

## St Josephs Catholic Church of Pilot Grove

**Township:** T-48-N  
**Range:** R-17-W  
**Section:** 21  
**Map:**

**Organized:** 1893  
**Disbanded:** No  
**Active:** Yes  
**Updated:** March 8, 2020

**Cemetery:** There is a cemetery associated with this church.

**Area:** Southwest quarter of the southeast quarter of the section in Pilot Grove, Missouri.

**Records:** The records of this church were microfilmed in the late 1950s by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

### History:

Photograph courtesy of H. Stone

#### St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church

From "History of Cooper County Missouri" by W. F. Johnson, 1919

**St. Joseph Church at Pilot Grove**, was established by Rev. Father Pius Conrad, O. S. B., Jan. 1, 1895. In 1893 the cornerstone of St. Joseph Church was laid and Sept. 16, 1894, the church was dedicated by Rt. Rev. Abbot Frowin Conrad, O. S. B. of Conception Abbey, Mo., Rev. Father John Conrad, O. S. B. Pastor of Clear Creek built St. Joseph Church and held service in it until Rev. Fr. Pius came. From Jan. 1, 1895, Pilot Grove had regular services every Sunday and Holy day. When the parish was organized, 35 families belonged to it, the present number of families is 90. In 1898, the priest house, costing \$2,500, was built. As soon as Clear Creek had a resident priest, Rev. Fr. Pius held service every Sunday in Pilot Grove and Martinsville. He worked hard for God's honor. In 1907 the church was enlarged by adding to the old church a new sanctuary, raising the ceiling about six feet and erecting new altars at the cost of \$5,650.00. Jan. 1, 1909, Rev. Fr. Pius took charge of Martinsville but lived at Pilot Grove until Sept. 1911, when he moved into the new residence at Martinsville. St. Joseph cemetery consists of two acres and is situated one mile south of the church.

Jan. 1, 1909, Rev. Father Philip Ruggle, O. S. B. took charge of St. Joseph Parish and stayed here until Sept. 1, 1915. From Sept. 1, 1915, to Dec. 4, Rev. Father Berthold Jaggle O. S. B. was the parrish priest. December 4, 1915, Rev. Father Hildebrand Roesler, O. S. B. took charge. In 1900 the convent and school was built at the cost of \$4,000.00. The parochial school started in 1902 with 50 children. Benedictine Sisters were the teachers. In 1917 a new school building was erected at a cost of \$14,000. The attendance is 90-100. Benedictine Sisters from Shoal Creek, Ark., are the teachers.

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#### St. Joseph's Parish Has Built Enduringly

From, "History of Cooper County Missouri" by E. J. Melton, 1937

*Father Richard Felix, Its Present Pastor, Is Author of Six Books and of Series of Radio Addresses on Religious Subjects.*

ONE of the outstanding Catholic parishes in rural Missouri is St. Joseph's, in Pilot Grove. Its present pastor is FATHER RICHARD FELIX, O. S. B. He was born in St. Joseph, Missouri, March 31, 1890; attended the public schools there, received his high school and college work at Conception College, Conception, Missouri; his seminary training at St. Vincent Seminary, Latrobe Pennsylvania; and took post-graduate work for two years at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at the Catholic University, Washington, D. C.

Father Felix is an energetic and enthusiastic worker for the Master, and possesses a warm, magnetic personality. He holds A. B. A. M., and B. D. degrees, and is the author of six widely read books: "Psychology and the Sacramental System of the Church", "The Apostle's Creed", "Church or Churches", "What is the Catholic Church?", "What About the Bible?", and "After Death - What?".

He has delivered series of broadcasts on religious subjects over Station KFRU, Columbia, Missouri; WHB, Kansas City; and WLWL, New York City, and by means of electrical transcription is now heard every week over more than a score of stations in the United States and Canada.

Father Felix joined the Benedictine Order in 1913. He was ordained a priest in 1918. He was rector of Conception College, 1920-27; pastor at Maryville, Missouri, 1928-31, and has been pastor at Pilot Grove since 1931.

THE CATHOLIC REGISTER, of November 12, 1925, gave a brief history of St. Joseph parish at Pilot Grove as follows:

"The early history of St. Joseph parish at Pilot Grove is relative to that of St. John parish at Clear Creek, as daughter to mother; wherefore it cannot lay claim to any particular history prior to 1893, than to refer to its lineage, St. John's parish at Clear Creek.

"In 1892, seven men: J. Spaedy, J. Gantner, A. Saenger, W. Dwyer, P. Donnahue, J. Brauer and F. Dieterich, requested Father John, O. S. B., rector of the Clear Creek parish, to erect a church at Pilot Grove, pointing out that the community could be served better by a more centrally located parish and that Pilot Grove, with railroad facilities, was a promising place for a parish. They pledged support, and, when Father John had obtained the necessary permit from the respective authorities, they constituted the first building committee. They began soliciting funds, and P. Donnahue and sons began quarrying rock for the foundation.

"A church site was donated by Samuel Roe. In pioneer times he had entered a tract from the government on the site now occupied by Pilot Grove, then known as the Pilot Grove Settlement. This same Samuel Roe, although a leading 'Methodist, in 1893, donated ground to Father John, O. S. B., for a church site on Fourth and Harris streets. Later the rest of the block was purchased by Father Pius, O. S. B., from B. Harris for school purposes.

"In the spring of 1893, preparations to erect the church were pushed. The rock quarried by P. Donnahue and sons was hauled by those who had joined the group of seven. All labor and material and part of the mason work were donated.

"By September, 1893, the foundation was finished. It was decided to defer the brick work until the following spring. Liberal contributions were made. Almost every Protestant family contributed money or labor to the erection of the first Catholic Church at Pilot Grove, some up to \$100.

"The brick construction was begun in the spring of 1894, and completed by September. At the dedication ceremony, September 15, 1894, the brother of Father John, O. S. B., Abbot Frowin Conrad, O. S. B., officiated. The sacrament of Baptism was administered for the first time in the church on that day to the eight-year-old adopted daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Saenger, whose name was Ida Long.

"Until January, 1895, Father John, pastor of Clear Creek, held services every other Sunday in the new church. On January 5, 1895, Father Pius Conrad, O. S. B., officially took charge of the new parish as its first pastor. The records show that approximately 30 families had affiliated themselves. Quoting minutes from the parish records:

"Saint Joseph's Congregation was regularly organized February 10, 1895, by the Reverend Pius Conrad, O. S. B., pastor. The members of the congregation were this day called to a meeting for the election of church directors. The following officers were elected Messrs. John Spaedy, president ; Lorenz Esser, secretary; and Joseph Gantner, treasurer.'

"For want of a parish residence, Father Pius, O. S. B., continued to reside at Clear Creek, but gave regular services on Sundays and Holidays, as also catechetical instruction to the children. In 1898 a parochial residence costing \$2,500 - as completed. Father Fintan, O. S. B., took charge at Clear Creek, and Father Pius took up his residence at Pilot Grove, in 1899, with Martinsville as a mission.

"The next problem was education of the children. With the approval of Bishop John J. Hogan, Father Pius arranged with the Benedictine Sisters to establish a convent. In 1900, funds were solicited for this purpose in three parishes: Clear Creek, Pilot Grove, and Martinsville. The largest contribution was from Martinsville about \$1,700. The building, costing \$4,000, was completed in 1901, and was blessed by Bishop J. J. Glennon, coadjutor to Bishop Hogan. Transfer of title was made to the Benedictine Sisters with the provision that they assume the \$1,200 debt and use the building for educational purposes. Thus the first parish school in Pilot Grove opened that year with 60 pupils.

"After 10 years, St. Joseph Church became too small. It was remodeled in 1905, at a cost of \$5,650.

"On January 1, 1909, Father Pius Conrad, O. S. B., was appointed rector of Saint Martin's Church at Martinsville, and Father Philip Ruggle, O. S. B., was appointed pastor of St. Joseph parish. Father Pius continued to reside at Pilot Grove until 1911, although attending to all the pastor's duties at Martinsville.

"Father Philip, O. S. B., continued his pastorate at Pilot Grove until September 1, 1915, when he was transferred to Cottonwood, Idaho, where he became prior of that foundation. In May 1922, he was elected abbot of Conception Abbey. Father Berthold Jaeggli, O. S. B., was appointed to succeed Father Philip, O. S. B., but was recalled on December 4 of the same year to be succeeded by Father Hildebrand Roessler, O. S. B.

"When Father Hildebrand received his appointment the school rooms were inadequate. Despite war time costs, he erected in 1917 a large four-room school building. With the willing help of the parishioners, this \$12,000 task was accomplished. The entire indebtedness was canceled in four years. The school is taught by the Benedictine Sisters of Fort Smith, Arkansas. It now has an enrollment of 100.

"Father Athanasius Dengler, O. S. B., was successor to Father Hildebrand, who in turn was succeeded by Father Joachim Menne, O. S. B., July 6, 1924. Father Joachim built the present church basement at a cost of \$16,000. It was dedicated in 1928.

"Father Joachim was much interested in music, being an accomplished violinist. He organized a parish band of 30 pieces. He died March 25, 1931, and was succeeded by Father Richard Felix, O. S. B., the present pastor.

"During its comparatively short history, St. Joseph's parish has made rapid progress. This is due largely to the splendid leadership of its pastors and the enthusiastic cooperation of a devout and faithful people. Through the church and the splendid work done by the Benedictine Sisters who teach the parish school, much lasting good has been accomplished for communicants and the community in general."

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**St. Joseph's Catholic Church**  
**From, "Pilot Grove Centennial Book, 1873-1973"**

St. Joseph's Catholic Church was organized in 1883; under the leadership of Father John Conrad, O. S. B. The first church directors were John Spaedy, Lawrence Esser, and Joseph Gantner. Upon hearing the plans, Mr. Samuel Roe donated an acre of land for the site. Joseph Gantner, and early brick maker, was given the contract to make the bricks.

On May 10, 1895, services were begun with 35 families as members. Father Pius Conrad was appointed as the first pastor. The membership continued to grow until in 1929 the old church was outgrown. Under the direction of Father Joachim, O. S. B., it was decided to begin a new church. A basement was first built, and finished properly for holding services. A depression had hit the country, and the congregation was financially unable to complete the building.

It was under the direction of Father Ingoldsby that the new church was constructed. It was dedicated in 1957. Later, the old church, which had been used as a hall, was torn down. A new brick convent was built on this place. Monsignor Hagedorn was pastor at that time.

Father Francis Gillgannon is pastor at present.

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**St. Joseph's Parish Pilot Grove, Missouri**  
**From "Memorabilia of Cooper County", 1990**

(Excerpts from this article were taken from newspaper clipping dated 11-12-25.)

In the year 1892 seven men, J. Speedy, J. Gantner, A. Saenger, W. Dwyer, P. Donnahue, J. Brauer and F. Dieterich, approached Father John Conrad, O.S.B., rector of the Clear Creek parish, with a request to erect a church at Pilot Grove, pointing out the fact that the community could be served better by a more centrally located parish, as also that the growing village of Pilot Grove with railroad facilities would be a most promising place for a parish. They pledged their loyal support, and as soon as Father John had obtained the necessary permit from the respective authorities, constituted the first building committee.

In 1827 Samuel Roe entered a tract of land from the government on the site now occupied by the city of Pilot Grove, then known as the Pilot Grove Settlement. This same Samuel Roe, although a leading member of the Methodist Church, in 1893 donated a plot of ground to Father John Conrad, O.S.B., for a church site on Fourth and Harris Streets. Later the rest of the block was purchased by Father Pius Conrad, O.S.B., from B. Harris for school purposes.

In the spring of 1893 preparations to erect the church were pushed with great determination. The rock quarried by P. Donnahue and sons were hauled by those who had joined the little group of seven. Joseph Gantner, an early brick-maker, was given the contract to make the bricks. All the labor and material with the exception of part of the mason work were donated by the people. Thus by September, 1893, the foundation work was finished, but it was decided to defer the brick work until the following spring. Continued interest was manifest by the fact that by this time about thirty families had signified their willingness to be affiliated to the new parish. Liberal contributions were forthcoming, and it may be noted that almost every Protestant family contributed either money or labor to the erection of the first Catholic Church at Pilot Grove, some as high as \$50 to \$100.

The brick construction was begun in the spring of 1894 and completed by September. The dedication ceremony took place September 15, 1894 at which the brother of Father John Conrad, O.S.B., Abbot Frowin Conrad, O.S.B., officiated. The sacrament of Baptism was administered for the first time in the church on that day to the 8 year old daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Albert Saenger, whose name was Ida Long.

Until January 1895, Father John Conrad, pastor of Clear Creek, held services every other Sunday in the new church. January 5, 1895, Father Pius Conrad, O.S.B. officially took charge of the new parish as its first pastor. The members of the congregation were called to a meeting for the election of church directors. The following officers were elected: Messrs. John Spaedy, president; Lorenz Esser, secretary, and Joseph Gantner, treasurer.

For want of a parish residence, Father Pius Conrad, O.S.B., continued to reside at Clear Creek, but gave regular services on Sundays and Holy days, as also catechetical instruction to the children. In this manner Father Pius Conrad continued to serve St. Joseph parish until 1898, when a parochial residence was built at a cost of \$2500, with an additional cost of \$500 for house furnishing.

The next problem to confront Father Pius was the education of the children. He made arrangements with several Benedictine Sisters to establish a convent and school, with the approval of Bishop John J. Hogan. In the year 1900, funds were solicited in all three parishes, namely Clear Creek, Pilot Grove, and Martinsville. (It may be noted that the largest contribution was offered by Martinsville about \$1700.) The three story brick building was completed in 1901 and blessed by Bishop J.J. Glennon, coadjutor to Bishop Hogan. The total cost of the building was about \$4,000. The transfer of the property and building was made to the Benedictine Sisters with the provision that they assume the then incumbency of \$1200 and the use of the building for parish school purpose. Thus came into existence the first parish school that same year with about 60 pupils.

During these years also, two acres of ground was donated by Pete Bock for a cemetery, located about one mile south of Pilot Grove. (The first person buried in St. Joseph's Catholic Cemetery was Louis Roth, 1828-1899.)

After a lapse of ten years, the St. Joseph's church became too small and it was necessary to build and remodel the church. The enlarging of the church and raising of the roof took place in 1907 at a cost of about \$5,650.

January 1, 1909, Father Pius Conrad, O.S.B., was appointed rector of St. Martins Church at Martinsville, and Father Philip Ruggle, O.S.B., was appointed rector of St. Joseph parish. Father Pius continued to reside at Pilot Grove until 1911, although attending to all the pastoral duties at Martinsville. Father Philip continued his pastorate at Pilot Grove until September 1, 1915, and then was succeeded by Father Berthold Jaeggli, O.S.B. Father Jaeggli was succeeded several months later by Fr. Hildebrand Roessler, O.S.B.

At the time when Father Hildebrand received his appointment, the school rooms were inadequate and necessity to build a larger school became evident. Despite the high cost of war times, he succeeded to erect a large four-room school building with modern equipment. Together with the willing help of the parishioners, this task was accomplished at a cost of about \$12,000, including furnishing the equipment in the year 1917, and the entire indebtedness canceled in four years. The school was taught by the Benedictine Sisters of Fort Smith, Ark., and at that time, included grades one through eight plus two years of high school. Due to increasing demands for personnel and equipment, the high school closed in 1929. (Fr. Hildebrand died while a pastor here on July 21, 1923.)

Father Joachim Menne, pastor from 1924 until his death in 1931, started a band and an orchestra, teaching the various musical instruments and directing dramatic productions staged in the school. He also wrote plays and music and rebuilt musical instruments.

In 1929, under the direction of Fr. Joachim, it was decided to begin building a new church, because the number of Catholic families continued to grow and the old church was no longer adequate. After the basement was built, the work was discontinued because of the depression. The basement was appropriately decorated and used as the church until 1951.

Fr. Richard Felix, who was pastor from 1931 to 1939, made St. Joseph's a "mini catechetical center", publishing pamphlets, founding the "Defender of the Faith" organization and giving lectures on radio.

Following Fr. Richard was Fr. Luke Backer, O.S.B. who on Oct. 15, 1939 began the second longest career of a Benedictine at Pilot Grove and was at St. Joseph's ten years, until July, 1949. (Fr. Pius served 12 years as pastor.)

When Fr. Luke arrived, the country and especially the farmers and small towns were still feeling the depth of the great depression. Believing that a good pastor should be interested in the temporal welfare of his flock as well as their spiritual welfare, he set forth to help them materially as well as spiritually. He gave assistance in obtaining Federal Loans for farmers. He began his program of Rural Life, working with the Diocesan Rural Life Conference and the County Agricultural Agent together with the Federal Security Administration to help finance farms, buy stock and new implements. He organized the 4-H Club, the CYO, Holy Name Society, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Council of Catholic Men and Women, and brought to the parish in its Golden Jubilee year of 1944, the National Rural Life Conference. During the W.P.A. days up to 1942, he established a cannery employing 20 people. Also in 1942, he established the School Hot Lunch Program for our own children and the public school pupils. In February 1946, he established a Movie Picture Show to provide wholesome entertainment for the family and he chose Class A pictures only. (The old church building was made into a theater and was also used for parish meetings, school plays and other community gatherings.) In July, 1946, he built a Skating Rink and skating parties were held one night a week with the CYC supervising them. Basketball goals were set up and were used by the young people of the town and surrounding country.

Following Fr. Luke, Fr. Gervase Ingoldsby was pastor from 1949 until 1952. While he was pastor, our present church was built over the basement that was built in 1929, and Fr. Ingoldsby also supervised the building of the rectory. Much of the work on the church and rectory was done with volunteer labor. After the new and present church was completed, the basement became the parish hall and the old church building was razed.

Monsignor Francis Hagedorn, first chancellor of the Jefferson City diocese, was pastor from 1959 until 1963. A new convent was built under his supervision, and was the residence for the Benedictine Sisters who taught in the school. The Benedictine Sisters taught until 1973, when the sisters of Our Lady of Peace Convent in Columbia, Mo. withdrew from the school and were succeeded by a lay staff who conduct the school today. CCD classes are now held in the convent building.

St. Joseph's Parish has been blessed with many good priests following Monsignor Hagedorn and they are as follows: Fr. Sean Smyth from 1963-1964; Fr. Edwin Sturm from 1964-1968; Fr. Robert Chenoweth from 1968-1971. (Fr. Chenoweth was pastor when St. Martins, Chouteau Springs, and St. John's, Clear Creek, merged with St. Joseph's. St. John's became a mission church and St. Martins was razed.) Fr. Francis Gillgannon from 1971-1973; Fr. Michael McHugh from 1973-1975; Fr. Brendan Lawless from 1975-1977; Fr. Kenneth Brockel from 1977-1985; Fr. Richard Frank from 1985-1988; and our present pastor is Fr. Richard Colbert, C.P.P.S.

by Joan Knipp

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**St. Joseph's Catholic Church of Pilot Grove, Missouri**  
**From "Cooper County Church Sketches" by F. Chesnutt, 1993**

In 1827, Samuel Roe, a Methodist, claimed land from the government which comprised most of what we know as Pilot Grove. The village was to the north at the "Pilot Grove." When the M.K.T. Railroad laid tracks and established a depot, businesses moved from nearby Mt. Vernon, Clear Creek and the village to plots on the Roe farm. He donated a plot to Father. John Conrad, O.S.B., in 1893 for a church site on Fourth and Harris Streets. Later, the rest of the block was purchased for a school, run by the Benedictine Sisters from Fort Smith, Arkansas.

This was the beginning of St. Joseph's Catholic Church. In the spring of 1893 Joseph Gantner, whose brickyard was in the old village, was given the contract to make the bricks. Except for part

of the masonry work, all the labor and materials were donated by the parishioners, who numbered about 30 families. Using local clay and coal for firing, the bricks were ready and construction began in the spring of 1894. The dedication took place September 15th the same year.

During the next ten years the congregation swelled with the many Irish Railroad employees and it was necessary to enlarge and remodel. In 1929 the basement for a new church was begun, but the hard times of the Depression prevented completion. Using the finished basement, Father Becker enlarged community activities; a hot lunch program, a cannery employing 20 people, a moving picture show, a skating rink, a 4-H group and a vocational program for youth. A convent school had been built on the site of the original church.

In 1951 the present mission-style church was built. Those whose lives were touched by St. Joseph's return every fall for a homecoming dinner on the grounds. The 100 year anniversary will be celebrated in 1993.

St. Joseph's had its earliest beginnings long ago, but not far away, when Stephen Young and Lawrence Sommers came from Germany and settled on government land at Clear Creek in the 1840's. Twenty-one families followed and a Belgian missionary priest, hearing of the settlement, rode on horseback from Taos, Missouri, to serve Mass. He was Father Helias, a Jesuit, known as the "Apostle of Central Missouri." Later Rev. George Tuerk came weekly from Boonville. The handmade log cabin on land donated by the Sommers served as church and school. By 1856, St. John's and its school were the major Catholic center outside of Boonville. Missions were established at St. Martin's and Pilot Grove in the 1870's, both located on the Boonville - Georgetown road.

St. Martin's had a brick church and frame school building which served the area and became a rail stop for visitors to Chouteau Springs. The school included a home for the faculty Sisters and boarding school for students. The school and church closed in 1967. Only the cemetery remains on the land donated by Daniel Martin, who came from Bavaria. The earliest burial in the cemetery is that of the Martin's daughter, Agnes, in 1865.

St. John's at Clear Creek is now a mission of St. Joseph's and actively serves the rural community. Many of the parishioners are descendants of the first 23 families.

' According to the Luke Gospel, Heli was the father of Joseph, the father of Jesus. The Jesuit missionary chose the name Helias when he was ordained a priest, and it could be said that he is the father of St. Joseph's Church.

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