

In the 1880's, a few Catholic families of the Elgin Territory attended services at St. Bonaventure's Church at Raeville in Boone County. On March 3, 1900, the block which is now the nucleus of the St. Boniface Parish was purchased from the Pioneer Town Site Company for a sum of \$450 and an A frame church, 27 ft x 55 ft., was erected. Rev. Adam Brass celebrated his First Mass in this church on December 25, 1900, this also being the first Mass said in the new church. The parishioners built a two-story frame parsonage which was ready for use by December 1901. This house was located south of the present rectory, which was built in 1948.

The new parish, named St. Boniface in honor of the Apostle of Germany, was in the charge of Father Mueller and his assistant, as Elgin was a mission parish of Raeville. In January 1, 1902, His Excellency, Rt. Rev. Richard Scannell, Bishop of Omaha, dedicated St. Boniface Church. He also formally established the parish and appointed Rev. Adam Brass the first resident pastor.

The cemetery, two acres of land two miles north of Elgin, was purchased from John and Caroline Heithoff in 1901. In 1965 a tract of ground along the south and along the east was purchased from Helen and Al Neukirch and named the First Addition. Nearly fifty years later, in 2012, another addition of over 2 acres to St. Boniface Cemetery took place, through the generosity of the Neukirch family. The Second Addition is east and north of the First Addition. In 2013 three new entrance signs, made of brick, were erected at the cemetery.

In 1904 St. Boniface School began as a small 20 ft. by 36 ft. addition built onto the church. There were about 40 pupils enrolled the first year. The cornerstone for a new brick school was laid on August 4, 1908 with the building opening January 12, 1909 with eight grades and an enrollment of about 70 students, of which nearly 40 were boarders. It was the first Sister's school, conducted by four sisters from The School Sisters of St. Francis. A Commercial Course was open to non-Catholic students and was well received by many local students. In 1927 an addition was built onto the east side of the existing structure, twice as large as the as the old part and contained 4 spacious classrooms, two large dormitories for boarders, a gymnasium and a large chapel at a cost of \$27,000. A high school course was added to the curriculum. A more detailed story found in this history book about St. Boniface School.

A vote of the parishioners in 1911 brought plans to erect a brick church. The edifice 52 ft. by 142 ft. steps and sacristy, built of Indiana hydraulic lime brick, would be of semi-Gothic design. Parishioners did the excavation and hauled material from the train depot. Sand for the concrete work was brought in from the nearby sandhills region. The cornerstone was laid on September 12, 1912 and the new church was formally dedicated on September 30, 1913.

The St. Boniface Thanksgiving Bazaar was began in 1925 when Father Theodore H. Buel, newly named pastor, having been assistant for five years prior, was instrumental in the plans for a celebration on Thanksgiving Day. The activities began with a little get-together for a dinner, each family bringing their favorite dish. The affair, open to the public, had dinner prices of \$0.25 for adults and \$0.10 for children. Mrs. Anna Schlenz, using her own recipe, made the dressing, which is still on the menu for the dinner today. Other mainstays of the meal include the sauerkraut, and introduced in 1934, our famous sausage. The bazaar was shortened in 2012 with only one meal served instead of two. With the Spring Benefit Auction running a close second, the St. Boniface Bazaar is the number one fund raiser for the parish, and a wonderful social event for all who take part. In 2014 St. Boniface Parish will proudly continue the tradition and celebrate it's 90th Thanksgiving Bazaar.

In 1955 a home for the teaching Sisters, whose number had grown to ten, was built. In 2000, the number of Sisters serving our parish and schools had declined to two and the convent proved too large for them. The sisters moved to a rental home south of the convent, until 2003 when the home directly west of St. Boniface Auditorium was purchased for them. The parish convent now serves as a meeting area, for storage, is used during the bazaar. It is home to the Religious Education Program, Sunday Youth Group, and the St. Boniface Quilters.

The decision to build St. Boniface Auditorium was made during January, 1958, with a contract with Behlen Manufacturing for \$69,930. The auditorium has seen many social events, such as the Craft Fair, annual Thanksgiving Bazaar, and various other parish and school functions. In 1994 a wood playing floor was installed over the tile, after a summer that included removing the floor from Neligh's gymnasium, board by board, and refinishing. The next major updates to the auditorium were from 2005 to 2008 when all new entrance doors were installed, the exterior painted, the building was re-wired and the kitchen underwent a major \$95,000 remodel. The roof was re-coated in 2012 after a hail storm. In 2014 when asbestos abatement of the ceilings required new insulation, suspended ceiling and lighting updates, for a cost of approximately \$250,000.

In 1966 St. Boniface Parish became a member of a corporation called, the Pope John XXIII Central Catholic High School, with the faithful of St. John's parish of Petersburg, St. Bonaventure's Raeville, St. John's Clearwater, St. Theresa's Clearwater and St. Francis Parish Neligh. The high school was built in 1967 on land owned by St. Boniface Parish, near the Ball Diamond, which is still owned and maintained by the parish. A more detailed story found in this history book about Pope John XXIII Central Catholic High School.

The 1980's and 1990's saw expansion of every facet of the parish plant. A handicap ramp was constructed south of the church, the parking lot was cemented, and the church was tuck pointed. An electronic controlled clock/bell system was installed to aide in the ringing of the two original bells, one of which weighs 1,800 pounds. The Father's Day hail storm in 1984 did extensive damage to every building in the parish. Volunteers came to aid their parish, and with the help of Catholic Mutual Insurance, everything was repaired or replaced. The old boiler in the church was replaced with forced heating and air units in 1998.

An extensive restoration of the interior of the church began in June 2000, and ended with the church opening for the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil in 2001. During this time the interior of the church was completely re-painted, new altar and sanctuary furniture built, the church was re-wired, received a new PA system, and carpet throughout. The stations of the cross, statues, canvas paintings, and the nativity were restored as well. The Wicks Organ was completely dismantled, cleaned, pipes painted, and tuned, and the original pump organ was returned to it's original condition and brought back into use. The church basement received new flooring, new suspended ceiling after the boiler pipes were removed, new lighting and paint. Donations from parishioners, groups, other parishes, and memorials and estates totaled nearly \$425,000 for the restoration project. Money raised during the parish centennial helped pay for the remainder of the project. During the 10 months the parish was out of it's church, Masses were held in the library of Pope John High School and at St. Bonaventure Church in Raeville, which became a sister parish, sharing a pastor, in June of 2000. Other major improvements to St. Boniface Church included a new roof in 2009 at the cost of \$110,000, and in 2012 a complete tuck pointing of the church tower, replacement of the tower louvers, relining of the gutters, painting of all trim, and the installation of storm glass over the stained glass windows took place, for a total cost of \$225,900. The pride St. Boniface has in their church is noticeable to all who travel by on Highway 14.

The St. Boniface Church building, as grand as it is on Highway 14 coming through Elgin, there is another St. Boniface Church that was built so intricate that by looking at photographs you cannot tell it from the real thing. It is a true replica of St. Boniface Church, built to scale, three-quarters of an inch to every foot, by Bill Parks. The replica was built in an estimated 6,500 hours between 2005 and 2013. The church is nine feet long, four feet wide and seven feet tall and plans are to have it on display during Elgin's Q125 Celebration.

Milestones have been celebrated through the years, but none proved as grand as the parish's 100th Centennial Celebration in the summer of 2001. Many joyous events, including a Chautauqua, Grand Parade, Fashion Show, Penny Carnival, Alumni Banquet, Street Dance were held, among others. The Centennial Mass, celebrated by Archbishop Elden F. Curtiss and many priests, former pastors, and religious capped the weekend with a church filled to capacity. A Centennial Grotto adorns the west entrance of church with a tribute to religious vocations and the families of St. Boniface past and present. Among items available at the centennial were CDs, professionally recorded, of 16 of the most beloved songs of the St. Boniface Choir, directed by Rosie Schueths. Hundreds of solid oak crosses were made by volunteers from the original wooden kneelers from church were also available.

An rare and exciting 24 hours in the history of St. Boniface Parish took place October 16, 2012 when Paramount Pictures pulled into town and set up their home base at the St. Boniface parking lots and served their meals at St.

Boniface Auditorium while they filmed scenes for the movie “Nebraska” in the West Cedar Valley Cemetery. Director Alexander Payne and cast Bruce Dern, Will Forte, June Squibb, Bob Odenkirk, and Stacy Keach graced our parish for a day, with plenty of security shielding them from onlookers.

The youth of St. Boniface Parish are educated in their faith through the 5-Day Schools of St. Boniface and Pope John or through the Parish Religious Education Program, or Sunday Youth Group. In 2013 St. Boniface introduced Family Formation for their Grade 1-6 program, a change from the standard C.C.D. program, as Family Formation involves parents. An Ecumenical Vacation Bible School is available in the summer in Elgin and TOTUS TUUS (Totally Yours) is a fun and energetic parish based summer catechetical program, for grades 1-12 that has been offered at the parish a number of years. The youth of St. Boniface are known to give of their time in service to the parish, community and the surrounding area.

Adult parishioners have had many opportunities through the years for faith growth. Parish Missions have been important with the very first Mission held for seven days in 1914. During the Lenten Season, Parish Missions are still held, with a mission speaker and three to four evenings set aside for Mass, confession, prayer and reflection. Eucharistic Adoration is available one day each month at St. Boniface Parish, since 1997. There are currently 115 committed adorers who pray for 1 hour each month, with the focus on vocations. Bible Study sessions are available, in the winter months, and several parishioners are involved with the area Christian’s Encounter Christ and several small prayer groups meet weekly. Individuals wishing to join the Catholic Faith do so by receiving instruction from the pastor.

Rev. Ross C. Burkhalter is the current pastor of St. Boniface Parish. Sister Patricia Hoffman resides in the parish and has been an instructor at Pope John XXIII Central Catholic High School since 1972. Deacon Dennis Wiehn and Deacon Bill Camp serve the parish in ministry, and fourteen committees combine their efforts and leadership to help build up the Kingdom of God and the community that is St. Boniface Parish.