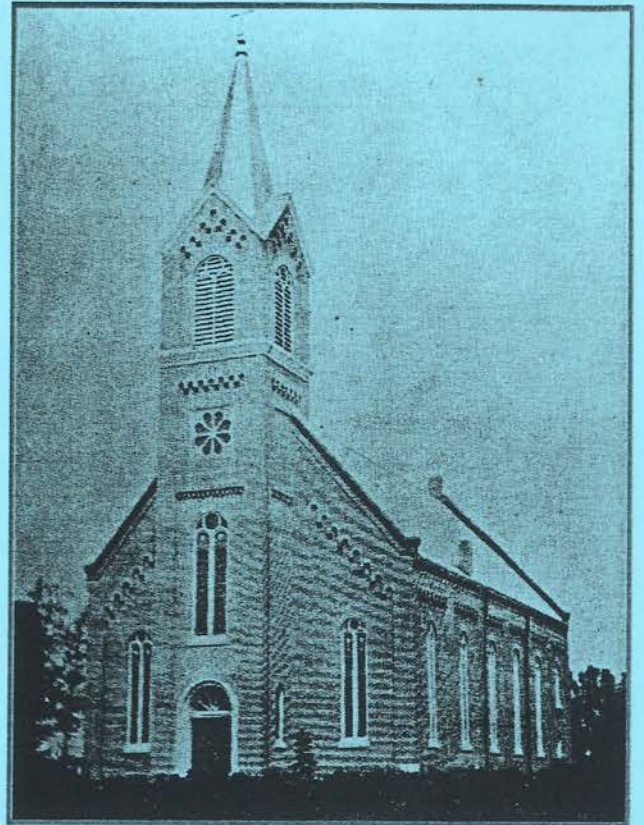




Old Rock Church-1865



Second Church-1895



Current Church-1903

# ST. BENEDICT'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Bendena, Kansas

*Register of Historic  
Kansas Places  
January 17, 1997*

*National Register of  
Historic Places  
April 9, 1998*

## St. Benedict's Church Bendena, KS

*Adapted from the nomination for  
The National Register of Historic Places.*

St. Benedict's Church is located about four and one half miles southwest of Bendena, an unincorporated town, in Union Township, Doniphan County, Kansas. It is situated on a ridge near the headwaters of Independence Creek, so named by Lewis and Clark who camped at its mouth on the Missouri River on the fourth of July, 1804. This area remained a rural district. The parish plant, consisting of the church, a rectory, the Unity Center for educational and social functions, and a cemetery, stands alone surrounded by fields and a few scattered farm homes.

St. Benedict's parish was founded in 1856, when Henry Lemke, O.S.B. walked the thirteen miles up Independence Creek from Doniphan, Kansas, to celebrate Mass in the Edward Doyle home. Fr. Henry came once a month. His journeys were always made on foot. His parishioners were few, five or six families and some of them were poor. They came to Mass on foot and in ox-carts. Fr. Henry made provision for the future by purchasing 320 acres of land at a cost of \$400. Soon the plot for a St. Benedict's Settlement was drawn up and Catholics were solicited to settle there.

Peter Balthasar Henry Lemke was born July 27, 1796 at Rehna in Mecklenburg. He attended the University of Rostock and in 1820 became a Lutheran minister. He took instructions and became a Catholic on April 21, 1824. Then he studied Catholic theology and was ordained on April 11, 1826.

In 1834 Fr. Lemke sailed for America to serve immigrant German Catholics. The following year he was sent to assist Fr. Demetrius Gallitzin, the Russian prince-priest who became the apostle of western Pennsylvania. In 1840 Fr. Lemke bought land and laid out the town of Carrolltown, Pennsylvania. In May of 1845 during an European trip to seek funds and missionaries for the Germans of his diocese, Fr. Lemke met Fr. Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B. a member of the Abbey of Metten, Bavaria. In 1848 Fr. Wimmer purchased Fr. Lemke's farm in Carrolltown and established, in the nearby town of Latrobe, St. Vincent Priory, now St. Vincent Archabbey, the first Benedictine monastery in the new world. Fr. Lemke entered St. Vincent Priory and made vows in 1853, taking the name Henry. He was assigned to St. Benedict's Priory in Carrolltown, founded on his former property in 1849 and served as an assistant to younger men. Fr. Henry felt like a stranger in his own home and in December 1855 arrived in Westport, (now Kansas City) Kansas.

When Fr. Henry went to visit John Baptist Miege, Bishop of Leavenworth in February, 1856, the apostolic vicariate included a bishop, a little frame cathedral, one diocesan priest, two Indian missions and a scattering of Catholics. Bishop Miege had been approached by a representative of some Catholics who had settled "in a beautiful region near Nebraska," who had promised to donate property for a church if he would send them a priest. The Bishop decided to send Fr. Henry to Doniphan with \$500.00, a chalice, vestments and a Jesuit breviary. On July 6, 1856 Fr. Henry left "for the wilderness!"

Geographically his mission was large, extending halfway

to Leavenworth toward the south, to the Nebraska line on the north and to the Rocky Mountains in the west. Fr. Henry had no horse. On one occasion, while answering a sick call at night, he lost his way. His situation seemed so desperate that he thought of asking the aid of the Blessed Virgin. Like some other converts he had never had much devotion to her. But now he prayed, "Till now, O Mary, I have not called on thee, but if you help me out of this difficulty, I shall always call on thee." Then he saw a light and found himself not far from a settler's cabin. When he arrived there he expressed his surprise at not seeing the light sooner. The lady of the house explained that the baby had cried so hard that she arose and struck a light to see what had suddenly come over the child. Fr. Henry jokingly insisted that the Blessed Virgin had made the guardian angel pinch the baby to make it cry and save his life.

Fr. Henry planned to have a school at Doniphan and a monastery and farm on the claims near Bendena (Albers) and Denton (Dentonville) as they were called at that time. The NE 1/4 12-4-19, on which the present St. Benedict's Church is located, was entered January 14, 1858, by Joseph Gerig, a member of the monastery. Land records indicate that he transferred his title to Prior Augustine Wirth in 1862. A part of the land was at one time divided into town lots, although no town plot was ever filed with the state. This territory was called St. Benedict's Colony (Settlement).

Between 1858 and 1860, the parish had no regular pastor, many different priests serving there during that time, all being sent from St. Benedict's Priory in Atchison to where the monks had moved from Doniphan. However, in 1860, Fr. John Meurs, O.S.B. was placed in charge. Early in 1861 plans were drawn up for the construction of a stone church, 70 by 30 feet, and the foundations begun. On March 17, 1861 Prior Augustine Wirth, O.S.B., the superior of the monks, laid the cornerstone. By December 3 Fr. Augustine could write that the walls were built up ten feet. The Bishop had donated \$100 and the parishioners were doing most of the work gratis. In a dissertation Peter Beckman wrote: "...as only the window frames had to be purchased, the hundred dollars donated by Bishop Miege probably covered the expenses" (Beckman, 1943, p. 69). However, poverty and the Civil War delayed the completion of the church.

In 1862, Fr. Thomas Bartl, O.S.B. became the pastor. He at once undertook to complete the church, but found building in those Civil War days a very slow process. The work was mostly done by members of the congregation, as hands willingly turning to help. Even so, it was 1865 before the church was roofed. On the second Sunday of November of that year, Mass was said for the first time in the church, the entire congregation of 30 Irish and five German families turning out for the occasion. Plastering and other interior finishing were not completed until 1869.

In 1867, a seven-room rectory was constructed. Fr. Thomas moved into the house on June 22, 1868, and became the first resident pastor. In the spring of 1874, he was replaced by Fr. Suitbert DeMarteau, O.S.B., who accomplished much in his year and a half as pastor. The old brick flooring in the church was torn up and replaced with pine. The

sacristy and belfry were built and a bell installed.

Fr. Pirmine Koumly, O.S.B. was appointed pastor in October, 1875 and remained until 1886. He not only liquidated the debt on the church but also built a \$2,000 church in nearby Severance in 1882.

In 1877 the parish numbered about 500 people. Shortly after buying land south of Atchison in 1833, all but fifteen acres of the land in St. Benedict's Settlement was sold by the monks of Atchison.

Fr. Thomas Burk, O.S.B., who became pastor in June of 1891, began to collect funds to build a new and larger church. Though the amount of the subscription was not sufficient for Fr. Thomas to begin the church himself, he left a fair sum to his successor, Fr. Augustine Baker, O.S.B., who became pastor on December 10, 1893. By 1892, the parish population had dropped to 250.

Fr. Augustine continued soliciting for funds. In the summer of 1894, Joseph J. Waitz drew up plans for a brick church, 90 by 50 feet with a 36 foot ceiling and a tower 112 feet high. Excavation was begun but it was not for Fr. Augustine to finish the work. On December 6, 1894, Fr. Matthew Bradley, O.S.B., "the church builder," was appointed pastor. A contract was let for \$10,300. Building contractors were John Buckley and E. Ryan of Kansas City, KS., the contract being signed December 21, 1894. Services were held in the dilapidated "old rock church" for the last time on February 24, 1895. One week later, workmen began to tear down the old church and by March 21, the first foundation stone of the new church was laid. On April 14, 1895, the cornerstone was solemnly blessed by the Very Rev. Boniface Verheyen, O.S.B., Prior of St. Benedict's Abbey, assisted by Fr. T. Fitzgerald and Fr. Aloysius Bradley, O.S.B.

On August 11, 1895, the beautiful new church was formally opened. The celebrant of the Mass was Fr. Michael Rank, O.S.B., assisted by Fr. Bernard Ulrich, O.S.B. as deacon and Fr. Anthony Barr, O.S.B. as subdeacon. Fr. Aloysius Bradley, O.S.B., brother of the pastor, spoke on this occasion. Bishop Louis M. Fink solemnly blessed the church on October 9. After the dedication by the bishop a Solemn High Mass was celebrated by Fr. A. W. Jennings, assisted by Fr. Charles Stoeckly, O.S.B. and Gregory Neumayr, O.S.B.

Actual cost of the new church was about \$15,000, some \$4,500 more than was expected. In order to pay off this debt Fr. Matthew met with members of the parish and decided to raise the pew rent sufficiently to cover all parish expenses, thus eliminating "the odious Sunday collections" and at the same time equalize the burden of church expenses. In January, 1896, this plan was adopted. Four years later Fr. Matthew could still write, "Since then it has not been necessary to take up a collection for church purposes, the only ones taken up being the Diocesan Collections." The debt was entirely cleared in January, 1899.

In November, 1895, two hot air furnaces were placed in the basement of the church for heating the building.

By December 1, 1898 the last note of the church debt was paid and on January 8, 1899, Fr. Matthew announced to his parishioners the glad news, "Your church is out of debt!" In the spring of 1900, the old rectory of 1867 was torn down and a new two-story, ten room, brick veneer building was

erected in its place. This was the people's gift to their beloved pastor. The Illustrated Doniphan County Supplement wrote that the new rectory "was equipped with every manner of modern convenience, and when completed the total cost aggregated \$3,500. It is a serviceable building and was designed for essential needs, rather than luxury" (16 April 1916).

At that time there were 60 families in the parish. Thirty boys and twenty girls attended catechism classes that year and there were twelve baptisms, nine funerals and three marriages.

"At 10:15 on the night of May 25, 1903, a tornado struck and entirely demolished the church. The next morning, as Father Matthew stood by the wreckage, he said, 'The will of God be done! With his help we can build again.' Before the sun set, workmen were clearing the wreckage in preparation for a new church" (*Eastern Kansas Register* 19 February 1943).

The Illustrated Doniphan County wrote: "Reverend Father Bradley was undismayed by the destruction of his church and, with the hearty co-operation of his parishioners, the work of rebuilding was at once begun. There was not a single day lost in grieving over the disaster. Plans for larger and finer building were at once formulated. The members of the parish were prompt to respond with financial resources with which to erect a new St. Benedict's. Before the ruins had settled the day following the destruction of the building, three beautiful altars had been donated by Joseph Richenberger and Joseph Bodart, Mrs. John Kirwan and Mrs. Susan Severin. Donations for the building fund poured in without solicitation from everybody in the parish with such liberality that no time was lost in starting operation on the new St. Benedict's. The \$15,000 structure destroyed was soon to be replaced." The newspaper also commented: "There are sixty families in St. Benedict's parish, making a total church membership far in excess of four hundred souls" (16 April 1916).

A few days after the destruction a contract for the clearing of the wreck was let, then followed, on July 23, the contract for the rebuilding of the church. In December, The Weekly Kansas Chief wrote: "Within a few weeks St. Benedict's Church will be completed. It will be a good, substantial, comfortable building of which the congregation and the country may well be proud. Under the able management of Father Matthew, the St. Benedict congregation has erected three buildings representing a value of nearly \$30,000" (3 December 1903).

On the annual financial report for the year ending December 31, 1903, in the ledger for his house accounts, Fr. Matthew wrote:

Baptisms	21
Families	60
Marriages	3
School Children	45
Deaths	4

This farming congregation was still predominately Irish with family names such as Boyle, Corcoran, Cuninghame, Dowling, Day, Flynn, Foley, Finnegan, O'Shea, etc.

In many aspects, the new church was similar to that of 1885. The front of the church, the door, windows, particularly the wheel window would indicate the use of the same architect, Joseph Waitz. Also, this third church was erected upon

the foundation of the previous one. The same cornerstone was used. The bell tower and Gothic style steeple differ in design and are higher. According to the Church Committee minutes of June 26, 1903, the spire was cut down eleven feet bringing the height 101 feet from ground to the top of the cross. The use of buttresses on both sides gave the church exterior an appearance of being larger.

On December 20, 1903, the bells of the new church rang out for the first time summoning the congregation to a Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving. The pastor, Fr. Matthew Bradley, O.S.B. was celebrant, assisted by his brother, Fr. Aloysius Bradley, O.S.B. and Fr. Robert Salmon, O.S.B.

On May 10, 1904, the church was solemnly dedicated by Bishop Cunningham of the Concordia diocese. The Solemn Mass, which followed, was said by Fr. Aloysius Bradley, O.S.B., assisted by Frs. Thomas Burk, O.S.B. and Odilo Otott, O.S.B. Fr. Martin Veth, O.S.B., later Abbot of St. Benedict's Abbey, was master of ceremonies. The Rev. T. C. Ahearn, pastor of the Cathedral in St. Joseph, Mo. preached the sermon.

The Severance reported: "The new St. Benedict's Catholic church was dedicated on Tuesday, and as the day was a lovely one there was a large number of people present. The church is built upon the foundation of the one destroyed by a cyclone last year, and while its dimensions are the same, the structure is not as high and is built with more strength than the one that was blown down. The interior decorations are very beautiful. The light falls softly through beautiful stained glass windows upon altars with golden hangings and golden candle sticks upon them. There are seven life size statues representing the Savior, the Virgin Mary, the Madonna and child, St. Benedict, patron saint of this church, and other saints in the church calendar. The organ is a fine one and the music (and a large part of the service on Tuesday was music) was of the highest order of excellence. There were nine priests present besides Bishop Cunningham of Concordia. Father Ahern of St. Joseph, delivered the address which was very fine. The service was largely in Latin of course and was not so easily followed by unaccustomed ears, but was very impressive in its nature. The people of St. Benedict's parish have in their resident priest Father Matthew Bradley, a most excellent teacher and guide in all matters pertaining to both the spiritual and temporal affairs of the church. He is possessed of sound judgement and is held in high esteem by all who have the pleasure of his acquaintance. This new church which has cost in the neighborhood of \$25,000, stands as a monument to his untiring energy and zeal which it is but justice to say has been generously assisted by the loyal members of his flock. Long may this beautiful church stand among the green fields and fertile plains of this parish, and may no devastating storm ever mar its beautiful architecture" (13 May 1904).

The Weekly Kansas Chief wrote. "The church at St. Benedict's was well filled Sunday by the regular parishioners and by numerous visitors both Catholic and non-Catholic, the occasion being the opening of the church which has just been completed, and which is pronounced to be not only one of the finest in the state, but one of the finest in the west. The interior view of the church is most pleasing in its artistic arrange-

ment. The statues, paintings, etc., are the work of master hands, their equal being found only in the city churches of the east. But it was the sermon delivered by the Rev. Father Aloysius Bradley that won the hearts of the throng, the non-Catholic visitors being especially pleased with the lucid explanations of certain beliefs of the church; for the sermon was not only oratorically beautiful, but was also highly instructive and most powerful in its simplicity and clearness. The parishioners may well be proud of their new church reared from the ruins of the old one which was destroyed only a few months ago, and also have cause to be deeply grateful to the self-sacrificing, energetic resident pastor, Father Matthew, for the great and noble work he has done for them" (24, December 1903).

The Abbey Student commented, "The new Church surpasses the old one in solidity of structure, and is beautifully furnished, having seven life-sized statues, three altars and a good organ" (12: 5. June, 1904, 301).

On January 1, 1904, a debt of \$2,500 was hanging over the church. On the second Sunday of the month the pastor took up a subscription in the church to cover the debt. By December 31, 1904, the entire debt was paid. The expenditures were as follows:

Clearing up Wreck	490.25
Contract for New Church	7,690.00
Extra Work	99.80
Frescoing and Gilding	405.00
Windows	507.50
Furniture	<u>3,094.05</u>
	\$12,286.60

#### Receipts

Insurance	6,171.64
Subscriptions	1,298.00
Special Donations for Altars, etc.	<u>2,429.00</u>
	9,898.64

Fr. Matthew wrote to his people: "The building of a church is frequently accompanied by grave difficulties, lack of money, unwillingness to give on the part of some, and dissatisfaction on the part of others, but let me say to your credit, my dear people, by your strong faith, earnestness and zeal for your holy religion, you have not only made it possible for us to accomplish so much work in such a short time, but you have made it a work of pleasure. To build and furnish two brick churches and a ten room brick veneer parsonage, and pay for the same in nine years time, in a parish of not more than fifty families, is a work equaled by few parishes, but surpassed by none. With feelings of gratitude let me repeat, "God bless those who so generously assisted us in our work" (St. Benedict's Church, No.3).

In the month of October, 1905, a beautiful crucifix was erected in the cemetery at a cost of \$350. During the years 1930 - 1931, the Hall was erected. In the late forties the church interior was painted. In the years 1953 - 1955, the church was tuck-pointed and a new hot water heating system installed. In 1958 due to shifting underfoot, the church structure began to split. It was necessary to excavate to solid rock, twenty-five to twenty-seven feet below the foundations and pour nine concrete piers extending from the solid rock ledge

to the footings of the foundation. This was done at a cost of \$7,100.

The church was again extensively damaged by a tornado on the evening of May 18, 1959 at 7:35 p.m. Shingles were torn off the roof, plaster torn off the walls, stained glass windows bulged. This storm also demolished the garage and destroyed many trees on the property. All the storm damage was repaired and a complete redecorating of the interior of the church was made. Floors were refinished, new carpet installed in the sanctuary, pews refinished, altars and statues redecorated, new lights installed. All this work was finished by August 8, 1959. Earlier that year, in April, a new hot water heating system was installed in the rectory.

In 1968 Fr. Ernest Stallbaumer, O.S.B. built the Unity Center for educational and social functions. This cost was \$68,000. When this was built, the former church hall was torn down.

In the summer of 1988, the interior of the church was repainted and the entire church was carpeted.

Over the years weather and use took its toll of the sidewalks, some dating back to 1909. And so in the spring of 1991 every walk was replaced all the way to the cemetery at the cost of \$22,000. The ramp in front of the church was added at this time. The money used to pay for these improvements came from insurance money collected from hail damage to the roof of the church which was patched.

In the fall of 1992, the aging furnace of 1954 was replaced by a new hot air furnace with air conditioning added at a cost of about \$18,000.

During the summer of 1994 five roofs were removed from the church including a shake shingle roof believed to be the original church roof. The gutters and downspouts were also replaced.

On December 12, 1993, Fr. Augustine Rottering, O.S.B. retired as pastor of St. Benedict's at the age of 89. Fr. Augustine's first and last appointments as pastor were to St. Benedict's from 1953 to 1955, and from 1970 to 1993. His last tenure here spanned many years after the Second Vatican Council, giving stability during these changing times. During this time the Gronniger Trust was established by Anna Gronniger for the upkeep of St. Benedict's Church and Cemetery.

Fr. Daniel McCarthy, O.S.B. was appointed pastor on December 13, 1993 with the intent of taking one and one-half years to make the parish "as strong as we can to face the challenges of the future." After his first mass at 8:00 A.M. on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, he gathered the Pastoral Council to discuss a better time for Sunday mass. When they could not agree on a recommendation among themselves, they asked him how to reach decision. He responded: "However you want to!" They conducted a survey, which helped draw many people back to the parish community. During that year and a half, the parishioners developed their leadership of the parish, in union with Fr. Daniel. Committees met frequently-often well into the night.

During this time many trees and shrubs were planted around the foundation of the church and throughout the yard. Items commissioned for liturgical use include: hand blown

bowls in cobalt blue with dicrylic glass for sprinkling with baptismal water, hand thrown pit-fired bowls for Ash Wednesday and offering incense, and a hand made leather bound book used as a ceremonial record book. Donated items included an Easter candle holder, two gold plated communion trays, Waterford crystal communionware, decanters for the holy oils in Waterford crystal and serpentine jade, and numerous altar cloths. The St. Benedict's Day fish fry, on the Friday evening before March 21 was reinstated.

In December, 1994, the bell from St. Vincent's Church, Severance, was donated to St. Benedict's Church. This bell remains a physical connection between our two parish communities.

The Bendena and Denton Ministerial Alliance (St. John's Lutheran Church, Bendena, the Denton United Methodist Church, and St. Benedict's Church) began a joint Vacation Bible School and restored the high school Baccalaureate--in addition to their annual Thanksgiving Service.

After one and one-half years of his pastorate, Fr. Daniel, while remaining pastor of St. Benedict's, was appointed pastor of St. Charles, Troy, and St. Joseph, Wathena, where he resides. This formed the Tri-Parish Catholic Community of Doniphan County. Activities shared among the Tri-Parishes include: the stational liturgies of the Easter Triduum, adult faith formation, and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

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Special liturgies have been developed at St. Benedict's including a liturgy for visiting the cemetery, and a blessing of parish leaders, both of which have been published in the Newsletter of the Monastic Liturgy Forum.

The road to St. Benedict's has been upgraded by the Doniphan County Commissioners in anticipation of a chat and oil surface. In 1997 the East-West road in front of the church and rectory was named "St. Benedict's Road" by the County Commissioners in honor of our historic parish community.

St. Benedict's Church was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on April 9, 1998. The nomination was prepared by Sr. Marie Louise Krenner, O.S.B. A mass and pot luck dinner in anticipation of this status was held in November, 1997, the 95th anniversary of the first mass in the current church. Archbishop James Patrick Keleher presided. Concelebrants were Fr. Augustine Rottering, O.S.B., Fr. Daniel McCarthy, O.S.B. and Msgr. Tom Culhane.

**That In All Things God May Be Glorified.**