

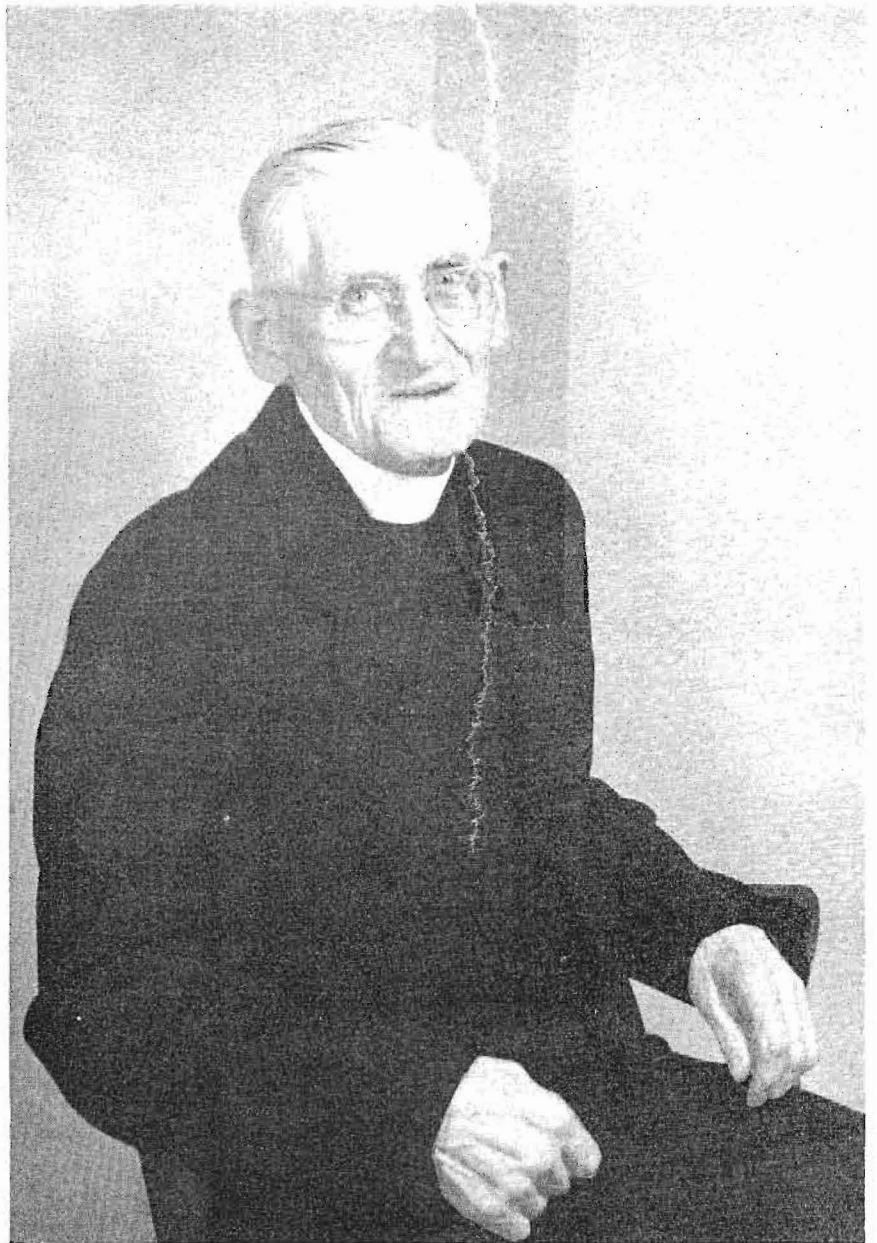
Golden Sacerdotal Jubilee

REVEREND JOHN PETERS

1902-1952

Saint John The Baptist
Roman Catholic Church

JUNE 10, 1952



REVEREND JOHN PETERS

GOLDEN JUBILEE 1902-1952

Father John Peters was born in Haltern, Germany, on May 16, 1875. His father died when he was 2 months old. In the year 1888, the whole family, consisting of the mother and her



five sons, George, Henry, Herman, Fred and John, emigrated to the United States and settled on a farm about eight miles from Glasgow, Missouri, where St. Mary's Catholic Church is located.

One other of these emigrant sons was called to the priesthood and is now Rt. Rev. Msgr. Fred F. Peters, pastor of the Church of St. Teresa of Avila, Glennonville, Missouri, which he established. Msgr. Peters celebrated his golden sacerdotal jubilee on June 7, 1948.

Father John Peters attended St. Mary's School at Glasgow. Later heeding the call to the priesthood, John Peters pursued his collegiate studies at Quincy College, conducted by the Franciscan Fathers at Quincy, Illinois. He then entered old Kenrick Seminary, located on 18th Street and Cass Avenue in St. Louis, where he concluded his priestly studies. He was ordained by Archbishop J. Kain on June 14, 1902.

In the same month he received a temporary appointment to Caruthersville, where he remained until September, 1902, when he was appointed to serve at Azora.

In January, 1903, he received a permanent appointment as assistant pastor at St. Francis de Sales Parish, St. Louis, where he served until 1914. The pastor of St. Francis de Sales Church during that time was the Right Reverend F. G. Holweck. History of that parish discloses that on April 3, 1907, Father John

Peters laid the first brick of the magnificent edifice of St. Francis de Sales Church on Gravois Avenue, and that he was the first Spiritual Director of the St. Aloysius Society.

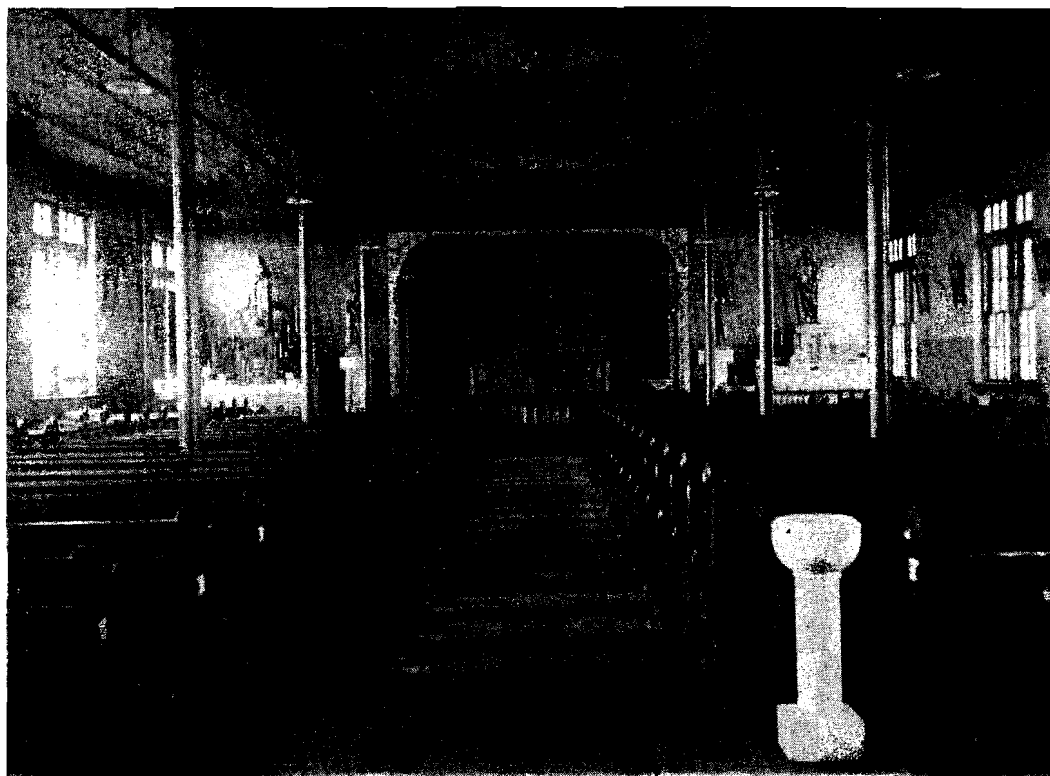
Father John Peters was appointed as pastor to establish the present St. John the Baptist Parish on December 30, 1913.

The first Holy Mass (a High Mass) in the new parish was celebrated by Father Peters on Sunday, February 1, 1914, at ten o'clock, at 4626 Gravois Avenue. For the first few months after its establishment it was known as Oak Hill Parish until the selection of St. John the Baptist as its patron.

The work of establishment began in earnest, and on April 1, 1914, the ground was broken for the present Sodality Hall (Old Hall). The completion of the building was the occasion of a gala three-day celebration, a "Fair" being held in this building on May 31, June 1-2, 1914, which netted the parish the sum of \$1,815.84.

September of that year marked the opening of the parish school, with an enrollment of 235, which included the kindergarten.

But in the meantime plans progressed, and on August 16, 1914, the corner-stone was laid for the first church (now the Sisters' residence). This event commenced with a parade from



Newport Court and Gravois to the site of the new church. This event was attended by many thousands of people from all over the city. It was also an extremely hot day, since it is said the 70 kegs and 100 cases of beer were inadequate.

Construction of the two-story building progressed well, so that on Thanksgiving Day (November 26, 1914), the new church was dedicated by His Excellency, the Most Reverend John J. Glennon, Archbishop of St. Louis. The Holy Sacrament of Confirmation was administered on this occasion to about 200 persons.

During the week prior to the church dedication, the school rooms on the second floor were occupied by the school children, and the good Sisters took up their abode in the southern part of the building.

About this time, the residence of the pastor was changed from 4628 Gravois to 4204 Delor, in the rear of the hall. This remained the pastor's home until May 2, 1915, when he moved to the parochial residence. At that time the Trustees of the parish purchased six lots as a permanent playground for the children when Father Peters promised the Trustees he would relieve the parish of the expense of building, and maintaining for five years, a parochial residence. In 1924, the parish bought the house for \$5,000.

Parish growth continued and in 1917 the second story on the Old Hall was added, followed in the next year by an addition to the Sisters' residence. The building south of the Sisters' residence was built soon after, with an addition added thereto. This building became the original High School building and now houses part of the grammar school and the bowling alleys.

The official breaking of ground for the present church was held on May 30, 1924. The corner-stone laying took place on Sunday, July 10, 1924, with Archbishop Glennon officiating, assisted by Father Peters and Father A. J. Hoegen. A number of other priests participated in the ceremony, which was followed by eloquent addresses by His Excellency, the Archbishop, and by Father Westhus. The Church was under roof by August 10, a little more than six weeks later. The official opening of the church took place with the Midnight Mass of Christmas the same year, although on the vigil of that feast at 8 a. m., the first Mass was said, attended mostly by the school children, who were accorded this special distinction because of their great sacrifices in donating the marble Communion rail.

Many special memorial donations were made in connection with the new church, and of the cost of approximately \$77,000 as of Easter Sunday, 1925, nearly \$23,000 constituted such special donations.

Solemn dedication of the church took place on October 25, 1925, with the Most Reverend Archbishop officiating. The ceremony commenced at 10:30 a. m., followed by a Solemn High Mass and Confirmation. On that occasion, the Most Reverend Archbishop said:

"I don't know that any congregation in the diocese, or any priest in the diocese, has done better than your pastor and this congregation. I don't know of any that have achieved so much, all things considered. * * * I doubt not that you will go onward with the completion of the work, and that furthermore, you will maintain your extraordinary solvency: that what you build you practically pay for, by making an oblation that shall be free from the ties that bind it to the money lender, whose companionship with the Almighty is not always agreeable."

This construction did not include the steeple nor present vestibule of the church. Such construction was undertaken and completed in 1931.

By 1934, increase in numbers of grade and high school students necessitated construction of eight additional school rooms on the property west of Adkins Avenue. Upon their completion, the high school was moved to the new building.

In 1938, additional construction was undertaken, resulting in the auditorium, which also contains the school cafeteria, recreation rooms and additional high school rooms.

The buildings were now on both sides of Adkins Avenue, and that street presented a traffic hazard to the school children going to and from classes. In 1940, through the earnest efforts of Father Peters, the city authorities were induced to close Adkins Avenue and the alley. Ultimately, complete title was vested in the parish and gates and fences were installed, thereby also adding much needed playground space.

Further building was undertaken in 1946 (completed in 1947) when the west wing was added to the Auditorium, to give added class rooms, particularly the kindergarten. Removal of the kindergarten to the new location enabled turning over to the good Sisters the entire building and relieving crowded living conditions. The building was subsequently completely renovated.

The foregoing sets forth some of the milestones passed by St. John's Parish in its growth and development under the pastoral leadership of our Jubilarian. But many other factors aided in that development, and some of these are set out below.

Parish School

The August, 1914, Messenger announced the opening of the parish school with the slogan, "The Catholic Child Belongs In the Catholic School." Each annual opening of the school has been similarly heralded.



September 1, 1914, was the opening day of the Parish School, followed by the opening of the kindergarten on September 8, 1914. The enrollment reached 235 the first year. The first eighth grade class graduated in June, 1915, and 2,778 children have received eighth grade diplomas.

The high school was established in 1922, at first offering only commercial studies, but in 1929, a full high school curriculum was included.

The first commercial high school graduation was held in June, 1924, and that of the complete high school course on June 11, 1933. The total number of graduates is: Commercial, 74; Classical, 1,514.

Approximately 866 children now attend grade school, and approximately 440 now attend high school. As was the custom in the beginning, free books are furnished to those attending either the grade or high school.

The Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, Missouri, undertook to teach at St. John's School when it opened and have labored untiringly in their scholastic work ever since. Thirty-four Sisters, three priests and seven lay teachers now comprise the faculty of St. John's Grade and High School.

Assisting Father Peters in the material affairs of the school through the years has been a school board, selected annually by the Married Men's Sodality. The first school board came into being in August, 1915.

Parish Organizations

The first organization was the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which started its mission of mercy on January 15, 1914. Following the first parish Mass, February 1, 1914, the Married Ladies' Sodality, now numbering about 550 members, was organized. A week later the Young Men's Sodality was organized, followed three weeks later by the organization of the Young Ladies' Sodality. In June of the same year the St. Agnes Society began.

Following a mission conducted by Father Sieber (later at St. George's) and Father Gass (later at All Souls, Overland), the Married Men's Sodality was organized and the first meeting was held on February 23, 1915. Frank Wagenblast was the first president. In the same year the St. Aloysius Society was begun, and later on the Sacred Heart League.

With the encouragement and leadership of Father Peters, the well-rounded group of parish organizations have been active, demonstrating their true Catholicity by attendance at monthly Communion, as well as participating, each in its own sphere, in the many activities of the parish.

To this group has been added in the past few years a Boy and a Girl Scout troop, a Cub Scout troop, and a C.Y.C. Activities Council. The parish also has an Ushers' Society and branches of the Catholic Knights of America and Western Catholic Union. It also maintains active delegations to the newly

organized Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Men and the Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women.

Another recognized parish group is the Board of Trustees, which has counseled with Father Peters in the material affairs of the parish. Members of the parish who have served on the Board are D. E. Weaver, G. B. Windler, William Shurnate, D. J. Cirkal, Jos. Kovarik, Sr., Henry Konnersmann and F. B. Aug. The present Board of Trustees consists of Frank Wagenblast, Henry Tenholder, John Wood, Charles Martens, Thomas Brinker and Charles Hynek.

Assistant Pastors

During his period of pastorate, Father Peters has had several assistants: Rev. Chas. A. Rees, Rev. Nicholas W. Brinkman, Rev. A. J. Hoegen, Rev. Sylvester L. Cassidy, Rev. Vincent W. Schuler, Rev. Anthony J. Grellner, Rev. Robert J. Arnold, Rev. J. J. Jadrach. Many of them return to St. John's each year in January on the occasion of the Married Men's banquet to spend a pleasant evening with Father Peters, their associates and acquaintances.

Father Peters' present assistants are Fathers George M. Klaric, Adolph M. Schilly, M.A., and Robert F. Overman. Fathers Klaric and Schilly were ordained in June, 1944, and Father Overman in December, 1945. Prior to coming to St. John's in June, 1949, Father Klaric served four years as assistant at Holy Cross and one year at Holy Trinity. Father Schilly came to St. John's in June, 1950, after serving as assistant for five years at St. Matthew's and one year at St. Augustine's. Father Overman came to St. John's the month following his ordination.

Vocations

Eight of Father Peters' "boys" are now serving as priests at the altar of God. There are also eight young men pursuing the priestly studies. Four boys of the parish are Brothers in religious orders.

In addition, there are at least 30 young women who have espoused the Higher Life and have entered the various sisterhoods. Most of these are Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, Missouri, who have conducted the parish school since its inception.



Parish Messenger

The parish messenger began with the February, 1914, issue of the Oak Hill Parish Messenger, changed with the May, 1914, edition to St. John's Messenger. The first announcement it contained was that of the first Holy Mass to be said

in the parish. During the years it has served not only as a means for transmitting parish announcements, but also as a record of events in the parish, from which many of the facts contained herein were taken. During World War II it was sent to over 500 boys in their country's service to keep them informed of the doings in their parish. Since its inception the Messenger has contained a section in the center, numbered with Roman numerals, containing the life of a saint and many interesting items of Catholic philosophy and practices. Credit for this feature is due to Father Peters, and not only does it appear in the St. John's Messenger, but in a number of other parish messengers. Much of the writing was assembled by Father Peters, with the assistance of several other priests.

Athletics

Father Peters' interest in the youth naturally led to an interest in athletics. He brought to St. John's knowledge and experience gained at St. Francis de Sales in athletic ventures. His interest has continued through the years, and St. John's has become a well-known contender on the baseball diamond, the soccer field, and the volleyball and basketball courts. In the hall of its school are many trophies indicating achievements of the various teams in the field of sports. St. John's participates in many C.Y.C. leagues, putting into play approximately 65 teams annually. These activities are now directly sponsored by the Father Peters Activities Council, organized several years ago and composed of representatives of the several parish organizations.

But this type of activity is not limited to competition with groups outside the parish. Father Peters early insisted on a playground for the children, and interspersed among the buildings of St. John's are a number of playgrounds. The main playground was equipped with floodlights in 1934, and is now the scene of many late evening and night softball games between teams belonging to parish sodality leagues. Many a time, too, Father Peters threw the "first ball" to open the season, and now and then pitched an inning or so for a men's sodality team. The ready availability of the parochial residence to the playground has made it a convenient place to store and procure "bats and balls" for the formal or informal contests of sports which take place.

Bowling takes its place also among the sports, with the parish bowling alleys furnishing the outlet for its indulgences. There the Men's 60% and 75% Leagues engage in heated contests, to say nothing of those sponsored by other parish organizations.

"Field Day" for the high school boys and girls was instituted many years ago and each year, near the close of school year, its participants vie with each other to earn coveted class team points and individual awards.

Camp St. John

Father Peters' love of the outdoors led to the organization of "trips" to the Ozarks. Moving vans were engaged for these trips and were looked forward to by the St. Aloysius boys, who enjoyed swimming, camp fires and sleeping in blankets, usually on the lawn of Arcadia College. Then came Father Peters' purchase of some acreage at Iron Mountain Lake and the construction of two buildings thereon. During the years it has served as a place of relaxation not only for him, but for many of the parishioners, particularly the grammar and high school students who each year have their "weeks" at Camp St. John.

The story of St. John's is the reflected story of our Jubilarian, Father John Peters, and his labors in the Lord's vineyard as a true leader and shepherd of his flock. His people cherish his labors and as a symbol of their regard will present to him on his Golden Jubilee an extensive Spiritual Bouquet of Masses, Rosaries, Communions and other Devotions.



JUBILEE COMMITTEES

Space limitations do not permit naming all those who co-operated so generously in the arrangements for the celebrations of Father Peters' Golden Sacerdotal Jubilee, so only a bare outline is undertaken.

General and Executive Committee

Rev. A. J. Hoegen, Spiritual Advisor
Frank Wagenblast, Honorary Chairman
Charles M. Hynek, Chairman
Henry J. Tenholder, Vice-Chairman
Thos. Molloy, Secretary
William V. Beck, Treasurer
Past Presidents, Married Men's Sodality

Ways and Means Committee

Chas. Martens and John Woods, Co-Chairmen
Married Men's Sodality

Invitations

George Steffens, Wm. Singer, George Hummel, Co-Chairmen

Program

Alvin J. Baumann, Chairman; Leo J. Falk, Vice-Chairman
Rev. Robert F. Overman, Henry C. Zeis, Associate Editors

Publicity

Jerome Toohey, Chairman

Spiritual Bouquet

J. J. Kwiatkowski, Chairman
Chas. Blankman, Wm. Reuter, Vice-Chairmen
School Sisters . . . Young Ladies' Sodality

Breakfast

Married Ladies' Sodality
Young Men's Sodality

Commemoration Cards

St. Vincent de Paul Society

Ushers

Alex G. Schrader, Chairman

Choir

Paul Windmueller, Organist . . . Men's Choir

Parking

St. Aloysius Society . . . Boy Scouts