

St. Mary's Catholic Church was established in 1885 by the Right Rev. Martin Marty, Vicar Apostolic of Dakota, who sent the Rev. J. H. Juetting to be the first parish priest. Fr. Juetting immediately set out to make plans for a church, but died before it could be built. The first church was completed the following year under the second pastor, the Rev. Joseph Weixelberger, and dedicated by Bishop Marty on November 10, 1887.

Father Weixelberger started St. Mary's School in fall of 1889. He also purchased the first church bell, which was christened "Mary" on May 5, 1891 by the Very Reverend A. L. Ricklin from Sioux Falls, under delegation of Bishop Marty. Realizing that the first church was too small for the growing parish, Father Weixelberger began making plans for the new church. Unfortunately, he died in early November, 1896.

The third pastor, the Reverend John Bernard Weber, arrived in Salem on January 22, 1897. Born in Germany on November 6, 1869, Father Weber studied for the priesthood at St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee, and was ordained on June 24, 1893. Father Weber continued Father Weixelberger's plans for a new stone church, but changed the proposed location from N. Main Street to its present location on Vermont Street. The cornerstone of the new stone church was laid on July 4, 1898, with the church opening for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in 1899. The three wooden altars and pulpit, carved in Bavaria, arrived in 1905, with the appointments from the first church used in the intervening years following the opening of the church. Amidst great fanfare and enthusiasm, St. Mary's Church was solemnly consecrated by the Right Reverend Thomas O'Gorman, Second Bishop of Sioux Falls, under the title of Our Lady, Help of Christians, on June 18, 1907.

Father Weber began the building of the first school building in 1901, and invited the Sisters of St. Francis from Milwaukee to serve as teachers. In 1929, the High School was opened and served the parish until it closed in 1970. Father Weber was named a Monsignor on January 16, 1923 and a Protonotary Apostolic by the Servant of God, Pope Pius XII in 1952, the same year he celebrated the 60th Anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood. In June of 1956, Msgr. Weber resigned as pastor and moved in with his niece, Frances Weber, and her husband, Steve, on their farm northeast of Salem. Msgr. Weber died six months later, on December 11, 1956, and his Solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated on December 15, with the Reverend Urban J. Rodenbur (third native son of St. Mary's to be ordained a priest) as Celebrant. Father Henry Kolbeck, another native son of the parish, served as the Deacon of the Mass, and the Reverend Patrick C. Conway, future pastor of St. Mary's, serving as Sub-deacon. The body of the famous third pastor of Salem lies in St. Mary's Cemetery, awaiting the Resurrection of the Body on the last day.

In 1985, St. Mary's Parish celebrated its centennial, and the church was formally placed on the National Historic Register. On July 4, 2010, St. Mary's will celebrate its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary.