

Father Edward Gutha—A Man Of Many Talents

Hello! I am Father Edward Gutha, your Pastor from 1932-1942. I see we have a good attendance here today. Would it be a good time to pass the collection basket? Many of you have said that I really knew how to stretch a dollar.

I was born in Detroit in 1896. That was the year when Henry Ford was building his first workable automobile—and made Detroit that well-known Motor City. We've come a long way since those days.

John Gutha and Anna Skotzke were my parents. I had three sisters: Agnes, Helen, and Mary and one brother named John—better known as Jack. He was my good friend. Some of you here may remember him. Jack made many trips from Detroit to Westphalia to visit me.

My parents were members of the St. John the Evangelist Parish in Detroit and I received my elementary and high school education at St. John's. A good education was always important in our family and luckily for me Detroit had many good schools even in those early days. I applied and was accepted at the University of Detroit.

I'm not sure when I had my first thoughts about the priesthood. Maybe some of my teachers—the Jesuits at the university—planted those seeds. But at the time I also had great dreams about painting—becoming a famous artist. After many, many prayers—mine and my dear mother's, I entered Saint Francis Seminary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Two of my classmates at St. Francis were Father Francis Bertram and Father Bernard Loehner of Westphalia. So early on I had heard about Westphalia.

I was ordained a priest on September 22nd, 1922 by Bishop Michael Gallagher in the Blessed Sacrament Cathedral in Detroit, and seven days later I celebrated my first Solemn High Mass at the church of St. John the Evangelist.

My first assignment as a priest was to assist at Our Lady of Lourdes

Parish at River Rouge in Michigan. After a little more than two years I was appointed pastor of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Parish in Sebawaing with the adjoining mission of Pigeon. My ministry in the Thumb Area covered a territory of 400 square miles. While there I built the new church of St. Francis in Pigeon.

In January of 1932 I was appointed pastor of St. Mary in Westphalia. Father Krams was ill and no longer able to remain there.

As I was driving up on Grange Road from Eagle to Westphalia—about one and one-half miles from town, I happened to look out to the north and I saw a church tower. Is that St. Mary Church, my new assignment? I can tell you I was excited even more so when I walked around the parish grounds and saw the buildings—the schools, especially the school with the big auditorium and stage. Then I walked into that beautiful church. Yes, God, this is where I want to be.

I celebrated my first Mass at St. Mary on Candlemas Day—February 2nd, and as I remember, after the church services I asked the young people to join me in the hall—the old boarding house—a few came. I pointed to one young woman and asked, “Would you like to be in a play?” “Yes I would,” she said. That young woman was Bernita Thelen Harr and many more followed her lead. That was the beginning of the many plays produced by the St. Mary dramatic club. And the most successful was the Passion Play.

Now we had a dramatic club. We needed an orchestra. In no time we had a very talented group of musicians performing in the St. Mary orchestra. The youngest of them was Leon Halfman playing the violin at age 14.

Remember this was in the early 30's and everyone was still suffering from the Great Depression. There was little money, especially for the young people. What did they have for their entertainment? So a baseball team was organized with John A. Thelen as their manager. And I gave the younger boys a taste of basketball when hoops were

put up in the hall and I gave them a basketball.

One of my best memories of Westphalia is the centennial celebration in 1936. Many preparations were being made two or more years before that time. First was the book. Members of the parish, namely Elizabeth Schneider and her sister Margaret Trierweiler, were busy compiling the one-hundred year history of Westphalia St. Mary and that book (hold up the book) entitled St Mary's Centennial 1836-1936 was published and was for sale at the 1936 centennial celebration.

At the same time the demolition of the old boarding house was going on. Parish volunteer workers were building a new hall where people would enjoy those famous chicken dinners. Through the years, that building has been many things—a school, a church, and of course a hall for wedding receptions. And do you remember the bowling alley in the basement? Now the building is a funeral chapel.

For the church a new pipe organ was purchased to replace the pump organ that was installed by Father Reifert in the 1870's. And the church interior was redecorated—a job that was finished a few days before the centennial celebration.

And now let's talk about the cemetery—this beautiful cemetery! Hundreds of trees and shrubs were planted with the able help of Louis Fink, the sexton. And again the parish men came with their teams of horses, board scrapers, shovels, and rakes. They came to build the Grotto—a grotto patterned after the one in the Lourdes. The first Mass was celebrated in the Grotto August 28th, 1936. I understand that since that time the Mass is celebrated every Memorial Day. Leo Bauer and his sons built the fish pond with its fountain also in the 1930's.

I want to say that one of my best accomplishments at St. Mary's was the formation of the 4-year high school. That school opened in September of 1936. A high school education changed the lives of many young people.

After St. Mary's I was appointed pastor of Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian in Bunker Hill. I remained there until 1964—the year I retired. I came back to Westphalia to my home in the sub-division you have kindly named Gutha Acres.

In my retirement I was busy assisting Father Miller and then Father Jim Schmitt.

Why did I come back to Westphalia? It's the place where I was at home among the friendly people and in a sense—to “touch base” with my hunting and fishing pals. I was asked by Father MacDougall about a fond memory of St. Mary's. I said, I have many good memories. St. Mary's is a parish that lives its faith and a parish of many religious vocations. And the Passion Plays are another fond memory.

Thank you for remembering me, and God Bless all of you!