



# PARISH PROFILE

## Blessed Sacrament keeps heritage of the past while looking to the future



Blessed Sacrament Church, Sioux City

By MICHELLE DELANEY  
Globe staff reporter

Blessed Sacrament Church in Sioux City has undergone many changes in the past 20 years. Father Merlin Schrad, pastor, noted that the congregation's make up is much different now than it was six years ago.

"In the last year or two, our parish has had younger families moving in and more children being born. We also have many different nationalities in our parish," said Father Schrad.

Blessed Sacrament also caters to the homebound and elderly. Every Sunday morning people can hear Blessed Sacrament's 9 a.m. Mass broadcast on the radio at KSCJ 1360 AM. The radio station reaches an approximate 100-mile radius outside of Sioux City. While some people may have been listening to these Masses for years, they might not know much else about the church.

### History

Ninety years ago, the announcement to build a new parish on the north side of Sioux City was made by the second Bishop of Sioux City, Bishop Heelan. While the new church was in the planning process, Mass was held in the North Junior High School auditorium.

Two years later, in 1924, the construction of Blessed Sacrament School was completed. Msgr. Newman Flanagan spearheaded the plans for a new church, convent and rectory during his years at the parish. Three times the project was halted, once for The Great Depression, once for World War II and once again for fund-raising efforts associated with the construction of Heelan High School.

Eventually in 1948, plans for the church were completed and on Sept. 4, 1955, the first Mass was celebrated. Blessed Sacrament kept on growing; in 1960, six classrooms, offices, and an auditorium was added to the existing grade school building.

After the Dominican Sisters left Blessed Sacrament in 1987, the convent was remodeled and transformed into Angel House, a preschool and daycare center.

### Recent renovations

In December of 1999, an electrical short in the rectory started a fire. While no one was injured in the fire, there was a considerable amount of damage to the rectory. During the restoration process, it was decided to move the rectory across the street and convert the space into a parish center.

Blessed Sacrament's tower and spire has become a cornerstone of the parish and a recognizable landmark in Sioux City. It came to the church's attention that it was in dire need of repair and was becoming a safety hazard. In 2004 the rehabilitation plan was presented to the parish and a campaign to raise funds began.

"We did the campaign because some of our stones were starting to fall out and it got to be a safety issue," said Father Schrad. "That has been our biggest project so far."

The parish banded together and raised \$3.3 million in just over four months. Soon after the tower was reconstructed with the original limestone from the spire. During the spire's face lift, the importance of keeping the church's historic look was stressed.

"Our theme was 'pride in our past, commitment to our future,'" said Father Schrad. "We have a pride in the past of those people 50-plus years ago who built this church, and this generation has made a commitment to keep it going."

In addition to the tower, they made renovations to other areas of the church also. A new roof was put on the complex, all new lighting was put in the church and the heating and air-conditioning system was redone.

### Parish Today

Blessed Sacrament has always had a great commitment to Catholic schools. The parish has a day care center, Angel House; one located on the parish grounds and the other at Villa Maria on West Street. Furthermore, a pre-school is offered with four initiative classes and Holy Cross Grade School is linked with the church.

"One thing I'm proud of and am really thankful for is our high school students who have continued to share their time and talent with our parish. We have 41 high school students who serve Mass on weekends," said Father Schrad. "I see it as them wanting to live out their commitment to their faith but also helping out in the parish."

Father Schrad also noted that there are lots of members of the parish who are active in numerous other Catholic programs outside of Blessed Sacrament. Trinity Heights, KFHC, Mary's Choice, 40 Days for Life, and Bishop Heelan Catholic Schools are just a few of the organizations.

"I'm proud of our parishioners for being involved in the parish itself, various different activities and various causes but also having an openness to the wider church," said Father Schrad.

In addition to having parishioners active in outside works, Blessed Sacrament has an active peace and justice committee, sewing group, Knights of Columbus, celebration choir, children's liturgy and other groups.

The most recent program for the parish began about six months ago called Praying Them Back. It allows people to put a first name of someone they believe needs extra help coming back to the church. During Mass on Sunday the parish prays for the individual named in the hopes of bringing them back to.

Father Schrad spoke of two to three people he knows of who have come back after the parish's efforts.

## PARISH INFORMATION

**Pastor:**  
Fr. Merlin J. Schrad

**Senior Pastor**  
Rev. Msgr. Roger Augustine, V.G.

**Deacons:**  
Fred Karpuk  
John Heffernan  
Dick Billings

**Youth minister:**  
Patricia Walsh

**Mass times:**  
Weekdays - 6:45 a.m.  
Saturday - 6:45 a.m. & 4:30 p.m.  
Sunday - 7:30, 9:00 & 10:30 a.m.

9 a.m. Radio Mass on  
KSCJ 1360 AM

## Peace and Justice Committee prepares for Lent

By MICHELLE DELANEY  
Globe staff reporter

Blessed Sacrament Church has many different boards and groups affiliated with the church. One group that will be especially busy as the Lenten season starts is the Peace and Justice Committee.

The goal of the Peace and Justice Committee is to link the parish with the larger local, national and global communities. The committee strives to apply Catholic social teachings in concrete programs of service and education.

Bernadette Rixner, chairperson for the committee, spoke on how 12 years ago the bishops put out a statement called "Communities of Salt and Light."

"The gist of it was to point out that being a part of a Catholic parish means you should be concerned about social justice. It's not just the Peace and Justice Committee's responsibility, it's not one person's responsibility, it's the responsibility of all the parishioners and the parish," said Rixner. "I think that message is getting across and is very alive in our parish."

### Lent activities

Rixner and the rest of the Peace and Justice Committee are very busy preparing for all of the Lenten activities the Peace and Justice Committee has planned.

Three years ago they started making prayer cards for the parish. These cards can be picked up by the Lenten material in the church. Each card has a cause written on them in which the recipient will pray for during Lent.

"It may be to pray for the people and the government of South Korea, it may be for people who are struggling with addiction, it may be for anyone who is going to eat at any of the soup kitchens or it may be for the

strength to forgive someone," said Rixner.

Rixner spoke of the positive responses of this program. She knows of people who have kept their cards and continued to pray for the cause throughout the entire year.

Another program the Peace and Justice Committee heads is collecting alms for needy causes. They place coffee cans wrapped in burlap at the entrances of the church where people can donate their loose change. A petition is also made during Mass for the cause.

The groups picked for this year are:

◆ Welcome Home Project by the Community Action Agency of Siouxland, this program offers shelter for homeless families

◆ St. Augustine Indian Mission, which benefits the Native American people of the Winnebago and Omaha tribes

◆ Shesler Hall, which provides a residence for women with special needs who would rather be homeless

◆ Friendship House, partnered with the Siouxland Mental Health Center, this place allows people with chronic mental illness to socialize and play games

◆ Mary Treglia Community House, which helps the immigrant population through education, services, advocacy and celebration of diversity

◆ Birthright International, which helps any woman who is struggling with an unplanned pregnancy

The Peace and Justice Committee is committed to having at least one peace activity each year. This year they are preparing peace packets. The packet includes a paper cross and eight hearts. Each heart has a suggestion on what people can do for peace. Once the heart's suggestion is completed, it can then be glued to the cross.



Chris, Caleb and Kelli Engel with the Peace and Justice Committee make donations to the food pantry. (Submitted photo)

One of the big events they do for Lent is hosting a Lenten soup supper. This year, the event will take place on March 26, at 6 p.m. in the parish center. The supper will include prayer, a simple vegetable soup and a presenter.

"We always try to have something from the country that is being spoken about that night," said Rixner.

This year Deacon Joe Twidwell, of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, will speak on his trips to Haiti before and after the devastating earthquake. Since he is speaking on Haiti, black beans and rice will be served, a common dish over there. A free will offering will be taken for Deacon Twidwell's cause.

Another event that the committee hosts is a scriptural rosary reading. The special rosary reading is called Unity and Diversity and it came from the United States Consulate of Catholic Bishops a couple years ago.

Blessed Sacrament will also be hosting several Lenten speakers. The non-profit agencies will be coming to the parish to inform people about what their organization does and how the parish can help.

The scheduled speakers are:

- ◆ Jane Griesel from the Council on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence
- ◆ Brian Mathers from the Center for Siouxland
- ◆ Sisters Grace Ann Witte and Gwen Hennessey from the Clare Guest House
- ◆ Chris Kuchta from the Siouxland Aging Services

### Other events

While the Peace and Justice Committee is certainly busy throughout the Lenten season, they also do numerous other events throughout the year.

They have a bi-monthly fair trade coffee and tea event. This is where everyone is welcome to come and have coffee and rolls after the Sunday Masses. The coffee and tea they serve is also coffee and tea they sell. Fair trade coffee and tea is coffee that gives the workers a just price for their coffee.

"It gives the people of the parish a chance to have fellowship and they get the chance to taste and buy some really good coffee," said Rixner. "The people who make the coffee are paid upfront and they are paid a fair price. Catholic Relief Services also gets some money so they can use it for economic development."

Along with the coffee events, they also host Work of Human Hands craft sales. This sale is compiled of fair trade craft items from around the world. They also say the rosary throughout the year at 5 p.m. on Wednesdays, and send out cards to the elderly, homebound and lonely during the holidays.

God's blessings on our  
Bishop, Priests & Religious!

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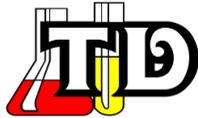
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