

Communities of the Word

STORIES OF THE CHICAGO PROVINCE



THE APPALACHIA STORY, 1972 – 2012

Rev. Elmer Nadicksbernd

AND THE PITTSBURGH HOUSE, 1960 – 2012

Rev. Dennis Logue



Any story about West Virginia will always be profoundly affected by its mountainous terrain, spectacular river valleys and rich natural resources. These are all factors that influence its people and drive the circumstances of life in the Mountain State.

The environmental, economic and social conditions of the state all have a bearing on how the people live, what the people believe and how they express their beliefs. The people, as a rule, are very friendly, but also somewhat cautious when it comes to outsiders. This is most evident in their religious convictions.

The Catholic Church in West Virginia, although it has been present for more than 150 years, is often seen as a foreign element, ruled by a foreigner, singing foreign-sounding hymns. Most of the “preachers” are foreigners—that is, non–West Virginians.

The task of preaching the gospel in all the fullness of God’s love and mercy is a daunting one. This is the task we face as Divine Word Missionaries.

WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY

The history of West Virginia goes back to the Civil War, when it was carved out of the Commonwealth of Virginia. As Virginia had opted to secede from the Union in 1861, some 55 western counties of the state, amid great turmoil, voted to break from Virginia. Originally the new state was called Kanawha, but when the U.S. Congress accepted the petition of these counties to become a state in its own right, the name given was West Virginia.

Since West Virginia is wholly within the Appalachian Mountains, its development was very slow and quite haphazard. The mountainous terrain, the many creeks and rivers and the extensive woodlands made it hard to build roads. Consequently it proved extremely difficult to develop business and industry. Agriculture remains difficult because of the poor, shallow soil.

The larger river valleys of the Ohio and Kanawha rivers saw some growth because of the ease of transportation on and along the rivers. Areas grew quickly where coal was found in abundance, especially in the southern counties of the state. These areas were of great economic importance. Most of this growth took place in the last half of the nineteenth century.

There is a different story, however, in the central part of West Virginia. It remained isolated and undeveloped. Few usable roads were developed and very few railroads were built to get from one populated area to the next, until the latter part of the 1890s. The finding of some rich coal veins opened the central counties to some extent. Because

of the large number of hardwood trees, timbering also became an important element in the development of central West Virginia. This is the area the Society of the Divine Word inherited from the Marists.¹

BEGINNINGS AND GROWTH

The history of the West Virginia portion of the Appalachia District (known as the Pittsburgh/West Virginia District until 2010) begins in 1972 when the provincial of the Eastern Province, Father Donald Ehr, decided to look for different ministries for returning missionaries. Not everyone wanted to retire fully, and not all would be suited for seminary work or involvement in our Black parishes.

In the early 1970s the nation as a whole was witnessing a general unease and social unrest in the population. Along with this social upheaval there was a back-to-the-earth movement afoot, especially in the hills and hollows of West Virginia. This factor, along with rural poverty and the sparse numbers of Catholics in the area, was a consideration for Father Ehr. He sensed that working in West Virginia would be a welcome opportunity for those returning from overseas. Here they could continue to be active, doing much-needed ministry without the hassle of too much administrative responsibility.

At the time of the Society's entry into Appalachia, West Virginia-native Joseph Hodges was bishop. He had a good understanding of the people and the diocese.² Early on he recognized the need to have a Catholic presence in all 55 counties. He worked diligently to fill this need. Thus he welcomed Father Ehr's offer of men and asked if we could take on the task of missions in the rather neglected central part of the state. It had long been overlooked both politically and religiously.

For the better part of a century the Marist priests and Brothers had been doing an admirable job of maintaining a Catholic presence for the few Catholics in these central counties. They traveled by horseback and then by train to cover the area, offering Mass and the sacraments on a regular but infrequent basis. They worked at getting to these places at least once a month.

So it was, then, in October 1973 that the first two Divine Word Missionaries took on the task of pastor and associate at St. Thomas Church, Gassaway, and St. Anne Church in Webster Springs.³ These two parishes (missions) had been part of the Marists' concern for many years. The two men who came to West Virginia were Fathers

Kenneth Reed and Edwin Daschbach. Both were relatively young (47 and 35 years old, respectively).

Although the two parishes had always been mission churches before the arrival of the Divine Word Missionaries, they were treated as a parish and a mission. It soon became evident, however, that if our work was to succeed in this mission environment, young men would be needed. The hope of Father Provincial Ehr to send older missionaries returning from overseas was quickly confronted with a new reality. The environment, the travel and the prejudices encountered would require youth and great vitality.

Our two new missionaries had much to learn, much to do. The churches were some 35 miles apart over some very difficult, treacherous mountain roads. The number of Catholics was small (35 active members in the main church of St. Thomas and even fewer at St. Anne in Webster Springs). Resources were scarce. Travel between the two parishes was (and remains to this day) a real challenge.



Father Edwin Daschbach, 1938 – 2009.

Meeting the people was also a challenge. Normally West Virginians are friendly people. They are, however, most cautious in dealing with outsiders. These two men were truly outsiders. Father

Reed from Indiana and Father Daschbach from Pittsburgh would have to win the confidence and goodwill of the people at large as well as the few Catholics in the area.³

Helping the people with many of their physical, social and economic needs was going to take patience, as well as muscle, stamina and many good ideas. Economic development and social concerns were seen as immediate needs. These pioneers jumped into the work. They involved themselves not only in proclaiming the Word, but also in many social ministries especially in housing rehabilitation.

Before they could do anything else, however, they had to find housing for themselves. This was provided by a parishioner in Gassaway in a rental house on Elk Street. In Webster Springs they lived in a small room off the sanctuary with no running water and no heat. New housing in Webster Springs was eventually found.

To tell the story of the involvement of Divine Word Missionaries in Appalachia, it is necessary to look at the men who have worked in the different places and enumerate their talents, endeavors and contributions to the parishes.



ST. THOMAS, GASSAWAY, BRAXTON COUNTY, 1973

Because of the location in the middle of the Divine Word parishes,⁴ and because it was the first parish that was accepted in West Virginia, St. Thomas in Gassaway has always played a predominant role in the

Society's involvement in Appalachia. It has also been the parish with the greatest stability of personnel.

As noted above, when Fathers Reed and Daschbach arrived in Gassaway, they had much to learn, but also much to contribute. Father Reed, especially, busied himself in meeting the people through his untiring work on homes and farms. He took up helping with plumbing, "carpentering," general fixing up, and maintenance. Father Daschbach gave himself to educational tasks, especially with the youth of several parishes.

Father Reed also saw the great need for social concerns like providing clothing and better nutrition. He set about looking for religious Sisters who might help in this endeavor. Several religious from the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur made themselves available from their Connecticut Province. They came to teach and to administer a food pantry and secondhand clothing center. Sutton, West Virginia, the county seat of Braxton County, located six miles from Gassaway, became their home.

A major setback to the work came in 1977. Father Reed sought laicization and married one of the parishioners from St. Anne. She was a widow with two children still of school age living at home. Ken became their surrogate father.⁵ In spite of this development, those early days saw growth and promise because of the dedication and hard work of these two pioneers.

If the work begun by Fathers Reed and Daschbach was to continue, however, another man would have to be found quickly to take the former's place. Father Anthony Hemphill was that man. He became pastor of St. Thomas in 1978. By 1979 Father Daschbach was appointed full-time pastor at St. Anne in Webster Springs, thus separating the responsibility for the two parishes.⁶

Meanwhile, at St. Thomas in Gassaway, Father Hemphill gave himself over to furthering the understanding of Scripture with Bible study groups. He also tried to involve the people in a deeper prayer life by the example of his own life.

Father Hemphill made great use of the Sisters' house on Main Street in Sutton. He would schedule a Mass one day a week at their residence and would often use the house as a place for meetings, especially if most of the folks were from the Sutton area.

Then, in 1983 a great tragedy struck the small Catholic community of Braxton County. One morning while Sister Francine Ciccarelli was

on her way to a meeting in Wheeling, she apparently had a heart attack, crossed the center line on State Route 4 and hit a school bus. She was killed immediately. None of the schoolchildren were hurt. Shortly after this, the other Sister returned to New England.

Father Hemphill looked for some immediate help to continue the work that had been done by the Sisters from New England. Sisters Margaret Becker and Margaret Mary Fischer, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, from the Cincinnati Province were invited to come to St. Thomas as catechists and social workers. Sister Margaret Becker was the first to move to the St. Michael Outreach Program in Burnsville, West Virginia (25 miles away and a new program). St. Michael was described in the diocesan directory as a mission of St. Thomas, although there were only two or three Catholics in the town.

Sister Margaret stayed on in Gassaway/Burnsville after Father Hemphill moved on to St. Peter Claver in Asbury Park, New Jersey, in 1984.

Father Edward Wald became the new pastor at St. Thomas. Because of his pleasant personality and thoughtfulness, Father Wald became the glue that held the parish together in spite of the natural friction between the old guard and new families moving into the area. Under his care the parish grew to about 55 families with about 150 members. In his last several years at the parish there was a felt need to build a parish center and catechetical classrooms for the growing number of Catholic families. This was accomplished by 1992 with the many sacrifices and hard work of the people and Father Wald. In 1993 Father Wald resigned as pastor of St. Thomas because of health. He then took on a small parish in Lewis County, St. Boniface in Camden, West Virginia.⁷

After Father Wald's resignation, Father Elmer Nadicksbernd was asked to take on the responsibility as pastor at St. Thomas. Although the parish had grown in numbers since the Society took it over in 1973, one of the first things Father Nadicksbernd noticed was the poor condition of the church due to "benign neglect." There never had been sufficient funds to do proper maintenance on the building. Even the larger number of parishioners could not keep up with the finances for the needed repairs. The church had been built in 1906 mostly by Italian immigrant artisans and railroad workers at the cost of \$32,000. But it was now 1993.

At a meeting of the Finance Council in 1994 a proposal was made to undertake a capital campaign that would help restore the church to some of its original splendor. The necessary repairs would be finished by the centennial year of the building of the church in 2006.

The capital campaign got off the ground in earnest in 1997, and by the time the rehabilitation was complete in early 2006, the cost of \$332,000 had been completely covered. The exterior, roof, masonry and windows had been repaired or replaced by several different contractors. The interior, meanwhile, was refurbished by a local contractor and parishioner, Mr. Greg Shimko. This beautiful church hosted a rededication ceremony, with Bishop Michael Bransfield presiding, on July 3, 2006, the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle.

At the end of July 2008, after 15 years as pastor, Father Nadicksbernd resigned to have needed surgery on his hips and knees. A year earlier, a young Indonesian confrere, Father Matheus Ro, was appointed to assist Father Nadicksbernd. By now Father Nadicksbernd had been asked to take charge of another parish. He could do this only with the additional help. When Father Nadicksbernd resigned, Father Ro was assigned as pastor with Father Dominikus Baok as his assistant.⁸ In 2012, Father Baok moved to the town of Richwood in Nicholas County to take over Holy Family Parish from the Marists, who were withdrawing from the area.

Over the years, besides the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur mentioned above, other Sisters have worked at St. Thomas. Sister of St. Joseph Pat Calahan from Wheeling came to St. Thomas as the Director of Religious Education and remained for one year. Then, in relatively quick succession, Sister of Notre Dame de Namur Pat Tryon from the Connecticut Province came, also as Director of Religious Education, to replace Sister Calahan.

Several Sisters of Divine Providence also served the parish. Sister Mary Weatherly from Allison Park, Pennsylvania, came as a social worker. Sister Ruth Flynn from Melbourne, Kentucky, followed for one year. Finally, Sister Mary Kriley from Allison Park, was the last of the Sisters to work in ministry at St. Michael / St. Thomas. She gave of herself from 1998 to 2007.

ST. ANNE, WEBSTER SPRINGS, WEBSTER COUNTY, 1973

St. Anne in Webster Springs had been a mission of St. Thomas. It became a parish on its own in 1979, with Father Edwin Daschbach



becoming the first permanent pastor. For eight years Father Daschbach worked tirelessly against what was (and remains to this day) the ingrained prejudices of some of the fundamentalist folks of the county. He did this mostly by his skill as a writer. Every week he would have an apologetic article in the local newspaper.⁹

In the summer of 1987 Father Provincial Raymond Lennon asked Father Daschbach to transfer to the Divine Word parish in Indianapolis. Father Elmer Nadicksbernd, who had been rector at Divine Word College in Washington, DC, for two years (1985–1987), was assigned as the new pastor of St. Anne.

Father Nadicksbernd had had two years of previous experience in Appalachia. Now he felt the need to study more deeply and thoroughly the culture of the mountains. His work with the Ministerial Association in social ministries was a big help. This work included running a food pantry and conducting weekly Bible study sessions with senior citizens. He volunteered his efforts in the yearly work camp (housing rehabilitation) throughout the county and tried direct evangelization through various study groups.

In 1993, when Father Nadicksbernd was assigned to replace Father Wald at St. Thomas, a longtime missionary from Papua New



The interior of St. Anne, Webster Springs

Guinea, Father Xavier (Joseph) Cooney, took up the position as pastor at St. Anne.¹⁰ During his tenure Father Cooney worked diligently to meet the people on their level. He loved to hunt and fish and used these hobbies as a means of understanding the culture of the mountains. He also worked in housing rehabilitation and became involved with Habitat for Humanity.

In 1999 a new mission was opened in McDowell County, West Virginia, and Father Cooney moved there. A Divine Word Missionary just back from the Congo, Father David Cornett, was appointed as the new pastor of St. Anne. Much of Father Cornett's time was spent in making improvements on the facilities at St. Anne. Because of his interest in the deaf and his knowledge of sign language, the diocese made frequent use of his abilities to sign important and official ceremonies throughout the diocese.

It had been on the mind of Father Cornett for some time to ask for a leave of absence so that he could give himself to pastoral work in his home diocese of Steubenville, Ohio. With the permission of the provincial he made this move in the summer of 2004 and is now a priest in that diocese.

This move, of course, left the parish without a pastor or administrator. At this time, however, Brother James Zabransky asked to leave his position at Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa, and go to Appalachia. He became the administrator of the St. Anne Parish in Webster Springs.

At this same time, Father Arnold Lang, who had been retired since 1997, was asked by the bishop to take on the responsibility as

pastor.¹¹ With the effort of both Father Lang and Brother James, a much-needed parish hall was built onto the church in 2007. Together they expanded the social ministry of the parish, especially by encouraging and extending Catholic Social Services in Webster County.

Father Lang worked diligently for three years at St. Anne, but in 2007 at the age of 81, he retired. Father Elmer Nadicksbernd resumed the pastorate at St. Anne. He did this with the able help of Brother James Zabransky, who continued on as administrator. As was noted earlier, Father Matheus Ro from Indonesia, came to the District and assisted in this ministry.

When Father Nadicksbernd resigned from active ministry in 2008, Father Ro continued on as pastor. In the summer of 2014 he left Gassaway to study business management in preparation for an administrative position in the Chicago Province Center at Techny.

In addition to Divine Word Missionaries, several Sisters have had an impact at St. Anne. These include Sister of Divine Providence Mary Weatherly and Sister of Notre Dame de Namur Pat Tryon who was Director of Religious Education for St. Anne along with St. Thomas in Gassaway and Good Shepherd in Glenville.

St. Anne in Webster Springs also has a permanent deacon, Rev. Mr. Todd Garland, who has served there since 2004.



GOOD SHEPHERD, GLENVILLE, GILMER COUNTY, 1980

In 1980 Bishop Joseph Hodges asked the Society to provide a priest for Good Shepherd Parish in Glenville, Gilmer County. This parish was important as Glenville is home to a small state teachers' college. Father Charles Heskamp, looking for missionary work after

being in high school seminary formation at East Troy, Wisconsin, for many years, was assigned here. It would be a perfect fit. Two years later, however, he was asked to return to seminary work as principal at Bordentown, New Jersey.

For one year, in 1982–1983, Father Michael Bodnar from the Southern Province became pastor, but because of his age and his longtime work among the relatively straight roads of Louisiana, he found it difficult to negotiate the mountainous terrain of West Virginia. Father Elmer Nadicksbernd, in his first assignment to the missions of West Virginia, replaced him.



Vacation Bible School, taught by Sr. Ruth Nadicksbernd at Good Shepherd in Glenville.

After two years Father Provincial Raymond Lennon asked Father Nadicksbernd to take on the position of rector at Divine Word College in Washington, DC.

For many years Father Arnold Lang had taught in college seminaries, but by 1985 he wanted a different kind of missionary work. He replaced Father Nadicksbernd and immediately became involved with various ecumenical works.

Then Father Daschbach, after serving one year at St. Rita in Indianapolis and several years at St. Peter in McDowell County (not an SVD parish at that time), became pastor of Good Shepherd and worked there from 1991 until his death in August 2009.

Father Daschbach was a tireless worker. He busied himself with writing articles, publishing books, teaching Latin at the local high school, and pursuing his love of music. During his time at Glenville, the federal government built a prison there and he became the Catholic chaplain.

It was a tremendous loss to the efforts in Appalachia when Father Daschbach died of cancer rather suddenly in August 2009. At that time, the Chicago Province did not have anyone immediately available to take his place, so Bishop Michael Bransfield appointed a diocesan priest as pastor of Good Shepherd.



RISEN LORD, MAYSEL, CLAY COUNTY, 1994

In 1994 Bishop Bernard Schmitt was in need of someone who could take care of a small Catholic community in a poor, isolated county. The parish was Risen Lord. Since it was relatively close to St. Thomas in Gassaway (35 miles away), the bishop asked the pastor of St. Thomas, Father Elmer Nadicksbernd, if he could also take on the responsibility of Risen Lord Parish. With the permission of the provincial this was done.

Father Nadicksbernd remained there for 14 years. During his tenure there was a complete overhaul of the parish hall and catechetical center. A Charleston Catholic Work Camp was begun in the county

and a Divine Word Alumni Association “Appalachian Experience” doing housing rehabilitation became a fixture each year during the last week in June.

When Father Nadicksbernd retired in 2008, Father Matheus Ro continued to look after the spiritual needs of this parish.

There have been a number of Sisters who were active in Clay County and Risen Lord Parish. Sisters of Saint Joseph Nancy Facker and Cathy Britt from Brentwood, New York, had been active in the community in social work for some years before becoming directly associated with the parish in 2003–2004 as Director of Religious Education and administrator of the parish.

Several other Sisters were also involved with the administration of the parish as well as being Director of Religious Education: Sisters Dorothy Turk and Delphine (1994–2000). A laywoman, Mrs. Diana Pfeiffer, became administrator for one year. Sister Ruth Nadicksbernd, one of Father Nadicksbernd’s three sisters in the Sisters of Divine Providence, was administrator and Director of Religious Education from 2004 to 2009.

ST. PETER, WELCH, MCDOWELL COUNTY, 1999–2008

A major expansion of the Divine Word ministry in West Virginia took place in 1998. The diocese had asked Father Provincial Stanley Uroda if the Chicago Province might consider taking on missionary work in the coal region of McDowell County, West Virginia. He visited the county along with some diocesan personnel and determined that this certainly was a place we could do missionary work.

In committing to this new venture the plan was to have a team of men, priests and Brothers, available to care for the Catholic population of the four parishes¹² of the county. These men, of course, were also to seek out the many un-churched people of the county. This was and remains a very economically depressed county due to the mechanization of the many coal mines in the area. Much work was going to be required of any and all personnel.

To get the right people, however—to form a team—proved difficult. An able and dedicated missionary, Father Xavier Cooney, formerly working in Webster County, was appointed as pastor. Two other priests also were assigned, but one of the first obstacles was the

limited amount of time these men had to give to the project. Both Father Marek Pardon, from Poland, and Father Alex Jebadu, from Indonesia, were available for a maximum of three years. Another obstacle? Both men had limited skills in English.

Brother Rogers Hannan was assigned to the work in McDowell County, but he had the unenviable task of dealing with a culture with which he was not familiar. He was from the South and had worked for many years serving the Black communities in our southern missions.

One of the most devastating events took place shortly after our arrival in McDowell County. In the spring of 2004 a major flood hit the county and all but destroyed the downtown area of Welch, West Virginia, the center of the county and the parish. Much planned work had to be put on hold because of the devastation as all available help was directed to relief efforts.

Father Uroda, after finishing his second term as provincial, was assigned to the parishes in McDowell County. He, along with Father Thomas Tran and Brother Rogers Hannan, began to get a handle on some of the most pressing pastoral and social problems in the county. Then, after only three years, Father Uroda was asked to become the rector of the Divine Word Theologate in Chicago.

There was a quick succession of personnel appointed to care for the parishes in the county, but because of the rapid changeover, it became evident that the Society could not supply the number of men needed to do the work. In 2008 the Chicago Province and the Diocese of Wheeling–Charleston mutually agreed that the Divine Word commitment to the parishes in McDowell County would end.

Until 2013, however, the Society of the Divine Word still had a presence in the county in the person of Brother Rogers Hannan, who continued his humanitarian and social work for the people of this beleaguered area of West Virginia.

There also have been some Sisters who have worked in McDowell County, but because they were not always associated with the parishes, their work was not always linked to the work of the Divine Word Missionaries.



2006 District Meeting. Standing (left-to-right): Fathers Edwin Daschbach, Elmer Nadicksbernd and Walter Ostrowski; Brother George Haegele; Father Arnold Lang. Seated (left-to-right): Fathers Xavier Cooney and Raymond Hober, Brothers John DeBold and James Zabransky.

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, SUMMERSVILLE, NICHOLAS COUNTY, 2003

Father Xavier Cooney has involved himself in several major projects while pastor of this flourishing parish. Seeing the need for substantial housing he worked with Habitat for Humanity until his health no longer permitted. He also has been a driving force behind establishing a Catholic radio station in the heart of our mission territory.

Since 2004, a deacon in St. John Parish, Summersville, Rev. Mr. John Ceslovni, has worked alongside Father Cooney.

OTHER PARISHES WHERE DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES SERVED BRIEFLY

St. Boniface, Camden

1993–1994 Father Edward Wald

1994- 1997 Father Dennis Logue

St. John Neumann, Marlinton, Pocahontas County

1991–1997 Father Arnold Lang, until his retirement

Epiphany of the Lord, Moorefield, Hardy County

2003–2004 Father Alex Jebadu, until he was assigned to teach in Indonesia.



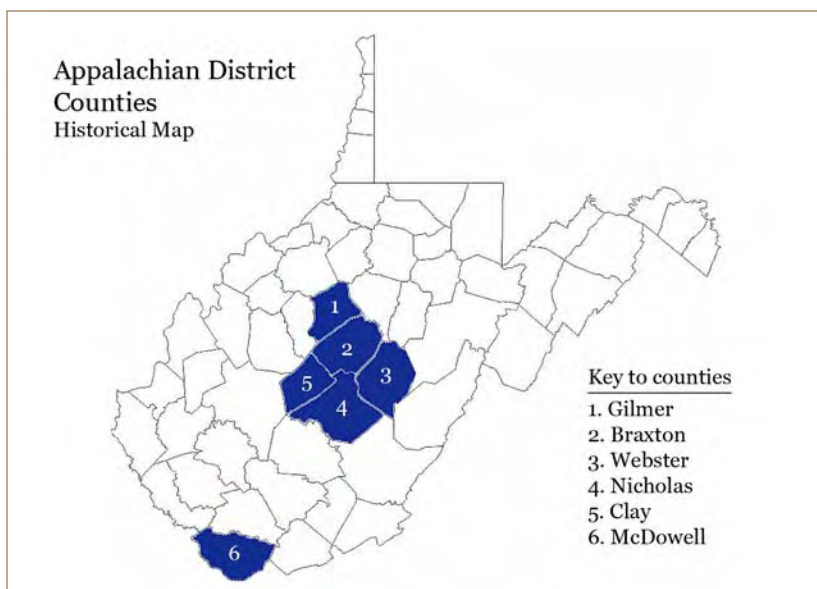
Father Arnold Lang stands outside St. John Neumann Church in Marlinton, Pocahontas County.

THE WORK CONTINUES

We continue to serve the parishes in the center of the state: St. Thomas, Gassaway; St. Anne, Webster Springs; St. John, Summersville; and Risen Lord, Maysel/Clay.

When the first two men came to West Virginia they were given two rural churches. In both of these combined there were approximately 50 members. Over the years, through hard work, dedication, social activity, and just plain stubbornness, we now have four parishes. The total number of Catholics is well over 400. More are added every year.¹³

There are now five members of the Chicago Province doing mission work in West Virginia.



APPENDIX

District Superiors

The Society of the Divine Word started its work in West Virginia in 1972. There was no district superior in the beginning. There was, however, a house superior appointed for the Divine Word Residence in the city of Pittsburgh. The first mention of a *praeses* for the Pittsburgh house in the *Catalogus* is in 1986.

The pastor of St. Thomas in Gassaway seems to have been the presumed superior of the several men working in West Virginia. These men would have been Father Kenneth Reed from 1973 to 1978; Father Anthony Hemphill, appointed pastor of St. Thomas from 1978 to 1984; and Father Edward Wald, following Father Hemphill as pastor of St. Thomas.

In 1987 Father Elmer Nadicksbernd was assigned to St. Anne Church in Webster Springs. It seems that everyone took it for granted that he was the local superior—that is, the district superior. Finally in 1992 there is a formal notice of a district superior in the *Catalogus*.

District Superiors

1992–1996	Father Elmer Nadicksbernd
1996–1997	Father Dennis Logue
1997–2000	Father Elmer Nadicksbernd
2000–2003	Father Xavier Cooney
2003–2004	Father David Cornett
2005–2006	Brother Rogers Hannan
2006–2008	Father Edwin Daschbach
2008–2014	Brother James Zabransky
2014-	Father Xavier Cooney

Pastors

St. Thomas, Gassaway

1973–1977	Father Kenneth Reed
1978–1984	Father Anthony Hemphill
1984–1992	Father Edward Wald
1993–2008	Father Elmer Nadicksbernd
2008–2014	Father Matheus Ro

St. Anne, Webster Springs

1973–1977	Father Kenneth Reed
1977–1979	Father Anthony Hemphill
1979–1987	Father Edwin Daschbach
1987–1993	Father Elmer Nadicksbernd
1993–1999	Father Xavier Cooney
1999–2004	Father David Cornett
2004–2007	Father Arnold Lang*
2007–2008	Father Elmer Nadicksbernd*
2008–2014	Father Matheus Ro*

* = Brother James Zabransky was Administrator

Good Shepherd, Glenville¹⁴

1980–1982	Father Charles Heskamp
1982–1983	Father Michael Bodnar
1983–1985	Father Elmer Nadicksbernd
1985–1991	Father Arnold Lang
1991–2009	Father Edwin Daschbach (died August 2009)

McDowell County

St. Peter, Welch, and Christ the King, War

1999–2003	Father Xavier Cooney
2003–2004	Father Stanley Uroda
2005–2007	Brother Rogers Hannan, not as pastor but in residence

Sacred Heart, Powhatan

2000–2002	Father Marek Pardon, in residence
2003–2004	Father Arnold Lang, in residence
2004	Father Thomas Tran, in residence

Our Lady of Victory, Gary

2005	Father Stanley Uroda
2006–2007	Father Dennis Logue
2007–2008	Father Tan Viet Nguyen

In 2008 the Society of the Divine Word formally ended its commitment to McDowell County.

In the spring of 2012 the Society took on the Parish of Holy Family in Nicholas County from the Marists, who were withdrawing from Central West Virginia. This church is the mother church of St. John in Summersville, St. Anne in Webster Springs, and St. Thomas in Gassaway. Father Dominikus Baok was appointed as pastor.

Social and Charitable Works

Involvement in Housing Rehabilitation

Members of Divine Word Alumni Association, Fathers Xavier Cooney and Elmer Nadicksbernd, Brothers Rogers Hannan and James Zabransky

Secondhand Stores

Brother James Zabransky and Fathers Xavier Cooney and Elmer Nadicksbernd

Food Pantries

Each parish has some sort of food pantry, either through joint ventures with other organizations or on its own.

Direct Assistance for Utilities, Rent, and Transportation

Each parish has a program that offers these forms of assistance. Each parish/mission also has other forms of charitable works, depending on the interest, need, and abilities of the individuals.

Other Personnel Working in the Appalachia District

Sisters in Gassaway

Sister Margaret Becker, SND de Namur, Cincinnati, Ohio
Sister Margaret Mary Fischer, SND de Namur, Cincinnati, Ohio
Sister Pat Calahan, SSJ, Wheeling, West Virginia
Sister Pat Tryon, SND de Namur, New England
Sister Mary Weatherly, CDP, Allison Park, Pennsylvania
Sister Ruth Flynn, CDP, Melbourne, Kentucky
Sister Mary Kriley, CDP, Allison Park, Pennsylvania

Sisters in Webster Springs

Sister Mary Weatherly, CDP
Sister Pat Tryon, SND de Namur

Sisters in Clay

Sister Dorothy Turk, CSJ, Cleveland, Ohio
Sister Delphine, CSJ, Cleveland, Ohio
Sister Nancy Fakner, CSJ, Brentwood, New York
Sister Cathy Britt, CSJ, Brentwood, New York
Sister Ruth Nadicksbernd, CDP, Melbourne, Kentucky
Plus: Mrs. Diana Pfeiffer, Saginaw, Michigan

Deacons

Rev. Mr. Todd Garland, Webster Springs
Rev. Mr. John Ceslovni, Summersville

THE PITTSBURGH STORY, 1960 – 2012

Rev. Dennis Logue



In the late 1950s the Eastern Province of the Society of the Divine Word wished to establish a mission office in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was a new venture for the Society and for the Eastern Province. It presented a new opportunity with vigor, a sense of growth and importance. Members of the province could realize anew that to be a missionary was not only going to far-off lands, but one could be a true son of St. Arnold “in mission” in one’s homeland as a promoter of the missions and as a hospital chaplain.

The mission director was seen as an apostle first-class in his tireless zeal for the missions. The chaplains in their mission spirit touched the lives of countless souls as they faithfully covered their hospital calls day or night, in season and out of season.

This mission office opened in 1960 under the direction of Father Edward Wojniak, who was on loan to the province from his mission in China. The loan was long-term—since the Communist takeover of the government of China in 1949.

Father Raymond Weisenberger was the provincial superior of the Eastern Province at the time. He and Father Wojniak negotiated with

the Ordinary of the diocese, who eventually became His Eminence John Cardinal Wright. The condition that Bishop Wright set down for the Society to come into the diocese was that the community would serve Presbyterian Hospital, Children's Hospital, McGee-Women's Hospital, Eye & Ear Hospital and Montefiore Hospital as chaplains.

The first men in our Pittsburgh House chose an excellent location for the property: 207 Lytton Avenue. It was within walking distance of the hospitals they served.

Father Francis (Frank) Mahon was asked to coordinate the chaplaincies of the hospitals. He also was appointed as the superior of the community. In the beginning the Divine Word chaplains were not paid by the diocese for their work. The community lived off their Mass stipends and offerings they received from friendly people in the hospitals who appreciated their priestly services. Father Mahon said that it became evident that they could not continue to live and survive in their work without financial help from the diocese. Father Mahon approached the new bishop of the diocese, the Most Rev. Vincent M. Leonard, in 1964, who, having reviewed the work of the chaplains, graciously agreed to pay the chaplains a salary for their priestly services in the hospitals. The diocese continued to pay the chaplains throughout the years until the Divine Word Missionaries ended their chaplaincy in 1993. In addition to their ministry as chaplains, they also helped out in local parishes on weekends and at other times when needed.

It was understood that the mission office director was fully a member of the community, and that the community would give hospitality to the mission director.

Father Wojniak was the first mission director in Pittsburgh, followed by Father Walter Hafner in 1962. Father Hafner's goal as the mission director was to raise \$1 million, a goal he achieved. Father Hafner was a zealous man, always of good humor and a delightful community person. He retired from his mission office work in 1985, having achieved his financial goal.

After the retirement of Father Hafner in 1985, Father Walter Ostrowski took charge of the mission office. He continues in the work and is a missionary of great zeal in his goal to take up as many mission appeals as possible. The thousands of miles that he untiringly travels each year give witness to the true mission spirit of the founder.



Father Walter Hafner, 1909 – 2002.

In the mid-1980s the Pittsburgh House was “bundled” together with the Appalachian parishes as a voting and governing unit.

The men of the Pittsburgh community have enjoyed a very cordial relationship with the bishops, priests, and religious Sisters and Brothers of the area, as well as with the neighbors and laypeople in the area. Brother Vincent Webb teased the neighbors with his delicious pies and pastries. Schenley Farms is the neighborhood where the community is located in the Oakland section of town. The University of Pittsburgh’s main campus is right around the corner. Because of this, the community is right in the middle of a very active neighborhood, with many students and visitors.

In 1985 the Divine Word community celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in Pittsburgh. Anthony Bevilacqua, then the Bishop of Pittsburgh and later Cardinal Archbishop of Philadelphia, came to the Divine Word Residence and celebrated Mass and enjoyed dinner with the community members and their invited guests.

NOTABLE MEN OF THE PITTSBURGH COMMUNITY

Father Frank Mahon had a great attachment to the Pittsburgh Pirates since Forbes Field, the Pirates' ball field until 1970, was within walking distance of the Divine Word Residence. Father Ralph Roina was a delightful confrere with his Italian sense of good humor. Father John Buys from Volendam, Netherlands, brought to the community a sense of Dutch wit and happiness.

The humble builders of the first Divine Word community in Pittsburgh have left a legacy that lives on to this day. They were hard working and self-sacrificing with a mission spirit that edified the common people they walked with each day on the streets and in the hospitals and in the parishes where they graciously served the people of God.

The year 1965 saw Father Richard Marks from Girard, Father Andrew Adamek from Bordentown, and Father Claire Risse, a former missionary in Indonesia, come from Techny to Pittsburgh. After many



Father Claire Risse, 1918 – 1998.

years of service in the hospitals, Father Marks died in Pittsburgh in 1978. Father Adamek went on to become a missionary in Mexico. Father Risse fought a valiant fight against problems with his voice. He died in Pittsburgh in 1998.

Father Laurence Lovasik was devoted to giving retreats and writing children's religious literature. His books, pamphlets and children's literature are as popular now as in the days he wrote them. Father Lovasik died suddenly at the age of 72 on June 9, 1986, in St. Paul's Cathedral in Pittsburgh. He was buried with his family in Tarentum, Pennsylvania, in Sacred Heart–St. Peter Cemetery.

Although he was not officially assigned to the Pittsburgh house, Archbishop George Bernarding came to the Pittsburgh house in 1987 from his archdiocese in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea. His family had lived in Pittsburgh, so it was natural that while seeking medical help the archbishop would feel at home in the Divine Word house. He died on December 21, 1987, at the age of 75 in the Vincentian Sisters of Charity Home in Pittsburgh. His funeral was held in his home parish of St. Basil the Great in Carrick, Pennsylvania. His body was returned to Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea, for interment.

A longtime resident of the seminary in Bay St. Louis, Brother John DeBold came to Pittsburgh to do social ministry. He was almost totally deaf. He knew sign language so his ministry was with the deaf. He is now retired in the Pittsburgh house.

APPENDIX

The Pittsburgh House

Superior / Praeses

1961–1971	Father Francis Mahon
1970–1979	Father Edward Wald
1972–1976	Father Joseph Fleishaker
1980–1985	Father Leo Dusheck
1985–1996	Father Dennis Logue
1996–2005	Father Walter Ostrowski
2005–2008	Brother George Haegele
2008–	Brother Gerald Raker

Many men have spent time at the Pittsburgh residence, either as a hospital chaplain, student or in the mission office. Some of these men

spent only a few years, others many years in hospital work. The year the men started their ministry is noted if it is known.

Mission Office

Father Edward Wojniak	1960
Father Walter Hafner	1962
Father Walter Ostrowski	1979
Father Raymond Hober (assistant)	2002

Chaplains

Father Ralph Roina	
Father John Buys	
Father Edward Detig	1963
Father Thomas Leibold	1963
Father Richard Marks	1965
Father Andrew Adamek	1965
Father Claire Risse	1965
Father Joseph Fleishaker	1968
Father John Lakatta	1970
Father Edward Wald	1974
Father Herbert Pins	1974
Father Leo Dusheck	1980
Father John Fonville	1980
Father Dennis Logue	1983
Father August Langenkamp	1985
Father Dennis Flynn	1986
Father Patrick Barder	1987
Father Richard Graham	1987
Father Robert Mertes	1987
Father Philip Danaher	1991
Father Edward Baur	2000
Father Tan Viet Nguyen	2010

After 1990 there were very few men assigned to chaplaincy work as the diocese was able to put its own men into the hospitals.

Other Ministries and Administration

Brother John DeBold (with the deaf)

Father Lawrence Lovasik	1968
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Brother George Haegele	2005
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Brother Gerald Raker	2006
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Students Who Lived at the Pittsburgh Residence

Father Ricardo Antencio (Philippines)	1990
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Father Thomas Korattiyil (India)	1990
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Father Franklyn Nubuasah (Ghana)	1991
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Father Edmund Afagbegee (Ghana)	1992
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Father Victor Roche (Papua New Guinea)	1992
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Father Romeo Bancale (Philippines)	1997
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NOTES

1. The area in which the Society of the Divine Word works is Braxton County, (14,400 population), Clay County (10,000), Gilmer County (6,800), Nicholas County (26,200) and Webster County (9,400).

2. About this time, a change took place in the structure of the diocese. The Diocese of Wheeling was established in 1850, before the State of West Virginia existed. The Diocese consisted of most of West Virginia, with the exception of the counties in the eastern panhandle of the state. It also included 17 counties from the far western part of the Commonwealth of Virginia. In 1974 the diocese was renamed “Wheeling-Charleston,” and the boundaries became coterminous with the State of West Virginia

3. Returning missionaries might find the social and geographical challenge more than they could want. Trying to bring the fullness of the Gospel to these folks, long ingrained with a fundamental antipathy especially toward the Catholic religion, would be a difficult endeavor for even the most seasoned missionary.

4. See the map at the end of the chapter.

5. Kenneth Reed died in a nursing home in Braxton County on May 14, 2011. Father Matheus Ro presided at his funeral Mass at St. Anne Church, Webster Springs.

6. After Father Reed left the active ministry, Father Edwin Daschbach continued on for several years as the assistant to Father

Anthony Hemphill, until he was appointed to St. Anne in Webster Springs as the first permanent pastor in 1978.

7. Father Edward Wald remained at St. Boniface for about a year and a half, but medical problems required him to resign. For a short time, Father Dennis Logue took on this parish, until he left to head up a Byzantine parish in Girard, Pennsylvania.

8. In the spring of 2012 Father Dominikus Baok was asked to take over the parish of the Holy Family in Richwood, West Virginia. This parish is the mother church of some of our other parishes.

9. No matter what parish Father Daschbach was working in, he continued this practice of writing until his untimely death in August 2009. The newspaper articles are compiled in a book titled *Not Everyone Calls Me Father: Explaining the Bible and the Faith in Appalachia* by Father Edwin Daschbach, 2004.

10. Father Cooney had worked for several years as vocational director at Divine Word College before coming to St. Anne.

11. Father Lang had been pastor in several other parishes in West Virginia.

12. St. Peter, Welch, the largest parish; Christ the King Parish, War; Our Lady of Victory Parish, Gary; and Sacred Heart Parish, Powhatan.

13. At one time the Society of the Divine Word staffed nine parishes with nine men working in West Virginia.

14. The rapid changeover of pastors in the first five years at Good Shepherd was hard on the people. The situation was stabilized with the coming of Father Arnold Lang. Then Father Daschbach further helped to stabilize the parish by his 18 years of continuous service.