

## **A HISTORY OF ST. FRANCIS BORGIA PARISH, PIGEON, MICHIGAN**

The year 2001 marked the 75th anniversary of the current church building at St. Francis Borgia Parish in Pigeon, Michigan. This is the second church building for the parish. The history of our parish started way back on June 21, 1879, when Father T.B. Krebs was appointed by Bishop Casper H. Borgess as the missionary for the thumb area. Using Gagetown as his home base, Father Krebs made his way by horse and buggy to the villages of Bay Port, Caseville, Pigeon, and Elkton. Services were held at the home of Mrs. Bernhardt Maier, later known as the Albert Buerker home, located at 41 S. Caseville Road.

In 1893 a decision was made by Father Krebs and his small group of parishioners to build the first St. Francis Borgia Church. Since Pigeon was the approximate center of the villages served by Father Krebs, it was decided to build the church there on the corner of Ruppert and Nitz streets where presently the old Erla's Supermarket stands. The structure, dedicated to St. Francis Borgia, was built of wood with a seating capacity of approximately 100 people.

Also that year a second phase in St. Francis Borgia history began with the transfer of Father Krebs and the assignment of Father John Helton at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Church in Sebewaing. St. Francis Borgia was made a mission of the Sebewaing Parish where several priests from November 1893 to September 24, 1941, administered to the spiritual needs of the families at St. Francis Borgia..

In 1926 Father Edward Gutha purchased two acres of land located in the Village of Pigeon from Mr. Henry Moeller . Later that year a small group of parishioners (approximately 60 families) contracted to build a new brick Spanish Romanesque Style church which we worship in today. The architect was Andrew R. Morison of Detroit, Michigan. A loan was negotiated from a local bank along with pledges and donations to help pay for the project. After the church was completed, Fr. Gutha also supervised the building of the present parish hall which was completed in 1927.

On September, 24, 1941, the Most Rev. William Murphy, D.D., Bishop of Saginaw, issued a decree raising Pigeon to a full parish status under the name of St. Francis Borgia. Fr. Aloysius Hafner, who was pastor of Sebewaing and Pigeon since November, 1936, was assigned as the first resident pastor. The current brick contemporary Georgian Style rectory was built during Father Hafner's pastorate. Also, as a note of interest, Father Haftner played an influential role in the founding and design of the Scenic Golf and Country Club located on Filion Road northwest of Pigeon..

Many improvements have been made to the church building over the years. The first major renovation was completed in the late 1940s under the direction of Father Alphonse Kromka. At that time a new mission tile roof was installed and the interior was redecorated. During Father Kirchman's pastorate (1955-1963), carpeting was installed in the sanctuary and the interior of the church was redecorated in rose tones with 23-carets gold leaf trim.

Father Cronkite (1963-1976) remodeled the sanctuary by installing paneling and adding a

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new moveable altar facing the people. Carpeting was installed throughout the church. The parish hall was also renovated with redwood siding, paneling on the interior walls, and moveable walls that could be closed to make six classrooms for teaching C.C.D.

In 1997, new carpeting was installed, the paneling around the altar was removed, and the interior was given a new coat of paint.

Thanks to the pastoral leadership and the support of the parishioners throughout the years, Saint Francis Borgia Parish remains a prominent part of the lives of its members. In another seventy five years may the members at that time look back and say "job well done".

In 1893 Saint Francis Borgia was made a mission of the Sebewaing parish. The following priests served the Pigeon Mission from November, 1893 until October, 1941:

November 1893 - September 1897	Fr. John Helton
August 1897 - July 1900	Fr. Joseph Herr
July 1900 - February 1903	Fr. L. J. VanStraelen
April 1903 - July 1914	Fr. Charles F. Hofsted
July 1914 - September 1916	Fr. John Bonkowski
September 1916 - October 1919	Fr. John M. Lewis
October 1919 - December 1922	Fr. Joseph Maier
December 1922 - June 1924	Fr. George Schleich
June 1924 - March 1925	Fr. Charles Einig
March 1925 - January 1932	Fr. Edward Gutha
January 1932 - November 1936	Father Elmer Betzing
November 1936 - October 1941	Fr. Aloysius Hafner

### **Since attaining full parish status:**

October 1941 - June 1947	Fr. Aloysius Hafner
June 1947 - April 1955	Fr. Alphonse Kromka
April 1955 - September 1963	Fr. Bernard J. Kirchman

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September 1963 - July 1975	Fr. Glenn Wm. Cronkite
July 1975 - March 1976	Fr. James Kendziorski
March 1976 - July 1984	Fr. Michael H. Wolf
July 1984 - July 1991	Fr. Bernard Skornia
July 1991 - July 1997	Father Barney Janowicz
October 1997 - Pastoral Administrator	Sr. Theresa Fox, OP
October 1997 - July 1999 Sacramental Minister	Fr. Malcolm Maloney, OFM Cap
July 1999 - 2004 Sacramental Minister	Fr. George Serour
2004 - Present Sacramental Minister	Fr. John Weis

### **ADDITIONAL ITEMS OF INFORMATION**

The first to be ordained to the priesthood from St. Francis Borgia Parish was Fr. Joseph Maier who also served his home parish from 1919 - 1922.

Fr. Richard Lobert was the other parishioner from St. Francis Borgia to become a priest when he was ordained in 1976.