

# Churches part of the fabric of Leelanau

By Amy Hubbell  
amy@leelanauenterprise.com

Faith and family has been part of the Leelanau fabric for as long as anyone can remember.

And while houses of worship in the Land of Delight are somewhat subdued by the cathedrals of Europe, Leelanau County has several churches worthy of note.

One of the first tasks tackled by pioneers was construction of a home. This was followed by a school and church.

Initially, worshippers would gather in the homes of the faithful. But as time passed and churches were built, these places of worship were filled.

Here are a few churches of note in Leelanau County:

- Grove New Mission Church (also known as Omena Presbyterian Church) was organized in 1843 by the Rev. Peter Dougherty, who had been sent by the Presbyterian Board of Missions.

Dougherty's first church included both European and Native Americans and was across the bay on the Old Mission Peninsula. In 1852, Dougherty and his mission moved to what is now Omena, establishing a "New Mission" there and constructing a mission and boarding school.

In 1858, Dougherty commissioned three local carpenters to build this church, based on traditional New England church design with a rectangular frame front-gable structure sided with white clapboard. The roof is

covered with shingles, and is capped with a square steeple.

The church was used by the congregation until 1871, when financial difficulties forced the mission to close. In 1885 the church reopened as a Congregationalist church. Since 1925, it has been used primarily in the summer months. It is still used as the Omena Presbyterian Church.

The church, located at 508 N. West Bay Shore Dr., was designated at Michigan State Historic Site in 1971 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

- St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church stands at the crossroads of Co. Roads 626 and 637, perched on a hill overlooking north Lake Leelanau and Lake Michigan. In the 1860s and 1870s settlers from Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic) came to the area to work at the Leland Lake Superior Iron Foundry and the Gill sawmill. Catholics attended Mass at Holy Trinity Church Leland until the church burned in 1880.

In 1890 the first St. Wenceslaus Church was built and the cemetery established. Ornate metal grave markers reflect the Bohemian heritage, as do the names Burda, Houdek, Hula, Jelinek, Kalchik, Kirt, Kolarik, Korson, Kovarik, Maresh, Novotny, Reicha and Sedlacek, which appear in the cemetery. Generations later, church members include many with the aforementioned surnames.

Church membership doubled in 1908. In 1914 volunteers hauled bricks and other materi-

als to this site and built the present church in a late Gothic Revival design.

**The church is on the state list of historic sites.**

- Holy Rosary Church grew from the community of Isadore, first known as Four Corners, but renamed in 1890 in honor of the patron saint of farmers. Rising above the farmlands cultivated by generations of Polish Americans are the red, brick church, convent (1957), and school, and the cemetery of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church.

The parish was organized in the 1880s and built a wood-frame church in 1883 and a school in 1884. In 1922 the church was torn down, and the building committee selected a Milwaukee architectural firm noted for its church designs to plan what it terms a "Roman-style church."

The church is entered through a square central tower that terminates in an open octagonal belfry—windows. The impressive structure includes six pair of stained glass windows depicting Christ's life were executed by the F.X. Zettler Company of Munich in 1922. An inscription on a the arch over the altar also reflects the predominantly Polish parish. It reads "Krolowo Rozanca S W. Modl Sie Za Nami" which translated to "Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, Pray for Us."

- St. Joseph Catholic Church in Cleveland Township is a church, but not in the traditional sense. The church, located at 5899 S. Bohemian Rd., was constructed by Bohemian immigrants in 1884.

It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. St. Joseph is significant as the only church association with Father Ignatius Mrak, an early Catholic missionary. The church was and still is the only church building in the relatively unpopulated, rural township.

St. Joseph served its Bohemian Catholic congregation until 1970s when the parish was merged with St. Rita Parish in Maple City. It's like stepping back in time as the church interior still features a communion rail, which were largely removed from Catholic churches during the late 1960s and early 1970s, following the Second Vatican Council.

Two Masses a year are celebrated: May 1, the Feast Day of St. Joseph the Worker and another in October, which is



Omena Presbyterian Church, also known as the Grove New Mission Church, was based on new England church design when constructed in 1858.  
Enterprise file photo



Holy Rosary Church is known for six pair of stained glass windows depicting Christ's life were executed by the F.X. Zettler Company of Munich in 1922.  
Enterprise file photo



Ornate metal grave markers reflect the Bohemian heritage at St. Wenceslaus Cemetery, which along with the church, is on the state list of historic sites.  
Courtesy photo

Continued on page 7



Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992, St. Joseph Church in Cleveland Township is significant as the only church association with Father Ignatius Mrak, an early Catholic missionary.

*Enterprise photos by Amy Hubbell*



The chapel at Old Settlers Park was built in 1896 and is maintained by the Glen Lake Women's Club, which rents it out for weddings.

## *Churches part of the fabric of Leelanau*

***Continued from Page 4***

celebrated in Extraordinary form, meaning it is in Latin.

The church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

- The chapel at Old Settlers Park is tied to two property purchases. In 1912, with funds from the association, Leelanau County bought a five-acre parcel adjacent to the Methodist Episcopal Church, which was built in 1896. In 1917 the associa-

tion funded the county's purchase of the church, with the Methodists stipulating that the church "shall not be used for dancing."

Each August people came from miles around to attend the Old Settlers Picnic and they still do more than 120 years later.

The chapel is maintained by the Glen Lake Woman's Club, a non-profit service organization since 1966 and is a popular wedding venue.