



Jesus Increased in Wisdom and Stature

The Centennial  
Committee  
acknowledges  
with heartfelt gratitude  
and appreciation the  
generous donations of  
time, talent, and treasures  
from the parishioners  
and friends of  
St. Joseph Catholic  
Church of Tonkawa.

*The frontispiece shows the first stained glass window installed, depicting the Holy Family. The Cameron Foundation donated the window in memory of Rosa Williams Havey and Isabel C. Cameron. The sanctuary windows pictured above depict the Infant Jesus (left) donated in memory of Ben & Vera Blubaugh by the Blubaugh family; and the Angel Gabriel (right) donated in memory of David & Lucile McWilliams & Families by the McWilliams Family.*

*Photos by Ken Crowder*

## ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH OF TONKAWA

The history of St. Joseph Catholic Church of Tonkawa has its roots in the opening of the Cherokee Outlet to white settlement in 1893. Several Catholic families were among the early settlers, including those of Cletus Blubaugh, David Blubaugh, John (Jack) Caughlin I, A.J. Esch, Theodore Esch, Conrad Fath, Margaret Patterson, and R.H. Swords.

Mass was said in the homes of the Catholic parishioners by priests from Ponca City and Blackwell or Benedictine priests from Sacred Heart Abbey (now St. Gregory's Abbey in Shawnee), traveling by horseback, buggy or railroad.

In the early 1900s the Methodist Church sold its wooden building to the Catholic community served by Father Renier Sevens, pastor of St. Mary's Church in Ponca City. Margaret Patterson donated the altars and statues for the church.



*The first Catholic Church in Tonkawa at the corner of Grand Avenue and Tenth Street. The building was purchased from the Methodist Church.*

The church was dedicated to the patronage of St. Joseph May 3, 1909, by the Most Reverend Theophile Meerschaert, first Catholic bishop of Oklahoma, and the parish was assigned as a mission of

Blackwell. The original building still exists as a private residence and at one time was the home of parishioners Dale and Lori Evans.



*First Communion class, 1909, showing interior of church. Front row, far left, is Velma Behar. Boy in center is George Fath. Father H. Kickx is in center, back row.*

During the 1920s the Three Sands oil boom brought an influx of people and money into Tonkawa, necessitating a larger building. Response to an appeal by Father Edward Mallen for funds to build the present brick church was generous. Dave Blubaugh donated a city block of land and planted the trees surrounding it.

The church, rectory and garage were paid for at the time of completion, one of the prerequisites for consecration. The congregation of approximately 25 families donated the major portion of the funds. Mass was held in the basement until the building was completed, and according to one parishioner, Father Mallen kept the church locked until it was paid for.

The architecture of the church is Gothic-inspired. The triptych altarpiece painted above the original altar features the Crucifixion of Christ in the center, flanked on the left by the Holy Family and on the right by the Women at the Tomb.

Bishop Francis Kelley officiated at the laying of the cornerstone by Father Sevens October 20, 1925, and consecrated the church November 20, 1926, in a ceremony said to have lasted approximately six hours. Crosses lining the nave indicate that the church was consecrated. The bell, which can still be rung, was moved from the first church building to the new church steeple.



*The present St. Joseph Catholic Church, looking from the north, circa early 1950s.*

For many years Mrs. Paul (Edith) Olivier served as church organist, playing a pump organ which had been hoisted over the balcony rail to the choir loft. To power the instrument, the organist pumped two large foot pedals to activate bellows, an action that took considerable practice to keep the organ volume constant. Since the organist's back was to the altar, Mrs. Olivier watched the priest on the altar through a rear view mirror. In the 1950s a second-hand Hammond electric organ replaced the pump organ in the choir loft. It was later moved to the main floor in the north transept.

The present Rodgers electronic organ was purchased with a bequest from the late Hattie Fischinger. Subsequent organists have included Helen Delmenhorst, Marilyn Kreger, Jo Wear from Ponca City, and Marjilea Smithheisler, Mrs. Olivier's great niece.

The two-story rectory became St. Joseph's Mission House from which four priests conducted missionary work, and the parish in Blackwell was for a time a mission of Tonkawa. Since Blackwell and Tonkawa parishes are now served by one priest, the building presently houses a chapel, Religious Education classrooms, the Religious Education Director's office, and an office and small apartment for the pastor's use.



*Church interior circa early 1950s. Note steam radiator under window at right.*

In 1948 Father (later Bishop) Stephen Leven established a Catholic school for grades K-8, staffed by the Felician Sisters. The school was built largely by donated local labor and housed three classrooms, a library and a lobby. A total of 54 students, Catholic and non-Catholic, enrolled. At the time, St. Joseph's School offered the only kindergarten in Tonkawa, and 13 children made up the class.

The school closed in 1963 and the building is now an artist's studio.



*St. Joseph's Catholic School 1949-1950. Felician Sisters in back from left are Sr. Angelina, principal, Grades 4-8; Sr. Archangel, Kindergarten; and Sr. Cherubim, Grades 1-3.*

A lunchroom in the Parish Hall served the St. Joseph School children as well as the public elementary school pupils until the Tonkawa High School cafeteria was built. One of the infirmaries from the former World War II German Prisoner of War Camp north of the city was moved in west of the school to house the sisters. Several of the sisters were of Polish ancestry and enjoyed speaking their native language with Polish-speaking visitors.

Born near Blackwell and reared on a farm, Father Leven was known to help with farm work when visiting his rural Tonkawa parishioners. He was one of the first two Oklahoma priests ordained for the Diocese of Oklahoma (1928) and the first native Oklahoman to be ordained a bishop (appointed Auxiliary Bishop of San Antonio, Texas, 1955 and Bishop of San Angelo, Texas, 1969).



During his pastorate at St. Joseph's, Father Leven brought his ministry of street preaching to Tonkawa. With the establishment of the POW Camp, he started a very successful U.S.O. in the basement of the Tonkawa Masonic Temple for the soldiers stationed at the camp and also served as chaplain for the Catholic prisoners.

The church basement was finished as a Parish Hall, hosting many activities over the years. A small stage was erected at the east end of the hall. The floor was painted with a numbered path for cake walks, a feature of parish carnivals. St. Patrick's Day ham dinners (the Most Reverend Eugene McGuinness, Bishop of Oklahoma City-Tulsa from 1948-1957, dispensed the diocese from the then-obligatory abstinence from meat during Lent on that day) and pre-Christmas turkey dinners attracted large numbers of community residents. Women of the parish were assigned items to cook for the dinners and men washed the dishes and silverware.



*Christmas pageant on the Parish Hall stage circa 1950. The stage area is now a small room used for meetings, religious education classes, and intimate social events,*

During the pastorate of Father Elmer Robnett, summer ice cream socials were occasionally held on the lawn south of the church. Father Robnett promoted youth activities, and the Parish Hall hosted several gatherings of Catholic youth from across North Central Oklahoma. He arranged for area Catholic youth to attend Summer Schools of Catholic Action, even personally chauffeuring them to San Antonio. In 1955 he organized a chapter of the Sodality of Our Lady, a religious-social group for teenage



parishioners. The group purchased the statue of Our Lady of Grace, enshrined south of the church.



*Teenagers from a number of parishes at one of Father Robnett's youth activities circa 1955.*

In the 1990s, St. Joseph's Table was held each spring to commemorate the saint's day, March 19. Rose Cadle, of Italian ancestry, introduced the Sicilian custom of holding the dinner, which originated as thanksgiving for deliverance from a famine. Many parishes serve the poor and homeless at their St. Joseph's Tables; not large enough to do so, the Tonkawa parish collected monetary donations for the Food Bank. Hispanic parishioners introduced celebrations honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Women of the church, organized as St. Joseph's Altar Society, have always held fundraisers to help meet the needs of the parish such as refurbishing the rectory and purchasing vestments. In the 1960s and 70s, bingo, a project originated by LaUna Levings and Virla Smithheisler, was held in the Parish Hall. At the time, St. Joseph's was the only bingo parlor in Tonkawa, and area visitors

flocked to the hall to win monetary prizes and purchase pie baked by the women of the parish.

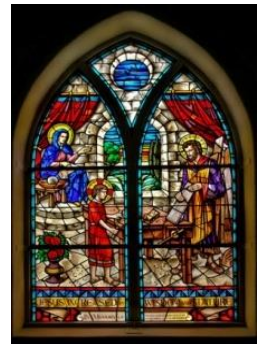
In the mid 1950s the building was one of several Tonkawa churches targeted by an arsonist. A fire set in the sacristy caused smoke damage to the plaster and paintings in the sanctuary; the church also sustained water damage. Cliff Townsend of rural Tonkawa cleaned the paintings to restore them to their original beauty. The church interior was redecorated in 1956 and the Open House for the community celebrated the occasion.



*Golden Jubilee celebration March 20, 1977. The Most Reverend John Quinn, Archbishop of Oklahoma City, presided at Mass.*

In 1977, the Golden Jubilee year for the present building, the church was again redecorated. Archbishop Victor Foley, a former pastor of St. Joseph's, and 17 priests were present for a concelebrated Pontifical Mass sung by Archbishop John Quinn.

Archbishop Quinn blessed the stained glass window depicting the Holy Family at work. The window was donated by the Cameron Foundation of Houston, Texas, in memory of Rosa Williams Havey and Isabel C. Cameron, mother and aunt, respectively, of the late Bea Harris, a long-time parishioner. The window, made in New



Jersey, was installed over the main entrance of the church.

Originally the windows in the main body of the building were of translucent amber glass with small, hinged windows at the base. Through the efforts of Father Martin Reid, (pastor 1977-1989), stained glass windows designed and built in Ireland replaced the amber glass and the hinged windows were sealed. The windows were donated by various families of the parish and generally depict saints and their symbols.

Through the years the building has been modified to adapt to reforms promulgated by Vatican II and to meet the needs of the parish. The communion rail was removed, and the sanctuary floor extended to support an altar table; an ambo from which the Gospel is proclaimed, and a lectern used by the cantor, all donated by the Blubaugh family. The Jueschke family donated new doors for the main entrance.

Large altars in the transepts were replaced by pedestals to hold the statues of the Blessed Virgin and of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The statues of St. Theresa the Little Flower and of St. Joseph were moved into the transepts. A central air and heat system replaced the original radiators in the walls; the main floor was tiled; carpet was laid down the center aisle; the sanctuary, sacristy and vestibule were carpeted. The Altar Society renovated the Parish Hall and installed a new kitchen. In 2009 the sanctuary walls were repainted, and new carpeting was installed.

The Parish Hall, subject to flooding when the water table is high, was revamped in 2000 to include a new sealed floor surface and new kitchen with cabinetry built by parishioner Phillip Caughlin from wood donated by a local farmer, Dave Rence. Sump pumps now keep the hall dry. Phillip also built the baptismal font now in use and the cabinet housing the sound system equipment. Jim Stone of Blackwell crafted the ambry containing the sacred oils. Jim F. Smithheisler built the music cabinet.

An elevator operating from the Parish Hall to the main level of the church has been installed on the southeast corner of the building and a shelter now protects the entrance. A concrete ramp has replaced the original open iron stairs leading to the outside entrance to the sacristy and the exterior brickwork has been cleaned and tuck-pointed several times. The front steps have been replaced. The south lawn has been paved to make a parking lot

with designated spaces for the handicapped. The church has acquired lots east of Tenth Street, enlarging the overflow parking area.

For more than a century many parishioners have given generously of their time, talent and treasure not only to build and maintain a structure for worship but also to establish and perpetuate a vibrant community of faith. Because of their outstanding and extraordinary services, two parishioners have been honored with the highest papal award a lay person can receive, recognizing services for the Church and its head. The medal of *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* (For Church and Pope) was awarded by Pope Pius XI to Mary Blubaugh in 1927 and to Helen Caughlin by Pope John Paul II in 2005.

The Parish of St. Joseph Tonkawa enters its second century with faith, hope and trust in God.

## STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

Photos by Ken Crowder



**ST. ANNE (left)**

*Memory of James Malone  
& Mary Virginia Bryan*

*Donor: Diane Malone*

**MARIA REGINA (right)**

*Memory of Oscar & Julia*

*Bellinghausen*

*Donor: Mary Bellinghausen*



**ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI (left)**

*Donor: James K. Samara*

**ST. JAMES THE LESS (right)**

*Memory of Samara Famil,y Kamil  
Assad, Adeba Barakat, Genevieve &  
James*

*Donor: James K. Samara*



**ST. JUDE (left)**

*Memory of Alexander & Mabel Esch*

*Donor: Esch Family*

**ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA (right)**

*Memory of James Howard Harris II*

*Donor: Harris Family*



**APPARITION OF  
OUR LADY AT KNOCK**

*Memory of Rosa & Clinton Williams,  
Dola & Norman Charles Cantrill*

*Donor: Mr. & Mrs. Clinton Williams*



**ST. CECILIA (left)**

*Donor: Whitehead Family*

**ST. PATRICK (right)**

*Memory of Msgr. Pat Reid*

*Donor: Family & Friends*



**OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE  
(left)**

*Memory of John Conrad Fath, Sr.*

*Donor: Eunice B. Fath, Mary Lou  
Fath, Mr. & Mrs. J.C. Fath & Dale*

**BL. KATERI TEKAKWITHA  
(right)**

*Honor of All Indian Tribes*

*Donor: 1986 Tonkawa Parishioners*



**ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON (left)**

*Memory of John & Florence Caughlin*

*Donor: Families of Cecil & Juanita*

*Caughlin, Hattie Townsend, John T*

*& Gladys Caughlin, Paul & Dora*

*Caughlin, Esther McDaris & Pauline*

*Johnson*

**ST. JOSEPH (right)**

*Memory of John & Pauline O'Grady*

*Donor: O'Grady Family*



**VISITATION OF MARY  
TO ELIZABETH**

*Memory of Charles & Elizabeth*

*Jueschke, Eleanor West & Virgil &*

*Catherine Jueschke*

*Donor: Family & Friends*

## PRIESTS SERVING THE PARISH

Father Renier Sevens .....	1903-1911
Father Paul J. Gillen .....	1905
Father Alfred Dupret.....	1905-1911
Father H. Kickx. ....	1911-1920
Father Alfred Dupret.....	1920-1925
Father Edward Mallen .....	1925-1928
Father B. Murtaugh.....	1926
Father John J. Higgins .....	1927
Father John T. Hall .....	1928-1936
Father B. Murtaugh.....	1937-38
Father Stephen A. Leven .....	1938-1948
Father Alphonse Lisko.....	1940
Father Charles A. Buswell.....	1940-1942
Father James A. Traut.....	1944-1946
Father Herman Foken .....	1946-1947
Father William A. Smith.....	1947
Father Philip Wilkiemeyer.....	1948-1949
Father A.S. Synakiewicz.....	1949-1950
Father Mark Maszkiewicz .....	1950
Father J.B. Loftus .....	1950-1951
Father J. Robert Henshaw .....	1952
Father Bernard J. Collins .....	1953-1955
Father Elmer C. Robnett. ....	1955-1962
Father Michael Hanrahan .....	1962-1964
Father Emil Depreitere .....	1964-1966
Father Bernard J. Havlik.....	1966-1971
Archbishop Victor J. Foley.....	1971-1972
Father Eric Beevers.....	1972-1974
Father John T. Murray .....	1974-1975
Father Martin E. Reid .....	1975-1988
Father Joseph Burger .....	1988-2001
Father Larok-Obwona Martin.....	2001-2014
Father Benjamin Lwin .....	2014-2020
Father Balaswamy Bathini.....	2020- Present

## FELICIAN SISTERS TEACHING IN THE SCHOOL

The Felician Sisters supplied a list of teachers from 1953-1954.

Former students supplied names from 1948-1952.

Sister M. Angelina, Principal; Grades 4-8.....	1948-1953
Sister M. Cherubim, Grades 1-3.....	1948-1950
Sister M. Archangel, Grade K.....	1949-1951
Sister M. Hilda, Principal; Grades 4-8.....	1953-1954
Sister M. Leonicia, Grades 1-3.....	1953-1954
Sister M. Leonilla, Grades 1-4.....	1953-1954
Sister M. Sylvina, Principal; Grades 4-8.....	1954-1956
Sister M. Arnold, Grades 1,2,3,4.....	1954-1956
Sister Justinia, Principal; Grades 4-8.....	1956-1957
Sister M. Arnold, Grades 1-3.....	1956-1957
Grades 4-8.....	January 1957
Sister M. Rosamund, Grade K.....	1956-1957
Sister M. Felix, Grades 1-3.....	January-March 1957
Sister M. Claire, Grades 1-3.....	March-May 1957
Sister M. Arnold, Principal; Grades 5-8.....	1957-1958
Sister M. DePaula, Grades 2-4.....	1957-1958
Sister M. Rosamunde, Grades K-1.....	until October 1957
Sister M. Doloretta, Grades K-1 ...	October 1957-February 1958
Sister M. Mariella, Grades K-1.....	1957-1958
Sister M. Arnold, Principal; Grades 5-8.....	1958-1959
Sister M. Michaeline, Grades K-4.....	1958-1959
Sister M. Doloretta, Grade K.....	1958-1959
Sister M. Colette, Principal; Grades 5-8.....	1959-1962
Sister M. Michaeline, Grades K-4.....	1959-1962
Sister M. Juvenia, Principal; Grades 5-8.....	1962-1963
Sister M. Doloretta, Grades 1-4.....	1962-1963

### Kindergarten Lay Teachers

Mrs. Perry Mason.....	1951-1952
Pauline O'Grady.....	1962-1963