

The History of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

One hundred years of parish life was celebrated April 28, 1983 by pastor Fr. William Wheeler and sixty three families which added up to nearly 300 people.

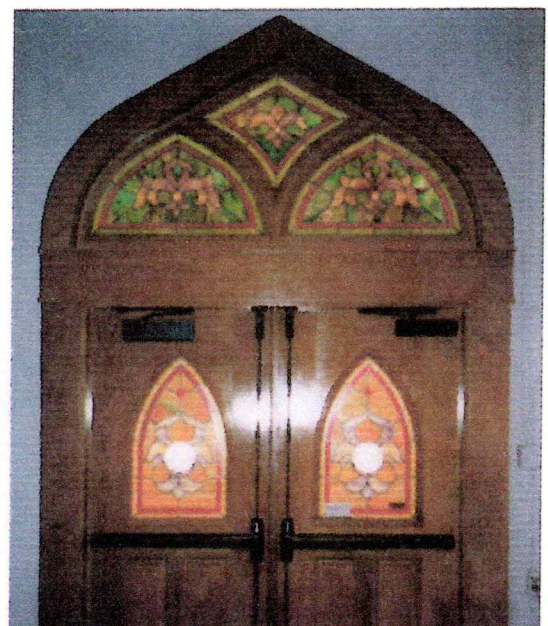
It was the pastor from Winfield, KS, Fr. George Kelly, who formed a committee to build the first Danville Catholic church in 1883. Almost four years later, the frame building was dedicated under the name of "St. Rose of Lima." During the next several years, a series of pastors from Winfield, Wellington and other places came and went, until the arrival of Father Bitters, the first resident pastor of Danville, who built a combination school and convent building called "St. Rose Academy." A small frame rectory was built at the same time. The Sisters of St. Joseph from Abilene staffed the school. Hard times came, and the school closed briefly in 1895, only to be reopened with the Sisters of St. Joseph returning to teach.

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

Danville, KS

of the
St. Joan of Arc Parish
Community

Harper County



Entrance to Immaculate Conception church doors re-stored in 1999, using the original stained glass windows.



Sanctuary of the church with its main altar featuring the statues of St. Joachim and Anne and the Last Supper.

Other pastors who served at this period of time were Fathers O'Hara, Withoff, Martin, Kearful, Carrivault, Sullivan and Dykman.

A new era began in 1902 with the appointment of Father P.J. Maloney, who began plans to build a new and larger church for the growing Catholic community in Danville. The original frame church was moved several feet east and the foundations for the new building were begun at the original church site. The cornerstone was laid June 3, 1904. After nearly four years of construction, the new gothic church was ready for dedication. When Bishop John J. Hennessy came and blessed the new church on November 21, 1907, it was renamed "Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception." Therefore, the beautiful new edifice became known as the Immaculate Conception Church to the Danville parishioners for generations to come. Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Moritz were the first couple to be married in the new church, on July 25, 1908. In the meantime,

the old frame church was used as a temporary hall and additional school space for some years until it was razed. The lumber from the old building was then re-used for the construction of a barn at a parishioner's farm.

Fr. Daniel Kenneally arrived in 1913 as the new pastor, and was to stay for more than forty years. It was on that year that a sudden fire destroyed the original frame rectory that had been in use since the early years of the parish. Fr. Kenneally built a commodious, two story rectory later that year, and in 1917 built a new two story house to be used as a convent for the Sisters of St. Joseph who were teaching in the school. Both buildings were frame structures. Previous to this, the Sisters lived in the school built in 1887. They were then able to convert the former convent quarters in the old frame academy building into more classroom space.

Parish records show that at least three generations of people were baptized, married, given first Holy Communion, prepared for Confirmation and laid to rest by the same priest, Fr. Kenneally, who is today fondly remembered by several older parishioners.

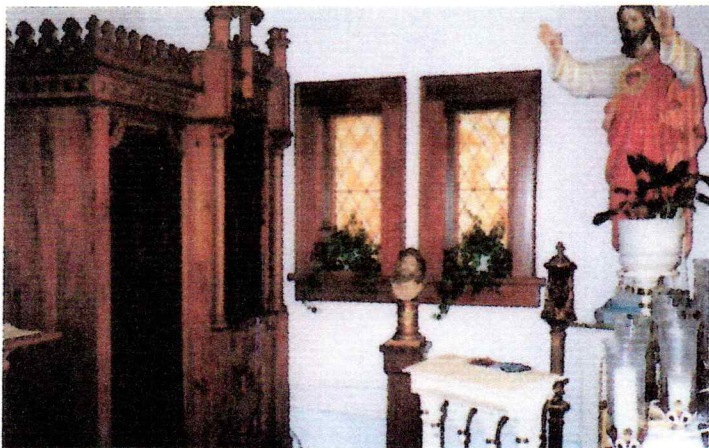
In the summer of 1940, Fr. Kenneally and his parishioners built a new parish hall close to Danville's downtown area. Today it is used as the Knights of Columbus Hall. Fr. Kenneally retired in 1953 and was succeeded by Father Vincent Ryan, who stayed for only one year.

When Father Joseph Bartos arrived in 1955, he made some modifications to the sanctuary and altar area in the church and installed a loud-speaking system. He also was instrumental in the building of the new school building, which was dedicated February 22, 1956 and replaced the old and original St. Rose Academy building. It was a very much needed improvement, consisting of a gym/hall, storage, a large kitchen, a library

and three roomy classrooms. The hall also features a very well equipped stage, the scene of many dramatic productions to this very day.

May 24, 1967 was a sad day for the parish. The Sisters of St. Joseph, who on that very day began to wear the new modified habit, announced that they would not be returning to Danville to teach the following school term, due to a shortage of teaching Sisters, so the parishioners decided to close the school. The St. Joseph Sisters taught in Danville for 80 years. During those years, they taught Saturday morning religion classes and summer vacation schools at both St. Patrick parish in Harper and Sacred Heart parish in Anthony. The parishioners can only be grateful to the Sisters for their many years of dedication in bringing Christ to our young people. In the meantime, both the rectory, built on 1913, and the convent, built in 1917, were razed to make way for a new modern and up-to-date rectory that would serve the parish for the next several years. Also, the former grade school building continues to be used for religious education classes, social events, meetings, parish activities, quilting projects and family gatherings. The parishioners greatly appreciate their good fortune in having this facility.

Other pastors who served during those years were Fathers Herbert Mohr, Joseph Tockert, Paul Meier, Raymond Whelan, James Wilson, (Msgr.)



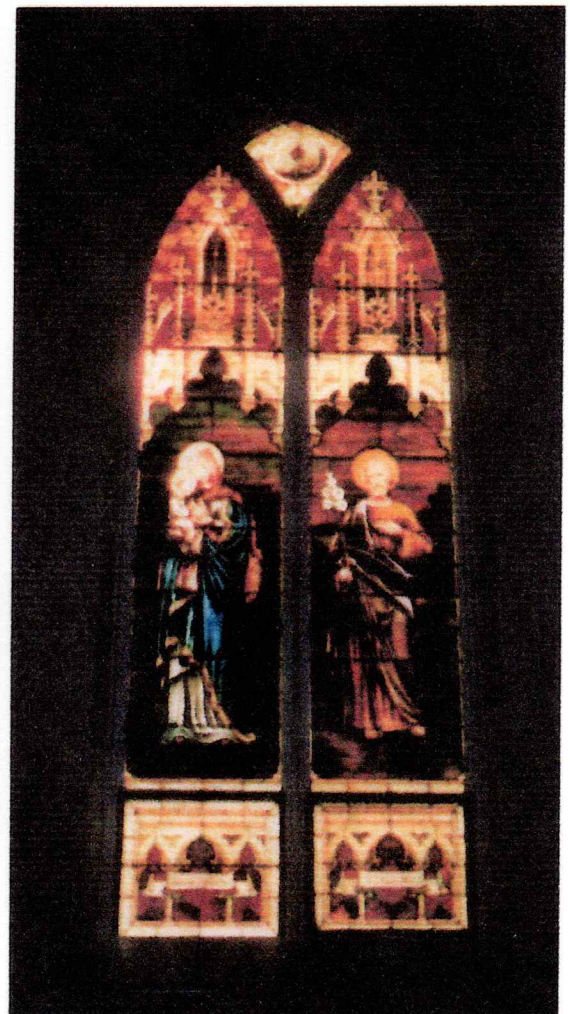
Sacred Heart shrine with its confessional, serving as a reconciliation area.

James Wilkinson

Thomas Glynn, William Wheeler, Charles Middleton, and Robert Hartmann. Both Fr. Meier and Msgr. Glynn died while serving as pastors here.

In the 1990's, there was an awareness of the shortage of priests and for the first time since the early days, Danville had to share a pastor with two other neighboring parishes - St. Patrick in Harper and Sacred Heart in Anthony. This would be the arrangement until the consolidation of the three parishes in Harper County into one, which occurred in 1997.

Due to the growing problems of this shortage, it was in April of 1996 when Bishop Eugene J. Gerber asked Fr. Robert Hartmann and the



One of the stained glass windows that line both sides of the church.

parishioners from all three parishes to begin a serious study as to what can be done about the future of Catholic life in Harper County and to the parish life as well. This was a difficult time for the parishioners in the county. Many meetings were conducted and many hard decisions had to be considered. It was finally decided that by late 1996 the Catholics in Harper County would be better served by only one parish instead of three different single parishes. By July 1, 1997, with the approval of the bishop, the three parishes of St. Patrick, Harper; Immaculate Conception, Danville; and Sacred Heart, Anthony; were all consolidated into one parish, called ST. JOAN OF ARC. It was agreed that all three churches would continue to be used and maintained.

In the meantime, with the bishop's approval, the Danville parishioners proceeded with their plans to completely renovate and restore their church into its original beauty, since it had been listed as one of Kansas' historical sites. Therefore, from February to June 1998, the historic Immaculate Conception Church was closed so this project could begin. Much needed and extensive repair work, bringing the church to its standard condition, had to be done before restoration could begin. Much was accomplished to retain the interior beauty we enjoy today.

In addition to this, there was a change of pastors. Father Michael Peltzer arrived on August 2, 1998 to take up the duties as the new pastor of the St. Joan of Arc parish community. Because of his love and interest in church architecture and historical old church buildings, he saw to the completion of the interior work of the church, even to the point of restoring several of the furnishings and altar appointments that were removed from the building in the 1960's. The communion rail, which was found under the stage in the school building, was restored and returned to its rightful place in the church. The original Sanctuary lamp,



Baptistry where generations of parishioners became children of God through the waters of baptism.

missing for several years, now hangs from the ceiling, as it had before. Several other original altar appointments were restored and put to use once again. Old requiem candle sticks and stations of the cross were restored, along with the altars. The CYO donated a beautiful wooden statue of St. Joan of Arc, which stands near the Virgin Mary Shrine. In the meantime, a large painting of the Divine Mercy graces the sanctuary of the church. The organ in the choir loft was over-hauled, and some special lighting was placed behind the statues and other furnishings, giving the church some interior illumination at night. The stained glass windows, imported from Minneapolis, were all given a thorough cleaning and repaired. New ornamental doors were placed in the front of the church in the fall of 1999.

Even though it is now a part of the St. Joan of Arc parish community, Immaculate Conception church in Danville is a place which we proudly call home!

Thank you for visiting us today!