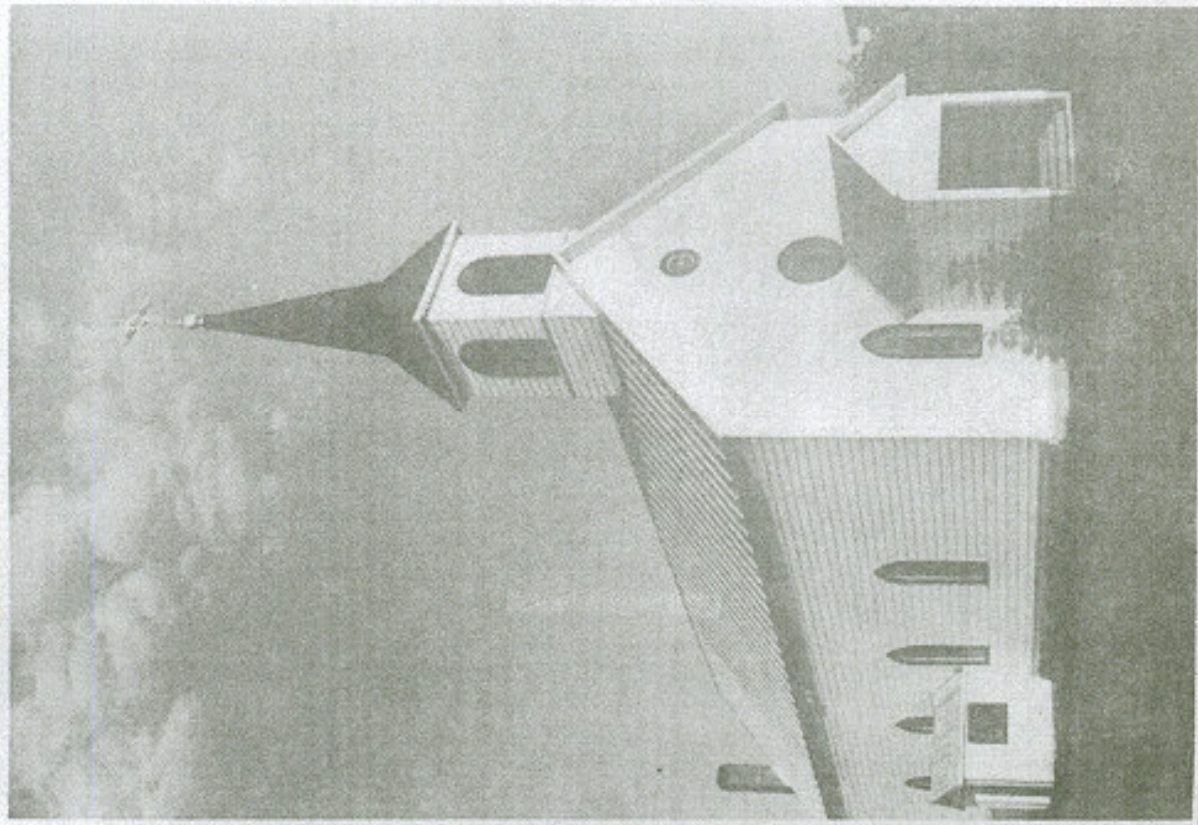


SAINT ISIDORE'S PARISH



Montgomery Center, Vermont

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CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY

1881 — 1981

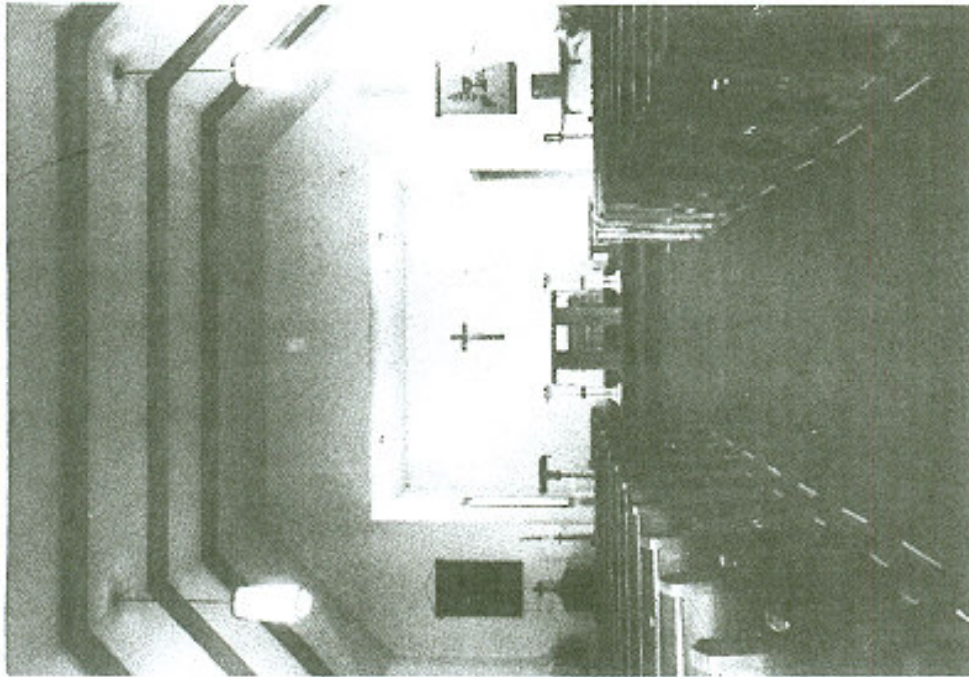
Montgomery Center, Vermont



HIS HOLINESS, POPE JOHN PAUL II



MOST REVEREND JOHN A. MARSHALL
Bishop of Burlington



St. Isidore's Church redecorated interior
August 1980



July 3, 1981

Dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Isidore's Parish:

The Centennial Celebration of our parish gives us all reason for great joy. We are deeply thankful to God for the wonderful favors He has bestowed upon our parish since its meager beginnings.

The observance of this anniversary marks the opening of a new chapter in the history of St. Isidore's Parish. It is a day of prayer with gratitude for the plentiful blessings of the past and of petition for the Lord's continued care and protection in the years that lie ahead.

We dedicate this centennial anniversary booklet to the priests, religious and laity of St. Isidore's Parish, living and dead, who by their devotion to God's church have been so important to its growth.

May we strive to preserve what we have inherited from our religious and zealous ancestors and strive also to leave something of the same legacy to future generations.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. Roger L. Charbonneau

Rev. Roger L. Charbonneau
Pastor

EARLY BEGINNINGS

This year we celebrate the one-hundredth year of the establishment of a Catholic parish in Montgomery Center on July 4, 1881. The first Catholic settlers in the town were Francois Messier, George Cochesne, Pierre Harel and a few others. The first Mass was offered in the mountain-top log cabin owned by George Cochesne in 1855. The celebrant of the Mass was Fr. L. Lyonnet of Swanton. About 15 French-Canadian Catholics attended. From that year onwards, priests from nearby parishes came on an irregular basis to spiritually nourish the growing number of Catholic families settling in the area of Montgomery and Montgomery Center. Masses were celebrated at Horace Rowley's Hotel (presently the house owned by Arnold (Puffer) Lumbra and at Clement Desautels' home (now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Austin Lumbra) until the construction of a church.

On July 4, 1881, Bishop Louis DeGoesbriand established St. Isidore's Parish in Montgomery Center and named Fr. Peter Mathieu as its first full-time pastor. He continued to live in Milton but served the people at St. Isidore's on a regular basis. Fr. Zephyrin Druon, the pastor of Holy Angels Church in St. Albans, a friend of Fr. Mathieu donated money for the purchase of land to build a church. The lot was bought from a Mr. James Ferguson and was deeded December 7, 1881. Construction began in 1882 under the direction of Fr. Mathieu. Many parishioners worked in bees to build themselves a house of worship, donating their time and talents to the project. Among the workers were Mr. William Desmarais, the father of Mrs. Mary Elkins and Mr. Joseph Potvin, the father of Mr. A. Charles Potvin. Mrs. Elkins, before her death, recalled that her father told her how the first church was blown down by a terrible wind storm just as it neared completion. Undaunted by this catastrophe, the courageous parishioners renewed construction efforts and completed the main part of the structure as we now have it in 1883. After only ten years, the debt on the church building was cleared and Bishop John S. Michaud came from Burlington on August 15, 1893, to bless and dedicate it to St. Isidore, the Laborer. By now, there were about 30 families who belonged to the parish. It is interesting to note that according to the Diocesan Archives, the spelling of the name of the parish was St. Isadore well into the 1890's.



Father Durochers
1899-1902



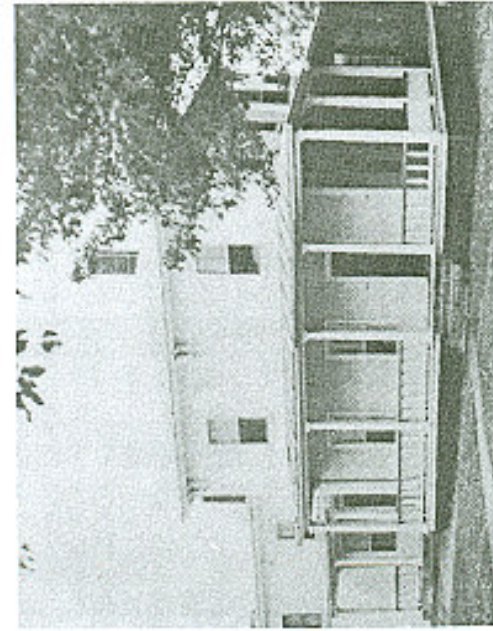
Father L'Ecuyer
1931-1939



Fr. Louis Clermont
1890-1893



Father Blais
1902-1904



St. Isidore's Rectory
Built in 1888



Bishop Michaud on a visit in 1902.

The first Baptism recorded in the parish was that of Maria J. Platte on April 8, 1881. The first Marriage was that of Mr. Louis Lumbrá and Miss Domethilda Domina on July 24, 1881. Both the Baptism and Marriage were presided over by Fr. Peter Mathieu. The first funeral was that of Malvina Desuatsels, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiahs Desuatsels. It took place on December 28, 1885 and was celebrated by Fr. Alfonse Langevin. The spring interment was held in a plot behind the church where the small pond now exists. A small cemetery was begun there and continued in existence until Fr. Louis Clement purchased the land owned by Alexander Laplant where the present cemetery is. The deed for this new cemetery was dated June 27, 1891. The soil in the first cemetery was found to be very wet and graves often would begin to fill with surface water before people were buried. The caskets were therefore unearthed and transferred to the cemetery on the hill.

The main part of the present rectory was built in 1888 during the pastorate of Fr. D. Daignault. However, the first priest to live there full time was Fr. Louis Clement in 1890. Between then and the turn of the century other buildings were added to the parish property, including a carriage barn adjacent to the rectory for the pastor's horse and buggy. This is now the old parish hall. It is presently used for storage on the main floor and for a youth center on the second story. Horse sheds were also constructed at the rear of the church yard. Parishioners who came to Mass with horse and carriage would rent stalls in these sheds on an annual basis just as they paid pew rent in church. These sheds provided shelter for the animals during church services. Although they no longer exist, it is known that they were located between the church and the new parish hall.

The number of Catholic families moving into the Montgomery area continued to grow as did the population of the town. With the shortage of priests in the diocese, the pastor of St. Isidore's in 1899, Fr. Louis Desrochers, must have feared that the parish might lose its resident priest to some larger parish in Vermont. So on January 15, 1899, he wrote the following to Bishop John S. Michaud: "I don't think that a priest who will visit the place once upon a time would be enough. In my humble judgment, they need Mass and a serious instruction every Sunday, or else many souls will go to ruin."

¹Letter to Most Rev. John Michaud, Diocesan Archives.

PASTORS OF SOULS

The first twenty-three years of the life of the parish saw a succession of nine pastors who came to serve the people of Montgomery and Montgomery Center. They included the following: Fr. Peter Mathieu (1881-1882), Fr. Joseph Brelivet (1882-1884), Fr. Alfonse Langevin (1884-1887), Fr. D. Daignault (1887-1890), Fr. Louis Clermont (1890-1893), Fr. Francois Boutin (1893-1894), Fr. Louis Desrochers (1894-1899), Fr. L. H. Pepin-Lachance (1899-1902), and Fr. Theodule Blais (1902-1904). Not much is known about these nine brave and hardy pioneers of the faith because there is no written record of them nor any record of earlier anniversaries of the parish. However, the bicentennial publication, "Montgomery, Vermont: the History of a Town," tells us that it was during the pastorate of Fr. L. H. Pepin-Lachance that a bell was added to the church: "On Thanksgiving Day, November 28, 1901, the Rev. Daniel G. O'Sullivan of St. Albans consecrated the St. Isidore Church bell which was rung that evening for the first time."² This bell has ever since called the faithful to worship.

In 1906, Fr. Joseph A. Cote arrived at St. Isidore's in what was to be the longest pastorate in the history of the parish. He served until his death in 1931. However, due to very poor health during the last two years of his life, Fr. Leo L'Ecuyer was sent to be his curate. Father L'Ecuyer was to succeed him as pastor until 1939. It was only during this time that the parish had two resident priests. It is likely that it was during the pastorate of Fr. Cote that the present kitchen and an extra bedroom and bathroom were added to the rectory.

Parishioners still recall that when Fr. Joseph A. Cote came to St. Isidore's he could speak very little English. He encouraged everyone to sing hymns at Mass even though they were all French ones that he taught them. Mr. Joseph Bonnett tutored Fr. Cote and soon he was able to converse well in English. Members of the parish remember that Father

²Montgomery, Vermont: the History of a Town, W. R. Brant Hoover and Sara Taylor, 1976, Queen City Press, Burlington, Vermont.



Father Fournier
1951 - 1954



Father Sutfin
1954 - 1959



Father Gingras
1945 - 1951



Father Dignam
1939 - 1945



Father Joseph Cote
1904 - 1931

Cote was very strict and would never allow partying on Friday evenings. Friday was to be respected as a day of sacrifice honoring the death of Jesus. He loved and enjoyed raising animals. Besides his horse, the barn also housed a cow and some chickens. He was often seen out in the hay fields with his black cassock on.

The parish continued to grow and develop spiritually during the pastorate of Fr. Joseph Cote. He taught religion classes regularly in church each week for the youth of the parish. In the summer classes lasted all day long. He established a women's group called the Ladies of St. Anne and a men's organization called the League of the Sacred Heart. It is also remembered that Fr. Cote was the first pastor to have an automobile. Misses Mary and Helen McElroy recall that he had an accident with it. He went off the road on the curve near the present home of Mr. and Mrs. Merle Saulters. He was trying to see if he could see the large white cross on the cemetery hill behind the church. As a result of this mishap, Fr. Cote was lame for a long time. He went to see Brother Andre at St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal. When he returned from his visit with the healer-brother, he no longer needed his cane and his lameness was gone.



Father Cote's car - 1918

Notes from the diary of Mr. Joseph Pudvah (Potvin), the father of A. Charles Potvin, found in the bicentennial history of Montgomery mentioned above, indicate that on July 29, 1906, a corner-stone laying ceremony took place at St. Isidore's Church. This was for the addition of the present sacristy which is at the rear of the sanctuary area. The diary relates that there were over 10 priests and a large crowd present that day. Fr. Daniel O'Sullivan, pastor of St. Mary's Church and Fr. Louis Desrocher of Holy Angels Church, (former pastor of St. Isidore's) both from St. Albans, spoke on the occasion: the former in English and the latter in French. Fr. Joseph Cote was the pastor at the time and it is remembered that this addition to the church was completely paid off during his pastorate. On May 13, 1924, Fr. Cote had the new Stations of the Cross canonically erected and blessed in the church.

Father Leo L'Ecuyer, the next pastor of St. Isidore's (1931-1939) established a new ladies' group in the parish under the protection of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus. St. Theresa's Society soon became a very active and helpful

group in the parish as it still is today. It sponsors the annual lawn social in July and many other activities such as rummage sales and bake sales. Fr. L'Ecuier is remembered for his kindness to the poor during the depression years of his stay here. He purchased homes for the people who were struggling financially, allowed them to live in them free of charge, and once they had saved enough money, he would sell them the home.

Father William Dignan arrived at St. Isidore's on September 20, 1939 and was to stay until July 17, 1945. He was a kindly and very generous man. He was interested in and involved with the youth of the parish. He enjoyed going to movies even if it meant long drives back and forth to the theatre in Montreal. Fr. Leo A. Gingras succeeded Fr. Dignan and remained as pastor until April 24, 1951. It was he who established St. Isidore's Court of the Catholic Order of Foresters. It began as a men's organization and later admitted women when this became permitted on the national level. The group is still active in the parish today. It sponsors a series of Lenten card parties and the annual parish New Year's Party. Fr. Gingras made good use of the present old parish hall--the former carriage barn. He would show movies there each week-end as pre-television era entertainment for the townspeople. The church building underwent renovations during the pastorate of Fr. Gingras.

Father Oliver Fournier came to St. Isidore's as its next pastor. As a zealous young priest he had much energy and enthusiasm for his first parish in 1951. He was followed by Fr. Edward J. Sutfin on June 23, 1959. Fr. Sutfin was a man ahead of his time. It was not long after his arrival that he began renovations in the church interior which made it liturgically avant-garde. The traditional statues were replaced by more modernistic and abstract art work. He was assisted in his work by Mr. Robert Bonnette, an artist who also redecorated the rectory at this time. Needless to say, the changes particularly in the church, caused some shock and consternation among the parishioners of this small conservative country church.

The modernistic look in the church, however, was to be short-lived. When Fr. Charles E. Fitzpatrick became pastor on June 25, 1959, he took steps to restore the church to its former condition. He brought back the traditional statuary as well as the old Stations of the Cross. National liturgical magazines heard about the reversion at St. Isidore's



Father Walsh
1965 - 1966



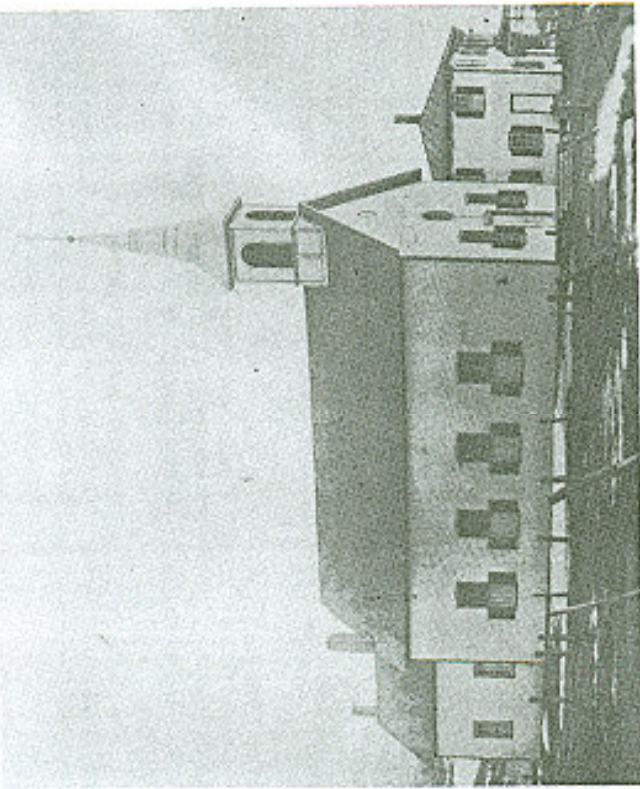
Father Duquette
1970 - 1978



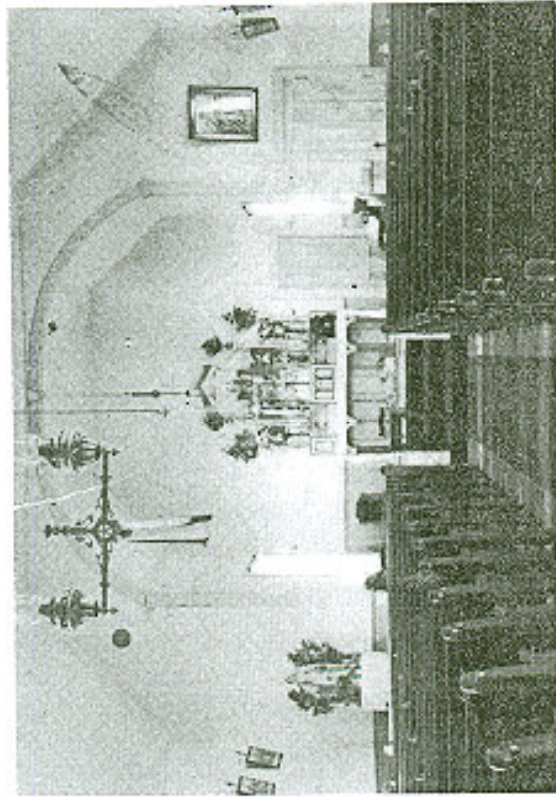
Father Fitzpatrick
1959 - 1965



Father James Foley
1966 - 1970



Saint Isidore's Church - exterior and interior.



and soon were calling it liturgical vandalism. Father Fitzpatrick is remembered for his enthusiasm as a member of the Montgomery Fire Department. Many parishioners still recall his hearty laugh and his general fun-loving attitude.

Possibly the shortest pastorate in the history of the parish was that of Fr. Raymond Walsh who arrived on July 16, 1965 and was transferred on May 28, 1966. Although his stay was very brief, many parishioners have good memories of this kind and joy-filled man of God. Fr. James F. Foley came as St. Isidore's next pastor. He likes to tell people that he left the parish with a bang because he left on the 4th of July in 1970. On that date Father Lucien Duquette arrived at St. Isidore's. He organized a very effective Bingo on a regular weekly basis to raise funds to help support the parish and later to build a beautiful new parish hall. This was built in the summer of 1976 and was completely paid for by June 22, 1978, when the present pastor, Fr. Roger L. Charbonneau appeared on the scene. Father Duquette is remembered by many parishioners as a talented bowler and card player.

VOCATIONS

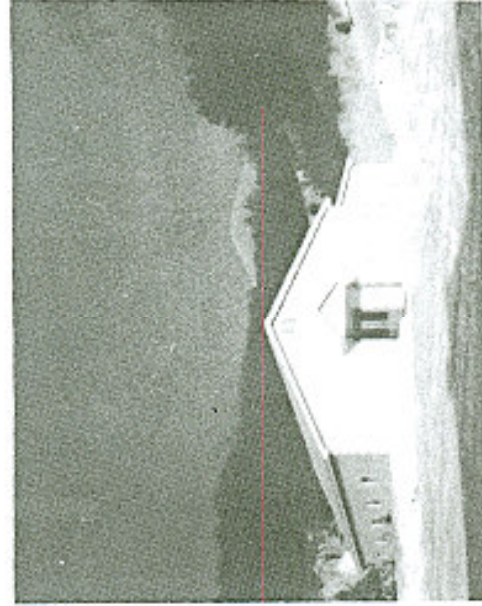
Although St. Isidore's Parish was never a large one, it can justly boast of having been the home of several vocations to the service of God and His people. At least one young woman and three young men are known to have entered religious life from the parish. Sister Lucy (Beatrice) Bushey, it is thought, entered religious life in the early 1930's. She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Bushey. She has been a missionary sister in foreign countries as long as parishioners can recall. Father Charles Dodge, SSE, was ordained May 29, 1920. He was a professor at Saint Michael's College for many years and died March 4, 1961. He was the uncle of Mr. Paul Dodge and Mrs. Dorcas Levesque, formerly of the parish. Father William Lepage, SSE, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Lepage, was ordained on June 11, 1938. He served as an Edmandite Father in the missions of the southern part of our country until his death on July 23, 1980. He was the cousin of Mrs. Joseph (Marion) Lumbra. Father Paul A. Dupre, the son of Mr. and Mrs. William Dupre, was ordained at St. Isidore's Church by Bishop John A. Marshall on November 24, 1974.

St. Isidore's Church underwent complete exterior renovations in 1962. Aluminum siding was installed and the steeple was painted green. The cross at the top of the steeple was painted with aluminum paint. In October, 1978, they were repainted. However, this time the steeple was painted black to match the decor of the church. After several months of discussion and planning, a complete renovation of the interior of the church was begun on Saint Isidore's feast day, May 15, 1979. This included installation of a new heating system, insulation, a new lighting system and wall-to-wall carpeting. The church was rededicated on August 19, 1979, by Father George Murtagh of St. Albans, the Dean of Franklin County, in the absence of Bishop John A. Marshall. In November, 1980, the parish became the happy owners of a new Allen electronic organ. This was purchased through a drive by members of St. Theresa's Society and through a memorial gift fund in the name of Mrs. Claudette (Proulx) Slade, formerly of this parish. The extra money left in the organ fund was used to build and install book shelves attached to the church pews for new Worship 11 hymnals which were also purchased with this money.

St. Isidore's Parish today numbers about 125 families. Its people are still the same type of generous and hard-working souls that helped to establish the parish in 1881. However, most of the parishioners of today are not employed in the dairy and lumber industries as their ancestors were. Many work in the tourist industry, especially since the development of Jay Peak Ski Area. Others work at the toy factory in Montgomery. Still others travel to Sheldon, Eden, St. Albans and Burlington for their employment. There is a good spirit among the members of the parish family. There are several lectors, altar boys and ushers for the celebration of the Eucharist, as well as a good choir under the leadership of Mrs. Eugene (Marion) Lumbr, the organist. The ladies' groups, St. Theresa's Society and Ladies of St. Anne, continue to be enthusiastic and active whereas in many larger parishes they have dwindled in numbers or been discontinued entirely. The Catholic Order of Foresters also continues its regular meetings and activities. St. Isidore's Cemetery Association performs a good service of administering and maintaining our parish cemetery, under the present leadership of Mr. Henry Godin. The parish council with its liturgy, education, social concerns and finance

committees works in cooperation with the pastor in an advisory manner, assisting him in the work of the parish. The council meets regularly with Mr. Richard Ryea as its present chairman. Elections are held annually in March when three persons are chosen to represent the parish to replace those whose term of office has expired. Religious education classes are taught each Monday afternoon throughout most of the school year by a competent staff of lay-teachers with the guidance and leadership of the pastor. A high school youth group meets every two weeks and is involved in many fund-raising, social and recreational as well as religious activities each year. The "Good News" Prayer Group meets to worship and pray on a weekly basis during the Lenten season and usually continues until the end of the school year.

Our parish is indebted to many groups and individuals who have made its history a great one. In their own particular ways, all of them have brought and shared many material and spiritual benefits--these are the priests and people of St. Isidore's Parish. As we begin a new century may we pledge to God that we will continue working together as His daughters and sons, striving to grow in faith, hope and love.



New Parish Hall
Built in 1976