

Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church – Currie 1881

The parish began in 1881 when 191 Irish Catholics and 3 English families settled in Currie. They came to this country through the efforts of John Sweetman, a wealthy landowner from Ireland. They soon were joined by other nationalities, mostly German and French Catholics.

The name, *Immaculate Heart of Mary*, was chosen by Mr. Sweetman in gratitude for a favor granted to his mother in 1879, as he was sure his mother's prayers were answered through the intercession of the Blessed Mother. Mr. Sweetman looked after the colonists like a father. It was this very desire of Sweetman's concern for the spiritual welfare of his people that brought to Currie its first resident pastor in 1881.

St. Paul's Bishop Ireland sent Father Daly, a Dominican from Minneapolis, to Avoca and to also take care of Currie on the weekends. Then in August of 1881, Father William J. Keul became the first resident pastor in Currie. Services were held in the upper room of the local department store. Neil Currie, a protestant and founder of the village, donated 10 acres to the parish for construction of the first church, which was completed in 1882. In December 1881, Father Joseph O'Keefe became the pastor until October 1882, when he was removed by Bishop Ireland. To the dismay of the parishioners and Mr. Sweetman, the Bishop was unable to send a replacement. Mr. Sweetman had just spent \$26,500 for the new church building and its furnishings. During his visit to Ireland and England in the winter of 1882-83, Mr. Sweetman was able to convince Father Martin Mahoney of Liverpool to come to America. Bishop Ireland gladly accepted him and appointed him pastor in Currie on May 24, 1883.

From December 1885 to August 1932, Currie's IHM parish was served by Fathers Timothy Healy, Patrick M. McTeague, Joseph Mesny, Condron, Joseph Dwyer, Garrett P. Murphy, Charles A. Cavanagh, Charles A. Knab, and William Colbert.

The parish constructed the first school and convent in 1907, which was staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph. The first high school graduation was held in 1912. By 1919, the school was staffed by the Sisters of St. Francis. The building was razed in 1980.

A new rectory was constructed in 1921. The large brick house is still in excellent repair and has been used as the Parish Center since 1984 when a parishioner, upon his death, willed his new home, located directly across the street, to the parish for use as a rectory.

On April 27, 1930 the church constructed by Mr. Sweetman was destroyed by fire. By July 1931 a new and beautiful church was dedicated by the Right Reverend Francis M. Kelley, Bishop of Winona. The church, which remains today, was constructed during the heart of the Great Depression at a cost of \$75,000, a true display of the generosity of the Currie parishioners.

Father Robert E. Jennings was the pastor of IHM from 1932 to 1942, then Father Joseph E. Davy until 1945, followed by Father Frank J. Schimek until 1947 when Father Earl W. Byron became the pastor. In 1955, a new high school building was constructed and Father Francis Glynn came as the first assistant at IHM. Father Eugene E. Egan and Father John Mountain followed as assistant priests in Currie.

In 1960, Father Byron was succeeded by Father Edward Klein as pastor. In 1964, Father Andrew Kreidermacher was appointed as assistant, followed by Father Dennis E. Schimek. Father George H. Smith became the new pastor in 1966, along with Father Benedict Palzer as assistant. In 1967, Father J.C. Haley was appointed as assistant.

From 1969 to the present (2017) the Currie parish has been served by Fathers Donald Halloran, Elmer Kellen, Robert Theobald, Eugene Stenzel, Joseph Pete, Paul C. Evers, Robert Horihan, Jeffrey Dobbs, Andrew Vogel and R. Paul Heiting.

The construction of a handicapped accessible addition to the church occurred in 2005, containing a carport, restroom and elevator. More recently, 2012, the Sanctuary was completely renovated. Over the years, the facilities of the parish have been continually improved and maintained in excellent condition. Also located on the church property is the IHM Calvary Cemetery, the earthly home of over 1100 departed souls.

Currie is located near Lake Shetek, which brings many tourists and homeowners back to the area during the summer months. Mass attendance at IHM increases substantially during that period of time. The Immaculate Heart of Mary parish has approximately 175 families and is part of a cluster with St. Gabriel of Fulda and St. Anthony of Westbrook.