

The History of Crucifixion Parish

as published in the Church of the Crucifixion 1858-1963 Dedication book

Revised 7/23/20

From the very beginning, God smiled upon this place where the waters of the Pine Creek raced to meet the mighty "Father of Waters" that flowed nearby. He placed the verdant hills as sentinels to guard this valley; He sent His gifts of sun and rain that this might be a fertile spot; He sent the snows to blanket the land that it might rest and then come to life again in a resurrection of beauty and abundance. And, through all the centuries of passing time, He preserved this crescent-shaped valley as a garden when the seed of faith would be planted and would be nurtured and grow that all future generations might reap its benefits.

And thus it came to pass that in the year 1839, the Indian brave who came to the summit of the hill to observe the beauties of nature and to thank the "Great Manitou" for His gifts, gazed down upon the "Father of Waters" and saw the boat of Bishop Loras wending its way northward from the settlement of Dubuque in search of Catholic families who settled on the shores of the Mississippi at St. Peter (Fort Snelling) in the territory now known as Minnesota. And there followed other canoes, bearing the missionaries of the Lord seeking to minister to His people.

In the year 1840, Father Lucien Galtier traveled northward to assume his task as the first resident pastor of the mission of St. Peter. He visited the settlement of "Prairie de La Crosse" many times in the years between 1850 and 1855 while he was stationed in Prairie du Chien, caring for the spiritual needs of the Catholic families who had settled there. And, no doubt, he crossed the Mississippi during those travels in search of Catholic families newly settled in the valley of the Pine Creek. Father Galtier's tomb may be seen in front of St. Gabriel's Church in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, where he died in 1866 at the end of his missionary trail.



Fr. Lucien Galtier

In the year 1841, Father Augustine Ravoux traveled upriver by canoe from Prairie du Chien to St. Paul where his Bishop had assigned him to work among the Catholic families of that area. Soon to follow were Father Godfert and Father Joseph Cretin, who had also been sent to the northern territory by Bishop Matthew Loras of Dubuque. Father Cretin was destined, in the year 1849, to become the first Bishop of the Diocese of St. Paul.



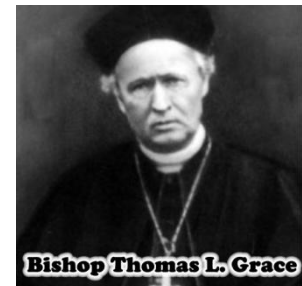
Fr. Joseph Cretin

It was not until the year 1855, that Father William Tappert was assigned as the first resident pastor in the village of La Crosse. There he built St. Marys Church which served all the Catholics of the entire area, including the Irish and German settlers who had chosen to make their homes in the area of Manton (which changed its name to La Crescent in 1865). Father Tappert visited the people of his charge frequently during the years he was stationed in La Crosse. The first Mass recorded as being said in the present confines of Crucifixion Parish was said by him in the year 1856, in a small log schoolhouse situated about five miles out in Pine Creek Valley, very near the location of the Pine Creek Catholic Cemetery.

Also in the year 1856, Father Michael Prendergast was appointed the first resident pastor in the village of Winona, and from that place began visiting the La Crescent area Catholics, at the direction of the Most Reverend Joseph Cretin, Bishop of the St. Paul Diocese. Through the efforts of Father Prendergast, the first church, a twenty by forty foot frame building, was built in 1858 near the site of the present depot. Mass was celebrated in this small church whenever it was possible for a priest to make the trip to La Crescent from Winona, La Crosse, the Convent School near Hokah, or even from as far away as the Catholic settlement of Prairie du Chien. On Sundays when no priest was able to come to La Crescent, it was necessary for the faithful to make the long journey to either La Crosse or the Hokah Convent Chapel in order to attend Mass. This was the way of life for the Catholic families of this area for twenty years.

Then, in the year 1878, Bishop Thomas L. Grace of the Diocese of St. Paul, appointed Father Peter J. Pernin as the first resident pastor of Crucifixion Parish, also serving the missions of Hokah, and his first work was at Marinette and Peshtigo, Wisconsin. In 1871, he escaped from the disastrous fire at this place, losing all his personal property when the entire town burned down. He came to the St. Paul Diocese from Grand Rapids, Wisconsin, in 1878 and was then appointed to the La Crescent pastorate.

Soon after his arrival, Father Pernin had the small frame church moved from its original site to a location in the heart of the village where there would be no danger of springtime flooding. This new site, across the alley north of the present Crucifixion School, made the church more easily accessible to the villagers. He remodeled the building, putting on a curved roof more suitable for a church, and attached a wing onto the building to serve as the rectory.



Bishop Thomas L. Grace

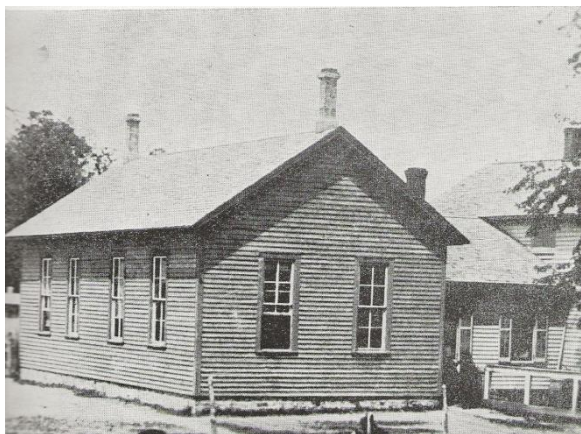


Father Peter Pernin
Pastor 1878-1886

Father Pernin was the only pastor who left any records through which the early history of the parish may be traced. These records he kept in the same book in which were recorded the baptisms, parish finances, and whatever else needed to be written down. Among the more interesting entries made by Father Pernin is the fact that, in 1879, he purchased 16 gallons of altar wine for which he was required to pay \$14.75. Apparently, Father thought the price was too steep for this wine as later entries show that he decided to make the altar wine himself, and each year thereafter, he bought a supply of grapes from Harris for that purpose. Father Pernin records that, in 1882, it was necessary to establish an annual parish collection to purchase firewood for the stove used in heating the church. The amount of this collection was set at fifty cents per family. Also in the year 1882, Father Pernin records that three lots which were owned by the parish, were sold to Mr. O. Thompson for \$75.00 and various repairs and improvements to the church were made.

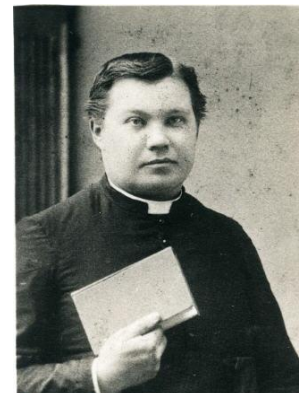
In 1882, Crucifixion Church boasted a bell for the first time, a 304 lb. unit acquired through the efforts of Father Pernin. This bell was blessed by Father Pernin, under the authorization of Bishop Ireland of the St. Paul Diocese, and the name given to it was "Maria Catherina". It is interesting to note that the sermon for this occasion was delivered by the Very Rev. James Schwebach, who later became Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse.

Before coming to La Crescent, Father Pernin's eyes were injured in the Peshtigo Fire in Wisconsin in 1871 and in time became one of the first priests assigned to Saint Marys Hospital in Rochester. At the time of the great fire, he carried out the Tabernacle in the church, went to the river, trying to save the Blessed Sacrament (and himself). Somehow, during the time in the river, the current managed to get the Tabernacle away from Father Pernin. After the fire, when it was found "down river", not a single consecrated host had spilled out of the ciborium within the Tabernacle.



Original Catholic School in Village of La Crescent
Built in 1886 - Destroyed by Fire in 1906

Father Pernin was succeeded, in the year 1886, by Father John Schwartz. During the pastorate of Father Schwartz, the property of J. C. Day, prominent lumberman and riverboat captain, was purchased to serve as the rectory. The



Father John Schwartz
Pastor 1886-1893

first school and convent was erected directly across the street from this new rectory. Father Schwartz did much work in connection with the Pine Creek Catholic Cemetery and was responsible for the founding of the League of the Sacred Heart, an organization dedicated to the upkeep of that cemetery.

It was during this time that the Diocese of St. Paul was named an Archdiocese, and the Diocese of Winona was established. Thus, in 1889, Crucifixion Parish became a part of this newly established Winona Diocese.

Father Francis Reichl became the third pastor of Crucifixion Parish in the year 1893. The parish, at this time, numbered some thirty families and a need was seen for a new, more adequate place of worship. The second Crucifixion Church was erected through the efforts of Father Reichl on the same spot upon which our present new church now stands. History records that the people of that day were very generous in the furnishing of their new Church. The main altar and a side altar were donated by the D. J. Cameron family, the stations of the



Father Francis Reichl
Pastor 1893-1897

cross by Allen J. Cameron, the baptismal font by Mrs. Rutiger, the holy water font by Mrs. Charles Dunn, the organ by Henry Eden, the candelabras by Matt Nagel, the Blessed Mother altar by the St. Cecilia Sodality and the stained glass windows by Martin Cody, Patrick Burns, Daniel Webster, Mrs. Theodore Eden, William and Katherine McCaffrey, Josephine Ormsby, Jenny Welch, Anton and Amelia Albrecht, Lambert Nintelmann, Herman and Christine Morman, Elizabeth Allen, Matilda Albrecht, and Mr. and Mrs. Casper Nintemann. The votive stand was the gift of John Humfeld, and all of the beautiful altar laces were the handiwork of Mrs. John Burns.



The Second Church of the Crucifixion
Built in 1894 - Dismantled in 1962
Rectory Purchased circa 1886 (on left)

The next pastor to serve our parish was Father Joseph Sand, who came, in the year 1897, from Africa where he had been a missionary. Father Sand's pastorate was devoted to the amortization of the parish indebtedness.



Father Joseph Sand
Pastor 1897-1901



Father John Dolle
Pastor 1901-1908

Father John Dolle succeeded Father Sand in 1901. During his years as pastor, the parish debt was paid in full and the church was completely redecorated. In 1908, Father John Dolle left our parish for a new assignment.

Father Henry Dolle succeeded his older brother as pastor of Crucifixion Parish. While he served as pastor, modern heating and plumbing systems and electric lights were installed in the church and rectory. The electrical system was a gift of Theodore Eden. It was during Father Dolle's pastorate, also, that the first sidewalks in the village were installed in front of the church. Father Dolle was known and loved by his parishioners for the frequent visits he made to their homes and for the manner in which he kept in touch with their families.



Father Henry Dolle
Pastor 1908-1921

Father Dolle retired to La Crescent during the 1960s.

The next pastor was Father Joseph C. Pudenz, who came to La Crescent in 1921. His eight years as pastor in La Crescent were devoted to the growth and development of the parish.



Father Joseph Pudenz
Pastor 1921-1929



Father Donald Cunningham
Pastor 1930-1936

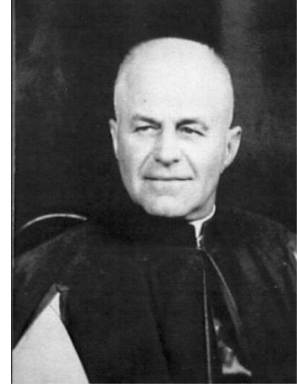


The Present Rectory
Build in 1933

In 1929, Father Donald Cunningham was appointed pastor of Crucifixion Parish. Through his efforts, the present rectory was built in 1933, replacing the original home

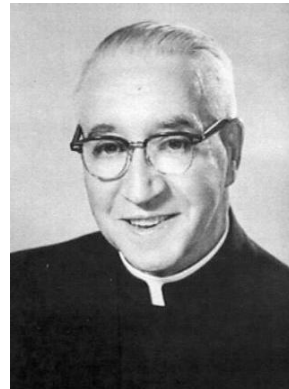
that had served our pastors for almost fifty years. Father Cunningham also took an active interest in the civic development of our village and was instrumental in getting the water and sewage systems installed.

Father Joseph Davy was assigned by the Bishop in 1936 as pastor at La Crescent. Under his leadership, the basement portion of the new Holy Cross Church in Dakota was built in 1937. Father Davy was active in the promotion of parish activities through which the debt on the new rectory was paid. In 1942, Father Davy left Crucifixion Parish to become a Chaplain and became a Lt. Colonel in the Air Force.

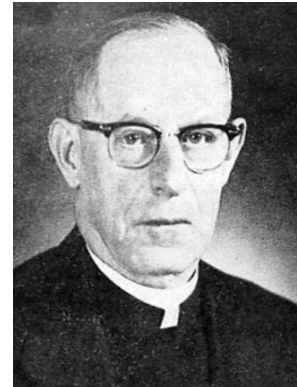


Monsignor Joseph Davy
Pastor 1936-1942

In 1942, Father Patrick Kearney became our spiritual leader. He served only a short period of one year at Crucifixion Parish and was succeeded in 1943 by Father Paul Britz.

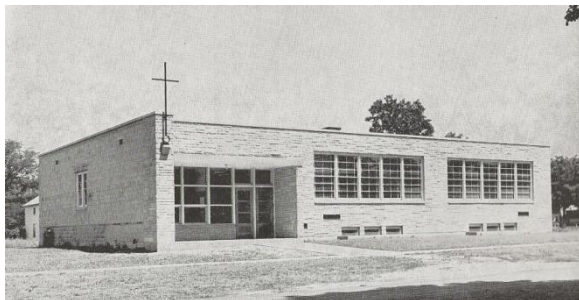


Father Patrick Kerney
Pastor 1942-1943



Father Paul Britz
Pastor 1943-1946

Father Britz soon recognized the need for a parochial school in La Crescent and, through his efforts, the people of our parish pledged approximately \$2000 in war bonds for this purpose. Father Britz also provided the leadership for the purchase of the new Catholic Cemetery on South Ridge Road. And, in 1944, he organized the men of the parish into the Crucifixion Holy Name Society.



First Portion of the Current Crucifixion School
Build in 1947-1949

Father Richard H. Speltz came to serve as the pastor of Crucifixion Parish, La Crescent, in April, 1946, directly from service as a Chaplain in the United States Army. One of his first

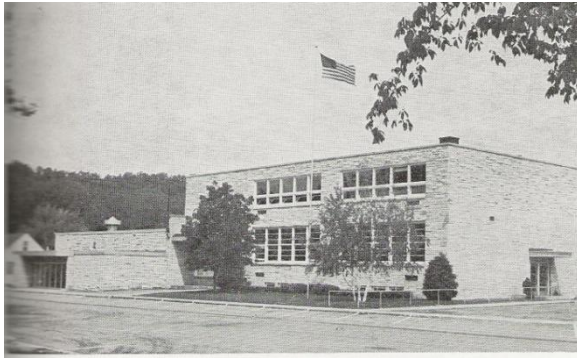


Monsignor Richard Speltz
Pastor 1946-1965
Retired in La Crescent 1984-1999

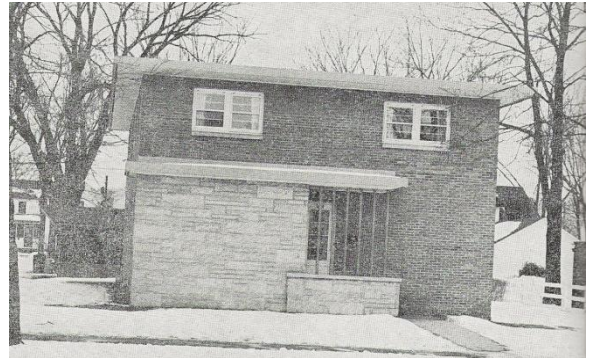
undertakings was the building of the new Holy Cross Church at Dakota. Dakota and LaMoille were mission parishes served

from La Crescent at that time. It is during the pastorate of Father Speltz that our village had seen its greatest growth and development, and our parish, keeping pace, had grown to new heights. The work begun by Father Britz was carried to its completion by Father Speltz in the building of a one-story four room parochial school building in 1949.

Since then, under his able leadership, a second story has been added to the school in 1955, and a large modern auditorium was built in 1958. In 1956, a new modern convent for our Sisters was constructed, and in 1963, we had come to the realization of a dream, the day of the dedication of our beautiful new parish church.



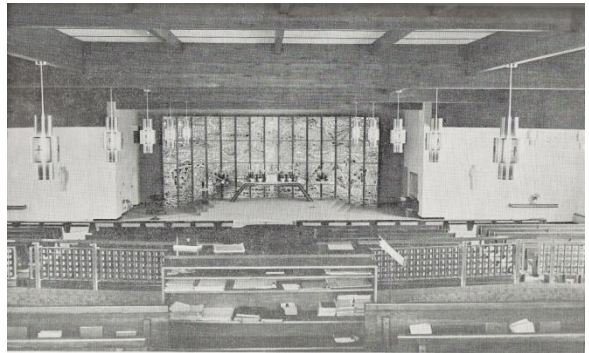
Crucifixion School
Second Story Added in 1955
Auditorium Added in 1958



Crucifixion Convent
Built in 1956

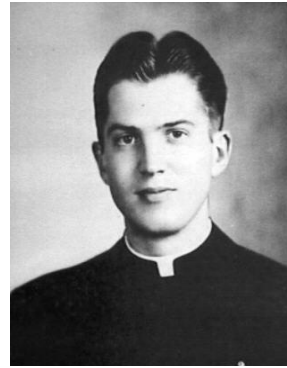


Church of the Crucifixion Dedicated May 12, 1963

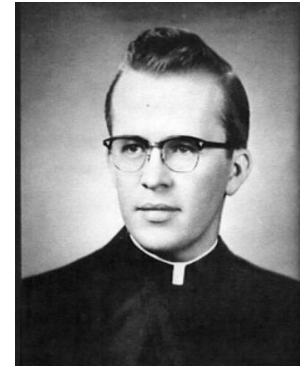


Not only did Father Speltz provide the leadership needed for all these projects, but he was the first man "on the job" and the last to leave during the days of construction. Side by side with his parishioners, he worked to achieve the finished buildings. Particularly during the construction of the first section of the school was this true, and each succeeding project has received its share of his labor.

Father Speltz was ably assisted in his work by three assistants: Father Eugene Gores who was here from 1947 to 1950, Father Donald Loosbrock, who served in 1957 and 1958, and Father William Kuisle from 1959 to 1965 when he became pastor.



Father Eugene Gores
Assistant Pastor 1947-1950

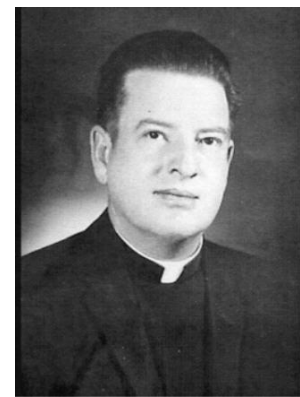


Father Donald Loosbrock
Assistant Pastor 1957-1958



The Fitzgerald Center
Build in 1965

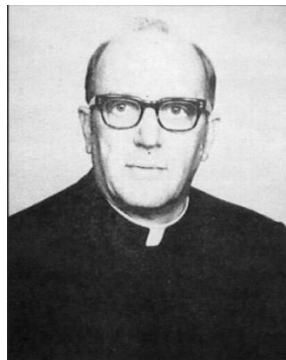
Father Speltz's final construction project was the Fitzgerald Religious Education Center across from the La Crescent High School in 1965. Construction was finished under the supervision of Father Kuisle.



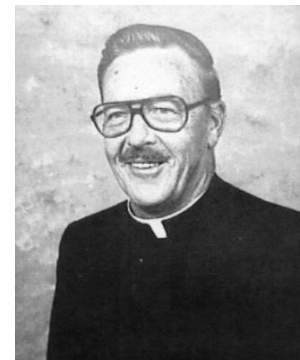
Father William Kuisle
Assistant Pastor 1959-1965
Pastor 1965-1970



Father Donald Winkels
Pastor 1970-1976

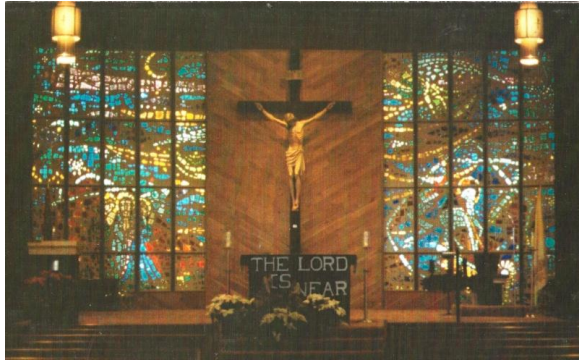


Father Francis Klein
Pastor 1970-1971



Father Louis Cook
Pastor 1976-1982

Father Donald Winkels and Father Francis Klein were assigned to Crucifixion Parish in 1970. Father Klein only served one year in La Crescent, but Father Winkels remained pastor until 1976 when he was replaced by Father Louis Cook. The sanctuary was remodeled in 1979.



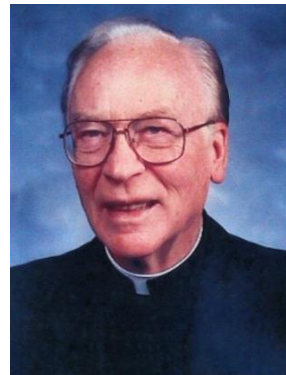
Church of the Crucifixion Sanctuary
Remodeled in 1979



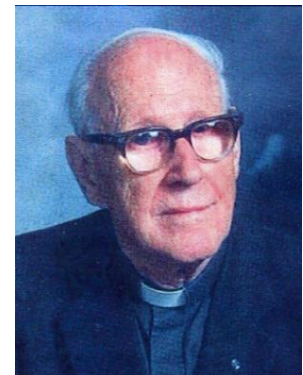
Church of the Crucifixion Sanctuary
Repaired After the Roof Collapsed in 2001



Crucifixion School
After the Addition on the Front



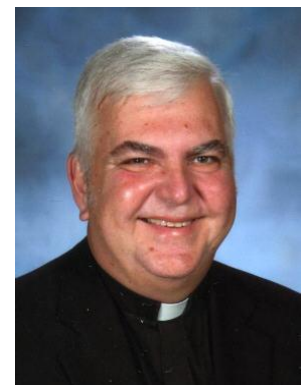
Monsignor Donald Grubisch
Pastor 1982-2008



Father John Vincent
Retired in La Crescent 1983-2000

Monsignor Donald Grubisch became the pastor of Crucifixion parish in 1982. He served the longest tenure of any priest in La Crescent, 26 years, retiring in 2008. Both Monsignor Speltz and Father John Vincent retired in La Crescent, and assisted Monsignor Grubisch for several years. Under his guidance, a large addition was added to the school. He also helped the parish recover from the tragic collapse of the church roof in 2001.

Father Gregory Havel was assigned to Crucifixion in 2008. Father Havel moved the parish office from the rectory to the former convent in 2008. In 2015 the entrance of the church was remodeled to make it more welcoming and more accessible for the handicapped. In 2015, Holy Cross Church in Dakota became an oratory and the parish merged with Crucifixion Church.



Father Gregory Havel
Pastor 2009-2019

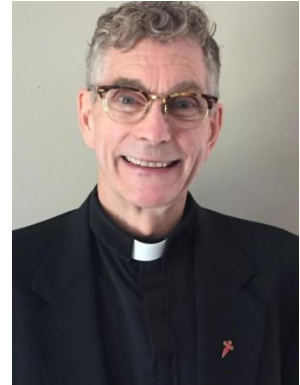


**Church of the Crucifixion
Remodeled Gathering Space at Entrance**



**Holy Cross Church, Dakota
Oratory in 2015**

In 2019, Father John L. Evans, II was assigned pastor of Crucifixion Church and St. Patrick's Church in Brownsville, after serving twelve years as a priest-chaplain at Mayo Clinic, Rochester.



**Father John L. Evans, II
Pastor 2019-present**