

# ***The History of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church***

## ***1909-1910***

**Compiled by Estrella Brown  
June 2010**

**In 1909**, priests and their "Chapel Cars" who made their rounds through smaller towns held services in parishioners' homes. During 1909, Reverend Fr. Servais from St. Patrick's Parish in Portland held many of the services in the International Order of Odd Fellows Hall in the Dietz building at the corner of East Second and A Streets. According to the *Catholic Sentinel*, Jan 14, 1909, Rev. Father Servais celebrated mass on the second and fourth Sundays of each month at both Rainier and Goble. From Feb. 24-28, 1909, Fr. O'Brien, O.P. of Portland gave a series of lectures at the I.O.O.F. Hall.

The women of the parish were also very active during this year and formed the Catholic Ladies Aid Society. Besides this group, they also formed the Catholic Sewing Society and gave a Christmas bazaar in Dec. 1909. According to *The Rainier Review* in the Dec. 16, 1909 issue it was "one of the most successful bazaars ever held in this city...Under the efficient management of Mrs. Chas. Clark the bazaar was successfully carried out. Too much cannot be said of the valuable aid rendered by Mrs. Lee, Mrs. B. Clark, and Mrs. Sheerin, while Mesdames Chambers, O'Leary, Werthes and Vogal and the Misses O'Leary, Nema Brough and May Gallagher all assisted materially to make the bazaar a success. Contributions also came from Mesdames Simmons, David, Burns, Lowe, Flynn and Downing."

**In August of 1909**, Rev. Father Servais left Rainier and Father McDevitt was assigned to serve the Catholic congregation. His first sermon dealt with "Humility" and "was one which would attract attention anywhere. A clear, forcible speaker who uses elegant

language. *Father McDevitt will attract attention in Rainier the coming season*" (*The Rainier Review*, Aug. 12, 1909).

During the first week of October, the Chapel Car of the Catholic Church, "which has been touring the west for the past several months, will arrive in Rainier next Sunday morning, and will remain in this city until the following Saturday. Services will be given both in the car and at the K.P. hall to which everybody is invited. Interesting lectures will be given throughout the week which will be of interest to both Catholics and non-Catholics" (*The Rainier Review*, Sept. 30, 1909)

### ***The Arrival of the Reverend Father Henry Bruenagel***

The arrival of Rev. Father Henry Bruenagel, the first Catholic resident Pastor in Rainier, is first mentioned in *The Catholic Review* on **Dec. 2, 1909**.

Fr. Bruenagel rented the house directly opposite the street from the present Catholic church and fitted it up as a chapel. "*Fr. Bruenagel is located in one of the W.J. Dietz's buildings on Harrison Street. He has placed an altar in one of the rooms, and will hold services every Sunday morning. First mass at nine o'clock and second mass at ten o'clock. During the week he will attend the missions in other parts of the county*" (*The Rainier Review*, Dec. 2, 1909). He held services there for the remainder of the year.

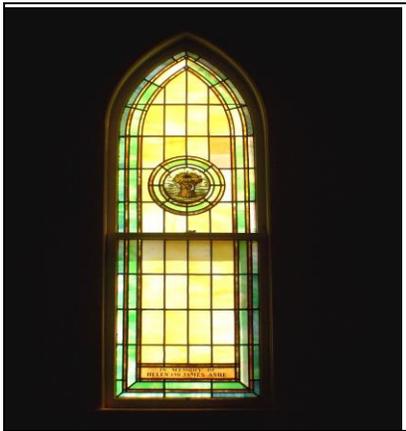
Fr. Bruenagel came from a large parish in Fargo, North Dakota, where he had built fourteen churches. He was a native of Bonn Rhine, Germany, where he was born on July 15, 1870. He served as an officer in the German army and studied medicine in Paris for several years. Upon deciding to become a priest, Fr. Bruenagel went to Rome for three and a half years. He was ordained on November 30, 1900, after completing his ecclesiastical studies at St. Paul Seminary in Minnesota. He was ordained by Archbishop Ireland and celebrated his first Solemn Mass in Cologne, Germany. According to *The Rainier Review*, "*He has also brought with him his cousin, Miss Koenig, who has been his*

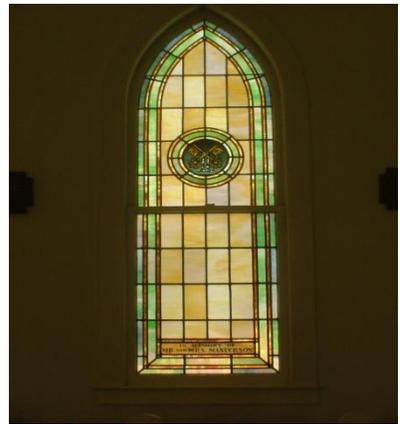
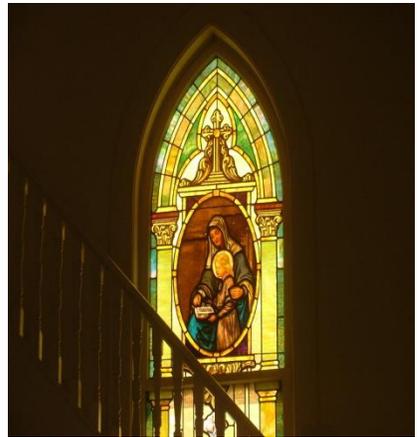
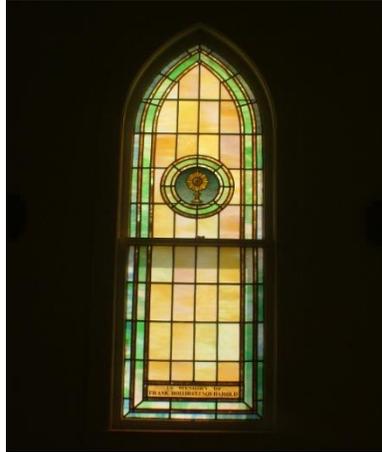
*housekeeper for a number of years; he has also brought with him a little orphan boy who is now three years old and was adopted by the Father when the child was but six days old” (Dec. 2, 1909).*

**Dec. 9, 1909**, *The Rainier Review*: “Rev. Father Breunagle [sic], the new pastor of the Catholic parish, was a pleasant caller at The Review office this week. Rev. Bruenagel is recently from North Dakota and came west for his health. He has not decided as yet whether he will remain permanently or not. He will have charge of this parish, however, during his stay in the west and says he is entirely at the disposal of his people here. Father Bruenagel is a very pleasant gentleman to meet, and being a fluent speaker in five different languages he will undoubtedly be able to accomplish much good in this community.”

## *The Building and Dedication of the Church*

Father Bruenagel purchased lots 7 and 8 Blk 22 in the City of Rainier from Dean Blanchard on **September 28, 1909**. The parishioners raised and contributed money for this purpose. The stained glass windows of the church were each donated in the names of parishioners of the time. Parishes were also being planned in Scappoose and St. Helens, which were to be Missions of Rainier.



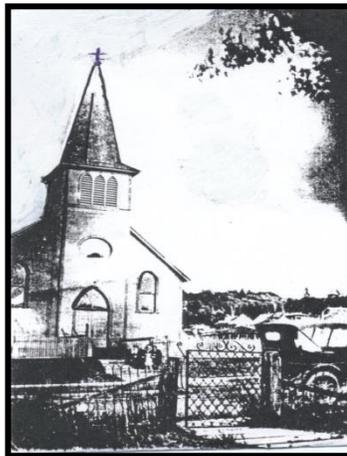


**On June 6, 1910**, Archbishop Alexander Christie dedicated the new church with Father Bruenagel as its first Pastor. Another source stated that Archbishop Alexander, assisted by the Rev. Henry Bruenagel and the REV. A.G. de Lorimier blessed the Church on June 12, 1910. Another source, *the Catholic Sentinel* states the church "will be dedicated May 15, 1910, by Archbishop Christie. Father Bruenagel was pastor from 1909-1912.

Fr. Bruenagel built a parsonage but felt that it was too big for one priest. It was later owned by Mrs. A.M. Lee. In 1912, the present parsonage was built.

Besides Rainier, Fr. Bruenagel later built parishes in St. Helens, Scappoose, and Gresham. At St. Henry's in Gresham, Fr. Bruenagel celebrated his twenty-fifth year as a priest on November 30, 1925, where he was their first pastor when he took up residence in 1912.

Fr. Bruenagel died on October 30, 1941 in retirement in Ashland. His funeral services were held in Portland, OR, at the Cathedral. He is buried at Mt. Calvary Cemetery.



1917

Artist: Gary Forrest

## **The Early 1900's**

### **1913-1916 Under the Reverend Father Urban Fischer, OSB**

In 1913, plans were made for a church site in Clatskanie, which was a Mission of the Rainier Parish. Mr. McKiel donated two lots along the main highway. Between 1916 and 1917, the church was built under the guidance of Father Urban Fischer and was dedicated by Archbishop Christie on Dec. 9, 1917.

### **Aug. 6, 1916-Dec. 3, 1919 Under St. Helens Parish, the Reverend Father Hampson**

In the Feb. 4, 1917, issue of *The Rainier Review*, Rev. Father Hampson organized a Catholic mission with Father Cartwright delivering lectures dealing with *"the authoritative dogmas of the Catholic belief, preceding each lecture in the evening a number of written questions will be answered by Father Cartwright. A question box will be placed at the door of the church and all who may wish to ask questions can do so by dropping them in the query box and if they are within reason they will be answered I am certain to the satisfaction of the writer. Many of our protestant brothers who surmise absurd ideas about the Catholic faith will be enlightened on these questions for he is a learned scholar and no question will be to [sic] difficult for him to answer. He will tell you what Catholicism is and why he believes it to be the translations from the original passages handed down by our Savior, why the priests have the same power to forgive sin as did the disciples after the ascension of the Lord, the differences between the Catholic and Protestant Bible will be discussed and many other important subjects will be pronounced each night. All are welcome to attend these meetings and you can be assured nothing will be said to offend anyone."* Written by ...Reynolds

## **1920-1921 A Mission Under St. Helens Parish, the Reverend Father Clancy**

In 1921, the Church of Our Lady of the Woods in Birkenfeld was built by Father Clancy and then also became a Mission under Father Clancy. Archbishop Christie dedicated our Lady of the Woods on Oct. 9, 1921.

## **1922 Under the Reverend Father M.J. Breen, CSV**

The Rev. Father M.J. Breen, C.S.V., from South Dakota, came to Oregon for his health. He was assigned to Rainier by Archbishop Christie.

Archbishop Christie divided the parish of St. Helens, which had included the towns of St. Helens, Rainier, Birkenfeld, Vernonia, and Jewel. Rainier became a parish with Birkenfeld and Jewel as missions (*Catholic Sentinel*, Sept. 7, 1922).

The congregation raised fund to purchase land to build a Rectory for Fr. Breen. The land was purchased for \$1900. The house was built by the Milton Smiths and deeded to the Parish on February 16, 1923. The deed is recorded in Columbia County, dated February 23, 1923.

From 1922-1939, Our Lady of the Woods in Birkenfeld became a Mission of Rainier.

## **Nov. 1922- Jan. 27, 1927 Under the Reverend Father George O'Keefe**

Fr. O'Keefe was born August 18, 1893, in Sac County, Iowa. He attended Columbia College, in Chamberlain, South Dakota, for his preparatory and philosophical studies. He later attended St. Thomas Seminary, in Denver, Colorado, and then went to the Benedictine Seminary in Mt. Angel. Fr. O'Keefe was ordained at the Cathedral in

Portland in February 1922. Fr. O'Keefe served the Archdiocese for thirty-two years, where he was an assistant at the Cathedral in Portland before he was assigned as pastor in Rainier. He left Rainier for the parish in Monroe. He then became pastor at St. Rita's in Portland; St. Peter's in Portland; Holy Family in Portland; St. Cecelia's in Beaverton; St. Vincent de Paul in Salem; finally St. Stephen's in Portland. Fr. O'Keefe passed away at Providence Hospital in March of 1954 after an illness of several months. He is buried at Mt. Calvary Cemetery.

**Under Fr. O'Keefe the present rectory was built in 1923.** The total cost was \$4,246.00 broken down as follows:

Contract for house	\$2500.00
Plumbing and Heating	933.00
Wiring and Fixtures	137.00
Doors, Windows, Screens	96.00
Grading	135.00
Varnishing	30.00
Waterproofing	8.00
Basement Floor	106.00
Sidewalks	176.00
<u>Drayage and Freight</u>	<u>35.00</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,264.00</b>

### **1927-1928 Under the Reverend Father Bernard J. Lee**

### **1928-1929 Under the Reverend Father John Dunn**

Fr. Dunn was born in Victoria, BC, in 1897. From the fall of 1921 to 1923, Fr. Dunn attended St. Patrick's Seminary. He completed his theological course at St. Thomas Seminary, in Denver, CO and was ordained to the priesthood by the late Archbishop Christie in Portland in 1925.

His first assignment was as assistant to Father George Campbell at St. Mary's Cathedral, in Portland. He was transferred to St. Stephen's in Portland and opened St. Stephen's High School in 1926 with Father Warren A. Waitt. Besides being pastor at Rainier, Fr. Dunn was also pastor in Monroe, Silverton, Salem, Seaside, and Oswego. He was also chaplain and professor at Marylhurst College and chaplain at St. Vincent's Hospital. When he was pastor at Monroe, he also taught at St. Mary's High School in Eugene, OR, and was also a coach of the athletic teams.

## ***The 1930's***

### **1929-1933 the Reverend Father Martin Doherty**

### **June 29, 1933- Feb. 6, 1936 Under the Reverend Father Stanley Cregan**

Msgr. Cregan was born on May 13, 1896, in Manchester, England, to Mr. and Mrs. James Cregan. He studied philosophy at St. Viator College in Illinois and theology at St. Paul and St. Thomas Seminary in Denver, Colorado. He was ordained for the diocese of Portland on December 21, 1926, at Springfield, Illinois, by the late Bishop James A. Griffin.

His first appointment in the Archdiocese of Portland was as an assistant at St. Lawrence Parish. He served there until June 26, 1933, when he became pastor at Rainier.

On Feb. 6, 1936, Msgr. Cregan became pastor of St Peter Parish in Portland, serving until July 1, 1946, when he was appointed pastor of St. Francis Parish. On September 2, 1959, he became pastor at St. Rose.

Archbishop Howard appointed him a diocesan consulter on June 20, 1960, and on July 12, 1960, he was elevated to monsignor.

### **1936 Temporarily, under the Reverend Father William Cashman from the Archdiocese of St. Paul**

### **1936-1942 A Mission of Astoria**

During this time, Rainier, Clatskanie, Birkenfeld, and Hammond were attached to St. Mary's Parish, which at one time was called the Star of the Sea, as missions. Rev. Father John Laidlaw was the pastor in Astoria at this time.

## ***The 1940's***

### **1942 Cared for by the Reverend Father Fall of Marylhurst, Oregon**

#### **July 1, 1942-Aug. 16, 1944, under the Reverend Father John J.**

#### **McGrenra**

Fr. McGrenra was born on May 1, 1904, in Philadelphia, Pa. He attended St. Anthony's Parish School in Philadelphia,; Villa Nova Preparatory at Villa Nova, PA; St. John's Seminary in Little Rock, Arkansas; and St. Francis Seminary in Loretto, PA. He was ordained to the priesthood at Trenton, NJ by Bishop N.D. Kiley on May 1, 1937.

On July 7, 1937, he became an assistant at Madeleine Parish in Portland. On August 1, 1939, he was assigned as an assistant at St. Rose Parish in Portland and then became an assistant at St. Luke Parish in Woodburn on Sept 19, 1940. His last two assignments were on July 1, 1942 as pastor at Rainier and its missions and August 16, 1944, as pastor at Newberg and Yamhill.

At the time of his death on Nov. 1, 1946, Fr. McGrenra was pastor of the Newberg and Yamhill missions. His sudden death came as a great shock to his parishioners and to the clergy and laity of the Archdiocese. Fr. McGrenra had just finished celebrating an early Mass at Newberg when he was hurrying to his Yamhill mission. His car collided with a heavy truck on a very sharp and dangerous curve. Fr. McGrenra's car was demolished. The Father received fatal injuries and died about two o'clock in the afternoon in the McMinnville hospital. Fr. John Joseph McGrenra's remains were taken to Philadelphia for final internment.

**In 1944, St John the Baptist Church in Clatskanie was given back to Rainier as its Mission.**

**Aug. 16, 1944-1949, under the Reverend Father Paul D. Malyszko**

The Rev. Paul D. Malyszko was an assistant at St. Rose in Portland before being assigned to Rainier and Clatskanie. On Sept. 1, 1949, Fr. Malyszko became pastor at Holy Redeemer Parish in North Bend, OR.

From 1949 to 1979, Our Lady of the Woods in Birkenfeld once again became a Mission of Rainier.

## ***The 1950's***

**Sept. 1, 1949-Aug. 28, 1952, under the Reverend Father Thomas A. Hamilton**

Archbishop Howard appointed Fr. Hamilton pastor of Nativity with attached missions of Clatskanie and Birkenfeld.

On Aug. 28, he was assigned to be parish priest at the Star of the Sea Church in Brookings, OR. In April 1960, Fr. Hamilton, now Dom John the Baptist, took his final vows as a Carthusian monk at St. Hugh's Charter House in Sussex, England. Dom John the Baptist studied with the order of cloistered contemplatives for five years before taking his vows.

**Aug. 28, 1952-October 1, 1955 (First Term) Reverend Father John T. O'Callaghan**

Fr. O'Callaghan was assistant parish priest of St. Joseph's in Salem before being assigned to Rainier. After Rainier, he was assigned to be pastor at North Bend.

**In 1953**, one of Rainier's own became a Catholic priest. Father Daniel Harrison Reynolds, son of Mr. Mrs. Frank Harrison Reynolds was born in Rainier on Oct. 11, 1926. He

attended grade school and high school in Portland before entering Mt. Angel Seminary in 1944. In 1949, he continued his studies at St. Edward's Seminary in Kenmore, Washington. In 1951, he received his minor orders and then was made sub deacon and deacon in 1952. Fr. Reynolds was ordained and offered his first mass at St. Andrew's in Portland on May 31, 1953.

### **October 1, 1955-1956, under the Reverend Father John J. Babyak**

Fr. Babyak came from Sheridan to be pastor at Rainier.

### **1956-Aug. 30, 1956, under the Reverend Father Michael Raleigh**

Fr. Raleigh was ordained March 28, 1936 in Techy, Illinois at the Society of the Divine Word Seminary by Archbishops William O'Brien. Father's first assignment was as associate pastor at St. John the Baptist in Milwaukie, OR in June 1938. He also served as associate pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Salem and then pastor of St. Patrick Parish in Canby. In 1943, he became pastor in Vanport and then went back to St. John the Baptist in 1946.

Fr. Raleigh was assigned to St. Augustine Church in Lincoln City after Rainier. His other assignments after that were pastor of St. Therese in Portland, chaplain at St. Vincent Hospital, administrator of St. Francis of Assisi, associate pastor of St. Monica Parish, in Coos Bay, chaplain at Christie School, Marylhurst, and St. Catherine Nursing Home in North Bend.

## ***The 1960's***

### **Aug. 30, 1956-Sept. 30, 1963, under the Reverend Father Patrick Curtin**

After serving as pastor in Rainier, Fr. Curtin was assigned to Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Cottage Grove.

*From The Rainier Review, 1962*

**“50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Marks Realization of Renovations”  
The Rainier Review 1962**

Members and friends of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church have been invited to join in observing the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of the Rainier parish Sunday.

The event will begin with the offering of a solemn high mass at 4 p.m. in the presence of the Most Rev. Edward D. Howard, D.D., Archbishop of Portland, who also will be guest of honor at a reception the in the parish house.

Officers of the anniversary mass will include the Rev. Patrick L. Curtin, the present pastor, as celebrant; and former pastors, the Rev. Richard Fall, deacon, and the Rev. Paul Malyszko, sub deacon. Other former pastors will serve as chaplains to the archbishop, . The Rev. Daniel J. Hurley of St. Cecelia parish will be the master of ceremonies. Archbishop Howard will give the occasional sermon at the mass.

The present church was dedicated June 12, 1910 by Archbishop Alexander assisted by the Rev. Henry Bruenagel, the first pastor of the parish, and the Rev. A.G. deLorimier.

The anniversary celebration coincides with the completion of the redecoration of the church, started by the Rev. Curtin shortly after his arrival in the parish in August, 1956.

**AMAZING ACCOMPLISHMENT**

The redecoration of the church shows what can be done by even the smallest parish in adopting the latest liturgical designs as a mean of furthering the liturgy and fostering the worship of parishioners, the Rev. Curtin said. The parish numbers only 65 families.

“A great change has taken place in the Rainier church,” James Hunt, president of the Catholic Book and Church Supply Co. in Portland, said recently. “Having seen the church before the changes were made, I can testify to the tremendous improvement. The parishioners deserve credit for their support and their acceptance of these latest works of liturgical art,” he added.

The first task was the removal of the old altar and furnishings in the sanctuary. A round stained glass window behind the altar was covered and a heavy red velvet drape, 16 feet high and eight feet wide was hung on the wall.

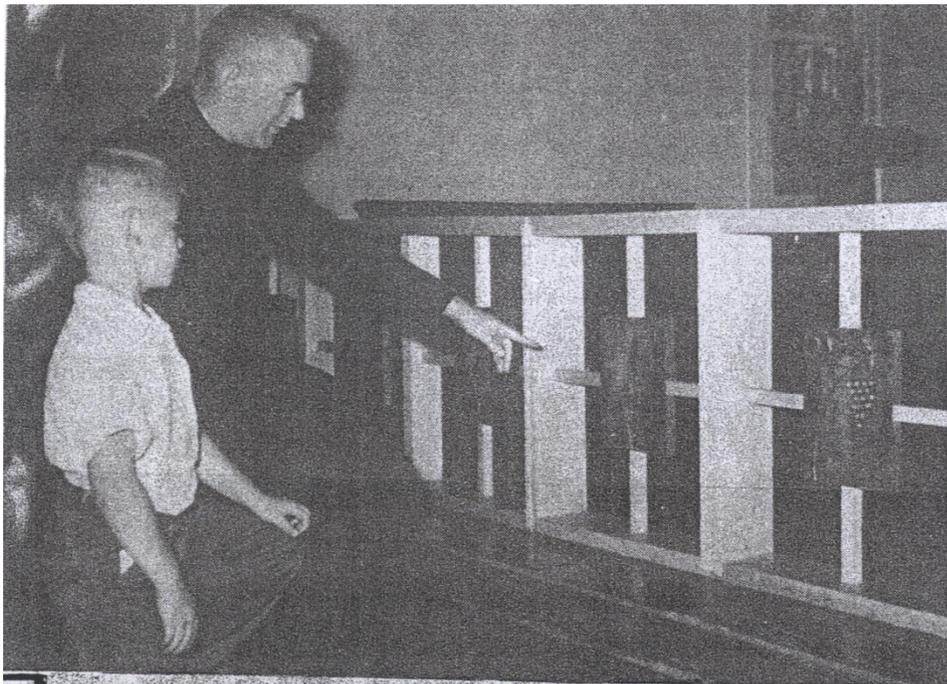
The new altar is constructed of four-inch, solid eastern rock maple. Carved in the center panel is the Chi Rho, representing the first two letters of the name of Christ; and attached to the Chi Rho are the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the alphabet, signifying Christ, the beginning and the end.

On the face of the altar pedestals are carved the grape and vine, symbolizing the Holy Eucharist. Above the altar and in front of the drape is a large crucifix, the bronze Corpus being attached to a cross made of rock maple. The metal tabernacle safe was designed and executed by Roger Sheppard of the Cathedral parish, as were the bronze altar candle, stands and cups.

Artist Leroy Setziol was commissioned to carve the 14 Stations of the Cross. At the same time he designed a communion rail containing eight panels. A walnut plaque has been inserted in the center of each panel, which also include hand-carved liturgical symbols.

**Artist Leroy Setziol carved the 14 Stations of the Cross-1960**





**CHURCH RENOVATED**—Bradley Anderson and the Rev. Patrick L. Curtin look at the Christian symbols on communion rail plaques recently installed in the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church at Rainier.—Photo by William Janvrin.

## 50th Anniversary Marks Realization Of Renovations

**RAINIER** — Members and friends of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church have been invited to join in observing the 50th anniversary of the dedication of the Rainier parish Sunday.

The event will begin with the offering of a solemn high mass at 4 p.m. in the presence of the Most Rev. Edward D. Howard, D. D., archbishop of Portland, who also will be guest of honor at a reception in the parish house.

Officers of the anniversary mass will include the Rev. Patrick L. Curtin, the present pastor, as celebrant, and former pastors, the Rev. Richard Fall, deacon, and the Rev. Paul Malyszko, sub-

deacon. Other former pastors will serve as chaplains to the archbishop. The Rev. Daniel J. Hurley of St. Cecelia parish will be the master of ceremonies. Archbishop Howard will give the occasional sermon at the mass.

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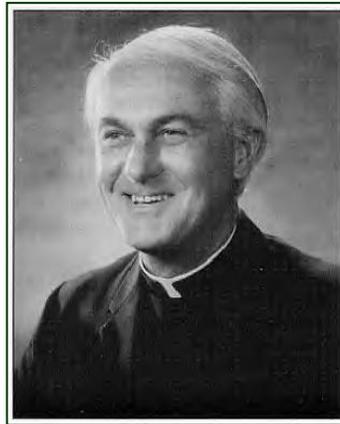
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In **1962** the new parish hall was built with volunteers from the parish. The hall was used for CCD classrooms and parish socials and is still being used today for those activities. Although the cost was estimated at \$22,000, with contributions and work done by the members of the parish, the cost was less than \$7,000. Sometime in early **1963**, Archbishop Howard dedicated the hall.

The Rectory was also remodeled to accommodate a live-in housekeeper.

### **Sept. 30, 1963-Aug. 3, 1966 Under the Reverend Father John Domin**



When Fr. Domin was pastor of Rainier, he also served as chairman of the Archdiocesan Sacred Arts Commission.

Fr. Domin was born in Wisconsin and was ordained in 1950 at St. Mary Cathedral after he completed his seminary studies at St. Francis minor seminary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and at St. Edward Seminary in Kenmore, Washington.

He was pastor at St. Mary, Star of the Sea Parish, in Astoria, was a faculty member at Central Catholic High School and then chaplain at Mt. St. Joseph residence.

After Rainier, Fr. Domin was appointed pastor of St. Wenceslas at Scappoose.

Under his pastorate, the Nativity Church building was renovated to conform to the new directives following the second Vatican Council. Again the funds were raised and donated by the parishioners, and they did much of the work as well. The new altar and

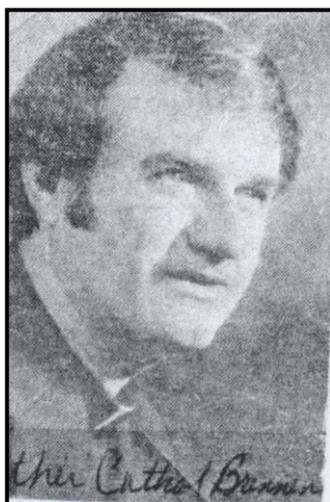
the Crucifix were designed, hand-carved and donated to the church by Carl, Minx, a parishioner. A new furnace was also installed at this time.

Fr. John Domin was an artist in his own right. The two stained glass art works in the parish hall and the two wood cuts in the hall were designed and created by Fr. Domin. Fr. Domin studied creative design at San Domiano Studio in Chicago, at the Portland Art Museum and the University of Washington Art Department.

He was also Chairman of the Sacred Art Commission of the Archdiocese of Portland where he helped design and renovate over once hundred churches and chapels to conform to Vatican II.

**On Nov. 15 and 22, 1964**, Father Domin narrated two one-half hour TV programs over Channel 8, Portland. The first telecast was the presentation of the new English Mass for the first time on television. **The new English Mass began throughout the U.S. on the first Sunday in Advent, Nov. 29, 1964.** The second telecast presented by Father Domin presented the Last Supper Service, Banquet of the Eucharist, and Holy Communion.

### **Aug. 3 1966-Jan. 1968 under the Reverend Father Cathal Brennan**



Fr. Cathal Brennan was born March 11, 1928, in Cloonteen, Kilconly, Galway, Ireland. He was ordained for the Archdiocese of Portland on June 22, 1952.

Before being assigned to Rainier, Fr. Brennan was the assistant at St. John Parish in Milwaukie since September 1952.

Fr. Brennan was very active with the Archdiocese serving as adult education area director in 1964. He was on the Archdiocesan Liturgy Commission, the Archdiocesan Radio-TV Commission, was a member of the Priest's Senate, was Clergy Conference Chairman for Columbia County from 1966-67, and was the originator and chairman of the southern Oregon Interparochial Association from 1968-1972.

### **Jan. 21, 1968- July 1968 under the Reverend Ernest J. Jackson**

Fr. Jackson was born January 27, 1917 in Portland and studied at Mt. Angel Seminary and St. Edward Seminary in Kenmore, WA. On December 19, 1943, Archbishop Howard ordained Fr. Jackson at the Cathedral in Portland.

Fr. Jackson served in Vanport, at St. Rose Parish and St. Francis Parish in Portland, in Ashland, Sandy, McMinnville, Molalla, and Waldport before coming to Rainier.

### **July 1968-June 1969 under the Reverend Father John Brouliard**

## ***The 1970's***

### **1969-1971 (Second Term) under the Reverend Father John T.**

#### **O'Callaghan**

Fr. O'Callaghan went on to become pastor of St. Stephen Parish in Portland.

### **August, 1971-April 28, 1978, under the Reverend Father Edward Altstock**

Fr. Altstock held quarterly parish meetings discussing all kinds of topics: CCD,

building budgets, weekly collections, study groups held in parishioners' homes, maintenance of the church, hall, and rectory, Archdiocesan guidelines. After these meetings, potluck dinners were held followed by game time, cards and bingo. He also encouraged parishioners to attend Parish Council meetings to guide the members in their decisions and voting.

**Fr. Edward Alstock**



*I was sent to Nativity of Mary, Rainier with missions in Clatskanie, and at Our Lady of the Woods, Bergenfield [sic], Oregon, in August of 1971. I found a great number of families who were solidly rooted in the Faith. The families were the centers of successful Christian life in education, culture and societal expressions. We didn't have, nor did we need, a great deal of organization in parish life. We counted students and recorded sacramental events, as required by Church law, but the real presence of Christ, besides the Eucharist, was evident in the daily lives of the people living from Goble to Jewell among the humanoids of Columbia and Clatsop Counties.*

*I enjoyed the priestly life among the people of the 3 parishes very much: very few personal regrets, very many fond memories.*

*If I can help through an interview, let me know.*

*Fr. Ed Alstock*

Archbishop Dwyer assigned Fr. Alstock to Rainier.

Besides Rainier, Fr. Alstock had assignments in Stayton, Albany, Astoria and the Cathedral.

At the time of his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, as a priest (1984), Fr. Alstock was pastoring at St. Johns the Apostle Church in Reedsport. He spent his time “ministering to 200 families along the Umpqua River and figuring out ways to help his new community meet their potential for economic stability and their responsibility for social justice. Fr. Alstock also spent time studying agriculture, science, and economics at Oregon State University.

**During the summer of 1972**, the Church was repainted with the work done by the parishioners. New gutters were also added and the doors were repaired.

**In the spring of 1972**, the Church had a rummage sale to finance carpeting for the whole church.

**During the 1960's and the 1970's, the CCD** programs at Nativity flourished. Many parents helped out as teachers and provided hospitality and chauffeured students to various events planned by the church. At times there were between 50 to 75 CCD children. Meetings were held in all parts of the hall, including the kitchen, and in the rectory to accommodate the various age groups of the children.

Mt. Angel Preparatory High School in Oregon would also extend invitations across the Archdiocese. The faculty and the student body of that institution had invited the young men of the parish to experience life at the high school and to examine what Mt. Angel had to offer in the way of high school education.

Fr. Alstock encouraged the young men of the parish to attend these weekends. He would also pay for the expenses out of his own pocket. A couple of our young men attended one or two of these weekends.

Two of our students did attend Mt. Angel for their high school education.

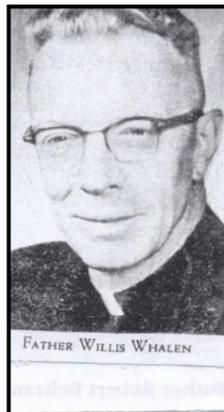
**In 1975**, Mr. Dale Bonser painted the interior of the church for \$1310.00. This included the body of the church, the sanctuary, the sacristy, the vestibule, the choir loft, and the confessional. The plaster walls, the woodwork and the pews were also painted. Mr. Charlie Deal and Fr. Alstock re-did the vinyl kneelers for \$75.00.

**In 1976**, Fr. Alstock helped the St. John the Baptist Mission exchange its church for the Church of Christ building on High Street.



Our Church in 1976

### **April 28, 1978-1980 under the Reverend Father Willis Whalen**



Fr. Whalen was the auxiliary pastor at St. Cecelia Parish in Beaverton, OR. He served as principal of Central Catholic High School and was pastor at Christ the King in Milwaukie, OR; St. John the Apostle in Oregon City; St. Anthony, All Saints, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Stephen all in Portland. From 1973-1974, Father Whalen served as Director of the Office of Education.

**In November of 1978**, new bookracks were installed on the pews. Parishioners no longer had to cart a missal with them as they entered and left the Church.

**Also in November**, Fr. Whalen started a "Basics of the Catholic Faith" forum for all parishioners and designed for even non-Catholics who were interested in the Catholic faith and for those who wished to join the church. There were 15 classes held every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m..

**In December of 1978**, Vigoren Roofing replaced the roofs for both Rainier and Clatskanie. It was discovered that the plywood sheeting on much of the overhang around the building had deteriorated to such an extent that it had to be replaced. The cost of replacing the roof was a lot higher than originally expected. For Rainier the cost was \$1624.00 and for Clatskanie, it was \$965.00.

**December 1978**, Columbia County was hit hard by snow and ice that it prompted Fr. Whalen to write the following letter:

*Finance Department*

*Heavenly Court*

*Paradise, Zip 1*

*Dear Angel in Charge of Church Contributions:*

*The snow and ice that plagued us on two recent weekends really hurt the money situation down here. Our three churches lost more than \$500 simply because people couldn't get to Mass and drop their normal offerings in the collection basket.*

*It makes one wonder if you and the Angel in Charge of Weather Conditions shouldn't have a meeting and get your acts together. From what happened it looks to us like the right wing doesn't know what the left wing is doing up there. We expect a little more cooperation and coordination.*

*Snow on a church collection day, especially on two of them-that's simply outrageous.*

*Please don't alibi that the situation got out of hand because you were both too busy practicing with the Heavenly Choir of Angels in preparation for Christmas. One is tempted to ask*

what were you practicing, "Let It snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow"?

*I'm sorry if my sarcasm ruffles your feathers. I don't use it to hurt you, but to emphasize no more snow on collection days. We literally cannot afford it.*

*By the way, if the two of you don't handle our problem we're going to take it right to the top. He can and probably would do something about it. After all, it is His day we're talking about.*

*Peace!*

*The Pastor*

*P.S. If one of you runs across the Angel in Charge of Gentle Reminders, you might ask him to nudge my parishioners to add a little more to their future offerings until they reach the amount they would have given had there been no snow. It wouldn't even suggest this, except that we had to put out so much of our income this past quarter on those two new roofs.*

**On November 20, 1979**, Our Lady of Woods Mission in Birkenfeld was given to the parish in Vernonia.

## **The 1980's**

**From January 26 to February 27, 1980**, Nativity and St. John participated in a two-week Parish Mission and Spiritual Renewal conducted by Father Vincent Sampietro, a Paulist Father who did evangelization for many years in the northwestern part of the United States and Canada. There were morning services and evening services that consisted of a sermon different from the morning homilies. Confessions were also offered daily. Some of the sermon topics were the following: TO KNOW CHRIST JESUS; BE RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT; NO GREATER LOVE; WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN; ANOINTING OF SICK AND ELDERLY; MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY.

**1980** saw 30 young parishioners being confirmed in Rainier and 21 in Clatskanie.

**April 17, 1980, under the Reverend Father Philip “Mike“ M. Hemming**

Father Hemming joined the pastoral staff and Fr. Whalen. Both Fr. Whalen and Fr. Hemming served the parish together until Fr. Whalen was reassigned.

**In the early 1980's**, a Pastoral Council was formed at the direction of the Archdiocese. At this time, or soon after, a Building Fund was established with the sole purpose of raising fund for major improvements for the future, i.e.: roof for the Church, roof for the Rectory, painting both buildings, repairing cement surrounding church property, rearranging the Sanctuary, and insulating the ceiling of the Church. A regular second collection was set up for this purpose on the last Sunday of each month.

**In December 1983**, Fr. Hemming began meeting with groups of parishioners in various homes of the parish. Parishioners who offered their homes were Les and Mary Tucker and Don and Wanda Cramer. The physical and spiritual needs of the parish were discussed: handrails for the front steps of the Church; some kind of ramp for the elderly or people in wheelchairs; painting the rectory, refinishing the pews in the church; better understanding of the changes in the Church, in particular, the Rite of the Sacrament of Penance; and get togethers for newcomers in the parish.

**In February 1984**, the women of Rainier form the Legion of Mary and had their first meeting on February 5.

**In 1984**, lay Eucharistic ministers began offering Communion with the Cup on November 25.

**In 1986**, during the pastorate of Fr. Philip Hemming, the St. John's parishioners then constructed the currently existing parish hall.

In 1988, the Nativity parishioners, especially the Elbert brothers, built an addition to their parish hall.

Stan Peerboom and Avery Bryant constructed a work shed to house the equipment needed to maintain lawns and grounds on all the property.

Other classrooms were added to the main hall in mid 1988. Mr. Dick Norman was architect to oversee this project. A new furnace was installed, and a lowered ceiling for the main hall was approved and installed as well.

In December 1989, the church received a new canvas awning for the front. It cost \$1200 and was made by Creative Canvas, a local firm in Rainier.

### The 1990's

## Celebration of the 80th Anniversary



The Chronicle Church News, Sat. April 21, 1990:

### **Window Uncovered for 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

*The unveiling of an 80-year-old stained glass window will be part of the celebration of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a Catholic church in Rainier.*

*Rev. Philip Hemming of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church, said the round window behind the altar has been boarded up for the past 25 years, because, he believes, when the priest would face the wall, the sun shone in his face.*

*Now, he said, the altar is turned around, and the boards and drapes have been removed from the window.*

*Hemming said the colorful window, which is approximately 8-feet tall by 7-feet wide, shows grapes and symbols of the Eucharist, with the chalice in the centerpiece of the window.*

*'The window is in surprisingly good condition,' said Hemming. He added that there was no moisture inside the frame, but parishioners are planning to replaster and repaint some minor damage to the frame.*

*Gene Stallings of Willemse Stained Glass in Scappoose, said that Povey Brothers Studios in Portland did many of the church stained glass windows in the area in the early 1900's. He said the leaded glass windows are not actually stained glass, but paint that has been enameled onto colored glass and opalescent glass.*

*The round window behind the altar is one of a dozen or so windows in the 80-year old church done in the same style. Each has the name of a family at the bottom of the window, probably a family who contributed to a memorial fund.*

*The 80th anniversary celebration of the church will be June 3, 3 p.m.*

### **1990 – Under the Reverend Father Emmet “E. B.” Painter, S.J.**

Fr. Painter was born in West Virginia and Rainier became his first mission as a pastor when he came here in 1990. Fr. Painter worked with Nativity and St. John to become self-sufficient because of the fear that their church and mission would be without a priest when assignments came around. His hope was to come to Rainier and to “be a bridge to that time, to develop lay ministry,” as he told the *Catholic Sentinel* in the article “Two Parishes Face the Priest Shortage With Hope” March 6, 1993.



Father Painter greets parishioners after Mass.



**In the early 1990's**, under Father E.B. Painter, SJ, the Sanctuary of the Church was remodeled after a vote from the Pastoral Council. Most, if not all of this work, was done or donated by parishioners.

The Rectory was remodeled and refurbished with monies from Betty Bryant and work done by other parishioners. A ramp for the handicap was built.

For the first time, NBVM saw female altar servers.

**On November 20, 1995**, the walkways around the church and the sidewalks were re-cemented to the cost of \$596.98.

In **1997**, a new sound system was put in place for \$2,578. That same year, in **July**, the funds for the vinyl siding on the church building were raised and the siding was put on for \$15,999.

### **1998 under the Reverend Father Richard Wallace**

Father Wallace, 46, was born in Fort Knox, KY. He attended Oregon State University and Mount Angel Seminary. He was ordained in 1986 for the archdiocese.

Father Richard Wallace



### **1999 Under the Reverend Father Luan Tran**



In August of 1999, a parishioner, Viola Everman, donated \$1,797.00 for the erection of an awning over the entryway to the Church. A new roof for the church was finally put in place for the amount of \$16,540 in June of 2001. Again with funds from the parish and under the direction of Gene Davis, a parishioner and contractor

## ***The 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

### **Summer of 2002- 2009 under Father Robert Beltrami, OFM**

Father Beltrami came out of retirement in 2002 to pastor Rainier and Clatskanie.

**In September 2003**, new lighting and ductwork costing \$1,600 was added to the hall. The funds came from fund-raisers, donations, and special collections. Felton Heating installed a new furnace. The cost of the furnace was \$2,300 and was completed on **March 1, 2004**. Again, the funding came from donations from parishioners.

### **Columbia Valley Parishioners Enjoy Small-town Fellowship**

By Kristen Hannum *Catholic Sentinel August 01, 2003*

'People don't skip it,' says Connie Lucero, RCIA director here, of the social time together every Sunday.

The parishioners, residents of this hard-working town on the banks of the Columbia River, halfway between Portland and Astoria, include people who have deep roots here as well as newcomers such as Ron Haley, who came here about three years ago and serves on the parish council.

'I wouldn't go back to Los Angeles for anything,' he says. 'I'd been looking a long time for this place.'

When an acquaintance told Haley to check Rainier out, he found in Nativity a friendly parish that reminds him of the parish he was raised in, in Nebraska.

'It reminds you of going back in time a hundred years,' Haley says.

Tucked between the white clapboard Masonic lodge - #24 - and the Columbia Bible Church, the little wooden Nativity Church does feel timeless.

Nativity has the grace of a New England classic. Nobody has come along and gentrified this church or its neighborhood - like the town, the church is a stubborn survivor, hanging on despite cuts in wages and outright layoffs.

From the church's perch on a steep hill above the wide river, the view takes in ocean-going freighters, anchored motionless near the long span of the Lewis and Clark Bridge, and of factory chimneys in Longview, Wash., just across the waters. Further still, the mountains of the Cascade Range hang on a blue horizon.

Franciscan Father Robert Beltrami came out of retirement to be pastor at Nativity and its mission parish in Clatskanie last summer. Even though there are two separate communities, he seems to be taking the workload in stride.

'He's a gem,' says Gil Curtis, a longtime parishioner. 'It's a work of love for him to have come here like this.'

Inside the church's entryway, a worn rope hangs from a hole in the corner of the ceiling - out of reach of most grade-schoolers, unless they've got a basketball player's jump.

Inside, the church's stained glass windows bathe the sanctuary in a lemony light.

Theresa Jones plays the piano accompaniment during Mass. Up until recently she did the accompaniment on an organ that didn't have the fine sound of the donated piano. She sits at the piano, all but invisible unless a person knows she's there, behind Father Beltrami when he's at the altar.

The tiny choir loft is usually empty, with only a couple of empty chairs. At some Masses, Jackie Schiedler plays the accordion to accompany the hymns. The church, built in 1909, boasts a round stained-glass window behind the altar that depicts vividly colored grapes on vines. Everyone here knows the story of the long-ago pastor who, in the days when the Liturgy was celebrated with the priest's back to the congregation, boarded over that window because the sun coming in through it hurt his eyes.

What was done was done, and no one took the plywood off for decades, despite the fact that the priest in question was long gone, as were the days of the old Mass.

The congregation is small, but there are a number of families mixed in with the older folks.

The worshipers share birthday remembrances and anniversaries in their prayers, and the congregation is small enough that all the people pretty much know whom they're praying for.

Community events such as the pancake breakfast fund-raisers and bake sales come several times a year, and last November brought a new money-maker - a sale of religious items - that pleased parishioners.

'It's a family parish,' says Ivan Jones, another long-time member. 'Our church is pretty much our family.'

Ministries other than Mass include a Bible study class Wednesday evenings and a revived youth group.

Parishioners are protective of their close-knit unity. For example, parish leaders are evaluating the new, 5 p.m. Vigil Mass that was begun not long ago.

They're concerned that what was until recently one Mass community is now two. 'But we're aware that it's serving the people's needs,' Lucero says.

There are a number of ill parishioners, and a cadre of volunteers reaches out to support them in a strong way with phone calls, visits and prayers, according to Lucero.

'The parish is a strong one,' says Lucero. 'People are really good about reaching out to one another, and volunteers do an awful lot of work.'



*Sentinel photos by Kim Nguyen*  
Fr. Robert Beltrami distributes holy Communion in Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Rainier.

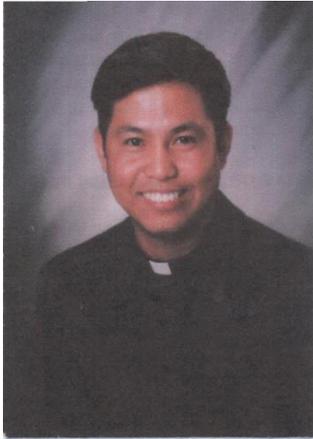


The stained-glass window over the altar figures prominently in the church.

**Catholic Sentinel August 1. 2003**

**July 1, 2009-summer 2014 under the Reverend Father Henry Rufo**

Father Henry was born and raised in the Philippines and was ordained for the Archdiocese of Portland in 2001. According to the *Catholic Sentinel*, June 18, 2009, "He has served as a parochial vicar at St. Anne Parish in Grants Pass and Sacred Heart Parish, Medford. Most recently he served as pastor at St. Helen Parish in Sweet Home.



**2009-2010** saw many changes in our parish in preparation for the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of our church.

A new sign replaced the old one thanks to Dennis Yeoman.



**2009** saw the choir move to the loft of the church. An electric piano was placed there. In 2010, a microphone was also placed in the loft. The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary heard music and singing at her Saturday Vigil Masses thanks to the time and voices of the members of the choir.

**By March 9, 2010**, the rectory's electrical system was totally updated thanks to Dennis Yeoman and Cando Electric. Cando donated some of the man-hours spent in performing the work, which reduced the overall cost of the labor and material. Total charge was \$2200.00.

**On March 22, 2010**, in preparation for the 100-year celebration, the stained glass window in the front of the church was removed for repairs. Archbishop John G. Vlazny presented the church with a \$7,000 endowment that helped prepare for the removal and repair of the window. Dennis Yeoman, building maintenance coordinator, was responsible for paving the way for this great undertaking. He, his son Tyler, Joe, Alvin and Bill Elbert, Kelly Bledsoe, Ron Haley, Larry Wallace, John and Carol Chesebro, Martha Cramer, Wanda Cramer, and Lee Dillon worked and supported one another on that Saturday. The women wrapped up the glass and prepared and served lunch.

Scott and Lori Alwine of The Glass Lady from Vancouver, WA, redid the window. \$1600 was the cost.

The Joe, Alvin, and Jim Elbert rebuilt the frame for the window. The Elbert brothers were also responsible for coordinating and managing the stain glass refurbishment. Before the window was placed back in the wall, the Rick Richmond Construction Company from Clatskanie, and Dennis and Tyler Yeoman reconstructed the entire wall. \$5250 was the cost for the Contractor.

Also in preparation for the celebration and to help raise funds for the



window, Nativity held a Valentine Dance on **February 13, 2010**, and a Silent Auction on **May 1, 2010**. The Valentine Dance raised \$1020.50, and the auction raised over \$5000.00.

The Hospitality Committee under Dan and Donna Mulford also planned a Pancake Breakfast on **February 28**, and took in \$586 for the repair of the Stain Glass window.

**On April 1, 2010, Holy Thursday**, the first Ambry for our church was blessed and the Chrismatory Set with the sacred oils were officially placed in it and blessed. Joe and Del Albert and Alvin Albert made the Ambry for our church and the one for St. John the Baptist Mission.



In preparation for the changes in the new (third) edition of the Roman Missal, Paul Cramer gave special presentations to Nativity and St. John's on **Saturday, April 10, 2010**. Paul did the program as part of his Masters Program final project toward becoming a deacon.

Work continued on the church in preparation for the celebration. On **May 2, 7, and 8, 2010**, Dennis Yeoman and Kelly Bledsoe tore out the floor to the entrance of the church. The three Elbert brothers, Joe, Alvin and Jim, along with Alvin's two sons Randy and Mark, installed new tile. Dennis Yeoman, Kelly Bledsoe, and the Columbia River Floor Covering spent May tearing out the old pink carpet and installing the new carpet. Before the carpet was installed in the altar area a platform (about one step tall) was built in front of the stained glass window so that the Tabernacle would be elevated. At one time there was a small platform there but it was removed during a previous remodeling of the church.

**The Altar-July 2009**



**The Altar-May 2010**



Generous sponsors donated two new statues to our church, one of the Blessed Virgin Mary and one of St. Joseph and the Christ Child. Joe and Del Elbert designed and constructed a beautiful pedestal for St. Joseph and the Christ Child. And Fr. John F. dePaemelaere designed and built the pedestal for the Blessed Virgin Mary. To accommodate the St. Joseph and the Christ Child, the piano was moved to the back of the church.



On **Memorial Day 2010**, Larry Wallace and Ron Haley coordinated the equipment and the work party needed to clean the outside of the church. They power-washed the building and performed whatever else was needed for maintenance around the church.

Our Parish Family Tree

June 2010



Made and designed by the Hisey Family-

### New Porch for NBVM Completed

The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Rainier, OR, went through quite a lot of face-lifts in 2010. One major face-lift was the removal of the old green awning that covered the front steps of the porch, protecting the parishioners from the rain before entering the church.

On July 16, 2010, the new porch for the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Rainier, OR was completed. **Angie Yeoman** from NBVM designed the original structure, and Andrew Niemi from St. Helens drew up the set of plans that would pass all the code requirements. The prints were approved on May 25, 2010.

Rick Richmond Construction was hired to build the roof, and **Dennis Yeoman**, the Building and Maintenance Committee Chair for the parish and father of Angie Yeoman, oversaw the project from start to finish and helped with the construction as a volunteer. He also installed the lighting in the structure.

Columbia River Floor Coverings in Rainier gave him many scrap pieces of marble or granite. One of the pieces was used to make a plaque, which Dennis inlayed in the concrete pillar. Ken's Engraving on Commerce Ave. in Longview did the laser engraving. On the back of the plaque, the names of Fr. Henry Rufo and the family members of Dennis Yeoman were engraved before the plaque was installed and then blessed by Fr. Rufo.

Parish fundraisers and anonymous generous donations helped pay for the cost of the \$9,500 structure. Some extra costs included some county fees such as engineering to have the prints made.



Photos: the old awning, the new porch, and the plaque

**From late summer of 2014 to the summer of 2015, Nativity Church and her mission, St. John the Baptist Church, had a variety of visiting priests conducting Masses.**

**Summer of 2015 to under Fr. Mark Gikenyi**

Fr. Mark Gikenyi was assigned to be Nativity’s Administrator by Archbishop Alexander Sample. Fr. Mark was born in 1978 in Kisii South (Gucha) K. He graduated from the Salvatorian Institute of Philosophy and Theology in Morogoro, Tanzania in 2005 and entered Mount Angel Seminary in 2006. His ministry in Oregon included All Saints in Portland, St. John in Milwaukie, St.Mary in Corvallis, and our Lady of Sorrows in Southeast Portland.

On July 1, 2017, Fr. Mark received a change in title from Administrator to Pastor for Nativity and her mission. He was officially installed as Pastor on July 30, 2017, with Father Nicolaus Marandu officiating.



Deacon Paul Cramer

Fr. Mark Gikenyi

Fr. Nicolaus Marandu

July 30, 2017

**NBVM PROJECTS COMPLETED 2016**

DESCRIPTION	DONATION	FINAL COSTS	VOLUNTEER HOURS	DATE COMPLETED
Interior of church replastered and painted	Betty and Avery Bryant	\$54,360.00 paid by the Estate (\$48,000.00)	Parishioners emptied the church before the	June 2016

# History of NBVM

Replaced light bulbs		Estate	and Building Funds LED lights-\$65.62	repairs and painting and then moved everything back in.	
Hall/Garage Exterior Replaced siding on east wall/ painted the entire hall and garage, replaced dry rot on foundation plate north wall, installed roof flashing on east end of hall, installed fascia board on garage		Volunteer hours	\$825.77 for paint and new siding material \$1300.00 for Taylor Made Homes- replaced dry rot on the foundation, and redid siding on front porch	Worked, July, Aug and Sept. 38 days	Sept. 2016
Installed security light for parking lot			\$89.98	Summer	
Church door closure			Hired contractor to work on the closure		Sept 2016
Paint porch of rectory		Volunteer hours	Paint used on hall was also used on the porch \$44.90 for the wood stain	8 days	Oct. 2016.
Paint parking lot lines		Volunteer hours	\$37.89 for specific paint for the lines	One day	Oct. 2016
Paint utility shed		Volunteer hours	Used the same paint for hall/garage + \$4.47 materials	2 days	Sept. 2016
Paint interior of rectory except for guest bedroom, two bathrooms, and kitchen		Volunteer hours 8 volunteers	\$691.24 for paint, materials, new curtains and rods for upstairs room. There is paint left to complete the rest of the rectory	5 days	Oct. 3-7, 2016
Installed walkway from parking lot to garage door		Volunteer hours	\$20.65 for cement	3 day	Oct. 2016
Stain glass window restoration and installation1 completed		Elberts & volunteer hours	\$200.00 for wood	2 Months	Oct. 2016