**The History of Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish**

**7. Parish Finances and Fund-Raising**

Financial concerns are an ongoing issue in any parish, and Sacred Heart was no exception. The 1920s were a period of general prosperity, though not so much in a rural community like Bowmansville. Building the church, school, and shrines, and buying three pieces of property and the rectory expanded the parish debt to $49,500 by the end of the 1920s. $35,000 was owed to the Citizens Bank of Lancaster and $14,500 to the Bank of Lancaster. Sunday and monthly collections were less than $3,000 per year.

By 1931, the effects of the Great Depression were being felt. Banks, facing failure, put pressure on the parish to pay off its loans. We were able to refinance $30,000 of our debt with Buffalo Savings Bank and pay off some of the obligation to local banks. But by the end of 1933, the debt had grown to $57,000. We could barely pay our bills, much less reduce the debt. To help the finances, Fr. Ott often did not take his salary. Fund-raising activities – picnics, card parties, and others – were held regularly and generated about half the parish’s income.

Many parishioners were out of work during the Depression. In response to the difficulty of handling coats, hats, and boots during card parties and other social events, Fr. Ott invented and patented a combination hanger for these items and a collapsible hanger rack. Rather than take a royalty, Fr. Ott required the manufacturer to hire some of the parishioners, as much of the work could be done at home. For a time, this helped ease parishioner unemployment. All this was reported in a Buffalo Courier Express article on January 6, 1935.

In 1936, the remaining $19,500 debt to the Citizens Bank of Lancaster was settled for $10,000 – $5,000 borrowed from the Diocese and $5,000 from Fr. Ott. The debt finally stopped growing, but payoff was slow. During the war years of the 1940s, when work was plentiful and wages were high, the debt finally began to shrink, from $39,000 at the end of 1942, to $28,800 at the end of 1943, to $15,500 at the end of 1944 and $7,500 at the end of 1946. By 1947 Sacred Heart was debt-free for the first time.

By 1950, we needed a new church. A fund-raising committee formed in 1952 raised $43,000 by January 1954. But with Fr. Kleis’s death and the division of the parish, the contributions from those who were now members of Nativity parish went to Nativity. Fr. Hall introduced roast beef dinners and an annual auction (garage sales were not yet common) and $62,000 was raised by the time construction of the new church began in 1958. When the church was completed in 1959, we had a debt of $70,000, which we were able to pay off by 1962. Fund-raising was then directed to a new school, and $80,000 was raised via picnics and “21 Club” drawings. Construction of the new school added $270,000 in new debt in 1965. This debt was finally paid by 1981, and the parish has had no significant debt since then.

The annual picnic (lawn fete) began in 1920 when the parish was founded, and remained a major fund-raiser for 50 years. The last picnic, on June 21, 1970, was impacted by an all-day rain. By then, many felt that picnics, dinners, and auctions were too much work and did not draw as many people as they once did.

But fund raising was still needed, and weekly Bingo began in September 1970, initially attracting over 400 people a week. Bingo continued until December 1986. By then, attendance had declined, and it was hard to get workers every week; the parish was debt-free and could manage without this extra income.

While the lawn fete (1920-70) and Bingo (1970-86) were the two major fundraisers over the years, many other types occurred as well. Roast beef dinners and the parish auction were held from 1957 to 1970. In 1974-75, a special drive raised $12,000 for a new organ. In 1994-95, the Diamond Jubilee Booster Club, featuring daily prizes, raised $40,000 toward renovations of the church for our 75th anniversary. In recent years, fund-raising has resumed after a period of absence. The Lottery Calendar drawings, Christmas Sweepstakes, meat raffles, and others have brought in much-needed resources for parish expenses and improvements.