



# PARISH PROFILE

## Alton parish works with other parishes in Pilgrim Cluster

By **KATIE LEFEBVRE**  
Globe staff reporter

ALTON – The twin towers of St. Mary Church are visible high on the hill on the western edge of Alton.

Each tower has a clock on all four sides and a bell inside that rings on the quarter hour 24/7. Father Paul Eisele, pastor at St. Mary's, said this is a unique part of the church.

He has been at St. Mary's for almost three years. He enjoys the people of the parish and their love of the church. St. Mary's has about 230 active families.

### Part of cluster

St. Mary's began clustering with St. Joseph's in Granville and St. Anthony's in Hospers in 1996 and took on the name of the Pilgrim Cluster.

According to Father Eisele, pastor at two of the parishes, the cluster works well together.

"We have a really good feel for how parishes work together," said the priest. "They have been working together for a while. They support and are loyal to Spalding Catholic. They are also loyal to their individual parishes."

He said he does some teaching at the school. Presently there are school buildings in all three towns.

"It is a small but very vibrant school," said Father Eisele. "We have graduates from Spalding Catholic literally all over the world."

The Knights of Columbus Council for the cluster is based in Granville and has members from all three parishes.

The RCIA program is also a cluster program and alternates meeting at all three parishes throughout the year. RCIA is facilitated by Sister Patrice Klein, who has been pastoral minister for the cluster for nine years.

She also runs the religious education program for the cluster and visits the sick and shut-ins of the parishes. She helps with programs that "help further the life of the cluster."

The cluster religious education program meets at Alton in the Spalding Center on Sunday mornings. The kindergarten through 11th grade program varies from 70 to 90 students depending on the year, said Sister Patrice.

Some of the traditions for the program are having a living rosary the first Sunday in October; on St. Nicholas Day a parent dresses up and gives the children treats; and events

are held for Advent, Epiphany and Lent. The sacramental programs are combined with Spalding Catholic School.

Some students, who have been confirmed, help with the program and Sister Patrice said this is a big help to her. Parents also volunteer as catechists for the program.

Even though the cluster has been established for a while, each parish has its own pastoral council and finance committee.

St. Mary's has a Rosary Society as well as a Family Guild that puts on an auction, chicken supper and pork chop supper (see story below about this organization).

"We are in such a complex society today that affording as many opportunities to grow in our spiritual life as we can is critical," said the pastor.

### History

In the spring of 1870, a group of families at St. Donatus wanted to find a new home, and headed west. Sioux County, the area targeted by these pioneers, was opened in 1862.

The original church, known as St. Donatus, was built in 1881. Each parishioner was asked to contribute \$80. Matt Probst donated 8 acres of land. The land was dedicated in September 1881 by Father Herman Meis of Le Mars.

With the railroad, the settlement of East Orange grew and in August of 1883, Father Ulrich Frey, under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, was sent to Alton and a frame church was built. An addition was constructed in 1886 with the front part of the church becoming the hall.

Construction of the present brick church began with the first brick laid April 6, 1908. Bishop Garrigan laid the cornerstone on May 3. The cost to build the church was \$41,700.

A renovation was completed at the church in 2006 when Father John Vakulskas was pastor. Father Eisele mentioned that seating configuration was changed in the sanctuary, the church was repainted and windows were repaired.

The centennial of the church was celebrated in 2008, Father Eisele's first summer in Alton.

The high school that was built in Alton was closed in 1962 and Spalding High School in Granville was opened. A new grade school in Alton was opened in 1964. Presently, the towns of Alton, Granville and Hospers support a pre-school through 12th grade Catholic school system.



St. Mary Church, Alton

There have been nine men from the parish go to the priesthood and 41 women from the parish have become women religious.

Many pastors have served St. Mary Parish including Father Ulrich Frey, Father Gerhard Luehrman, Father F. J. Brune, Father John Hausman, Msgr. M. A. Schmel, Father Leo Schumacher, Father Joseph M. Neppel, Father Leo Kelm, Father Thomas Lawless, Father James A. Fandel, Msgr. Zeno Reising, Father Raymond Wieling, Father Norbert Boes, Father Edmund Tiedeman, Father Mervin Hood, Father Michael Larkin, Father Bruce LeFebvre, Father David Hogan, Father Thomas Hart, Msgr. Nicholas Ruba, Father Ronald Reicks, Father James J. Tigges and Father John Vakulskas.

### PARISH INFORMATION

**Pastor:**  
Father Paul Eisele

**Cluster Pastoral Minister:**  
Sister Patrice Klein

**Mass times:**  
October-March – Sunday at 8:30 a.m.; April-September – Saturday at 5 p.m.; Weekdays – Two days in Alton and two days in Hospers (see bulletin)

**Confession:**  
Offered half an hour before weekend Masses and by appointment.

## St. Mary's Family Guild brings parishioners together

By **KATIE LEFEBVRE**  
Globe staff reporter

ALTON – The parishioners of St. Mary's in Alton join together to plan and execute three big events each year.

The Family Guild is comprised of everyone in the parish. There are six circles that make up the guild, noted Nancy Schwebach, president of St. Mary's Family Guild.

Three of the circles plan the Pork Chop Supper the first Sunday in May and three plan the Chicken Supper the last Sunday in September.

All of the circles come together to put on the Auction that is held the last Sunday in June. Planning for the auction, which took place recently, began in February.

Schwebach said that months of work go into planning each of the events. They



Attendees browse items at the Alton St. Mary's auction in June. (Photo by *The Sioux County Capital-Democrat*)

organize who is in charge of the food, ticket sales, etc.

Many attend the suppers and auction. Schwebach said that since they are held at

the same time each year, people know they are happening. They do a lot of advertising and spread awareness via word of mouth.

The proceeds of the events go back to the church with a little bit going into the guild fund.

"One year we had a pretty big year so we had to do a couple of fundraisers," said Schwebach. "We painted the inside of the rectory and put in new carpeting."

When they needed a new dishwasher for the kitchen that they share with the school, they did a fundraiser for that as well.

"It brings socialization to the parish," said Schwebach. "A lot of people have kids in sports. They go to church and go home, but this puts different groups together, people you don't normally talk to or see that often. It helps people come together."

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