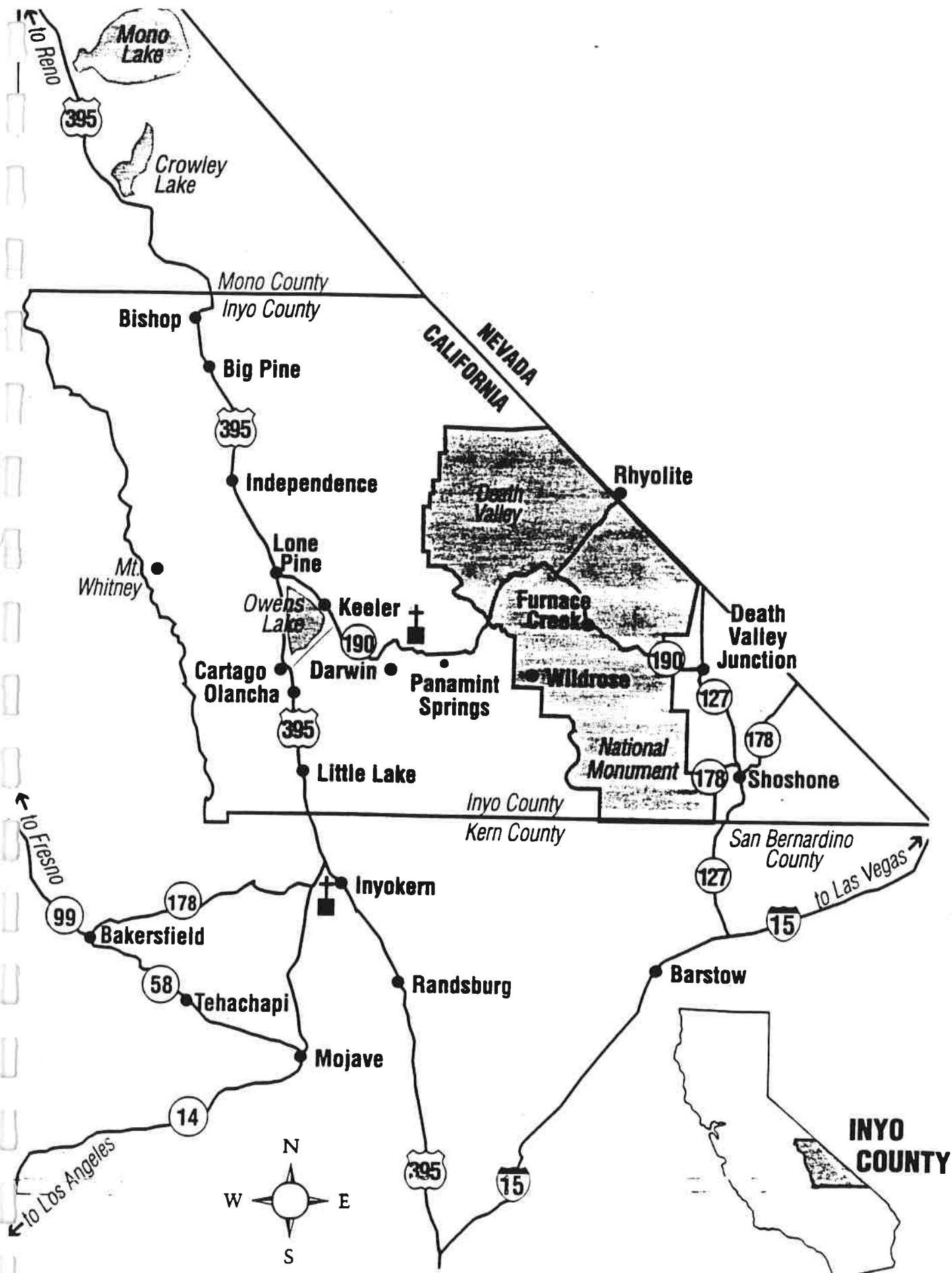


**HIGH DESERT RELIGION:
THE CATHOLIC EXPERIENCE**

by

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Courtesy Joan Brooks; map not to scale.

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Introduction and Overview

Establishing the Catholic presence in the high desert region of San Bernardino County (while at the same time expanding across the low desert areas of both San Bernardino and Riverside Counties) was a daunting struggle against terrain, weather and economic conditions to name the major challenging factors.

Although the city of San Bernardino had the beginnings of a parish (St. Bernardine's) as early as 1862 - shortly after the Mormon colony retreated to Salt Lake City - Catholic expansion continued mostly along an east-west axis and later to the south. There was little growth to the north. The first parish in the high desert was St. Ann's in 1886 at Needles to serve that new railroad community. Ironically, St. Bernardine's did not establish that parish due to the distance. Instead, it was founded from Prescott, Arizona. As an early indication of the adverse climate, for many years the assigned pastor spent only the winters in Needles; in the summer he rode in the caboose of a freight train to Tehachapi to serve the parish there and then returned to Needles in the fall.

Other than that isolated parish, for a number of years there were no other places of Catholic worship north of San Bernardino. A breakthrough finally occurred with the founding of St. Joseph Parish in Barstow in 1914. Ironically, the new mission was initially served from Bishop in northern Inyo County due to the difficulty of proceeding up Cajon Pass from the south. Finally, Barstow became an independent parish in 1921 and had assigned to it several missions to the east and south such as Ludlow, Oro Grande and Victorville.

This missionary type of services was duplicated a generation later when a priest was assigned to Amboy and commuted along Route 66 to other outposts. Otherwise, during the period between the two World Wars, only one other parish was established -- a church at Trona.

With the decline of mining activities after World War II, coupled with the changeover of railroads from steam power to diesel power, the smaller parishes and missions ceased to exist in response to the reduction in population. By 1970, the prewar places of worship had mostly disappeared. One reaction to this decline did succeed. In 1971 a mission was established at Baker to serve parishioners scattered across the northern part of the high desert.

Meanwhile, another demographic influence was at work. Due to the expansion of Los

Angeles commuters seeking cheaper housing, several towns south of Barstow began growing after 1960. This population movement led to new churches being built in Adelanto, Hesperia, Lucerne Valley, Apple Valley, Lenwood, and Phelan. In addition, a second parish was added in Victorville as recently as 1994.

Since the period of the 1880's to the 1920's was past the time of the missionary or itinerant preacher tending to a scattered flock by horseback (an exception being those serving Indian reservations), it is pertinent to inquire also about transportation arrangements. Once the automobile became a useful conveyance, such a mode was used, although that depended on the territory to be served. Otherwise, until better roads became universal, the railroad was used.

The Episcopal Church was the first to attach a "railroad chapel" car to trains in Michigan and then spread the concept to other midwestern states. The success of this concept in serving unchurched railroad towns, mining camps and other isolated communities which as yet had no permanent church building and an assigned pastor had other denominations soon copying the concept, particularly the Baptists and Methodists. Finally, the Catholic church joined in by 1907. It had three cars (appropriately named as St. Anthony, St. Peter and St. Paul) which served the North, the Midwest and the South. However, none of these denominations served California due possibly to the administrative distance from various eastern church headquarters.

In the case of Southern California's High Desert area, two modes of transportation were employed. Model T Fords were used from the late 19 teens into the 1920's. After that, newer models of mostly Fords and Chevrolets roamed missionary territory.

Where navigable roads were not yet in existence - such as the Barstow area - the railroad met the church need in a different way. Here, a priest could ride free of charge in the caboose of a freight train and stop off at each settlement along the way with services usually held in a church already provided or a building designated for worship. The missionary could stay the night and catch a freight the following day to the next settlement down the line. After four or five stops brought him to the edge of his territory, then the process was reversed. Either he could repeat the daily stops or ride nonstop back to his home base if there were pressing matters. Each one-way journey took a week, and the round trip could be repeated twice in a month if necessary.

The remainder of this booklet relates the stories of three pioneering Catholic priests

responding to religious needs in the high desert along with an article on the difficulties of a proposed parish at Newberry Springs. To assist the orientation of a reader, a chronological list of pertinent parishes, missions and preaching stations is also included.

Thus, in passing judgement on parish and mission activities on the High Desert, about half of the various endeavors succeeded in the long run. However, to be fair, it should be pointed out that many hundreds of the faithful parishioners were adequately served in the face of a variety of hardships.

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I. FATHER CROWLEY: "SHEPHARD OF THE SAGE", 1919-1940*

Inyo County in the early 1900's with its small towns, mining camps and Death Valley comprising one Catholic parish along with some scattered chapels beyond the county's borders needed a new priest at the time of World War I. The bishop for Southern California found his candidate when Rev. John J. Crowley volunteered to move from a Los Angeles parish in 1919.

Father Crowley was a new priest with just over a year's experience. Yet he proved himself as a leader in missionary endeavors along the semi-frontier eastern edge of California from Barstow north to Bishop. He was born in Killarney, Ireland on December 8, 1891, to Michael F. and Nora M. (Layne) Crowley and was brought by his well-to-do parents to Worcester, Massachusetts in 1903. Here he was enrolled in the public schools, followed by Holy Cross and Clark Colleges. After completing his studies for the priesthood at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, the newly-minted Father John was ordained on May 18, 1918 at Fall River, Massachusetts, for services in the Southern California diocese then known by the name of Monterey-Los Angeles.

Interestingly, his siblings also dedicated themselves to careers in the Church. His three brothers also entered the priesthood, while his two sisters became nuns.

After brief assignments to Pasadena and Los Angeles, he was chosen from a list of volunteer candidates to be assigned as pastor of a huge parish comprising all of Inyo County and nearby areas in Kern and San Bernardino Counties, totalling 20,000 square miles. He navigated a Model T Ford over mostly primitive roads during his first high desert assignment of five years.

Regardless of how he organized his itinerary, it took a month for him to make the rounds of the various churches, chapels and preaching stations in his jurisdiction. The aim was to give as many Sunday Masses as possible, while weekday Masses would have to suffice for the remainder of the stops. He explained the situation in one of his writings completed at the end of his first assignment to Bishop's Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish as follows:

On the first Sunday of the month, he said Mass in his home church at Bishop and then

* This chapter is based on an unpublished article by the author.

drove to Big Pine some 18 miles for another service. Returning home, he prepared for a lengthy upcoming trip.

On the next Saturday he drove to Lone Pine to give a Mass the following day. From there, he later went 15 miles to Independence and then 16 miles on to Keeler. A continuing drive to Cartago of 22 miles followed by 40 miles to Darwin completed those mission stops and the journey back to Bishop ended that week's circuit.

The third Sunday found him in Randsburg followed by a drive of 40 miles to Trona and possibly back to his home base.

On the fourth Sunday he was in Barstow and then journeyed nine miles to Yermo. The next day's drive took him the 55 miles to Ludlow. From there it was 165 miles back to Death Valley and another hitch on to Bishop.

If matters were not pressing at Bishop, he could make the entire circuit without returning to Bishop at the end of the second and third weeks. When the calendar provided five Sundays, then Bishop in effect benefitted from a second monthly Mass, and also the priest was not on the road for another week.

Nevertheless, it was an exhausting schedule. Father Crowley was forced to travel day and night to every part of his huge parish without proper sleep, food or the simple refinements of everyday living so as to conscientiously satisfy the spiritual needs of his parishioners. Also, it must be borne in mind that his flock was not numerous. Attendance at various services might range from four or five to fifteen in the beginning. As time went by, the congregations became larger and in some cases resulted finally in a church being built as at Lone Pine.

The transportation burden was eased somewhat in 1921. That year, the Bishop of Los Angeles decided to make St. Joseph's at Barstow a "mother church" similar to the role of Bishop's church in Inyo County, Father Crowley's home base. Accordingly, Barstow and its outlying communities east of it were reassigned from Bishop and constituted a cluster with its own resident priest at Barstow. This action reduced the expanse of the Bishop missions from the 20,000 square miles in 1919 to 10,000 in 1921. Even so, the setup still required a great deal of driving and absence from Bishop. This arrangement continued until the priest's death in 1940.

After a very busy five years Father Crowley was named as chancellor of the new Diocese

of Monterey-Fresno, which included Inyo County and Kern County. The following year in 1925, he was elevated to a Monsignor, and five years later he also became pastor of St. John's Cathedral in Fresno. As diocesan chancellor, he helped to finance and build churches, hospitals and schools until illness forced his resignation from such a hectic pace.

At his own request Father Crowley was reassigned in 1934 to his previous pastorate in Owens Valley where he hoped to spend his final years in the towering shadows of Mt. Whitney. Gradually, his health did return as he did not have the very long drives of his previous stint. The parish's extent was reduced to just Inyo County, and the total distance was thereby reduce to 10,000 square miles. The improvement in his health was manifested as early as September 12, 1934, when he became the first priest to celebrate Mass at the top of Mt. Whitney. Soon he was also able to add to his missionary schedule some Masses at Death Valley, Mammoth Lakes and Inyokern in an auxiliary capacity as chaplain for the Civilian Conservation Corps camps at those locations.

By 1935, he was also involved in restoring the water supply for the valley's parched earth. In this effort he was a successful activist. He guided to completion the details of erecting a massive dam to reclaim the valley for all of its people. About his activities, one writer commented: "Father Crowley was not only a devout churchman, but a tireless worker for the material prosperity of his people. He knew what every missionary knows: that it is easier to save a person's soul when he is prosperous and happy than when he is worried by adversity and embittered against the world and against God."

Death came unexpectedly to the "Desert Padre" at the age of 49. He was instantly killed in an unavoidable auto accident on Palm Sunday, March 17, 1940, while driving up Highway 14 (then known as Highway 6) between Mohave and Inyokern just south of the Walker Pass cutoff (Highway 178). Typically, he was on his way back from a trip to Fresno to say the Sunday 6:30 a.m. Mass at Death Valley to be followed by a 10:30 Mass at Lone Pine.

Funerals were held in both Lone Pine and then Fresno, followed by burial in Fresno's Holy Cross Cemetery. A simple stone monument marks the grave; the front side simply gives his name and dates of birth and death, while the reverse side states "Padre of the Desert". The "Shepherd of the Sage" had once more left his favorite pastorate but was not forgotten by the many people

whom he had touched in nearly eleven years of ministry.

The site of the tragic accident came to be marked by a cross and a ring of stones. Despite repeated vandalism, the cross has been maintained by a group dedicated to preserving his memory. Later, on October 19, 1941, Crowley Lake in Mono County was named to honor the chief activist for construction of the Owens Valley dam. Then in 1963, a monument was erected on Highway 190 on a spot providing a magnificent view of Death Valley to the east and north. In addition, Crowley Peak was named for him.

Most of the churches missioned by Father Crowley have either fallen into disuse or been replaced by new structures. One facility which has survived is Santa Barbara Catholic Church in Randsburg. This was built in 1904 and in 1946 became a part of the newer St. Ann Parish at Ridgecrest. The old church underwent structural integrity modifications in 1975 and continues to be well maintained and preserved. It is still used on special occasions.

It is interesting also to check the national Catholic Directory to ascertain how the one-priest Inyo mission parish has been divided since 1940. The 1999 directory shows five priests caring for four parishes, three missions and one preaching station as follows:

Bishop - Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, also cares for St. Stephen Mission at Big Pine.

Lone Pine - Santa Rosa Parish, also cares for St. John the Baptist Mission at Shoshone-Tecope; St. Vivian Mission at Independence; and a station at Death Valley which has its own priest.

Ridgecrest - St. Ann Parish cares for Santa Barbara Mission at Randsburg.

Barstow - St. Joseph Parish has historically cared for a number of missions and stations scattered along Route 66 and Interstate 40 such as Ludlow to the east and others along Highway 91 and Interstate 15 such as Victorville. By 1999, it cared only for Our Lady of the Desert at Baker and St. Philip Neri at Lenwood.

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Addendum

When Father Crowley learned of his transfer from Bishop in Inyo County to Fresno in the newly created Diocese of Fresno, he felt that some sort of a farewell narrative should be bequeathed both to his parishioners and other interested parties in the Diocese of Los Angeles-San Diego where he had served from 1918 to 1924. The result was a lengthy article published in the diocesan newspaper under the title of "Inyo, the County of Contrasts". This appeared in The Tidings (Los Angeles) on August 8, 1924, pages 51-52. Much of the article was reprinted by Joan Brooks in her book entitled Desert Padre: The Life and Writings of Father John J. Crowley, 1891-1940, Chapter 2, "The Young Pastor". This book was published in 1997 by Mesquite Press in Desert Hot Springs, CA.

This article is inserted next before proceeding to the story of a priest headquartered at Barstow, CA who was a contemporary of Father Crowley in the 1920s.

INYO, THE COUNTY OF CONTRASTS

by
Rev. John J. Crowley

"And how large is your parish, Father?" "Ten thousand square miles, your Excellency". The kindly eyes of the Apostolic Delegate widened perceptibly, and he repeated my answer in tones mellowed with the music of Italy, "Ten thousand square miles?" "Yes, your Excellency". "Ah, Father, you are a pioneer". The conversation then drifted into the details of the nature of the parish, etc., continuing until the arrival of the next visitor, when I retired, not without a secret joy of having helped to impress our Holy Father's representative with the vastness of the West and particularly of the great extent of the diocese of Monterey and Fresno. For the county of Inyo, the parish referred to, constitutes exactly one-fourth of the new diocese.

Perhaps no county in America, and county and parish are synonymous, possesses such variety of topography, resources or products as this little known area sandwiched between the Sierras and the state of Nevada. In truth, Inyo is the county of contrasts. With an area of over 10,000 square miles, it has a population of less than one person per square mile. Within its borders lies Death Valley, the lowest spot in the United States, 280 feet below sea level, and Mount Whitney, the highest peak, 14,501 feet above the level of the sea. Scarce sixty miles separate these two spots, one an inferno, with the highest recorded temperature in America, the other couched in eternal snows, and wooed by the roaring thunder god. Not a year dies that the burning sands of its deserts have not claimed at least one victim, some brown and grizzled desert rat or an unwary tenderfoot, found face downward, hands outstretched as death overtook him digging for water with bloody fingers, his protruding tongue black and swollen, while from the Snow Saw (Sierra Nevada) the icy brooks tumble into the Aqueduct that bears the precious fluid eighty leagues to the Pueblo de Nuestra Senora de Los Angeles. Over thousands of acres of Inyo soil sleek cattle graze, yet in other thousands, and they are many, the rattle snake and the horned-toad reign supreme. Poor, indeed, to the beholder, yet the mineral content of Owens Lake, a vast depository of soda and potash, if sold at war prices would have paid the entire national debt of the United States before the war. Today the companies that refine the potash on the receding shores of the lake have the western monopoly on this basic product, so vital to the new industries of

Southern California, being a basic mineral in the steel, glass, soap and paper industries. Many a bejeweled, powdered and refurbished daughter of the city has gazed upon Inyo from her Pullman or Packard and exclaimed, "How horrible!" While the freight train whistling by, hauling away to civilization a few thousand sacks of Inyo's talcum powder from her talc mines, rouge from her painted hills, beauty clay or medicinal water from Coso's boiling hot springs, gold and silver from the bosom of her mountains or borax or precious stones from the floor of Death Valley.

Contrasts? Inyo abounds in them. Her minerals run the gamut from aluminum to zinc, her animal and agricultural products from winesap apples to golden trout. And what of the Church in Inyo? Even as in temporals, so it is in spirituals. Inyo is the county of contrasts. In the whole county there are not over six hundred even nominal Catholics. The explanation of this small proportion is readily found in the isolation of Inyo, both geographically and in lack of means of transportation in the days gone by, combined with the impossibility of adequate instruction for those scattered singly, or in small groups, over its vast area. Although there are 1,500 Indians in Inyo County, all Piutes, there is no record that the Franciscan Padres ever ventured on this side of the Sierra. Consequently there is not one Catholic Indian in Inyo today. Old timers recall the first priest to visit them as the Bishop, then Father Mora, who was followed by Rev. Cornelius Scannell, Rev. Father William, O.P., who seems to have been a sort of Missionary-at-large, was also one of the adventurers of the Cross into these desert fastnesses, one of those whom the Apostolic Delegate could far more justly have denominated "pioneers" than the present pastor. We of the present generation have little concept of the real hardships these men suffered in their weary journeyings over the wasteland, hundreds of miles in the snows of winter and the burning suns of summer, atop a rolling stagecoach or straddling a bony cayuse, carrying the altar stone and vestments in knapsack or saddle bags, verily real soldiers of Christ. Another pioneer was Rev. Malachy Bannon who was a familiar figure in Inyo. To this day a certain spot in Lone Pine, once owned by Father Bannon, probably with the thought of erecting a church thereon, is known as "the priest's lot". Bishop Montgomery was probably the first Bishop to visit Inyo in his official capacity, having made at least one journey there, administering Confirmation to many. Father John Reynolds, recently deceased, made many visits to Inyo in stagecoach days and was followed, for a brief period by Rev. Matthias Ternes, now pastor of Arroyo Grande. In Father Ternes' case,

as in that of most of the priests that labored in this region, Inyo was but one portion of their field of labors, which usually included the entire desert region of Southern California. Up to this time, 1905, no church had been erected in Inyo County, the missionaries having been content to say Mass in schools, halls and private houses. In that year, however, Rev. Leo Foin, now at Paso Robles, built the first church at Bishop, the largest town in the county, situated in the Owens Valley, ten miles south of the northern county line. Rev. Raphael Fuhr, now pastor of Saint Michael's Church in Los Angeles, was Father Foin's successor in caring for these desert missions, and labored longer in this charge than did any of his predecessors. For over six years he made the rounds of Inyo and parts of Kern and San Bernardino counties, offering Mass in each and every place that he could gather a group of Catholics together. Those were the days of the building of the Angeles Aqueduct and many a construction gang along the Owens Valley was the mass offered in a tent or a lean-to under the rays of the early morning sun by this zealous missionary who had perhaps slept the night before in a box car.

During the interregnum, following the death of Bishop Conaty, no priest visited Inyo, but Bishop Cantwell journeyed to this corner of his vast diocese early in 1919, and immediately appointed Rev. Austin Fleming to the post. Father Fleming at once began construction of a church in Lone Pine, sixty miles south of Bishop, in the Owens Valley. Bishop Cantwell returned here the same fall for Confirmation and blessing of the little chapel, as yet devoid of furnishings. In November of 1919 the present pastor was appointed to take care for the churches of Bishop, Lone Pine, Randsburg and Barstow, located respectively in Inyo, Kern and San Bernardino counties, a parish of some thirty thousand square miles, equal in area to all of Ireland, or to all of the New England States with the exception of the state of Maine. The nearest of these churches were sixty miles apart, the farthest two hundred and thirty five. Bishop Cantwell furnished the means for the purchase of a Ford, without which systematic development of the Catholic life of the region would be impossible. Thus equipped, I began at Bishop on the first Sunday of the month and celebrated Mass there, the first time to a congregation of four Catholics. Then driving south through Owens Valley celebrating Mass in the other small towns in private homes, halls or schools, as opportunity offered. I arrived in Lone Pine for the second Sunday, where my first congregation numbered eight people. Then south and east 100 miles to Randsburg for the third

Sunday, where the first time I celebrated Mass there were five people present. Then south and east sixty-five miles to Barstow for the fourth Sunday, where my first Mass was attended by fifteen people, then down along the Santa Fe Railroad to Death Valley and back again to Bishop for the first Sunday of the month, thus completing the circuit. In this way, giving these people regular monthly service, a distance of more than fifty thousand miles, or twice around the earth, was covered in about sixteen months, most of it in the Ford, which had been arranged so that I could sleep in it, thus enabling me to save many hotel bills when caught on the desert at night between my missions. In 1921, after a year and a half of this systematic attendance, the Catholics at Barstow had returned to the practice of their religion in sufficient numbers to justify the bishop in placing a resident pastor there, which narrowed down my field of labor considerably. Six months more and a mining boom accomplished a like result in Randsburg, so that early in 1922 Inyo county had for the first time a resident pastor who now felt more or less confined within his little 10,000 square mile enclosure. Just previous to this we had purchased property in Bishop for the construction of a new church. The old building had no sacristy, no quarters for the priest, no adjoining property for future expansion, in fact stood within ten feet of a noisy blacksmith shop that furnished constant peril from fire. With a gift of \$1,000 from the Catholic Church Extension Society of Chicago, the new church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was begun late in 1921, and the first Mass was celebrated there at midnight on Christmas of that year. The interior still uncompleted (we had borrowed all we dared from the bank) had been fitted up with the old altar, confessional and pews from the chapel which we had sold for lumber. One of the sacristies in this new edifice served as a bedroom for the pastor.

In 1921 also, we were fortunate enough to be able to purchase the Protestant Episcopal church in Randsburg for \$200. We wrecked this building and transported the lumber and equipment over the desert by truck 100 miles to Lone Pine, where the pews were set up in the little church, the altar became a confessional, and the walls and rafters became a sacristy and part of the rectory. The Extension Society gave us our little wooden altar, our stations and sanctuary lamp, while other good friends donated vestments, altar furnishings, etc., so that the little church of Santa Rosa was soon decently, if modestly, furnished. A bell and funds for a tower were also donated and this tower was built over the original porch.

Extension, fairy god mother of the mission, again aided us with \$500 towards the building of a rectory and the exterior of this was completed at once with the help of other generous donors and money borrowed on the Bishop's note. Of the interior, even to this day but three rooms are furnished, namely, what will eventually be the housekeeper's bedroom, in which the pastor sleeps at present, a little parish office and library, and the kitchen, where the pastor cooks his meals if he does not go out to a restaurant or share the humble fare of one of the parishioners.

Such was the material condition of the Inyo county missions in 1922. When Randsburg was removed from my care, I began to say Mass in each church every second Sunday, the first time in history that these people had ever enjoyed such a privilege. It is difficult for city-bred Catholics to realize the deprivation the dwellers in the desert have suffered, or to appreciate how far they have drifted from the faith. Mass once a month, once in six months, once a year, frequently no Mass for years had been their portion, -- was it any wonder that now they knew naught of the liturgy, nay worse, that hundreds had no desire to return to the practice of their religion, and some were so hopelessly entangled in marriages, mixed or invalid, that return was impossible? I have baptized three or four children in the same family at the same time in Inyo, because when they were born there was no priest here to baptize them. I have married grandmothers and grandfathers while their own grandchildren sat in the pews and watched the ceremony because when they wished to marry there had been no priest here to marry them. My Sunday school teachers had never seen a Sister or a Catholic school, -- these things existed for them only in catechisms and picture books.

Yet, despite all these handicaps the congregations were steadily growing. Experience teaches every missionary that the faith grows in more than direct proportion to the frequency with which Sunday Mass is offered in each center, so I prayed for the day when it would be possible to offer Mass every Sunday in both churches. The day came sooner than I dreamed, owing to the construction of a state highway from Independence, 16 miles north of Lone Pine, and Bishop. This is not a paved road, but rather a graded sand and dirt thoroughfare, far shorter and easier than the old ruts that wound in and out of the dunes and over and under the sage brush and boulders.

This brought the two churches within striking distance, and on January 7, 1923, I

celebrated Mass in Bishop, and two and a half hours afterwards in Lone Pine. This has been the regular Sunday schedule ever since. On one Sunday Mass is celebrated in Lone Pine at 8 o'clock, and by driving in the Ford over the sand roads sixty miles to Bishop, it is possible to celebrate the second Mass there at 11:15. On the following Sunday the order is reversed with the early Mass in Bishop, the late Mass in Lone Pine. Thus the sixty or more Catholics who attend Mass in Bishop now, and the eighty odd in Lone Pine feel that they owe a debt of gratitude to a certain Detroit millionaire motor-car manufacturer for his aid in lifting them to the ranks of "honest to God" Catholics.

In the spring of 1923 Bishop Cantwell gave the writer permission to speak of the Inyo county missions in the larger parishes of his diocese in an endeavor to raise funds to continue the work. This task completed last winter had a very successful outcome, and a great step forward has been taken with this aid. The interior of the church at Bishop was at last plastered and painted, and new pews made and installed. A comfortable residence adjoining the church completely furnished, was purchased for a rectory with \$2000 cash and a two year mortgage for the balance, \$3000. At Lone Pine a small hall was constructed for parish use, with a basement that can later become the nest egg for a parochial school. Nothing further was done to the rectory, because there was no need, nor will there be, until it is necessary to have a housekeeper there.

Sixteen miles south of Lone Pine, on the banks of Owens Lake, lies the town of Keeler, a little community supported by the mining and talc industries in part, but principally by the large soda-ash plant in the neighborhood. This refinery employs nearly 300 men, most of them Mexicans, many of whom live with their families hard-by. Last spring Extension gave us the initial push towards a little chapel there and at present we have in Keeler the partly completed Saint Ann's church, at the rear of which are three rooms in which a resident catechist has her abode. This good lady came from Chicago for this purpose and is supported in part by the publication, "Our Sunday Visitor". Mass is celebrated in Keeler every Saturday now, and the congregation seated in the old pews transported from Bishop, are content to wait until Divine Providence sends them too the inestimable privilege of Sunday Mass.

It is a far cry from these days in Inyo with its resident pastor, three churches and two

Sunday Masses, to the old days of the uncertain and long-separated visits of the Catholic missionary, and the Catholics of Inyo are deeply grateful to all who have hastened this hour. But rejoice though he must with his faithful people in their happiness, their pastor still sees the woeful disparity between present debts and needs and local income, such as the rectory in Bishop and the uncompleted residence in Lone Pine, but worst of all the gaunt, unfinished chapel of St. Ann at Keeler, -- and he prays that God will not forget us in the future, but will move even still more Catholics who are blessed with a little to help us out of the shadows and into the sunlight. The pastor of Inyo has other dreams also, of two parishes instead of one, or a parish school, or more catechists, or many needs and he contrasts the day when all these things shall come to pass with the day that is now, and he hopes and prays, -- for after all, is not Inyo the county of contrasts?

II. FATHER C.T. KERFS AND HIGH DESERT "RAILROAD PARISHES", 1921-1927*

In the fall of 1921, Bishop John J. Cantwell of the Diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles (renamed Los Angeles-San Diego after July 1, 1922) determined that enough Catholics lived in the high desert surrounding Barstow that a resident pastor should be assigned permanently to serve such a vast area. Some of this increase stemmed from the immigration flow caused by the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917 and its aftermath of Church persecution in that nation. Before 1921, aside from a parish established in distant Needles about 1886, the county's high desert had only a mission church in Barstow itself which had come into existence in 1914. At first the mission was attended from Needles, with the pastor commuting once or twice a month by use of a clergy pass on the railroad. After World War I, the mission assignment was given to the parish at Bishop. Over the years, religious services were also held occasionally at outposts such as Oro Grande, Ludlow and Victorville. In 1921, Blythe had been added to the circuit when that town's parish was reduced to a mission with the departure of the pastor and a demonstrated lack of financial support.

On October 12 of that year, the Rev. Charles Kerfs (he later used the signature of C.T. Kerfs) arrived in California from assignment at St. Mary's Church in Odell, Nebraska. At that time he was nearly 43 and had traveled considerably. Born in Krefeld, Germany on December 2, 1878, he began his studies for the priesthood in his native land and completed them in Mexico, where he was ordained on August 10, 1906. He was assigned to Odell from 1918 to 1921 but "preferred urban life to rural life". He thought that his next assignment was to an urban parish in the Los Angeles area, so the sight of the high desert town of Barstow in 1921 was a mild shock to say the least. He proved to be quite a letter-writer among other accomplishments, and his correspondence over the next several years provides an illuminating insight into the problems of adjusting to a hardship post.

Since there was no rectory as yet next to the existing St. Joseph's Chapel, Father Kerfs took up residence at Barstow's Hotel Melrose located in the Post Office Building opposite the

* This chapter is based on an unpublished article by the author.

railroad station. In his first letter to the diocesan chancellor, Monsignor John Cawley, he revealed his unhappiness with the temporary living arrangements and surroundings:

I am willing to take charge of these missions if you will allow me to make my residence during weekdays in Los Angeles (for instance at the hospital) where I can have a room. It would be less expensive, and I could just as well attend these missions on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays or any other day in the week if necessary.

This request was wisely not granted, as within a month Fr. Kerfs was writing to Msgr. Cawley that:

I am very pleased with my missions. The good Mexicans come from every section along the railroad to hear Holy Mass and to receive the Sacraments. The coming week am going a few days to Oro Grande to give a little (preaching) mission to the 30 Mexican families there. Please tell Rt. Rev. Bishop I am delighted with my missions, that I am so busy that I have no time to think about the desert.

By the end of the year he had visited all of the outreaches of his desert domain and become familiar with transportation arrangements. The highway as a matter of course paralleled the Santa Fe Railroad tracks from San Bernardino to Victorville; after that point, road conditions were decidedly more primitive. The route from Victorville to Barstow was 36 miles of sand road, which took seven or eight hours by auto. Oro Grande, 36 miles west of Barstow, took an hour and a half by auto. Ludlow, 56 miles east of Barstow, could be reached over a sand road in three hours by auto. Blythe, another 135 miles east of Ludlow, featured a bad road all of the way; 44 miles from Blythe there were numerous sand holes and a three-mile stretch over railroad ties was a necessity. This route was obviously little used by auto traffic. The better way was to take a train from Ludlow at 11 p.m., arriving in Blythe at 8 a.m.; the return trip was by train leaving Blythe at 8 p.m. and arriving in Ludlow at 2 a.m.

The priest worked out a ministerial schedule which he could hopefully meet. Usually, he rode in the caboose of freight trains, for the timing was better. His health improved in the desert air, and he found himself able to maintain a fairly fast pace. The first Sunday of the month he reserved for the spiritual needs of the Barstow parish, although he also conducted a daily Mass when in town. The congregation came from not only local Catholics but also those from Kramer,

Helendale and other scattered tiny desert communities. The second Sunday he went to Oro Grande and Victorville. Ludlow was the destination on the third Sunday, while Blythe was assigned the fourth Sabbath day. In those months which had a fifth Sunday, a quarterly event, Fr. Kerfs journeyed to Death Valley Junction for about three years until the responsibility was taken over by the parish at Bishop.

It did not take long for the priest to conclude that all of his mission stops needed a chapel if the congregations were to flourish. For Oro Grande, as early as December 12, 1921, he offered to buy personally an old, small abandoned Protestant chapel and fix it up for use. The diocesan chancellor quickly gave his permission, but evidently Fr. Kerfs, on second thought, decided against the proposition. By March 1922, he had a new building under construction, and it was completed by the end of April. The chapel measured 40' x 20' and had three small rooms in the back. The structure stood on an acre plot donated by a Mr. Bennette, a non-Catholic. In May, the Catholic Church Extension Society gave \$500 to help cover costs, provided the name of the chapel would be St. Cecilia. The Society also sent an altar, Stations of the Cross and various altar supplies. During the first summer, the property was fenced, and water pipes were installed. (It should be mentioned at this point that Fr. Kerfs brought \$6,000 with him and did not spare the use of it for mission facilities when needed.)

About the time he had decided on a new building for Oro Grande, Fr. Kerfs was promoting the idea at the Chancery that Ludlow also needed a new chapel. There were around 100 Catholics in the town, mostly from 18 Mexican families. Early in July 1922, permission was given to erect a church. Within six weeks the congregation had already raised \$600 in cash, in large part from a fiesta. The pastor's policy was that as soon as the \$1,000 mark was reached, then he would order the structure ready-cut in Los Angeles. By November, two-thirds of the \$1,500 cost had been raised and the lumber ordered, followed quickly by the construction process. To ensure completion, Fr. Kerfs paid the remaining \$500 himself. In January 1923, the chapel's name of St. Michael was approved. The Sunday School was headed by the only American in the congregation, a Mrs. McFarlane.

Meanwhile, progress was also being made for a third church to be erected in Victorville. Permission to build was granted in February 1922. After consulting an architect in Los Angeles, a

picture of the projected structure was made. On the real estate front, three lots listed at \$1,100 were made available at \$800 by a Mr. Lacy "as a special favor". Actually, subsequent negotiations resulted in obtaining the land for \$735, which included lots 26, 27 and 28 of block B5. Mr. Albert Martin, a local architect, drew up the final plans. Mr. Carl Leonardt, owner of a local cement plant, promised that he would build the cement church free of charge and "without delay when I return from Europe" in November.

With arrangements for three churches completed and two actually constructed, Fr. Kerfs could look back on the year 1922 with a measure of satisfaction. This feeling was bolstered by a note from Bishop Cantwell on December 4, stating, "Will you please be assured of my very great gratitude for all you are doing for the Mexicans and others in the Barstow district...I cannot promise such a priest as you any reward in this life...."

During 1923-1924, Mr. Leonardt, despite repeated promises, never found the right opportunity to build the Victorville church. This situation unfortunately continued until he died in 1927 and his estate subsequently went into litigation. The congregation thus continued to meet in the town's movie theater until it could raise the necessary construction funds on its own.

In May 1924, the finishing touches were applied to the existing chapels when 16 new large benches were installed at Blythe, 16 smaller benches at Ludlow and 12 benches at Oro Grande. Father Kerfs paid for the latter installation, while the respective congregations financed the others. The pastor was then able to report to the chancery the completion of all chapels and furnishings and that "There is no debt, except in Blythe, where I formed a kind of Altar Society among the few Americans to pray the [quarterly] interest on the principal". Regretfully, there was no progress to report on the planned Victorville church; the pastor did not feel that any other financing scheme should be tried as long as Mr. Leonardt kept insisting that he would donate the cost.

Bishop Cantwell's schedule expanded as the years passed. He found it increasingly difficult to find time to make the trip to Barstow and from there proceed to Oro Grande, Ludlow and Blythe to dedicate the churches there as well as provide confirmation for those prepared at those missions plus Victorville. Finally, early in 1925, the bishop informed Fr. Kerfs that the Bishop of Cheyenne, Most Rev. Patrick A. McGovern, was "not all that busy" and was "looking

for things to do". Arrangements were then made for Bishop McGovern to come to California, which he did in the forepart of March, and the overdue ceremonies were at last performed.

While keeping busy with church construction details, Fr. Kerfs did not neglect his own housing problem. Although he continued his room and board regime at the hotel in Barstow, he had found time in the fall of 1922 to buy a new house for a rectory. As with the church, this home was erected on Santa Fe Railroad land on lot 3, block 15 of the townsite. As a special favor to the Bishop, the Church was only charged \$1.00 for an annual rent. The parishioners raised \$600 from two fiestas, so the pastor donated the remaining \$2,000 purchase price to assure the contractor that he would be paid.

The following year, the St. Joseph parish complex was completed when Fr. Kerfs bought a former dance hall from the railroad for \$100. He envisioned several uses such as a Sunday School and kindergarten for 60 Mexican children. Also the facility would be used to hold an evening school for adults.

In 1924, a new mission was started in Trona, which was tended initially on a quarterly basis using the fifth Sunday cycle. At first it was administered by Tehachapi (which itself had started as a "railroad parish" in 1887 tended from Bakersfield) and then Barstow. A change in the Barstow district organizational setup occurred in 1927. At that time, Victorville was raised to full parish status with its own resident pastor. Victorville was also assigned to tend the Trona station on a monthly basis. At the same time, the Barstow parish was assigned an assistant pastor who also took over the burdensome Blythe duties.

Despite these reductions in workload, Fr. Kerf's health had begun to deteriorate. In 1928, after an auto accident, he requested a transfer to an easier assignment in the knowledge that he had scored various degrees of success in Barstow, Oro Grande, Ludlow, as well as Blythe. Although he had not succeeded in actually building a church in Victorville, he had ministered well to a growing faith community which was on the verge of striking out on its own. The biblical praise of "Well done, my faithful servant", certainly was a fitting epitaph for his deeds.

Father Kerfs was transferred as the founding pastor of St. Angela's Church in Pacific Grove, northwest of Monterey. He died on January 3, 1949. In 1961, the Knights of Columbus Council in Pacific Grove was named for him.

Epilogue

As for subsequent high desert history, a summary of what became of Father Kerfs' churches is in order as well as later entities.

St. Joseph's Parish in Barstow continued to flourish. A second church was built in 1941 and replaced by a third one in 1966, while a parochial grade school began in 1955.

About the time Fr. Kerfs passed from the scene, the Victorville mission finally built its own church and rectory. The edifice, named for St. Joan of Arc, was dedicated on October 7, 1928. The church was built of reinforced concrete and cement brick, with dimensions of 62' x 32' and a seating capacity of over 200. A second church was built in 1949.

Another parish, also named St. Joan of Arc, at the low desert community of Blythe, continued as a mission of Barstow and then Indio for another decade. In 1938, it was once again raised to the status of a full parish.

The mission at Trona became a parish in 1938 after building a church in 1936 named St. Madaleine Sophie Barat. The parish built a new church in 1958. Thirty years later the "high desert blues" struck the community, which meant all denominations had economic difficulties in staying afloat.

St. Michael's Mission in Ludlow remained assigned to Barstow. Unfortunately, the wooden structure was completely destroyed by fire in 1931. A cement block church was built in 1935, and the mission briefly became a parish with its own pastor until 1942 when it reverted to mission status. It was inactive from 1945 to 1951, reopened with its own pastor again for a year and then became a mission of St. Raymond's Parish in Amboy. In 1962, it briefly was a mission of Joshua Tree until it closed later that year.

St. Cecilia Mission at Oro Grande also experienced a series of vicissitudes. It was closed in 1928 after Fr. Kerf's departure but was reopened during World War II as a Barstow mission. After a second period of inactive status from 1945 to 1957, it opened again as a full parish with its own pastor. This continued until 1966 when it reverted once more to mission status under Barstow. From 1970 to 1975, it was a mission of Victorville when it closed a third time for good, and the property was sold. Thus, the last of the 1920's era "railroad parishes" passed from the scene shortly after a newer high desert parish (1950) at Amboy also ceased operating.

Small preaching stations have functioned sporadically since World War II in the upper desert such as Newberry Springs and Essex along the Santa Fe line plus Pinion Springs, Mountain Pass, Nipton, and Kelso in other desert stretches. However, only two missions remain viable at Baker and at Phelan with the latter becoming a parish in 1989. Economic changes largely related to railroading and mining have caused a negative demographic change, sometimes drastic, in oldtime desert communities which has impacted seriously on church institutions located at a distance from population centers.

On the other hand, newer desert communities along major highways with a not-too-distant area population base have resulted in parishes founded in Adelanto, Hesperia, and Apple Valley. Meanwhile, in the southeastern corner of San Bernardino County, other parishes have appeared in Yucca Valley, Lucerne Valley, Twentynine Palms, and Joshua Tree.

III. THE PADRE OF ROUTE 66: AMBOY AND FATHER HANLEY, 1950-1970*

Many Americans, especially those living in proximity to the Chicago-Los Angeles highway and in particular those domiciled along the seemingly endless stretch of southwestern deserts, remember a popular sing and TV program from the 1950's. Even without a record, one can almost conjure up the sound of Nat "King" Cole singing about "Flagstaff...; Kingman, Barstow, San Bernardino..." from Bobby Troup's "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66". Yet, pastors of all denominations were among the unsung heroes of the hard life in a string of barren Mojave Desert "towns" between the Arizona border and San Bernardino. One of these men was a Catholic priest, Father Leo J. Hanley. During a four-year assignment at Amboy in the early 1960's, he became known as the Padre of Highway 66.

Near the eastern terminus of that highway, southwest of Springfield, Illinois, a pious farmer set up a statue of the Virgin Mary in an alcove on the edge of a cornfield bordering the road. Borrowing from the Burma Shave style of advertising then in vogue, he advertised the presence of the statue by a series of hand-painted signs leading the reader phrase by phrase through the Hail Mary devotion along a half mile of fence posts. This unusual display along a major highway named for Will Rogers led to the use of the term, "Our Lady of the Highways". John Steinbeck used the same theme by calling the route "The Mother Road of America".

This type of analogy could also be used for the Southern California portion of the route. Here, a pattern of settlements dating back to the coming of the railroads and the exploitation of mineral resources in the 1880's resulted in water stops initially strung out along the railroad right-of-way like beads on a rosary chain. Later, Highway 66 followed mostly the same route from Needles to Upland across San Bernardino County. Eventually, Interstate 40 paralleled the route.

East of Barstow in the early days these specks on the map were named alphabetically, including such exotic names as Bristol (later Bangal), Cadiz, Danby, Edson (later Essex), Fenner, Goffs, Homer, Ibex, Java and Klinefelter. The first stop was Amboy. When founded by the

* This chapter is based on the author's "Padre of Route 66", Route 66 Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 16-17.

Southern Pacific RR, it served as home for thousands of Chinese laborers who built the line eastward from Mohave. By 1939, the WPA guidebook for California described Amboy as having a population of 95, and "is another typical highway stop, blistered by temperatures that often soar about 120° in mid-summer". The description continued:

On the vast desert, here and there, lies an abandoned auto, sometimes on its back like an upturned turtle, or an occasional little pile of rocks, marking the boundary claims of some hopeful prospector or, topped with a weathered cross, the resting place of some luckless wanderer.

The last statement indicated some measure of religious belief but not necessarily an organized church community of whatever Christian faith. The Catholic Church established parishes in Needles (1888) and Barstow (1914), but nothing in between during that period. Father C.T. Kerfs, pastor at Barstow's St. Joseph Church from 1921 to 1927, also assumed the role of a railroad missionary. He rode in freight train cabooses of the Santa Fe RR to Victorville, Oro Grande, Ludlow, and Blythe on alternate Sundays during a month, but it is not recorded that he paused to minister at way stations such as Amboy, Essex, etc.

During the World War II years and aftermath of the 1940's, desert towns such as Amboy revived somewhat. Navaho Indians from Laguna Reservation in New Mexico began working for the railroad in 1942. They also worked at military installations such as Fort Irwin and the Barstow Marine Corps base. In addition, many Indian women worked for wages for the first time. To maintain a tribal community, several colonies were formed in the High Desert, one of them at Amboy. Another one existed near the city of San Bernardino.

By the spring of 1950, the local economy -- which also included salt-mining -- had attracted enough inhabitants and potential parishioners that Bishop Charles F. Buddy of the San Diego Diocese decided to form a parish. Prior to that action, the 40 Catholic families of the area (which included Chubbuck) had to travel some 50 miles for services at Blessed Sacrament Church in Twentynine Palms (founded, 1940).

The pastor who established the fledgling parish at Amboy leased an old house for the temporary rectory and chapel. However, he soon proved to be unable to cope with the arrival of hot weather, primitive amenities such as the lack of commercial electricity and fresh water and the

general social situation, so he was replaced by a temporary administrator. A young priest, Rev. Joseph N. Stadler, arrived in late April 1950 and immediately set to work constructing a church and rectory. Overcoming many obstacles such as the lack of workmen, a paucity of building materials and a chronic shortage of money, he did get both structural projects underway. But in a few months he departed for his own parish in Riverside County.

On November 11, Father Hanley arrived at the desert outpost from the large parish of St. Leo's in Chicago. His culture shock included finding his new church was but a crude shell of concrete blocks; the rectory as yet had no roof or floor. Through willpower, finagling and much prayer both buildings were completed within a month and put to use. St. Bridget's Church was dedicated by the Bishop in March 1951, just twelve months after the parish had been formed. Later that year, the parish was renamed St. Raymond because of a large gift from a resident of Chicago.

Although it was a tremendous accomplishment to get the parish firmly established and to have rather quickly an adequate physical plant which eventually included a parish hall, the task was not an easy one for the Padre of Route 66. In addition, St. Michael Mission at Ludlow was declining in strength by this time and had to be tended by the Amboy pastor. During the 1950's, Essex also had a preaching station which was periodically visited.

In a 1954 interview, Father Hanley admitted he was "terribly discouraged" his first night in Amboy as he crossed Highway 66 to have dinner at Roy's Cafe. There he met Roy Crawl, the man who donated the lot for the church, although he claimed he had never been inside any church in his life. Crawl, who then owned nearly everything in Amboy, introduced the priest to his first parishioner. She was Mrs. Francis Staples, wife of the superintendent of the salt mine at nearby Sautus.

Father Hanley confessed to the interviewer that he was tempted to head straight back for Chicago, but his first Sunday Mass changed his mind. "I saw those (Indian and Mexican) children and their great need", he explained. "I didn't want to renege -- let them down. They didn't even know how to bless themselves. It kind of touched me, I suppose".

The new pastor found that he had to take the same steps as his predecessor, Fr. Stadler, to continue the never-ending struggle for a viable parish. This meant rounding up workmen and

working side by side with them, mixing concrete and laying blocks. He drove repeatedly to Los Angeles for supplies and also did the cooking for his workers. His people gave all the money they could; a typical summer Sunday collection might be only five dollars. Non-Catholic merchants helped out, and others gave donations and even sent their children to the parish's Sunday School classes at the only church in town. A workable generator had to be procured; water was piped in from the railroad's supply which came by tank car from Newberry Springs. Yet, all of this community goodwill was not enough to keep the parish self-sustaining. Father Hanley spent his summer vacations in Chicago, raising funds among his old friends. He also contributed his own money at times when the parish checking account was low on funds.

This crushing burden of work finally took its toll. In September 1952 at the age of 48, he was stricken by a severe heart attack. The padre spent two months at St. Bernardine's Hospital, but returned to his flock. Fortunately, his sister, Mrs. Loretta O'Donnell, came out from Chicago the following summer on vacation and eventually stayed. She assumed the duties of housekeeper and helped with catechism classes for the little ones. Some people asserted she was "the best cook on the Mojave".

In 1954, Father Hanley was still busy with plans for the future, dreaming of tiling the floor and plastering the interior walls of the church, building a choir loft and confessional booths. But these dreams remained unrealized. In the fall of that year he was replaced after a longer term than usual for a hardship post, and he and sister departed for Chicago where he resumed duties at St. Leo's Parish. For the next decade his congregation sent an annual donation to St. Raymond's as a missionary offering.

Although the desert parish never really flourished thereafter, Fr. Hanley during his tenure was not discouraged that the flock was small and predictably would remain so -- the "least of the brethren" as Bishop Buddy called it. Nevertheless, economic conditions militated against continuance of even a minimally successful religious enterprise. With the railroads changing from steam to diesel locomotives, the decline of mining and a lesser need for civilians at military installations, the crowning blow in the late 1960's was the construction of Interstate 40 north of old Route 66.

St. Raymond's Parish struggled on several years under the last pastor, Rev. Adalbert N.

Kowalski (1963-1970). The church was closed when he retired. For a while the building was rented to a newly-formed Protestant congregation, but when it had difficulty in meeting the monthly payments, the place was deeded back to the Crowl family. The building still stands at the intersection of Old Highway 66 (renamed National Trails Highway) and Twentynine Palms Road. The traffic flow on the old highway from Ludlow to east of Essex is now minimal. But harkening back to those early post-World War II days, one wonders as the tourists and job-seekers sped through the desert night to the Los Angeles magnet, whether anyone gave a thought to the lives of people who sacrificed to provide some presence of humanity along the way.

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IV. HOLY FAMILY OASIS AT NEWBERRY SPRINGS, 1956-1985*

The post-World War II expansion of the Catholic Church's San Diego Diocese into San Bernardino's High Desert witnessed several efforts at ministering to scattered groups. Examples were at such locations as Kelso, Mountain Pass, Amboy, Ludlow, and Baker. None of these prospered due to changing economic conditions, with the exception of Baker, and were eventually discontinued. All but Amboy, a parish of short duration, were missions or preaching stations of St. Joseph Parish in Barstow.

Another location which began services in the 1950's was at Newberry Springs. This was an older community and had a better economic foundation, largely because it had a generous water supply from a high water table. The village, located about twelve miles east of Daggett on Route 66, had a post office as early as 1899 and had several name changes over the years. An 1883 schedule of the Southern Pacific Railroad showed it as Newberry, but it became Wagner in 1911, Water in 1919, Newberry again in 1924, and finally Newberry Springs in 1967. In the age of steam engines, the place was an important water stop. Over the years, the area attracted many residents (2,000 population by 1980) who used the ample underground water supply to construct small lakes and ponds and to irrigate crops.

There were enough Catholic people present by 1956 that a small group began saying the rosary in their homes. Within a few months, catechism classes began for the children. Next, a priest from the Marine base at Daggett came irregularly to say Mass for the faithful under a tree. The group began to grow in size, so the Community Building was rented for services. The Barstow parish was then requested to supply a priest once a month. If he could not come, the pastor from Amboy supplied the need until that parish was closed in 1970. By the mid-1960's, the Sunday schedule had increased to two Masses per month. In addition to the continuing need for catechism classes, adult studies were also conducted after 1965.

By this time, the fledgling congregation felt it was well on its way to forming its own parish with a church. However, this dream of a decade's duration was put aside when another

* This chapter is based on the author's "Holy Oasis at Newberry Springs", City of San Bernardino Historical Society Odyssey, Vol. 19, No. 2 (May-August 1997), pp. 8-10.

church entity appeared in the neighborhood. The St. Bonaventure Friary in Chicago gave permission to the western Franciscan province for acquisition of property to meet the needs of future expansion. A number of potential sites were found in Southern California, but all were found wanting for a variety of reasons. This effort included at least two of the existing California Missions from the colonial Franciscan era. The Friars continued their search.

In 1968, Father Aloysius Romanowski received an offer of a twenty-acre donation in the desert near the newly renamed Newberry Springs. The property was found not to be suitable, but another tract which eventually became the Franciscan Center came to the attention of the Order. This was found to meet all requirements, and the 30 acres were purchased. It had been nearly two centuries since there was a Franciscan presence in the area when Fray Francisco Garces had traveled through on a missionary journey in 1776.

Father Aloysius (or "Fr. Al" as he was known) was recognized by his Order as the logical leader of the building project for a Franciscan Center. Over the next two years he came to Newberry Springs frequently on business from his principalship of Bishop Montgomery High School in Torrance and stayed long enough to say Sunday Mass in several of the congregant's homes.

In March 1970, Fr. Al received a county permit to hook up a small trailer to utility lines for use while building permanent facilities. One of those structures was to be a church to serve future parishioners. That same year, a four-car garage was built and immediately modified for use as a chapel, pending construction of a church. Also, much of the main house and utilities had been completed the same year. By 1974, the sacristy-library building was finished. In 1976, a heavy beam grape arbor with a concrete floor area was completed. This came to be often used for outdoor Mass during good weather.

During those eight years since the land acquisition, Fr. Al labored alone. He received help from many volunteers for the construction phase. A number of dinners, barbeques, rummage sales and bazaars (plus the Sunday collection) were conducted by the local people to augment fund-raising efforts in the Los Angeles and San Diego diocesan areas. Finally, in 1976, the Franciscans sent Brother Francis Boerner to assist Fr. Al. He was of considerable help with the landscaping and a variety of other jobs. The result was many areas of patios, flower gardens and tree-shaded

walks with benches. The entire layout conformed to the "California Mission" style. However, no church was ever built either by the Franciscans or by the community on land set aside for that purpose.

After a decade of dedicated effort, the future parishioners were led to believe that the money and services they provided would soon result in the construction of a church on dedicated land and that the Franciscan priests would continue Masses or make some arrangement to function without the community having to rely on the Barstow parish. However, consternation reigned in December 1978, when the Franciscan headquarters in Oakland decided to sell the Newberry Springs property.

This proposal caused shock and anger among the local residents. Thought was given to appealing the move to a higher Church authority. Or, if that failed, filing a class action civil suit against the Order. As time passed, tempers cooled and the latter action was never taken. However, an appeal made to the Papal Apostolic Delegate in Washington, D.C. was turned down in favor of local negotiation between the newly established San Bernardino Diocese (which now covered San Bernardino and Riverside Counties) and the Franciscans.

Part of the problem was money. The residents estimated in 1980 that they had contributed the equivalent of \$100,000 to the project. The Franciscans offered the property for \$250,000 with no provision for either a refund to the community or at the very least some acreage on which to build a church.

Another part of the problem seemed to be that there was never a clear understanding of the intention or purpose of the project on the part of the parties involved. The bishop of the San Diego Diocese had granted permission for Fr. Al to serve the residents but not as a de facto parish pastor. Then too, the people of the community were not aware that it was not the intention of the Franciscans to build a parish church despite the map layout of 1968. They had come to the area with the intention of establishing a school for novices, retirement home and/or a retreat house for priests. The residents were under the impression that the project was their established mission and were working toward the establishment of their local parish. With the coming of Fr. Al, the diocese presumed the Newberry Springs mission was now under the direction of the Franciscans.

After two years of misunderstanding, it seemed that the sale of the property to a non-

profit organization -- Family Oasis, Inc. -- would provide some measure of emolument to the presumably soon-to-be abandoned Newberry Springs mission. Ironically, the Franciscans continued to staff their Center for three years after the 1978 sale announcement, and consequently a priest did continue to hold a Sunday Mass whenever convenient. The new prospective owner expected to have a priest available in conjunction with its purpose of operating a home for adult developmentally disabled individuals. It appeared that the garage-chapel would continue to be used for an interim, and some land in the 3-to-5 acre range would be set aside for future local use.

Escrow closed on the Franciscan Center in the spring of 1981. Finances of the existing Catholic mission were improved by having all collection money sent to Barstow to be used to defray expenses. This included a nominal rent for the chapel until a better arrangement could be made and a stipend to whatever priest said the Mass.

Holy Family Oasis, even with presumably strong backing, continued to be underfinanced and unable to inaugurate its patient program. When the full three-year note came due in 1984, neither funds or refinancing could be arranged. Consequently, the project passed into history and the property reverted to the Franciscans.

For the long-standing Newberry Springs mission (which had begun using the name "Holy Family Mission"), it was a case of deja vu. However, the previous arrangements made with the Oasis stood them in good stead. A new rental agreement with the Franciscans enabled the people to continue providing a facility for Mass in the old garage-chapel. The Franciscans stationed a priest at the Center to care for the Order's interests. He provided a weekly Mass when available or else a priest came from Barstow for that purpose. With another sale of the Center property in the offing, the Catholic community in 1985 arranged with the local Assembly of God church to use that facility for a Saturday evening Mass in lieu of losing the chapel unexpectedly. Holy Family Mission continued to look to the future by using its accumulated building fund in 1986 to purchase the five acres originally set aside almost two decades previously. Eventually, a church was to be built as the financial situation improved.

Thus, despite numerous setbacks over the years, the community exhibited its tenacity in overcoming obstacles and not becoming a footnote to history as with other desert towns.

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**Chronological Listing of
Churches and Missions for
The High Desert**

- 1886 - Needles, St. Ann Church
- 1914 - Barstow, St. Joseph Church
- 1921 - Oro Grande, St. Cecilia Church (closed in 1975)
- 1921 - Ludlow, St. Michael Mission (closed in 1962)
- 1922 - Victorville, St. Joan of Arc Church
- 1936 - Trona, St. Margaret's Mission. Raised to a full parish in 1938 and renamed as St. Madaleine Sophie Barat Church
- 1950 - Amboy, St. Bridget Mission. Renamed in 1951 as St. Raymond Church (closed in 1970)
- 1957 - Newberry Springs Mission
- 1961 - Hesperia, Holy Family Church
- 1965 - Lucerne Valley, St. Paul Parish
- 1966 - Nipton, St. James the Greater, Apostle Mission (closed in 1971)
- 1971 - Baker, Our Lady of the Desert Mission (moved from Nipton and renamed)
- 1974 - Kelso/Mountain Pass preaching station visited occasionally
- 1974 - Apple Valley, Our Lady of the Desert Church (renamed as St. David Church in 1982)
- 1979 - Lenwood, St. Philip Neri Church (reduced to a mission in 1985)
- 1989 - Phelan, Blessed Junipero Serra Church
- 1992 - Victorville, Holy Innocents Church

HIGH DESERT CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONS

Parochial Schools

1955 - Barstow, St. Joseph

1953 - Apple Valley, Our Lady of the Desert. Name changed to St. Mary Regional School, 1982.

Hospitals

1951 - Santa Anita, Lake Arrowhead (closed in 1965)

1956 - Apple Valley, St. Mary Desert Valley. Name changed to St. Mary Regional Medical Center, 1982.

Seminary

1959 - Victorville, Sacred Heart (closed in 1982). Originally located in Redlands, 1955-1959.

Retreat/Renewal Center

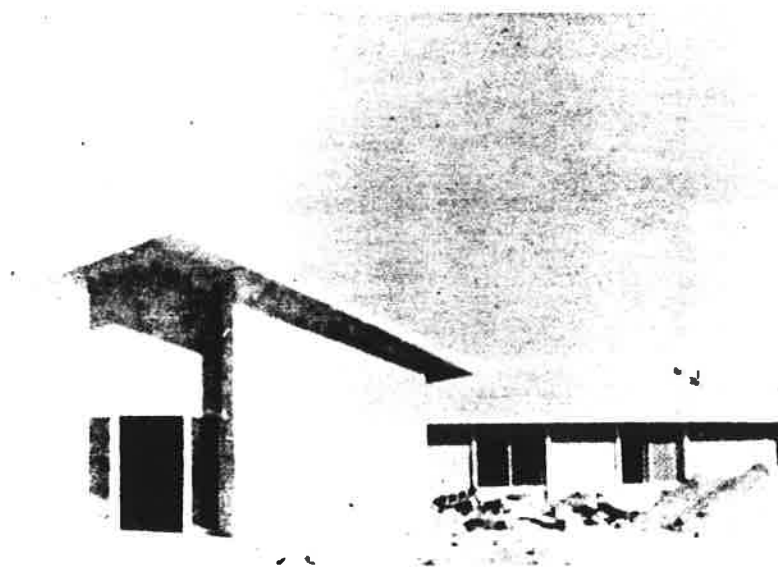
1982 - Victorville, Sacred Heart. Took over the facility from Sacred Heart Seminary (closed in 1986).

Hispanic Ministry

1987 - Barstow, Centro Sembrador

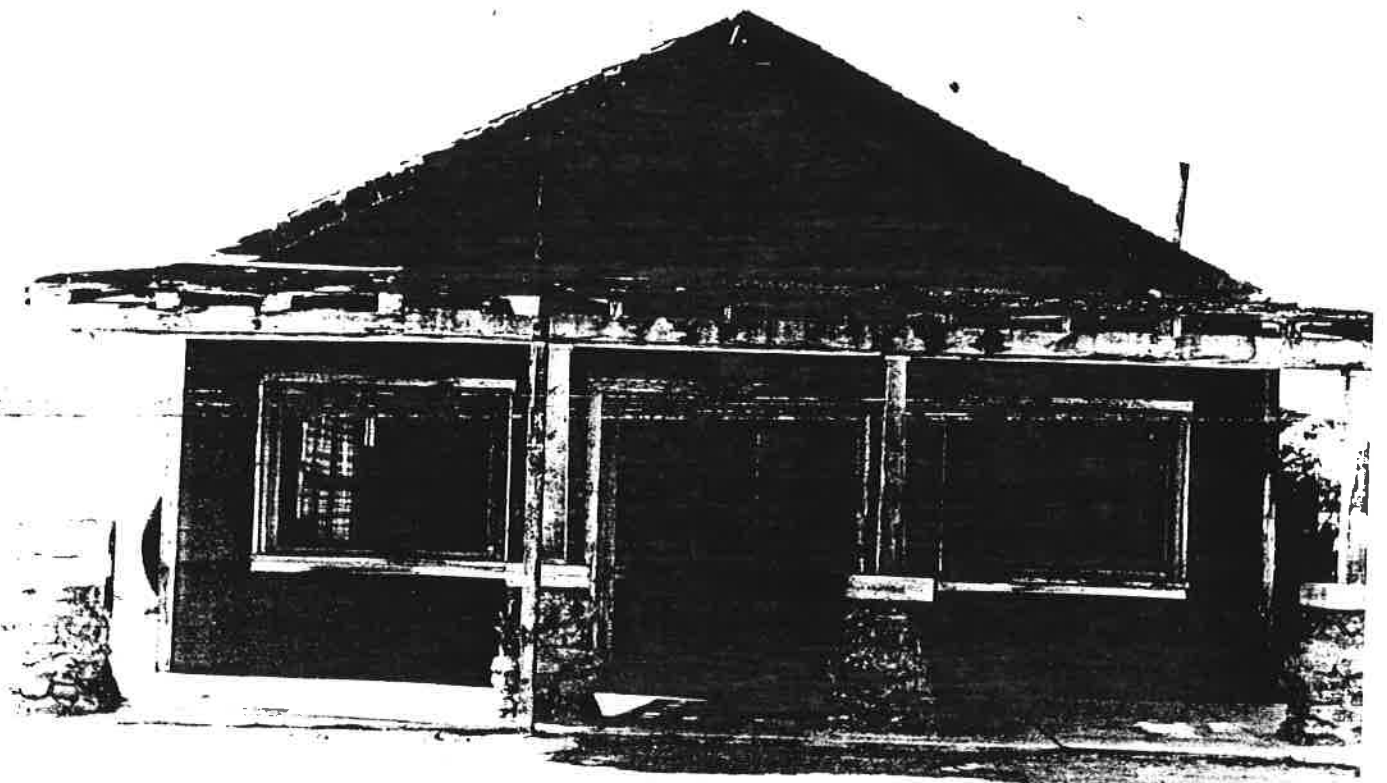


*First St. Joseph's Church,
Barstow,
built in 1914*



*Our Lady of the
Desert Mission Chapel,
Baker,
built in 1971*

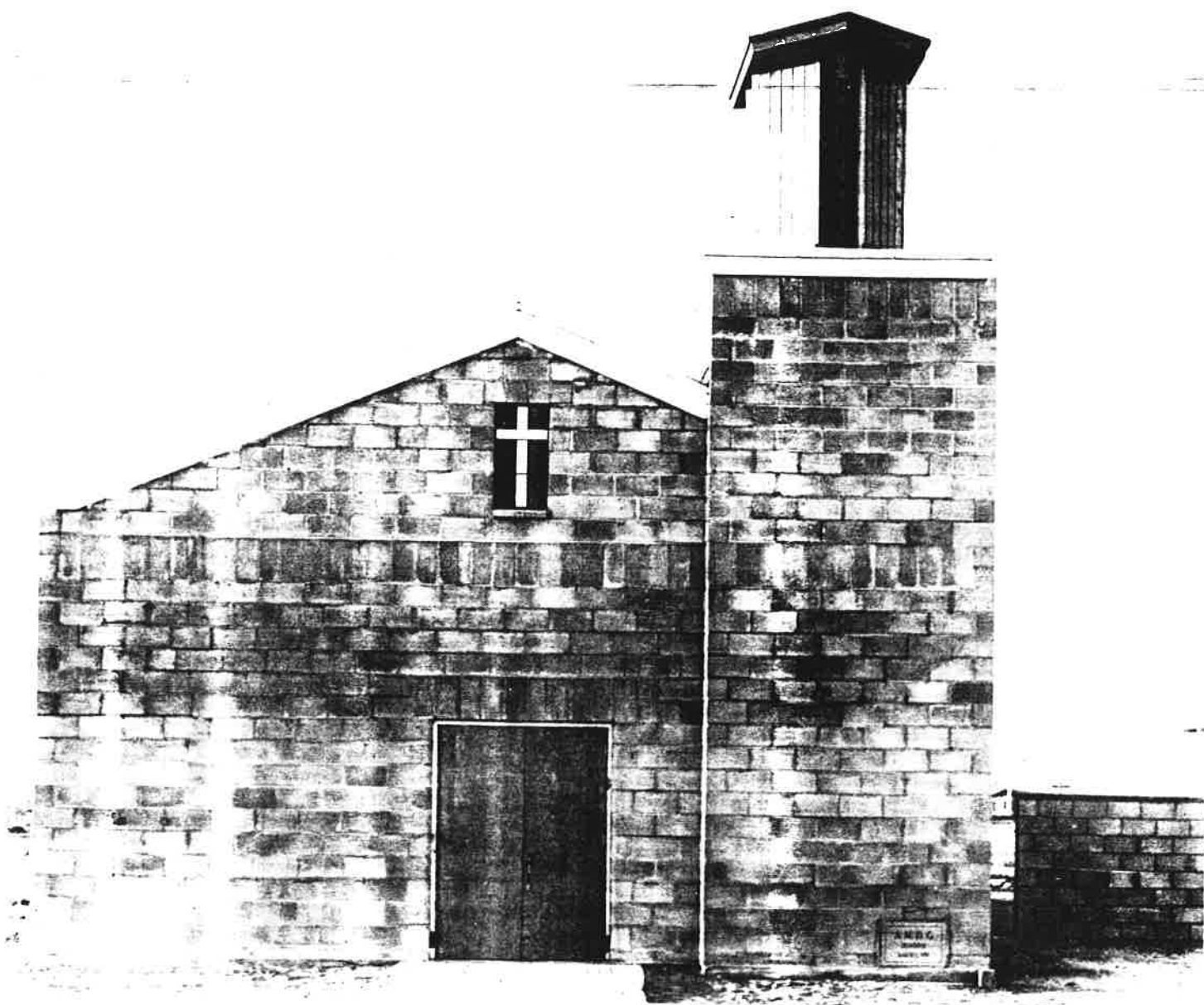
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St. Michael's Church, Ludlow, 1922-1962



St. Cecilia's Church, Oro Grande, 1922-1975



St. Raymond's Church, Amboy, built in 1950