In fact, two lots had been purchased in the Talley Addition, but were not zoned and were therefore unsuitable.

With the aid of M. K. Brown of the White Deer Land Company, we found one-half block of vacant property at the corner of Browning and Ward Streets with permission to purchase two lots and take an option on the remaining space so that the Committee would have first refusal before it could be sold to others. We had not launched a campaign for funds, so Father Krukkert loaned us \$600.00 from his Panhandle fund to purchase the two lots. We, of course, repaid him as soon as possible. In the meantime we arranged for the use of the Grand Theater on South Cuyler Street, where Mass was offered from January through March. At this time the theater burned, and we had to look elsewhere. The Chamber of Commerce permitted us to use their office in the White Deer Land Company building, now the White Deer Land Museum, until our Church was built. We used their facilities until April 27, 1928 when the Church was partially completed and services could be held.

In April, 1927, the Dallas Diocese was divided, and the Diocese of Amarillo was erected. Father Rudolph A. Gerken of Ranger, Texas, was elevated to Bishop and installed on April 26, 1927 as the first Bishop of the new Diocese. He had much to do quickly - finding priests, sisters, catechists, establishing parishes and reappointing Pastors. Father Krukkert was transferred to Plainview, Texas, and Father M. G. French was assigned as Pastor of White Deer with Pampa as a Mission.

Father French called a meeting of the existing committee of seven members at the Schneider Hotel and added several others to form a church planning committee. Present were P. J. (Pat) McNamara, H. L. Pohl, Martin McGarrity, Martin Muench, P. B. Mooney, A. D. McNamara, A. B. Zahn, Ed Carrigan and Mr. and Mrs. Lynn Boyd. A fund soliciting committee was appointed, and Mrs. Boyd was again appointed Secretary-Treasurer whose duty was to meet and collect funds from those who attended Sunday Mass at the Chamber of Commerce office.

There were only a few so-called permanent residents here as those associated with the oilfield were very transient, being transferred in and out often. The quandary was whether to plan accommodations for 50 or 500 people in the congregation so the committee settled on 250. The members visited many new churches in Oklahoma and hired Mr. Jimeno, an architect of Norman, Ok who had built a chapel near the O.U. campus. Our Holy Souls Church was modeled after it. It was built on a cost-plus plan for about \$20,000.00 by the firm of Sharp and Vasey. The Catholic Church Extension Society came to our aid with a \$5,000.00 grant - a gift left by a deceased donor asking prayers for Mrs. Susan Keefe White. This was the incentive for the Holy Souls name. A plaque commemorating this gift is in the Guadalupe Chapel at St. Vincent de Paul Church.

In January, 1928 the building was begun. The corner stone had been forgotten, and a place was made later during construction and was blessed by Bishop Gerken. On Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 29, 1928, Holy Souls Church was dedicated by Bishop Gerken, with several priests of the Diocese attending. The dedication was followed by a dinner given by Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Zahn in their home, honoring the Bishop, visiting priests and the Church Committee. There were now about 35 Catholic families in the parish.

The Altar Society was organized Feb. 3, 1927, in the Lynn Boyd home. Thirteen were present with Mrs. Pat McNamara being elected president. Our duties were very much the same as outlined in our present Constitution and By-Laws, but our immediate attention was given to raising money with which to purchase the Main Altar, Communion Rail, and all other articles for Altar and Sanctuary not individually donated, as well as paying the \$400.00 balance due on church lots. To raise this money the members gave rummage sales, homemade ice cream socials, food sales, spaghetti dinners, waffle suppers, hope-chest raffles, Mile of Pennies, and Cash Calendar Years. They collected old gold pieces to have candlesticks and gold altar pieces refinished, these having been given by Martin McGarrity's sister who was a nun in Pittsburgh, Pa. Society members also boarded and roomed the Sisters and Lay Catechists who came to give religious instruction to children during vacation time.

Holy Souls Choir was organized in the spring of 1928. Mrs. A. D. McNamara and Lucile Keim were first organists and Mrs. Lynn Boyd director. A High Mass was prepared for the dedication of Holy Souls on November 29. Other directors and organists were Fr. LeHive, Mrs. Coombs, Bill Haley, Joan Sawyer, Fr. Soklich, Delores Blymiller, and others. The Sisters directed the school children's choir.

In 1926 there was no place of entertainment for young men and women who were new to the community, so a group of young men organized the dance club known as the Bachelors' Club. They asked four Catholic couples to sponsor the invitational dances, and the name was changed to the Comus Club. The dances were held monthly in the Schneider Hotel dining room, with Joe Norman's Orchestra from Amarillo playing for them. The sponsors were Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Devine, W. J. Smith, A. B. Zahn, Lynn Boyd and Martin Muench. These dances served a social need, were well conducted and well attended. The proceeds paid for a good organ at Holy Souls Church and for paving one-half block with parking apron in front of the church. The dances were continued through 1928.

On July 1, 1928, Father Joseph Wonderly succeeded Fr. French as Pastor of White Deer and the Pampa Mission. Holy Souls Rectory was completed in 1930. Mr. Glover, a young architect member of the parish drew up plans and specifications, including features suggested by Bishop Gerken. In October, 1930, Pampa was made a Parish, with Father Wonderly as Pastor. Fathers Cefai and Knapp were assistants. Father Wonderly served as Pastor until 1940 when the Vincentian Fathers, the Congregation of the Missions, were assigned the Holy Souls Parish.

In these ten years the Parish developed many leaders, and this was recognized in the Diocese. Holy Souls membership grew rapidly and there was need for a parochial school. In 1936 the home of C. T. Hunkapillar adjoining the church property on the east was purchased, and the house was moved to Ward Street across from the Church property. This was used as a Convent for the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, who were to staff the school as soon as it was built. The school was then built on the Hunkapillar lot, at the corner of Browning and West Streets. The school opened Sept. 12, 1937 with grades 1 through 8, Mother Justin as Principal. Some of those beginning in the primer and finishing the 8th grade were Catherine McNamara, Judy Smith, Bill Gribbon, Dan Roche, Darrel Husted, Virginia Johnson and Edwina Lee Emerson. Later the Ward Street Convent was sold; the Kinnison home adjoining the school on the north was purchased for use as the Convent for Sisters. Holy Souls Parish now owned three-fourths of the block.

In 1933 Bishop Gerken was elevated to Archbishop of Santa Fe. He was followed by Bishop Robert E. Lucy, who arrived in Amarillo May 15, 1934, and immediately launched into a program of Catholic Action, organizing the Laity in many ways to enable us to be better informed Catholics. *The Texas Panhandle Register*, our first official Catholic newspaper, was dated July 6, 1936. In the fall of 1937 Bishop Lucey called meetings of ladies in each of four Deaneries to explain the work of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, an organization meeting for this would be held shortly in Amarillo and affiliated with the National Council of Catholic Women. Officers were elected, and one was from Pampa - the parliamentarian - Mrs. Boyd. Three Pampa ladies have served as Diocesan presidents - Mrs. M.F. Roche, Mrs. Ralph Kiser and Mrs. Jacob W. Garman.

The Parent-Teacher Association of Holy Souls was organized in 1937, affiliated with City, County, State and National Associations, as the Bishop encouraged us to do. He asked us to "Be present at these meetings and to put the mind of the Church into the mind of the people when the occasion arose." Mrs. Howard Myers was first president. This organization was necessary to the school, furnishing needed articles, cooking and serving noon meals to the school children, and many other services. In May, 1936, the Frank Keim Council 2767 of the Knights of Columbus was organized, named in honor of Frank Keim, an outstanding leader. Sixty-three charter members, with E. J. Dunigan, Jr., as first Grand Knight made up the first membership.

Girl Scout Troop No. 3 was organized in the Parish in 1938, with Mrs. R. E. McKernan and Mrs. C. F. Alford as Leaders, followed by Mrs. E. B. Tracey, and Miss Catherine Chestnut (Mrs. Elton Lathrop), then by Mrs. Lynn Boyd and Mrs. Dick Sullins.

In 1937 the Parish Council of Catholic Women was organized in Holy Souls Parish in order to correlate the Parish work with the Deanery and Diocesan Council. Mrs. William Finkbeiner was first president. In 1940 the Vincentian Fathers were assigned the Parish, which they have administered to this date. Father William J. Stack was first Vincentian Pastor, and served until 1946.

A Legion of Mary was organized but did not function long. In 1941 Boy Scout Troop No. 17 was organized. Joe V. Roche was Scout Master and Wyndell Cox was assistant.

In 1942 a B-25 Bomber School was built about 15 miles east of Pampa. Many Catholic boys sent here for training made it necessary for Father Stack to have four Masses each Sunday. Father Coupal was sent here to relieve the situation. There was no Catholic Chaplain at the base, but the Commandant set aside a room for Father Coupal, which the Altar Society furnished and equipped for a bedroom and little Chapel. Father was then available day and night to give Holy Communion to the men going out on the flight line. Father was very popular with the men. There was no band, so Father taught them to sing while marching. Holy Souls organizations entertained the men, their families and visitors with dinners, rooms, and dances and also furnished programs at the base.

After the close of the airbase, Holy Souls bought the Parachute Drying Hanger at a surplus property sale and moved the building to the corner of Ward and Buckler on a lot donated by Mr. Bob Manning, a parishioner renovated it to include a kitchen and other facilities, and used it as a Parish Hall and a cafeteria for the school. It is now the Knights of Columbus Hall.

In 1960 the Guadalupanas, an organization of Mexican- American women, was formed here.

In 1976 the Cursillista was formed by those who had completed a Cursillo - a course in Christian Doctrine.

Another organization which has given dedicated service to the Parish is the St. Vincent de Paul Choir, which has been recognized for its excellence by many in the Diocese. There are two Choirs, both adult and youth. The organizer and director of the present Choir is Tracy D. Cary of this Parish.

There are many other items of information that could be added to this account, but certainly one of them is the list of those from this Parish who have dedicated their lives to religious service. James E. FitzGerald, son of Mrs. E. J. FitzGerald and the late Mr. FitzGerald, was ordained a Priest March 10, 1945 and offered his first Mass in Holy Souls Church March 18th. He is now Msgr. FitzGerald and Pastor of Christ: the King Church in Lubbock, Texas. Lucille Diehl, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. B.J. Diehl, entered the Congregation of Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word in 1946, and is known as Sister Christine Diehl. Daniel E. Roche, son of Mr. and Mrs. M. F. Roche, entered the Congregation of Brothers of the Holy Cross in 1958 and is known as Brother Daniel Roche. Karen McCarthy, daughter of Mrs. Willard Taylor and the late J. J. McCarthy entered the Community of the Daughters of Charity in 1961. She is known as Sister Karen Ann McCarthy. Davlyn Duesterhaus, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. H.C. Duesterhaus, entered the Incarnate Word Congregation in 1965 and is now Sister Davlyn Ann Duesterhaus. The latter four are teachers in Catholic elementary and secondary schools or social workers. Mary Ellen Keough joined the Teaching Sisters of St. Francis and is now known as Sister Mary Ellen Keough.

Jack Jones, son of Lewis Jones and Marguarite Jones, was ordained for the Santa Fe Diocese in 1970.

In the building of St. Vincent de Paul Church, legal advisers were T.L. Wade and W.J. Smith. The Women's Advisory Committee was composed of Jean Chisholm as chairman, and Mmes. A. D. McNamara, R.D. Falkenstein, H. W. Laycock, Roger Farrow and M. F. Roche. Such is a brief sketch of the history of the Catholic Church in Pampa, Texas. The past knew trials and difficulties which history cannot recount. The present gives testimony to the self-sacrifice of the pioneer and with God's assistance, Catholics will strive to carry on the spirit of enthusiasm for the faith which animated their predecessors.