Under the leadership of Fr. William Foster, the founding members of St. Gerald Parish made many sacrifices so that we would have the faith today. They were dedicated in passing the faith to their children. We are thankful for the gift they have given us.

Fr. Gary Ostrander, Pastor

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO FOUNDING PARISHIONER

Irene Seykora

“Keeper of the Parish Archives”

Many thanks to the following for their dedication in preparing this book:
Fr. Gary Ostrander, Sherry Wachtler, Jan Hacker, Tom Valasek, Joe Prochaska, The Goodriches and everyone who has been a part of our rich heritage!

We sincerely apologize for any errors or omissions.
1957
The first official St. Gerald Parish Mass was offered in the City of Ralston Town Hall. Founding Pastor, Fr. William A. Foster, distributed Holy Communion to members of the new parish. This 50-year-old photograph was taken from the 1959 Dedication Book.

St. Gerald Parish Mission Statement
We, as St. Gerald Parish, are a Eucharistic community who will help each other to be good and faithful stewards of God’s love. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will accomplish this through prayer, worship, education and service.

St. Gerald Parish Identity Statement
St. Gerald Catholic Parish is a worshipping Eucharistic community. Jesus Christ, our brother and our God, is the heart and center of our parish life and worship. We recognize Christ and his love in the Eucharist, ourselves, one another and in all people.

St. Gerald Parish Vision Statement
Jesus came among us to do God’s will. We, as members of St. Gerald Parish community, also strive to live God’s will in our individual lives and parish life. These activities encourage the worship, education, spiritual growth, and the service outreach of our parish members. St. Gerald Parish calls forth its parishioners to be stewards that develop and use their talents, gifts and resources to help our parish community and the wider community beyond us. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will live the Gospel’s mandate of love and share that love with others. We look forward to the heavenly banquet with our loving God and Father.
Dear St. Gerald Parishioners,

When the early pioneers came to the Midwest in their stagecoaches and wagon trains, they brought with them not only their belongings but their faith. It wasn’t long before they began to settle and build homes. But their faith also needed a home, so they built churches and soon those churches dotted the plains. Parishes became the “family” by which faith was passed on from one generation to the next. The first generations of Catholics made huge sacrifices to not only build churches and schools but to pass that faith on to their children. It is each generation’s responsibility to do the same.

St. Gerald is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Under the leadership of Fr. William Foster, the founding members of St. Gerald Parish made many sacrifices so that we would have the faith today. They were dedicated in passing the faith to their children. We are thankful for the gift they have given us. We also accept the challenge and responsibility to pass on the faith to the next generation.

As I mentioned in the 2001 directory, the distinctive character of St. Gerald’s Parish is its friendliness. St. Gerald is a warm, welcoming parish. Because of this quality, St. Gerald Parish has grown in the last 50 years from just a few hundred families to 2,400 families. We are therefore thankful for the past, we celebrate the present, and we accept the challenge of the future to be a family of faith.

May God continue to bless our Parish Family,

Fr. Gary L. Ostrander
June, 2007

Rev. Gary Ostrander
St. Gerald Parish
7859 Lakeview Street
Ralston, NE 68127

Dear Father Ostrander and parishioners,

I extend to you my congratulations on the 50th anniversary of St. Gerald Parish, with the celebrations scheduled for June 3, 2007. I am looking forward to being with you for this special occasion.

The development of your parish over this past half century has been phenomenal, in terms of numbers of parishioners, and your new beautiful Church and your expanded school program. You should be very proud of what you have accomplished in such a relatively short period of time.

I ask the Lord to continue to bless you and your parish.

May our Lord continue to bless you.

I am sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Elden Francis Curtiss
Archbishop of Omaha
February 22, 2007

St. Gerald’s Catholic Church
7859 Lakeview Street
Ralston, NE 68127

I am pleased to be writing this letter on behalf of the City of Ralston and myself.

Congratulations St. Gerald’s Parish on attaining your 50th Anniversary.

St. Gerald’s has always been an integral part of making Ralston the exceptional community that it is today. We applaud St.Gerald’s for their contributions, past, present, and looking forward to the future.

Sincerely,

Donald A. Groesser
Mayor
City of Ralston

The Spirit of Independence

5500 South 77th Street
Ralston, NE 68127-3996
(402) 331-6677
Fax (402) 331-4553
E-mail: city.hall@cityofralston.com
2007
Our Clergy

Rev. Perry Robinson, SJ
Associate Pastor

Rev. Gary Ostrander
Pastor

Rev. Ralph Lammers
Retired
Assists with Masses

2007 - Our
Deacon Couples

Rev. Mr. Ray and Sue
Lukowski

Rev. Mr. Lonnie and
Mary Dinneen

Rev. Mr. Chris and
Ericka Hanson

Rev. Mr. Tom and Kathy
Valasek

Rev. Mr. Doug and
Carol Marsh
Memories

A first assignment is usually very special for a priest and I was very blessed to be so accepted at St. Gerald and have so many profound experiences there. I was blessed in being present for the opening of the new church at 96th and Q. Fr. Larry Dorsey was a good mentor for me and I was there when he was so suddenly taken away from us.

— Fr. Tom Weisbecker, Past Associate Pastor
An altar server throughout his grade school years, Msgr. Tom Fucinaro grew up in the parish. His parents, Joan and the late Tony Fucinaro, were founding members of St. Gerald.

Msgr. Fucinaro was the first parishioner from St. Gerald to enter the priesthood. He was ordained in 1989 for the Diocese of Lincoln. He studied Italian in Sienna, Italy, in preparation for his studies of Canon Law at the College of the Holy Cross in Rome. He has a Master's Degree in Canon Law and is a Canon Lawyer for the Diocese of Lincoln.

For the past 14 years, he has been at the Vatican in Rome where he is currently working with the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

Fr. Ross Burkhalter grew up in the Mockingbird area and attended St. Gerald School. He is the son of the late Bruce and Delores Burkhalter.

Fr. Ross was an altar server for many years during his years at St. Gerald. Ordained in the Archdiocese of Omaha in 1994, Fr. Ross completed his studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Conception Seminary and Kenrick College. He is currently pastor at St. Thomas More Parish in Omaha.

Michael Swanton was born and raised Catholic in Casper, Wyoming. After graduating from college, he held various teaching positions for six years. After leaving the teaching field, he held ten jobs in 13 years! One of those jobs brought him to Omaha. He says, “I really liked the people I got to know, and I became a member of St. Gerald Catholic Church.”

Fr. Mike studied at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis, was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Omaha on Saturday, June 4, 2005. He celebrated his first Mass on Sunday, June 5 at St. Gerald Catholic Church.

**a time capsule ...**

1957 – Archbishop Gerald Bergan directs Fr. William Foster to build a church in Ralston in May.

1957 – The first St. Gerald Mass was celebrated in the Ralston Town Hall in September.

1957 – The St. Gerald building fund drive was kicked off in October with a banquet at Ralston High School.

1958 - Ground was broken March 6 for the new church building at 78th and Lakeview Drive.

1959 – The first parish dinner was held at Trovato’s Restaurant. 500 attended the first anniversary party at the Livestock Exchange Building.

1959 – The first Mass was offered on Easter Sunday, March 29, at St. Gerald’s new church.
1957
As Sunday attendance grew considerably, Masses were moved to Hillcrest Shopping Center at 75th and Main streets. This 50-year-old photograph was taken from the 1959 Dedication Book.

1959
The St. Gerald Parish Family finally moved into its new church with the first Mass on March 29. (Photograph from Ralston Recorder 1959.)

a time capsule ...

1959 – The blessing and dedication of the new church was April 19.

1959 – St. Gerald Catholic School, grades one through eight, opened September 8. Tuition was free.

1961 – Mother-daughter breakfasts were held and the Green Berets, now the Men’s Club, was organized.

1962 – The parish shrine was blessed May 24 by Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan.

1963 – A new addition to the school – four classrooms, library and more – was completed in October.

1964 – Mass was celebrated Nov. 17 in English for the first time.

1965 – Fr. Foster faced the people while saying Mass for the first time.
1958

Groundbreaking for the church at 78th and Lakeview streets on March 6.
This 50-year-old photograph was taken from the 1959 Dedication Book.

Our Founding Members

Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Adams
Mr. and Mrs. Leo C. Adams
Mrs. George Allison
Mr. and Mrs. Harry Anderson
Mrs. Marvin J. Bade
Mrs. Carroll Baker
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph J. Barry
Mr. and Mrs. M. Barry
Miss Nada Batson
Mrs. S. R. Batson
Mrs. Floyd Beasley
Mr. and Mrs. G. Beisch
Mr. and Mrs. Louis Bernt
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Blankman
Mrs. Arthur Blum
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Boyle
Mr. Robert E. Bowen
Mr. and Mrs. L. Boyce
Dr. and Mrs. John Butkus
Mr. and Mrs. Leno Caradori
Mr. and Mrs. Albert P. Chickinell
Mr. and Mrs. Eugene C. Chickinell
Mrs. Julia Chickinell
Mr. and Mrs. Val Chickinell
Mr. William Chocholousek
Mr. and Mrs. Dana Christopher
Mr. and Mrs. Pat Collins
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Collins
Mrs. Rosemary Cooley
Mr. and Mrs. James Couch
Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Croft
Mr. and Mrs. William Cronan
Mr. John A. Cullen
Mr. and Mrs. Maurice F. Cullen

Mrs. K. Crandal
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Coufal
Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Daly, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Daly, Sr.
Mr. and Mrs. Richard R. Daly
Mr. and Mrs. Junior Daly
Mr. and Mrs. Don DeSciscio
Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Dunning
Mr. and Mrs. J. DeMontigny
Mrs. Mildred Farris
Mr. Joseph E. Federle
Mr. John Flatt
Mr. Anthony J. Fucinaro
Mr. and Mrs. Domenick Fucinaro, Jr.
Mr. Domenick Fucinaro, Sr.
Mr. and Mrs. Donald M. Fucinaro
Mrs. Teresa Fucinaro
Mr. and Mrs. Tony Fucinaro
Mr. and Mrs. Ray Faust
Dr. R. Forest
Mr. and Mrs. Art Foley
Mr. and Mrs. Douglas B. Glebe
Mr. and Mrs. Marlon Gorzelanski
Mrs. Helen Griswa
Mr. and Mrs. William Griswa
Mrs. Winifred Heavey
Mr. and Mrs. Edward Heafey
Mr. and Mrs. Dennis P. Hogan
Mr. Richard Hrabik
Mr. and Mrs. K. Hrabik
Mr. and Mrs. F. Hurst
Dr. and Mrs. F. Hale
Mr. and Mrs. W. Hopkins
Mr. and Mrs. W. Hayes

Mrs. Charles Haacke
Mr. and Mrs. T. Hallgren
Mrs. Hugo Johnson
Mr. and Mrs. Raymond L. Johnson
Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Jones
Mr. and Mrs. R. Jorgensen
Mr. and Mrs. Carl Kalhorn, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Louis Kantor
Mr. and Mrs. Alfred King
Mr. and Mrs. Mervin J. Kolell
Mrs. Dorothy Koory
Mr. and Mrs. Anton Kowal
Mr. and Mrs. Leo Koziel
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph F. Krajicek
Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Kriss
Mr. and Mrs. Joe Kritinbrink
Mr. and Mrs. F. Krakowski
Mr. and Mrs. Sigmund Kula
Mr. and Mrs. William Kulus
Mr. and Mrs. Ramon Kunc
Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Larkin
Mrs. David Leech
Mr. and Mrs. Earl R. Lewis
Mr. and Mrs. James F. Lindley
Mrs. Ed Littrell
Mr. and Mrs. Emil Lundeen
Mr. and Mrs. Dallas Marks
Mr. and Mrs. Frank Matison
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Medina
Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Miller
Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Mlynaczak
Mrs. George Molstead
Mr. and Mrs. Richard M. Moore
Mr. Joseph N. Morin
Remembrances from Founding Parishioners

Don Fucinaro and Bill Chocholousek
When it came time to move from the shopping center into the new church, Don and Tony Fucinaro and Bill Chocholousek went to Holy Name to pick up pews no longer wanted. They tipped the pews upside-down and carried them above their heads. They looked like a big caterpillar with six legs. Pews were loaded in a cattle truck donated by Mr. Timmerman and taken to a company to be refinished. Don said, “By doing it the way we did, the parish saved a lot of money. Some of the original pews are still at the Lakeview Church.”

Joan Kowal
Ralston parishioners were so lucky to have Father Foster. Money was tight at first, so he counted on the parishioners for all his meals. Everyone would take turns feeding him and absolutely nobody like without the many friends, social activities and spiritual guidance we received. It’s a wonderful community and I feel my life was especially blessed by it.

Jean Couch
In 1957 my husband Jimmy and our two children, Susie, 7, and Terry, 3, became a part of the beginning of St. Gerald. I don’t know what our lives would have been like without the many friends, social activities and spiritual guidance we received. It’s a wonderful community and I feel my life was especially blessed by it. Miss Marilyn Tangeman

Joan Fucinaro
I really have a lot of fond memories of Father Foster. I used to find golf tees in the decorative grill on my front screen door. I couldn’t figure out who was doing it, and even blamed the neighborhood kids. One day Father called me and asked why I hadn’t called him lately. I told him I didn’t know I was supposed to. “Well,” he said, “every time I stop by on my way home from golfing at Applewood, you’re never home. So I’ve been leaving my calling card on your front door!”

Dorothy Moore
When my family lived on Miller Avenue, my husband would go over to the Town Hall and set up chairs for Mass. Then church services were moved to the shopping center. My two daughters made their First Communion there. I love going to 7 a.m. Mass at the church on Lakeview.
1958
Thirty-three St. Gerald youngsters received their First Communion June 15, 1958.

1968
Father Foster’s 25th anniversary celebration of his ordination.

In May 1957, as Fr. William Foster stood surveying four acres of land which had been the Ralston Golf Course at 78th and Lakeview streets, the words of Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan echoed in his head, “I hear you like to play golf.”

“Oh, yes I do,” Fr. Foster replied.

“I want you to go out to Ralston and build a church and a school on the golf course,” the Archbishop said.

The task appeared to be a formidable one for the founding pastor, but on Sunday, June 9, 1957 during the 7:30 and 9:30 a.m. Masses, he told the 288 parishioners who attended the first Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at Ralston’s Town Hall that together with sacrifice and cooperation, “We can get it done.”

Boundaries of St. Gerald Parish were set - Papio Creek on the east, 120th Street on the west, Harrison Street on the south and Union Pacific Railroad tracks on the north.
Tracing Our History, continued

GETTING STARTED

September 1957 was an important month for Fr. Foster and the parishioners of St. Gerald. Mass was celebrated for a growing number of parishioners in the basement of Hillcrest Shopping Center which John Wiebe had donated rent free.

Parishioners donated their time and talents to provide a religious atmosphere for the people of St. Gerald. The parish men built the altar, pulpit, baptismal font and Stations of the Cross.

Catechism classes for the children began at the Town Hall, in the shopping center and at residences. Arrangements were made for a building drive with Charles Miller as chairman. Ladies of the parish formed the St. Gerald Guild with six circles which organized projects to raise money for the many parish needs. Also, Fr. Foster moved into his first permanent residence at 5210 South 79th St.

A banquet was held for 270 persons Oct. 20, 1957 at the Ralston High School cafeteria to kick off the building fund drive. Distinguished guests were the Most Rev. Archbishop Bergan, Right Rev. Monsignor Daniel Sheehan and Revs. Robert Hupp, Marcel Keliher and George Kempker. The goal of the dinner was to establish a weekly quota from each family giving the committee an idea on how to pursue with their building plans. $600 per Sunday was pledged.

Architects for the new church and school were Loftus and Ingalls. Rorick Construction Co. was awarded the contract.

1968 – The first Parish Council formed and Fr. Dennis Stolinski became the first full-time associate pastor.

1974 – Because of the rapid growth of the parish and overcrowding of Masses, it was decided to build a modest church at 96th and Q streets on 10 acres donated by the Joseph Krajicek family.

1974 – Fr. Norman Parr was welcomed to St. Gerald to help coordinate the addition of the second church.

1975 – Construction of St. Gerald West began on Oct. 15.

1976 – Fr. Stolinski was transferred to a West Point parish and Fr. Vincent Younccamp was assigned temporarily. Fr. Albert Massman, OSB, joined St. Gerald as permanent assistant.

1979 – St. Gerald’s first holiday boutique was held in November. Women of the parish made crafts and accepted donated items.

1979 – A new east church vestibule was built, the church was redecorated and seating was increased to 450.

1979 – Fr. Parr was transferred and Fr. Larry Dorsey was assigned to St. Gerald as a priest-in-residence.

1983 – Sr. Margarita Simon, OSM, was hired as a pastoral assistant.

1984 – Fr. Dorsey was reassigned and Fr. Marion Sitzmann, OSB became priest-in-residence.

1985 – St. Gerald Parish had grown from 120 families to 1,400 and from one to two churches.

1985 – A building fund drive started for the St. Gerald Parish Center.

St. Gerald is a warm, welcoming parish. Because of this quality, St. Gerald Parish has grown in the last 50 years from just a few hundred families to 2,400 families. — Fr. Gary Ostrander
1974
August of 1974 saw the erection of the 7,000 pound, 56-foot tall, redwood cross with stainless steel bands. It was donated by the church guild and placed so that the church could be noticed from Lakeview Street. (Photo and information taken from the Ralston Recorder 8-15-1974.)

1962
The parish shrine was blessed May 24, 1962 by Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan, followed by Mass. The Rev. J. Hanna, S.J., 80, laid the Kasota stone. The only one of its kind in the country, the statue of St. Gerald is made of white Carara marble and was designed in Italy.

a time capsule

1987 – The Knights of Clumbus Fr. William A. Foster Council 9518 was chartered on March 17, with Grand Knight Jim McNamara and Chaplain Fr. Foster. The group of 43 men has now grown to 210 members.

1989 – Founding Pastor Fr. William Foster retired and Frs. Larry Dorsey and William Fitzgerald were appointed by Archbishop Daniel Sheehan as pastor and co-pastor.

1989 – Fr. Perry Robinson, SJ, was hired as pastoral assistant.

Tracing Our History, continued

Groundbreaking

Ground was broken for the new building on March 6, 1958. Completion date for the church and the school was January 1959. Plans called for a seating capacity of 380 plus choir space and mothers’ room. Construction of the new church was on schedule until June 1958 when a two-month strike and weather delayed progress.

During the next few months, the men of the parish organized the Holy Name Society. The C.Y.O. and the choir, with Karen Seykora as organist, were becoming active parts of the parish.

Thirty-three St. Gerald youngsters received their First Holy Communion on June 15, 1958.

Fr. Foster baptized 32 persons, six of whom were converts, and he performed six marriages. Total income for the year was $36,853.72.

Nearly 900 attended the first parish dinner at Trovato’s Restaurant and 500 attended the First Anniversary celebration at the Livestock Exchange Building.

By Jan. 1, 1959, there were 191 families registered.
**FIRST MASS IN NEW CHURCH**

Mass was offered at the new church on Easter Sunday, March 29, 1959. The blessing and dedication took place April 19 that same year. The Most Reverend Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan blessed the church while parishioners waited outdoors until it was completed. They entered as a body for the solemn Mass celebrated by Fr. William Foster with Archbishop Bergan as main celebrant and homilist. The Rev. Richard Parr of Atkinson, Neb. assisted at Mass as deacon and the Rev. John Stear of Papillion as substitute deacon. Master of Ceremonies was Msgr. Daniel Sheehan, Chancellor of Omaha Archdiocese, and the Rev. Edward McCaslin, Vice Chancellor.

**CATHOLIC SCHOOL IN RALSTON OPENS DOORS**

Principal Sr. Mary Jasper, SSSF, and her assistant, Sr. Mary Alvina, SSSF, came to the school on Aug. 30, 1959. The Sisters took up residence in one of the empty classrooms, cooking their meals on a two-burner gas stove until Aug. 15, 1960 when the parish purchased a home at 7750 Dodson Circle for $20,000.

On Sept. 8, 1959, the doors of St. Gerald Catholic School opened and was formally dedicated Sept. 22, 1959 when Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan said Mass. The school, with grades first through eighth, was tuition free.

A new addition to the school - four classrooms, library and more - was completed in October 1963. At about this same time, building was beginning west of 84th Street and the Mockingbird addition was rapidly expanding.

**a time capsule**

1990 – Sr. Rosalee Burke, ND, was hired as pastoral assistant.
1991 – Fr. Dorsey added girls on the altar as candle bearers.
1992 – Perpetual Adoration began at the West Church, with many parishioners volunteering to spend an hour with the Blessed Sacrament.
1993 – Lonnie Dinneen was ordained as St. Gerald’s first deacon. He and wife Mary became the first Deacon Couple.
1993 – St. Gerald held its first Parish Picnic, which later became the Parish Festival.
1993 – 35 members of St. Gerald Youth Group make a pilgrimage to Denver to see Pope John Paul II in August.
1994 – Preliminary plans for a new church at 96th and Q streets were presented to Archbishop Elden Curtiss.
1994 – RCIA recorded its largest number of participants – 70 – since it began in 1989.
1995 – Groundbreaking ceremonies were held for the new church at 96th and Q streets.
1996 – Fr. Tom Weisbecker was assigned as associate pastor.
1972
Parishioners gather with Fr. Foster (2nd from left) and Fr. Henry Huber, OSB, (far left) to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the parish.

1973
Confirmation with Archbishop Daniel Sheehan.

1975
Construction begins on St. Gerald Catholic Church West.

1979
Construction of the vestibule addition at the East Church is completed.
Tracing Our History, continued

CHANGES

Mass was celebrated in English for the first time on November 17, 1964. After acquiring a portable altar in April 1965, Fr. Foster faced the congregation while saying Mass, encouraging fuller participation in the Mass.

The first lay principal in the Archdiocese at the elementary level was Lawrence Heck, who was appointed principal of St. Gerald School in 1968.

The Parish Council was formed May 10, 1968 with the following serving as members: John Merryweather, president; Art McCarty, president-elect; Tony Kowal, Athletic and Recreation; Sister Gloria, CCD; Mr. and Mrs. Carl Ryan, CYO; Mr. and Mrs. Al Heires, Give and Take; Bill Chocholousek, Green Berets; Bill Fry, Home and School; Helen Carl, Guild; and Herman Wehr, Padre Partners.

Donald Past was the first lay principal of the CCD program, which began in October 1968.

In 1972, volunteer Carole Manders was hired as school secretary and also helped Fr. Foster with secretarial duties.

Fr. Dennis Stolinski, who was a great hit with the youngsters of the parish, became the first full-time associate pastor.

MOVING WEST

In May 1974, Fr. Foster brought to the parishioners’ attention the rapid growth of the parish and the problem of overcrowded Masses. Since the Joseph Krajicek family had donated 10 acres at 96th and Q streets to the Archdiocese, it was decided to build a modest church at the location.

Fr. Norman Parr was welcomed to St. Gerald to help coordinate the addition of the second church in June 1974. St. Gerald West held its first Masses at Hitchcock School, 104th and Berry streets.

October 15, 1975 saw the construction of St. Gerald’s West Church begin, with Boyer, Biskup and Gonge as architects and Don Fucinaro doing the site preparation. Cost was around $190,000.

Upon Fr. Stolinski’s transferring to a parish in West Point, Nebr., Fr. Vincent Youngcamp, a Columban Father, was assigned to St. Gerald on a temporary basis. Fr. Albert Massman, OSB, from Mt. Michael Abbey in Elkhorn, joined St. Gerald as permanent assistant, staying until 1989. He often delighted the children with his puppets.

1996 – Fr. Foster’s Golf Tournament was held to benefit the Fr. Foster Endowment Fund.

1997 – The first Mass was celebrated on Feb. 22 in the new church. The formal dedication was March 9.

1998 – The parish was saddened to learn of the sudden death of Fr. Larry Dorsey on March 16.

1998 – Fr. Gary Ostrander, pastor of St. Mary’s Church in West Point, was appointed pastor at St. Gerald on June 18.

1999 – Fr. Tom Weisbecker was appointed pastor in Columbus and Fr. Mike Schmitz came to St. Gerald as associate pastor.

2000 – The first Guardian Angel Auction was held to raise money for the school.

2001 – Fr. Mike Schmitz was assigned pastor of parishes in Menominee and Fordyce and Father Robert Allgaier was assigned as associate pastor.

2002 – Fr. Perry Robinson, SJ, was assigned as associate pastor.

Memories

All my memories of St. Gerald are beautiful. I loved being with all of you. My duties were taking the Eucharist to the sick, visiting the homebound, hospital patients and those in nursing homes. Sometimes I would visit the school and give a talk on vocations or just to say “hello.” You were all so good and loving to me and are in my daily prayers. All the pastors were special and easy to work with. I’ll always consider myself a part of St. Gerald Parish.

— Sr. Margarita Simon, OSM
1983
Fr. Foster celebrated the 40th anniversary of his ordination on Dec. 18 by joining the St. Gerald school children in a song.

1989
Fr. Larry Dorsey was formally installed as pastor on Sept. 7. John and Margaret Bolas served as witnesses. Fr. Dorsey officially served as pastor from June 15, 1989 until his death in March of 1998.

Tracing Our History, continued

CELEBRATIONS AND EXPANSIONS
Fr. Foster’s 35th anniversary of his ordination was celebrated Dec. 18, 1978.

A new east church vestibule was built, the church underwent redecoration and seating was increased to 450. It was completed Dec. 4, 1979 at a cost of $105,000.

On June 6, 1979, a reception was held for Fr. Parr, who was being transferred, and Fr. Albert Massman, who was celebrating his 25th anniversary.

Fr. Larry Dorsey was assigned to St. Gerald as a priest-in-residence and moved into the former convent on Dodson Circle on July 1, 1979. A Creighton University professor, he assumed duties of saying Masses at St. Gerald.

After Fr. Dorsey left for duties at another parish, Fr. Marion Sitzmann, OSB, resided in the home on Dodson Circle.

Sr. Margarita Simon, OSM, was hired in 1983 as a pastoral assistant to take Eucharist to the sick, visit the homebound and hospital patients in the growing parish.

PARISH CENTER FUND DRIVE NETS SURPRISE
By 1985, St. Gerald’s Parish had grown from 120 families to 1,400 families and from one church to two. During the 28 years since St. Gerald had been established, the Mass schedule for both churches had increased from two every weekend to 12. The school was expanding from one class per grade to two classes per grade. In addition, as the parish continued to grow, a need for a multi-purpose Parish Center became apparent.

A building fund drive to cover the expected $650,000 cost netted a big surprise for Fr. Foster - pledges totaling $750,000 were received.

FOUNDING PASTOR RETIRES - FRS. DORSEY AND FITZGERALD TAKE OVER REINS
Fr. Larry Dorsey, who 10 years earlier said Masses at St. Gerald, and Fr. William Fitzgerald were appointed by Archbishop Daniel Sheehan to the position of pastor and co-pastor at St. Gerald Church on the retirement of Founding Pastor Fr. William A. Foster. Fr. Foster continued to help with weekend Masses for several years. He lived in a duplex in the Ralston area where he enjoyed playing golf, saying Masses at Mercy Villa and visiting with friends.

“When Fr. Larry Dorsey and I arrived, we discovered a pioneer parish that had been started from scratch by Fr. Foster and the pioneer families of St. Gerald,” Fr. Fitz recalls. “But that was growing by leaps and bounds into what would become in the future, one of the largest parishes in the diocese.”

They hired a full-time music director, Mary Clare Mendick; a lay parish business administrator, John Bolas, and a diocesan planner, Sister Rosalee Burke, ND, who helped with organization and detail work in getting programs off the ground such as RENEW and MOMS.
1986
The completion and dedication of St. Gerald Parish Center at 78th and Lakeview, later rededicated as the Fr. Foster Parish Center.

1982
Parishioners join Fr. Foster to celebrate the 25th anniversary of St. Gerald Catholic Church.
COMMITTEES OF PARISHIONERS DETERMINE PARISH PLANT NEEDS

Committees of parishioners met to determine parish needs and made recommendations. The Parish Council voted to have an architectural master plan done, with the $10,000 cost financed by the Archbishop’s Campaign for Educational Excellence.

A new church would benefit the largest number of parishioners including five-day school, CCD, youth groups, senior citizens, young adults and families. A plan was submitted to Archbishop Elden Curtiss who approved it. The plan also called for the continued use of the original St. Gerald Church at 78th and Lakeview streets and its K-6 school.

The 96th and Q location fit two requirements of the Archbishop: The Archdiocese must own the property and the church should be located as close to the geographical middle of the parish as possible.

“I remember gathering the data with the city planning office on the parish demographics so as to show how centrally located the property is that now holds the new church,” recalls Sr. Rosalee Burke, ND.

The Archbishop also asked that the parish offer fewer Masses.

COMMITTEES ORGANIZE TO PLAN NEW WORSHIP SITE AT 96TH AND Q

Lou D’Ercole and Bill Wachtler were named the general co-chairs. Honorary co-chairs were John Loughran, Helen Butkus, Fr. Larry Dorsey, George Reinhardt and Anthony Fucinaro. The goal of $2.2 million was set which would readily pay for half the cost.

After a search undertaken by the Master Plan Committee, under the direction of Paul Nelsen and Fred Kambach, the architectural firm of Zenon Beringer Mabrey Partners was awarded the contract. From the beginning, the “new” church was to have a building that “looked like a church.” It was to be visually prominent to the vibrant, growing, Catholic community of St. Gerald Parish.

The design committee spent numerous hours working to assure that the plan for the new church would reflect the needs and desires of the people.

Fr. Tom Weisbecker, in his first assignment in the Archdiocese, was assigned as an associate pastor.

Memories

The joy of working at St. Gerald was the goodness of the people, their willingness to take leadership positions and the support of new ideas by both Fr. Larry Dorsey and Fr. Bill Fitzgerald. I was really hired by the two priests to do organization and detail work, which neither of them enjoyed, and I loved. — Sr. Rosalee Burke, ND, Past Pastoral Associate
1995
PHOTO A - Archbishop Curtiss (center) and Fr. Foster (right) move the first shovels of dirt at the groundbreaking ceremony for the new church to be built at the 96th and Q location.

1995
Capital Campaign for new church at 96th and Q streets:
(All are l to r)
PHOTO B – Bill Wachtler, Fr. Perry Robinson, Sherry Wachtler, Mary Clare Mendick, Lou D’Ercole.
PHOTO C - Margaret Bolas, Fr. Perry Robinson, John Bolas, Fr. Tom Weisbecker, Fr. Larry Dorsey.
Under the direction of Mary Clare Mendick, the choir - 65 members strong including instrumentalists ranging from kettle drums to a harp - has grown by leaps and bounds. They have treated the community to various concerts and every weekend perform five liturgies. Before the new church was built, a much smaller choir performed 12 liturgies on weekends. Visitors from across the continent have expressed their admiration for the choir’s uplifting inspirational music. After recording their first CD in 2001, they recorded three more and are releasing one for the 50th anniversary celebration of the church.

**ST. GERALD MUSIC MINISTRY ADDS “HEAVENLY” ATMOSPHERE TO OUR LITURGIES**

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**Memories**

*Much gratitude to St. Gerald’s choir for providing the great music at the weekend liturgies and on other special occasions. Many, many times, I felt the music was very angelic.*

— Fr. Mike Schmitz, Past Associate Pastor
FIRST MASS IN NEW WORSHIP SITE

At 5 p.m. Feb. 22, 1997 the first Mass took place in the new church. The Liturgy of the Eucharist and formal dedication of the 96th and Q streets church with Archbishop Curtiss took place Sunday, March 9, 1997 at 3 p.m.

Historical ties to the original church at 78th and Lakeview are represented by the Celtic cross prominent on the southern face of the building and a replica of the statue of St. Gerald placed under the bell tower on the north. The new church comfortably seats nearly 1,140 and up to 1,500 can be accommodated using overflow space in the fellowship hall.

The area that formerly served as the worship space at St. Gerald West became the fellowship hall with a large kitchen. Almost every area in the building was designed to be multi-purpose.

By 1997, $2,180,000 had been received in the capital campaign drive.

FATHER DORSEY DIES – FATHER GARY OSTRANDER ASSUMES PASTOR’S DUTIES

The parish community was shocked and saddened by the sudden death of Fr. Larry Dorsey, 64. Fr. Dorsey was in his rectory office when stricken. Fr. Tom Weisbecker took over duties with help from Fr. William Fitzgerald, who was called back from Arizona to help.

In June, Fr. Gary Ostrander, pastor of St. Mary’s Church in West Point, was appointed pastor at St. Gerald.

“MEAT AND POTATOES” PRIEST ARRIVES AT ST. GERALD

Fr. Gary Ostrander may have spent 21 of his 27 years in the priesthood in rural areas, but the suburban St. Gerald Parish seemed a perfect fit for him for several reasons:

First, his love of golf which also drew Fr. Foster to St. Gerald. Frs. Foster and Ostrander had been longtime golfing friends. Fr. Gary had even given the homily at Fr. Foster’s funeral.

Second, Fr. Fitz, also a good friend of Fr. Gary’s, was partly responsible for Fr. Gary becoming a priest. Fr. Fitz, as a newly ordained priest, supported Fr. Ostrander’s decision to enter the priesthood and he was homilist for Fr. Gary’s first Mass.

Then, Fr. Gary and Fr. Dorsey had formed a priest prayer group with other priests which met monthly for six years. From these dear friends, he knew a lot about St. Gerald.

When Fr. Fitz called Fr. Gary about taking on the pastor’s job at St. Gerald, he told Fr. Gary he would really love St. Gerald because the people were like the folks at West Point Catholic – “meat and potato” Catholics.

“That’s good because I feel I am basically a meat-and-potatoes type of priest,” Fr. Gary replied.

This meat-and potatoes priest came to St. Gerald with no particular agenda and settled into his first year just getting to know the people – all 1,850 families.
Upon his arrival, Fr. Gary suggested doing something he'd initiated at West Point: holding a Guardian Angel Auction to raise money for the school. The first auction was held in 2000, and they have averaged around $75,000 a year since.

He also said there were four things we needed to do:
1. Pay off the debt;
2. Expand the school to seventh and eighth grades and renovate the school offices;
3. Renovate the rectory into offices; and
4. Renovate Lakeview Chapel.

Today, nearly all of these have been accomplished. The Dodson Circle home was sold and the rectory was renovated into offices in 2003. In the same year, Lakeview Chapel underwent renovation with new carpeting, refinishing of the pews, painting and the addition of new lights. St. Gerald’s seventh and eighth grades opened in the fall of 2006. The debt has been reduced while the church has made all monthly payments on time.

Other programs Fr. Gary initiated are:
1. Saying Mass at Waterford (originally Silvercrest);
2. Visiting shut-ins on First Fridays;
3. Adding another Mass to the weekend schedule;
4. Holding Lenten prayer breakfasts; and
5. Holding the Vincentian Missions, drawing nearly 800 people nightly.

“The reason all these things have happened is because of the generosity of the people,” Fr. Gary said. “People here are super-dedicated.”

In addition, in 2006 the St. Vincent DePaul Society helped people in the area – Catholics and non-Catholics alike – to the tune of $37,000 in emergency aid for rent, food, clothing “Again, this was due to the generosity of our parishioners,” Fr. Gary said.

Most recently, new Stations of the Cross were installed at the new church, and the usher's room has been renovated into a confessional.
POIGNANT HOMILIES AND FUTURE PLANS

Fr. Gary brought many gifts to St. Gerald, one of which is his succinct, clear and often poignant homilies. A master at skillfully applying the scripture to our daily lives in his homilies, he also is a craftsman at intricately weaving the message of the Gospel into parishioners’ lives at their funerals, weddings and anniversaries.

As St. Gerald moves into its next half century, Fr. Gary believes the parish will see a multi-cultural population. “I see all kinds of nationalities,” he said.

Future plans include retreats for the parish council and school board, a library committee working on book clubs, and whatever programs the ever increasing parish, which now numbers 2,450 families, wishes to move forward.

3. The interior of the main worship area at the main church during Lent 2007.

4. Fr. Gary delivering one of his inspiring homilies to the residents of Waterford at Roxbury (originally Silvercrest Assisted Living). One of our priests celebrates Mass for these elderly Catholics every week.
SAINT GERALD CATHOLIC CHURCH

1997–2007
As well as being the 50th Anniversary of St. Gerald Parish, 2007 marks the 10th anniversary of the dedication and first Mass in our new worship space.

— Fr. Bill Fitzgerald (Fr. Fitz), Past Co-Pastor

Memories
I remember the day we met with the sculptor and Fr. Larry said he wanted the Christ figure to be a welcoming and smiling Jesus. Then I responded, ‘Yes, but . . . we also need to honor the suffering Jesus – so why not have two images: the Suffering Jesus for Lent and the Welcoming Jesus for Ordinary Time?’ And so it came to be!.”

— Fr. Bill Fitzgerald (Fr. Fitz), Past Co-Pastor

a time capsule

2002 – In June, Fr. Gary and Fr. Perry moved to the house at 7852 Lakeview Street from the rectory and their house on Dodson Circle.

2003 – Fr. Gary’s first Putting Tournament was held.

2003 – Fr. Gary started the first Tuition Grant Assistance Program.

2003 – In the summer, Lakeview Chapel was renovated with new carpet, refinishing of the pews, painting and additional lights. The rectory was also renovated into offices.

2005 – Groundbreaking for the new seventh and eighth grade rooms was on May 20.

2006 – St. Gerald School’s seventh and eighth grades opened in the fall.

2007 – A committee headed by Kathy D’Ercole, Cheryl Bolin and Bonnie McDowall was formed to plan the 50th anniversary of the parish.
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Pictured is the groundbreaking for the 7th & 8th grade wing at St. Gerald Catholic School.

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Pictured left are FOUNDING PARISHIONERS MARY & DON FUCINARO at the groundbreaking for the 7th & 8th grade wing.

Pictured right are FOUNDING PARISHIONERS TONY & JOAN FUCINARO.

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