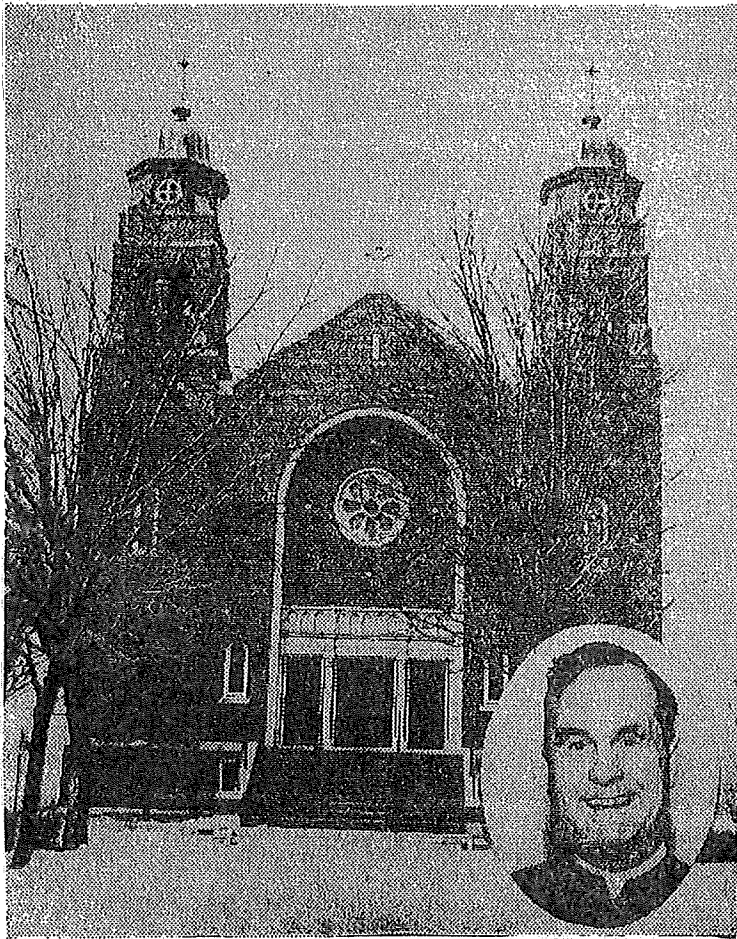


Celebrating 125 Years! (1900 – 2025)

Newspaper article from 1950 – 50 years since the parish started.

Marathon County Churches

Edgar Catholic Church Surmounts Difficulties



. . . Record-Herald Photos.

ROMANESQUE ARCHITECTURE FEATURES CHURCH AT EDGAR—This new and modern edifice of the St. John the Baptist Catholic church at Edgar was formally dedicated November 10, 1932. In addition to a spacious church auditorium, its ample basement provides room for the many groups participating in church activities. The inset is of the present pastor, the Rev. Oskar Cramer.

Edgar, Jan. 11—"There was scarcely any money in the treasury—only \$1.75."

So wrote the Rev. John F. Eilmaurer several months ago in supplying information on early-day conditions in the parish of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Edgar for last year's golden anniversary observance of the founding of the congregation.

It graphically shows the uphill conditions under which the founders of the congregation worked in the early days of the then straggling village of Edgar. It shows the faith that would surmount such troubles before the present day modern church buildings could be achieved.

If it turned out to be a long struggle, the early decision, according to information supplied by the old Wausau Herald, didn't require too much time.

Decide in Few Hours

"On September 2, 1899, 20 families called a special meeting at 3:30 p. m. to discuss building plans. At 7 p. m. this same day a notice was given to receive bids and to let out the contract for the building of the new Catholic church at Edgar. The successful bidder will be required to furnish a bond for the faithful performance of his contract, the committee reserving all rights to reject any and all bids," reads the published account of that meeting.

While written records of events preceding the decision to build are unavailable, leaders of the parish have gathered information showing that people of the vicinity, soon after 1877, started attending services at St. Mary's church at Marathon or at the Holy Family church at Poniatowski. Still later, about 1886, a small mission was established at Wuerzburg for settlers living west of Edgar.

The difficulties of traveling through the woods on the limited trails cut through them speeded the decision of the people in the Edgar vicinity to build their own church.

Completed in 1900

Volunteers donated logs and labor once the decision to build at Edgar was reached and the new church was completed for Easter in 1900. The formal dedication took place later when Bishop Schwebach offered mass and the choir of Holy Family church at Poniatowski sang during the services.

The first priest to attend the needs of the new congregation was the Rev. Constantin Frydrychowicz, pastor of the church at Poniatowski. He conducted monthly services from 1899 to 1901. He was succeeded by the Rev. Andrew Gara, also of the Poniatowski parish.

Later in 1901, the Rev. Joseph Rhode, chaplain of St. Joseph's hospital, Marshfield, made weekly visits to Edgar. He came by train on Saturdays and stayed until Monday.

Succeeding Father Rhode was the Rev. Martin Casper, pastor of St. Joseph's parish, Stratford. He, too, came by train Saturdays and returned on Monday.

Rev. Wojak next Pastor

The next pastor of the church was the Rev. Theophilus Wojak, who for years was pastor of St. Michael's church in Wausau and who is now living in retirement at Minocqua. He was appointed priest at the Sacred Heart church, town of Cassel, in June, 1902, and a year later the Edgar parish became his auxiliary charge. When he was transferred, the Edgar parish had increased from 39 members to 100.

Following the departure of Father Wojak, Father Casper again took charge of the Edgar church and plans were launched for the construction of a rectory for the priest. He remained in charge until in 1906, when Father

Ellmaurer, a recently ordained priest, was assigned as the first resident pastor.

The new priest found only the exterior of the rectory completed upon his arrival and he was obliged to live with parishioners. But, before illness forced his retirement in 1909, the rectory was cleared of its mortgage, the furniture was paid for and a balance existed in the treasury.

Improvement and enlargement of the church property followed during the regime of the succeeding priest, the Rev. Michael Hass. As in the case of the original church, most of the materials and labor were donated. Father Hass is now pastor of St. Paul's Catholic church at Bloomer.

School Opens in 1914

Another forward step took place on October 26, 1914, when the St. John's Catholic school opened with an attendance of 28. The building fund was started during the time Father Hass was pastor and was given early impetus with his contribution of \$100. The school was completed while the Rev. Francis X. Orthen was pastor.

The Rev. Augustine L. Olbert, who came to Edgar in January, 1918, served the congregation for 24 years. During his stay in Edgar, the school was enlarged, the sisters' home was built and the building fund for a new and modern church was launched.

The building fund increased steadily and on April 3, 1932, the last services were held in the old church. The cornerstone of the new church was laid and blessed May 30, 1932, and the church was formally dedicated November 10, 1932.

The new church is a 109 x 56-foot structure in Romanesque architecture. It is built of brick with travertine stone trimming. The interior provides a spacious sanctuary, priests' and boys' sacristies and concealed confessionals. The balcony provides ample space for the choir and organ. The 70x40-foot basement includes a well-equipped kitchen.

Father Olbert remained in Edgar until June, 1942, when he was transferred to St. Charles Catholic church at Cassville.

More Improvements

The Rev. Edwin Knauf succeeded Father Olbert. A young, energetic priest, Father Knauf launched improvements at the rectory, enlarged the playground, instituted the hot lunch program, purchased property east of the church for a parking lot, decorated the interior of the church and made many other additions to properties of the parish. Father Knauf had been an assistant at St. Mary's church in Wausau.

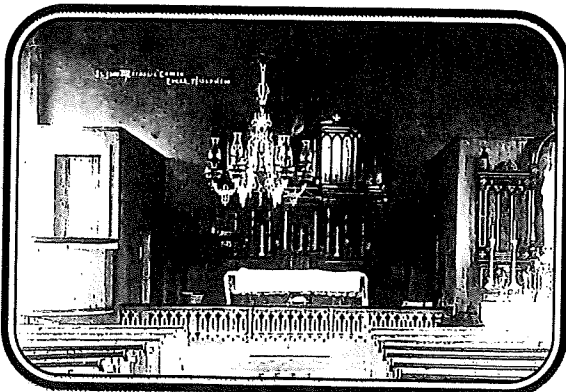
The debt of the congregation, it was announced on December 31, 1944, by Father Knauf, was entirely cleared.

Among the last of the major activities of Father Knauf during his tenure in Edgar was the launching of a building fund for an addition to the parochial school.

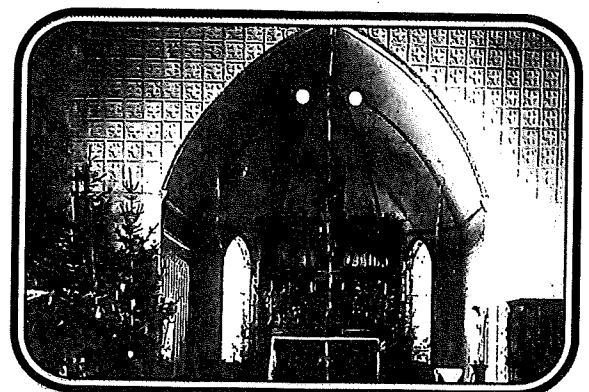
The present pastor, the Rev. Oscar Cramer, succeeded Father Knauf on April 17, 1947, and the constant progress of the congregation is being maintained. A new addition to the sisters' home was made and sidewalks constructed on parish property. Again the congregation was in debt, but only briefly.

Many activities are carried on in the spacious church basement. Among the going organizations affiliated with the church and constantly furthering its interests are the young ladies' sodality, Christian Mothers' society, St. John's court No. 1646, Catholic Order of Foresters, Holy Name society, History of Ave Maria court No. 741, Women's Catholic Order of Foresters, and the St. John's Ushers' club.

Interior views of First Church



1905-06: Two built-in Sacristies and raised pulpit



1910-11: Addition built for Sanctuary & Sacristy. Interior covered with ornamental metal. Side Altar moved to the left; confessional to the right.