

St. Boniface Parish

Traveling by the future Uniontown area, Father Cataldo and other Jesuit priest from the mission areas of Idaho occasionally said Mass at area homesteads in the early 1870s. An influx of German Catholic families into the area in the mid-1870s increased the demand for Catholic services. By 1878 the Catholics of Uniontown (and indeed most of them lived on farms in the surrounding area) planned to build their own church. The church was placed under the patronage of St. Boniface, the great apostle of Germany. Fr. John Blondel, of Walla Walla, was the first priest to say Mass in this church, a mission of St. Patrick's, in the spring of 1879.

St Boniface church, a wooden structure, 30 feet by 40 feet, received its first pastor, Fr. Don M. Cesari, April 26, 1882. Later the same year, Bishop Aegidius Junger of Nisqually arrived to bless and dedicate the church. Fr. Cesari's parish was the whole Palouse territory, about 1,600 square miles. In December 1884, Fr. Nicholas Frei was appointed the second pastor of Uniontown, with responsibility to minister to Colfax, Palouse City, Pullman, Genesee, Oakesdale, Rosalia, and other towns in his wide territory. The rapid settlement of the Palouse areas after the arrival of the railroads, led to the detachment from St. Boniface of these mission towns. Fr. Frei left in 1886 to become first pastor at Colfax.

In the fall of 1884, the Benedictine Sisters located their mother house in Uniontown. They were warmly received by Michael Schultheis and the entire Catholic community. By 1885 a new home and school had been built for the Sisters. This St. Andrews Convent and School was the beginning of the parochial education of the parish that continues to 2013. When the Benedictines left (they eventually settled in Cottonwood, Idaho), Sisters of the Divine Savoir, Sisters of St. Francis, and Sisters of the Holy Name, carried on the Catholic education of the parish, which is now run in cooperation with St. Gall parish at the Guardian Angel-St.Boniface School in Colton.

In 1904, St. Boniface parish began the construction of an imposing new structure. The grandeur of the church, as it towers above the low hills of rich wheat land, reflects the devotion, traditions, and dedication of the German settlers of Uniontown. The cruciform, Neo-Romanesque, brick structure has a façade flanked by two massive towers and with a seven-foot statue of the Immaculate Conception, the second patron of the church, surmounting the front gable. The brick came from the Uniontown Brick Yard. The interior has fluted columns with ornate capitals, stained glass windows, oil-painted Stations of the Cross, and main altar brought from the old wooden church. The new church was dedicated by Bishop Edward O'Dea November 22, 1905.

In the spring of 1910, the temporary altars were replaced by faux-marble, rigalico altars. The main altar has five statues: the Immaculate Conception in the center, with St. Francis, St. Boniface, St. Patrick, and St. Anthony of Padua at the sides. The two side altars at the front are dedicated to the Sacred Heart and St. Joseph. There are two other side altars in the transepts. On Sunday, June 5, 1910, the Feast of St. Boniface, Bishop O'Dea, of Seattle, came to Uniontown to preside at the solemn consecration of the church. St. Boniface Church is the first consecrated church in Washington and still today is one of only two consecrated churches in the Spokane Diocese. A three-story rectory was built in 1906. In 1913 a new rectory was built on the south side of the church and the three-story building became the convent for the Sisters of St Francis. This structure today is the Churchyard Inn, a private bed and breakfast.

In 1914 Augustin Skinner, newly appointed bishop of Spokane Diocese, appointed Fr. Metz of Uniontown as his personal secretary and Fr. H. J. Loeffler as pastor at Uniontown. Under Fr. Loeffler, who stayed in Uniontown 23 years, much was done to enhance the beauty of the church. Philipp Staheli, a Portland artist, painted frescos on the front apse, on the walls above the side altars, and on the ceiling ribs and vaults. Frank Wolf and L. H. Hattrup installed a new altar rail that was painted to appear to be of marble and thus to match the altars. St. Boniface has preserved this sanctuary rail and in the 1980s Gerald and Carol Druffel created a free-standing altar that again matches the faux marble decoration of St. Boniface church.

St. Boniface proudly stands as a testimony to the dedication of the early settlers and the sacrifices they made for their faith. Today, St. Boniface Church is a witness to the living faith of the current congregation, whose sacrifices maintain the faith tradition of of St. Boniface Church – a church rich in ornate beauty and symbolism.