

HISTORY OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST PARISH

In writing the history of the Catholic church in Morden, information of the early years is very sketchy. It appears from the attached [list of pastors](#), Morden became a mission around 1896.

The St. John's Catholic Church was built in the summer of 1899 on the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Thornhill Avenue under the leadership of Father Woodcutter. It became a landmark in Morden being over 60 feet high to the top of the steeple not including the cross on top.

The congregation was predominately rural and ethnic with some living as far as 15 miles away. Transportation was a problem due to poor roads and a dependency on horse drawn vehicles. Cars did not appear in any numbers until after 1915. Some families were only able to attend church on rare occasions. Morden did not have a resident priest and was served in conjunction with other missions as well as St. Boniface. Train service was put to good use. Permission was granted to use schools by some of the rural school boards to teach Catechism classes during the summer holidays in the outlying areas. Sisters and students from St. Boniface were sent out to live with families and to teach.

Little is known about the earlier priests except that Father J. H. Prud'home (1909, 1917-1921) was later named as Bishop of Prince Albert, and in 1923 the town of Howell Saskatchewan was renamed Prud'home in his honor. Research shows that in 1916 there were only 18 families belonging to the church and the church had a debt of \$1700. By 1921, the congregation had doubled and the debt had been paid by contributions, without the aid of box socials, bazaars and other fundraising means.

It will be noted that most of the early priests served only a short period of time in Morden, one or two years at most. In 1924, a change took place. Father Poitras, being a resident of Manitou, took charge of Morden for the next ten years. Masses were then alternated between Manitou and Morden. After the transfer of Father Poitras, Morden was served by Father Brunet from Starbuck. During that period, a fire at the church in Starbuck destroyed most of the records of Morden. These were the depression years and it was a struggle to maintain the church. The church was not used during the winter months, and Masses were occasionally held at the Manitou Hotel courtesy of the Gilbert's, and in later years at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Degelman.

When times got better and the population of Morden increased, so did the congregation. The church itself began to deteriorate. The foundation, which was built of stone, began to crumble and was rebuilt by volunteer labor. Later on, under the direction of father Baxter, a complete renovation of the church took place. A small basement was dug to accommodate a new oil furnace to replace the old pot bellied heater inside the church, which stood over 6 feet tall. The inside of the church was renovated and also an addition was placed on the East Side. The Catholic Women's League and the Men's Club were formed to help with the renovations and to help raise funds to pay for the debt that had been accumulated. In 1960, a God share campaign was initiated by Father Gauthier to strengthen the faith in the church and to raise funds to retire the debt that was left after the renovations. A considerable amount of the debt was retired through this effort. This movement was not only instituted in the Catholic Church, but in many other churches for the same purpose.

For the next few years, the congregation continued to grow and began to outgrow the old church. A committee was set up to study the possibilities of building a new church. During the studies that were being conducted, the Mennonite Brethren Church at 685 Stephen Street became available. The church was in good condition as it had only been built in 1946. It would be large enough to accommodate the catholic congregation. A decision was made to purchase the church, and through friendly negotiations, it became a Catholic Church in November 1969. The last Mass to be held in the old church was by Father Maurice Jeanneau on November 9, 1969. The old church remained standing until February 1970, at which time it was torn down. After serving 70 years, another landmark of early Morden disappeared.

St. John the Evangelist Parish up to this time had been a mission. The congregation had grown to approximately 100 families. A movement took place to have a resident priest. It was felt that father Jim gray could not adequately serve both Morden and Carman due to the growth of both regions. After a number of appeals, Archbishop Antoine Hacault answered our prayers and appeals by granting Morden a resident priest. A residence was provided immediately east of the church. On October 3, 1980, Father Renato Pasinato was installed by Archbishop Antoine Hacault of St. Boniface Diocese as the first resident priest, and as of that date, St. John the Evangelist Mission became a self-supporting parish.

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Year 2000

History always has a way of repeating itself. As of today, [Fundraising](#) efforts have continued for the past few years with the hope of building a new church for the parishioners of Morden. It will be located on Academy Drive in the south end of town across from Minnewasta School.

On Sunday, June 22, 1997, the Building Committee hosted a potluck supper to discuss the possibilities of renovating or building a new church.

On January 4, 1998, the Pledges & Donations Committee developed a Kick Off day to begin collecting pledges from all parishioners. We were well on our way to "show our children and grandchildren what our religion means to us. To show them that we are willing to give, and work, and pray for the Catholic church and what it teaches."

All parishioners have shown this dedication, and we will have the actual building in the near future. **Keep up the good work!**



LIST OF PRIESTS WHO HAVE SERVED MORDEN

1896 – 1898 Father E. B. Rocan

1899 Father F. Viens

1899 Father Woodcutter

1900 Father W. Bitter

1901 Father A. Enk O. M. I.

1902 – 1903 Father Augusta Sufa

1904 – 1905 Father Paul Hilland O. M. I.

1906 Father J. Riedinger O. M. I.

1907 Father Paul Hilland O. M. I.

1908 Father J. Vorst

1909 Father J. H. Prud'home

1910 – 1916 The Oblate Fathers from Holy Ghost and

St. Joseph Parishes in Winnipeg

1917 – 1921 Father J. H. Prud'home

1923 Father J. Ad. Sabourin

1924 Father J. Bellavance

1924 – 1934 Father G. Poitras

1934 – 1941 Father L. Brunet

1941 – 1952 Father M. Messier

1952 – 1957 Father Robert Baxter

1957 – 1966 Father Azarie Gauthier

1966 – 1968 Father Clayton Purcell

1968 – 1975 Father Maurice Jeanneau

1975 – 1980 Father James Gray

1980 – 1985 Father Renato (Ron) Pasinato

Sept. 1985 – Jan. 1986 Father H. Perron V. G.

Jan. 1986 - June 1986 Father G. Trudeau P. H.

**July 1986 – August 1987 Father Fred Olds**

Aug. 1987 – April 1988 Father L. Berard

May 1988 – Sept. 1988 No Priest

Sept. 1988 – Dec. 1988 Father Gagnon & Deacon Paul Martin

**Feb. 1989 – August 1992 Father Fred Olds**

Aug. 1992 – Aug. 1994 Father Renato Pasinato

Sept. 1994 – Aug. 1997 Father Wenceslao Rebillaco

Sept. 1997 –Father Romuald Szumierz

August 2002 – Father Joseph Tran

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