

Dear Parishoners of St. Wenceslaus Parish,

I read the article in the Traverse City Paper about the change coming to your church. It was one I had heard and lived through some years ago. I am currently a member of St. Joseph's Parish in Traverse City. However, I grew up in a small rural area in Iowa. I also attended St. Wenceslaus Parish in Clutier, Iowa. It was started by a group of people who had moved from Bohemia. My father and mother were married in the church along with most of my relatives. My relatives chose Iowa to call home because it looked like a great place for farming.

St. Vaclav, as we called it, resembles the old St. Josephs Church here. It was a small white church that pretty much sat in the middle of farmland. The cemetery is on the same plot of land. We just celebrated it's 150th birthday. It is also limited-use church. It stands empty for most of the year. On Corpus Christi, we celebrate with a mass and recession around the cemetery. The procession starts with little girls carrying bouquets of flowers that their mothers picked from the garden that morning so they could tear the petals and form a line of flower petals. Then the young boys followed, the Womens Rosary Society praying the rosary and finally the men. Following them was the priest and altar boys carrying the banner over his head. There were 3 small alters that they stopped at and were blessed and prayed at. The alters were all done in different colors, one pink, one yellow and one blue. These alters were decorated by the mothers couple days before the event and filled with flowers, once again picked from their garden. This past year, to celebrate the 150 years, the bishop came to offer the mass. I was not able to go back to Iowa for the mass but I saw videos of it and nothing really has changed. They also had a small band that played a song and which is the same song they played 150 years ago.

I mentioned my parents being married there along with my grandparents and many of my relatives. St. Vaclav was a very active church years ago just like your church. As time went on, we were short on priests like we are today so they began consolidating many years ago. My Dad would tell us stories about

his family coming to church in a horse drawn buggy and how cold it was. That was something that was instilled in all of our family...you never missed mass regardless of weather! Years ago, my entire family drove in the country for Christmas Eve mass. The gravel roads were ice covered and we were probably lucky we made it home...Today, we laugh and wonder how smart that was but it wasn't even a consideration to miss Christmas Eve mass.

I'm sure if I talked to Mr. and Mrs. Kolarik today we perhaps would share some the same memories. The church was just part of our family. We attended Sunday mass, sang in the church choir, went to 40 hour devotions (which had priests come and give the hell and brimstone homilies and as a small child you couldn't sleep for days), many weddings and funerals. That was just part of our life and as I said, we were with family.

I mentioned memories. That is what I have and that is what you all will have. Yes, it did feel like a death and in some ways it is. Everyone has to start over and if you are like I am, change is not easy. However, like a death, we all have cherished memories to pull us through some of these dark times. I encourage you to talk to your younger relatives and share some of these stories and memories you have made at your church.

I'm not sure why I felt so compelled to write this note to you. I think because I did experience the same feelings you all may be feeling and it is not easy. However, with changing times we all have to make the adjustments. I want you to know that I am keeping all of you in my prayers and asking Blessed Mary to wrap her arms around you to make this difficult time a little easier.

*Love & Prayers
Bonnie Burgan*