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Parochial Education in a Czech Community: The School Sisters of Notre Dame in Elementary Education in Omaha 1920-1960

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PAROCHIAL EDUCATION IN A CZECH COMMUNITY: THE SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN OMAHA, 1920-1960

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This work is dedicated to the memory of

---those valiant immigrant women who
dedicated their lives to education
through the Notre Dame Congregation

---the late Dr. Paul Beck, a great
teacher and personal friend, who
taught me the meaning of education.

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"Remember, remember always that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from Immigrants and revolutionists."[1] President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution reminded all Americans of their cultural and revolutionary heritage and the people from whom it came --- the immigrants.

The immigrants came to America to seek a better life for themselves and for their families. They came to the land of opportunity to make their fortune, to escape economic depression in the fatherland, to be free of political oppression, and in some instances, to seek religious freedom and refuge.

At first America welcomed the immigrant. It seemed to nineteenth-century Americans that the immigrants would be a useful resource to the growing nation. They could populate the vast western territories so that this last frontier could enter the Union. They would help build the transcontinental railroads of the nation. They would be useful as unskilled laborers in the low-paying factory jobs

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[1]President Franklin Roosevelt, Extemporaneous Remarks Before the Daughters of the American Revolution. Washington, D.C. April 21, 1938.

that were important in a rapidly industrializing economy. However, after a time, the golden glow of the land of opportunity began to dim for numerous immigrants. Bewilderment, frustration, disillusionment, failure, poverty, language difficulties, and loneliness caused the immigrant to look back to his homeland with longing. In his frustration with the New World, the immigrant held dearly to his memories of the old world. At times, the immigrant may have identified with the ancient Israelites, who in their exile sat down by the streams of Babylon and wept when they remembered Zion.

The fate of the American Catholic Church and that of the immigrant were bound together. Most of the peoples of the "new immigration" were from eastern and southern Europe where the Catholic Faith was the predominant religion. In the New World the immigrant turned to the Church as one institution with which he could identify. Between 1890 and 1920 there had been a steady flow of Czech immigrants to America because of the political unrest and economic depression in their country.[2] When Czechs came to America they had to leave behind most of their worldly possessions, but they were able to bring their language, dress, customs and religion. The Czech immigrants, like all other immigrants, tended to settle together in small, closely knit

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[2]Thomas Capek, The Czechs in America. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1920), p. 35.

communities. They were entering a foreign environment and sought the security of the presence of others who understood them, particularly the Catholic Church.

However, the "new immigration" presented a problem for the American hierarchy. The Bishops were afraid that the immigrant would lose his faith in the new environment, and that the Catholic identity would be destroyed. In trying to preserve this identity an organizational crisis arose in the 1880's in the Church.

Bishop John Ireland, the first bishop of St. Paul, Minnesota, believed that the Church must have an outward thrust and endorse the good elements in American society while attempting to change the destructive elements. However, Bishop Bernard McQuaid, the first bishop of Rochester, New York, argued that the new era of American liberalism would destroy the Catholic identity, which Bishop McQuaid felt had to be preserved in order to insure unity in the Church. Bishop McQuaid constantly petitioned Rome saying that if Rome wanted an American Catholic Church in the future, strong parishes and schools must be provided, for without these there would be no third generation of Catholics in America. Bishop Ireland argued that the Catholic school only separated the Catholics from other Americans and prevented them from participating in the

greater society.[3]

Rome heeded Bishop McQuaid's argument and solution. The American Church was to cultivate the Catholic solidarity, unity and identity that the new immigrant needed by building a strong centralized system of parishes and schools. This solution was a turning point in American Catholicism, for the Church opted to maintain its minority, separatist position rather than risk disunity by becoming part of the dominant society.

After the Ireland-McQuaid controversy Rome appointed bishops who were trained to preserve authority and maintain unity with the Universal Church. These bishops believed that they were "accountable before God for the religious training of both the native and immigrant Catholic children."[4] They realized that earlier the bishops had tried to reach an understanding with the public school and had failed. There was only one course of action open to them, if their consciences were to be satisfied. "That was to make the parochial school almost mandatory upon their priests and people, and this they did for the first time in the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 with the result that by 1900 the number of such schools had been

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[3]David O'Brien, "Pastoral Leadership in the American Church," unpublished paper presented to the Third National Conference of Diocesan Parish Council Personnel, Colorado Springs, Colorado. October 10-13, 1976. Notre Dame Convent Archives. (Hereafter Archives cited as NDCA).

[4]John Tracy Ellis, American Catholicism. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 104.

increased to nearly 4,000."[5]

The Bishops of the various dioceses recruited priests and sisters from eastern and southern Europe to come to the United States to serve in the national parishes that were being formed. Sisters and Priests were needed from Bohemia because the Church there had not maintained cultural ties with the emigrants in America.[6]

In 1907 the Notre Dame Sisters of Horazdovice were approached by Reverend Ladislav A. Kloucek of Cleveland, Ohio. He required the help of the Sisters in the parish elementary grade school for children of Czech immigrants. Later that year Sisters received another request for their assistance, this time from Reverend Charles Bleha of St. Louis, Missouri. Reverend Bleha was establishing an orphanage for Czech children in memory of the Right Reverend Joseph Hessoun. Monsignor Hessoun had established the first Bohemian parish in Missouri and was the founder of the Bohemian Catholic bi-weekly newspaper, Hlas.[7] At the time the Sisters did not grant the requests because there were no Sisters proficient in the English language.

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[5]Ibid., p. 104.

[6]Joseph Cada, Czech-American Catholics 1850-1920. (Chicago: Benedictine Abbey Press, 1964), p. 25.

[7]Sister Mary Qualbertina Vanek de N.D., "History of the School Sisters de Notre Dame, Omaha, Florence Station, Nebraska," 1924, Handwritten MS, Notre Dame Convent Archives, Notre Dame Motherhouse, 3501 State Street, Omaha, Nebraska, p. 4. (Hereafter cited as Vanek, "History of School Sisters," Convent Archives cited as NDCA.) Father Hessoun was the first Czech priest to respond to the call of the American Hierarchy in 1854.

In 1908 the Most Reverend Thomas Bonacum, first Bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska, personally applied to the Notre Dame Sisters to come to educate the children of Czech nationality in his diocese. The Bishop was deeply concerned about preserving the religious faith of his people as well as their cultural heritage.[8] Bishop Bonacum died shortly after the request was made; consequently nothing would happen for another two years.

Negotiations with the Board of Directors of the Hessoun Orphanage continued, and on March 27, 1910, Reverend Mother Cyrilla signed a contract with the Orphanage. The Notre Dame Sisters then received permission from the Most Reverend John Glennon of St. Louis to enter his diocese and perform their apostolate.[9]

The first five Sisters were indeed pioneers going to a mission country. In years to come, due to World Wars and political difficulties, only one of the original five would ever return to Czechoslovakia for a visit. These pioneer Sisters were Sister Mary Qualberta Krivanec, commissary; Sister Caroline Babacek, a qualified and experienced orphanage directress; Sister Xavier Hava and Sister Qualbertina Vanek, both certified teachers; and

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[8] Centennial, 1853-1953, printed for the private use of the Notre Dame Sisters, Omaha, 1953, p. 19. NDCA. (Hereafter cited as Centennial.)

[9] Ibid., p. 20.

Sister Nothburga Komrska, a housekeeper.[10]

The religious community to which these five Sisters belonged was founded in 1597 in Lorraine, France, through the inspiration of a young woman named Alix LeClerc and under the spiritual direction of a parish priest, Peter Fourier.[11] The religious congregation was successful in its task to educate those girls and young women of the lower class who were being overlooked and not adequately prepared for the responsibilities of adulthood. By the time of the French Revolution, the Congregation of Sisters had spread throughout France, Savoy and Germany. But the Order was suppressed during France's political turmoils. In 1853, again a parish priest, this time a Bohemian-German, Reverend Gabriel Schneider, felt keenly the need to educate the youth of his country, especially the girls.

> Father Gabriel had higher aspirations [than just organizing youth groups]. Knowing that . . . in childhood is laid the foundation for development of personality, that the child is the hope of the nation, he was convinced that the Christian education of children was one of his most important and urgent duties.[12]

With this value in mind, Father Schneider worked long and hard to establish the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Bohemia. By 1854 the first Motherhouse of the Sisters

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[10]Convent de Notre Dame Chronicle, 1910-1957, Handwritten MS, translated from the Czech by Sister Dolores Pavlik, N.D., NDCA, pp. 2,7. (Hereafter cited as Convent Chronicle.)

[11]Centennial, pp. 1-2.

[12]Ibid., p. 4.

was established at Horazdovice.[13] Again in time the Congregation flourished and the Sisters were able to fulfill Father Schneider's desires. By 1900 the Sisters were teaching from kindergarten through college, not only in the academic skills, but also in the arts. Later the Sisters began apostolates in orphanages, in homes for the aged and feeble-minded, in normal training schools for teachers and in vocational schools.[14]

In 1910, as previously mentioned, the Congregation extended its apostolate to the Czech immigrants in the United States. The Sisters left Horazdovice on April 27, with the blessing and encouragement of their Bishop and guided by the motto of their founder, "Useful to all, harmful to none." At Bremen, Germany, they boarded the Grosser Kurfurst, and as Sister Qualbertina noted, "Full of zeal and enthusiasm, but not without fear," the Sisters arrived in New York on May 10.[15] They reached St. Louis on May 12. When the Sisters arrived, the orphanage building was not ready and there were no orphans. It was two weeks before they could occupy the building, and another four months before they received two orphans. In these early months there would be much sacrifice, frustration and loneliness for the small group. The Sisters were not involved in teaching, but with

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[13] Ibid., p. 6.

[14] Ibid., pp. 72-75, 87.

[15] Vanek, "History of School Sisters," p. 4.

trying to run a 100 acre farm in "unbearable heat." They had language problems even though they had studied English. The Sisters felt that there was little understanding of a reliqious community's life-style or needs. Because of infrequent church services, the religious fervor of the people was poor. Some of the Sisters wanted to return to Horazdovice. However, by 1913 there were 22 children at the Hessoun Orphanage.[16]

In 1911 a request came from Reverend John Broz, a renowned Bohemian poet and historian, for the Sisters to staff his parish school in Dodge, Nebraska. So again from across the ocean came another band of Sisters: Sister Gustave Melmer, Sister Symphorosa Neunan, Sister Timothy Zinner, Sister Alena Sedivy and three young candidates (young women studying to be Sisters) later to be Sisters Wenceslaus, Cecilia and Nepomocene.[17] As the congregation grew so did the number of teaching commitments. By 1915 the Sisters were serving in schools in Iowa, Nebraska and the orphanage in Missouri. During their first five years in America the Sisters attended teacher training courses at Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and the State University of Iowa. The sisters took courses in teaching the basics as well as manual training, national dances, school games and the

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[16]Convent Chronicle, p. 5.

[17]Ibid., p. 6.

Palmer Handwriting Method. There was cause for great rejoicing when in September, 1917, Sister Agnes Vampola, the first to complete the state requirements, received her Iowa State Teachers' Certificate. "After (her) followed other teachers in gaining certificates so that there is a substantial hope that in a short time there will not be in our Congregation any teachers who would not be able to present a state certificate."[18]

In October, 1917, Father Broz visited Mother Qualberta in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He brought a request from the Right Reverend Archbishop Jeremiah J. Harty, D.D. of Omaha, Nebraska, inviting the Sisters to establish their novitiate in his diocese. Later Mother Qualberta received a written request from the Archbishop stating:

> I hereby invite you to make a foundation of your community in the Diocese of Omaha. I am deeply concerned about the welfare and religious life of the Bohemians in this part of Nebraska. I have visited their churches in person and have formed a strong admiration for them. They are a noble people and if they are cared for in these United States they will grow in influence and power for God and religion. They lack schools and Sisters to teach these schools, at least those that know their language and the traditions of their Old Country. Therefore, I would like to see a novitiate of your Sisters established in Omaha. I would take it under my special care . . . .
>
> Nebraska is a healthful, prosperous, growing State. Means will not be wanting, for the Bohemians whom I have visited show a disposition to favor such a work as we have in prospect.[19]

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[18]Convent Chronicles, pp. 7, 10, 14, 18, 20, 23.

[19]Archbishop J. J. Harty to Mother Qualberta, October 3, 1917, NDCA.

This letter came at a crucial time. Attempts to establish a novitiate and motherhouse in Missouri and Iowa had failed. There was a need for the Sisters to have a permanent home of their own for now the Congregation numbered fifty-two.

Mother Qualberta continued to receive requests from various parishes throughout the Mid-west. These requests were refused due to lack of personnel. But when an urgent telegram came from Archbishop Harty on December 11, 1917, for help with the care and education of homeless boys at Reverend Edward J. Flanagan's Boys' Home, two sisters were promptly sent to Omaha.[20]

The first two Sisters sent to the Boys' Home were Sister Rose Slevin and Sister Martha Djobek. Sister Rose was the superior and helped Father with the general administration of the Home. Her Irish wit and personality, her kindness and gentleness endeared her to everyone, especially the boys. She was always a gracious hostess to all visitors.[21] Sister Martha was a Slovak and could not speak English well. She was the cook, laundress, housekeeper and seamstress for the boys. At times there were language difficulties. Ludmila Kucera, a young candidate, came to act as interpretor. She was to be of general assistance to

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[20]Convent Chronicles, p. 7.

[21]Interview with Sister M. Cyrilla Hudek, November 18, 1976.

both Sisters.[22]

When the Sisters arrived in December, 1917, Father Flanagan had five boys. The number grew and soon there were too many boys for the house on Twenty-fifth and Dodge. In 1918 Father rented the German-American Home on South Thirteenth Street for his sixty-five boys. Notre Dame Sisters sent two more candidates to help the Sisters already in Omaha.

At first the boys attended schools in the neighborhood. The intermediate grade school boys were sent to Holy Family School. The high school boys went to Central High School, and the primary grade school boys stayed at the Home for instruction.[23] In 1921, in order to comply with a court ruling, Father Flanagan established a school within the Home. He appealed to the Notre Dame Sisters for teachers and two certified teachers were sent. Father often boasted of the quality of the school and its teachers in his newspaper which he sent to friends of Boys' Home as a means of soliciting contributions. The school's curriculum included the basic academic subjects along with religion, recreation and sports, music and vocational training.[24] The philosophy of the Home's School was to make a boy a good,

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[22]Interview with Sister M. Rita Kucera, November 19, 1976.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal, Vol. 2 (September, 1919), p. 3. (Hereafter cited as Boys' Home Journal.) unpaginated.

serviceable man to society and God. Father Flanagan's Home was open to any boy in need of guidance regardless of race, creed or nationality.

Discipline in the Home was firm but tempered with kindness. The boys were on an honor system based on truth and trust. More serious offenses were punished by spanking or confinement. The Sisters remember that the older boys were difficult to control, especially when Father Flanagan was gone on tours making appeals for money. These boys would attempt to run away, but were usually brought back by the police.[25]

As the number of boys increased, more staff had to be hired. Father Flanagan's nephew, Patrick Norton, and Francis Barta were hired to work with the boys after school hours. A secretary, a shoemaker and a baker were also hired. Later Father's sister, Nellie Flanagan, came to assume general administration of the Home.[26]

The Boys' Home had many benefactors. One of the first was the Nash family, owners of the Omaha Motor Railway Company. They donated dishes, silverware, furniture and made a contribution of $10,000.[27] The Gallagher family, owners of Butter-Nut Coffee, donated $20,000. Women from

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[25]Interview with Sister Cyrilla Hudek, November 18, 1976.

[26]Interview with Sister Methodia Saba and Sister Philomena Zmolek, November 18, 1976.

[27]"Mrs. E. W. Nash-Benefactor," True Voice, Omaha, Nebraska, 20 February 1920, p. 8.

the Omaha parishes organized a Mothers' Guild. Once a week these ladies met at the Home and did sewing for the boys which was a tremendous help to the Sisters. A Liberty Hall League was organized to raise money and in 1918 Father Flanagan organized the Boys Savers Society. The children of the Omaha Diocese were asked to donate twenty-five cents a month to help an unfortunate boy. The Saint Patrick's Parish Guild sponsored card parties for the Home. The Christ Child Society and the Knights of Columbus gave the boys Christmas parties. Archbishop J. J. Harty was probably the Home's greatest benefactor. Even though he had told Father that the diocese had no money to give to support the Boys' Home, he allowed him to solicit from the Catholics in the diocese and gave his blessing and support. The Archbishop also made frequent informal visits to the home to talk with the boys and the Sisters and to extend his encouragement.[28]

The Sisters were not only teachers but were the constant companions of the boys, supervising their work and play. The boys' numerous duties included setting tables, washing dishes, cleaning, working in the garden, and helping in the kitchen, bakery, and laundry. Every Sunday morning they went to various Catholic Churches in the city

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[28] Boys' Home Journal, Vol. 1 (December, 1918), Vol. 3, (January, 1919), Vol. 3, (March, 1920), Vol. 3, (April, 1920), Vol. 3, (December, 1920), unpaginated; and interview with Sister Cyrilla Hudek, November 18, 1976.

to sell Father Flanagan's promotional newspaper after the masses. The paper contained articles on the Home, background sketches on the various boys and their activities, pictures of the Home and boys, anecdotes, articles on education and juvenile delinquency, letters from benefactors and advertisements of local businesses. By 1919 the journal had 25,000 subscribers in the United States, Canada and Europe. The Notre Dame Sisters contributed articles to the journal, and Sister Qualbertina Vanek helped Father edit the newspaper.[29]

Father Flanagan hoped to raise enough money to buy a farm in order that the Home could become self-supporting. On the farm he hoped the boys would learn responsibility and the dignity of labor. In 1919 Archbishop Harty purchased "Seven Oaks Farm" in the Florence section of north Omaha for the boys. However, Father Flanagan never moved to this farm and later sold it to the Notre Dame Sisters.[30]

In the fall of 1921 Father Flanagan purchased Overlook Farm on West Dodge Street and in the spring of 1922 the six Sisters and 145 boys moved to the new location. There were only six temporary buildings on the farm; they were to serve as the dining room, dormitories, chapel, kitchen, and Sisters' quarters until the permanent three floor brick structure was completed. Keeping these

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[29]Boys' Home Journal, Vol. 3, (March, 1919) and (June, 1920), unpaginated.

[30]Convent Chronicles, pp. 29-30.

buildings clean was a difficult job. They had white wooden floors that had to be scrubbed almost three times a day because of the mud and dirt brought in by 145 boys. Finally, in 1923, they moved into the new brick buildings.[31]

By 1922 the six Sisters realized that they could no longer bear the burden of work. Although Father Flanagan had petitioned for more Sisters, Mother Qualberta could not send them, for the clergy and laity of the diocese were pressing her to send more Czech Sisters to Czech parishes. Moreover, the Sisters at the Home were experiencing difficulties with the Administration when Father was gone on tour. In view of the staffing problem, the Sisters suggested that Father solicit the help of a larger congregation of Sisters. On January 17, 1923, Reverend Mother Qualberta received a letter from Father stating that since the Notre Dame Sisters could not send him enough Sisters ". . . to attend to even the absolutely necessary duties at the Home. I have found it necessary to make a change of Sisters . . . As I am leaving the city within the next ten days, I would like the change to be made before leaving."[32] The Sisters of Mercy of Omaha would assume administrative and educational responsibilities of the Home. The Sisters remember that leaving the Home was not easy, for both they

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[31]Interviews with Sister Methodia Saba and Sister Rita Kucera.

[32]Reverend Edward J. Flanagan to Reverend Mother Qualberta, January 17, 1923, NDCA.

and the boys cried when it came time to part.[33]

One Sister remembered the poverty, the primitive conditions, the hard work, and the long hours at the Home, and said, ". . . but we were happy. We were young."[34] The Sisters worked well with Father Flanagan. They thought of him as a holy man who made tremendous sacrifices for the boys. He was very kind and considerate to the Sisters, but at times expected the impossible from them. In later years Father Flanagan stated that:

> I shall also never forget the kindness and consideration of the then Venerable Mother (Qualberta) who gave me so much cooperation and had such wonderful understanding of the many problems that confronted our little Home in its humble beginning, and her assistant, Sister Gustava, whose intelligent and sympathetic mind and heart found proper and prompt solutions for the various problems at the humble Home.[35]

In 1920 the Congregation sent four more Sisters to the United States to meet the educational needs of the growing immigrant population of the Midwest: Sister M. Honorina Kojan, Sister M. Regina Prusha, two qualified teachers, Sister M. Hilda Dahalska, a sewing teacher, and Sister M. Osvalda Noyacek, a domestic Sister.[36]

In 1920 the Notre Dame Sisters transferred the complete administration of the Hessoun Orphanage in Fenton,

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[33]Interviews with Sister Cyrilla Hudek and Sister Philomena Zmolek.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Father E. J. Flanagan, Commencement Address, Notre Dame Academy, Omaha, Nebraska. June 5, 1942, NDCA.

[36]Convent Chronicles, p. 34.

Missouri, to the Holy Cross Sisters, who had recently arrived from Czechoslovakia,[37] and moved to their new residence in Florence, a suburb of Omaha. There they had purchased the "Seven Oaks Farm" from Father E. J. Flanagan, founder of the Boys Home, as previously mentioned. The semi-rural location of the farm, west of the historic Mormon Cemetery, seemed very conducive to the peace and quiet of the religious life as well as allowing the Sisters the advantages of the city.[38]

The Sisters now had a permanent home described by Sister M. Wenceslaus as a tidy farm, with a crushed rock road, seven large oak and several apple, cherry, and mulberry trees, and a vegetable garden. Later the Sisters were able to get a cow, several hens, and add more buildings.[39] In the course of time fifteen more acres were added to the original ten. The Sisters added a chapel, sacristy, and two rooms to the original frame house.[40] In 1924-25 a spacious modern building was constructed which was one-third of the future Motherhouse and Academy.

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[37]Ibid., p. 31b.

[38]Ibid., pp. 29b-30. The Mormon Cemetery is the historical site of the Mormons' Winter Quarters on their way west in 1846-1847.

[39]Sister M. Vincent Dvorak, "Community Beginnings as Recalled by Sister M. Wenceslaus de N.D.," ca. 1970, Typewritten MS, NDCA.

[40]Convent Chronicles, p. 32.

The building was dedicated in August, 1926, and in September, the Sisters opened the doors of Notre Dame Academy, a boarding high school for girls. Notre Dame Academy became a fully accredited educational institution with a course of studies that included a commercial training course, an academic course, music, sewing, and art classes.[41]

In 1935 the American community numbered 43 active teachers, three inactive teachers (administration posts for the community), one ill, four in full time study, six novices, nine industrial arts teachers, and fourteen domestic Sisters.[42] They were teaching 1060 elementary grade school children, 164 in high school, four dressmaking students, 137 music pupils, and 715 in summer vacation religion schools in Nebraska and Iowa.[43] In 1936 a second addition was built to the Motherhouse to accommodate the growing enrollment and to enlarge the Sisters' residence.

The growth of the Notre Dame Congregation in America and its influence on parochial education was dominated by

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[41]For a detailed account of the history of Notre Dame Academy see, Sister Anita Rolenc, "The History of Notre Dame Academy Omaha, Nebraska" (Master's Thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1975).

[42]Convent Chronicles, pp. 51-52b.

[43]Chronicles, pp. 766-786. From 1932 the Sisters began to teach summer vacation school religious classes usually for two weeks in places such as Bruno, Wilber, Loma, Touhy, Bee, and Duncan and Little Turkey, Iowa.

Reverend Mother Qualberta Krivanec who served as superior in the United States from 1910 to 1929. In the first ten years in America, Mother Qualberta was Commissary, novice mistress, teacher, editorial correspondent, and spiritual advisor to all her Sisters. Her work was to cultivate the spirit of Notre Dame -- "Help all--harm none." This woman of faith worked to love and glorify God through the education of children.[44]

Mother's apostolate was to the Czech immigrant, her own people with whom she shared the frustrations of the New World. However, she was concerned about all people and lived to see the Sisters extend their apostolate to the Native American Indian.[45]

It was this woman who influenced the succeeding years of dedicated teaching that the Sisters performed. As she expressed her philosophy of teaching:

> The criterion of a model educator is not so much what she trains the listener to accomplish, but rather what she inspires him to be . . . .
>
> [A teacher must have] a strong yet many-sided and winning personality, a stainless life, a complete mastery of the truths to be taught, a thorough knowledge of human nature and an ability to teach.[46]

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[44]Sister Barbara Markey, N.D., "History of the School Sisters of Notre Dame," Typewritten MS, NDCA.

[45]Sister Mary Immaculata Polak de N.D., "An Appraisal of the Educational Efforts of Mother Mary Qualberta de N.D.," (Master's Thesis, Creighton University, Omaha, 1947), p. 19. (Hereafter cited as Polak, "Educational Efforts.")

[46]Polak, "Educational Efforts," p. 32.

Mother Qualberta sought the best possible education for her Sisters. They were to have the advantages of a liberal education and teacher training. She insisted that first the Sisters be cultured women and acquire a general knowledge and a degree of specialization in the subjects they were to teach; second, that the Sisters be trained in the best and most efficient teaching methods; and third, that the Sisters have a solid spiritual formation.[47]

Each Sister went to an accredited college to attain her baccalaureate degree. If they attained the baccalaureate, they had to go four years. Often situations arose that interrupted their education, such as the immediate need of a teacher because another Sister was ill or a pressing need in a school where enrollment had increased. In these cases Sisters were usually sent to teach on emergency certificates and acquired the rest of their education through summer schools or attending college courses on Saturdays at local institutions. The Sisters' education was paid for by the community. At times Sisters were awarded grants and scholarships. However, this education of the Sisters was complicated by the need for certification. According to the Omaha Public Schools Policies, Rules and Regulations set forth in 1887, each Sister applying for primary certification for grades kindergarten through fourth grade was required to pass examinations in orthography (spelling),

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[47]Ibid., pp. 55-56.

reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar, English composition, physiology, and the theory and practice of teaching.[48] This was the basic curriculum of the primary grades, and to this the Catholic School added religion, doctrine, and Bible studies, and in some cases, the Czech language. The Sisters who sought grammar school certification were required to pass examinations in geography, national philosophy, and civil government.[49]

The Sisters also had to abide by the teacher-pupil ratio set up by the Omaha School Board in 1909 that stated: ". . . the ideal standard room should be two grades to a room and twenty pupils to a grade except when three or more grades were placed in charge of one teacher, the number of pupils assigned to such teacher should not exceed thirty

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[48] Arvid Nelson, "A History of the Policies, Rules and Regulations of the Public Schools of Omaha, Nebraska from 1870-1960." (PhD Dissertation, Department of Educational Administration, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1969), p. 31. (Hereafter cited as Nelson, "Policies, Rules and Regulations.")

[49] Nelson, "Policies, Rules and Regulations," p. 81. These requirements were a burden for the Sisters. The Community Chronicle in 1919 stated that for the Sisters "The considerable expenses involved will perhaps be compensated in the future". In 1921-22 some of the Sisters took extension courses from the "American School" in Chicago, Illinois. In 1924 three Sisters received Second Grade certificates, three received Professional State certificates, two were granted First Grade City-State certificates, and two received First Grade county certificates. In October, 1924 and again in March, 1925, the Nebraska State School inspectors visited the Notre Dame Sisters Schools and found everything in order.

pupils.[50] Often the shortage of qualified teachers and the lack of space did not allow for Catholic schools to comply with this standard.[51]

In 1919 the State Law required that all teachers in the elementary schools were to be graduates of an approved normal school or college, or university and possess a State teaching certificate. Prior to this anyone who passed the State examinations was qualified and certified to teach school. The law allowed provision for emergency certification if a shortage of teachers existed in a school district.[52] The laws became increasingly stringent in 1925 and again in 1928.

Mother Qualberta was personally involved in the education of the Sisters. She prepared a course of studies for those Sisters preparing for state certification. She also taught pre-college courses at the Motherhouse to prepare some of the young candidates for college.[53]

The purposes of education for Mother Qualberta ". . . involved making the child an honest person, a good citizen, a true Christian, and ultimately, a prospective saint."[54] To the established state curriculum, Sisters

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[50]Ibid., p. 162.

[51]Precise enrollment figures for each grade level are not available.

[52]Nelson, "Policies, Rules, and Regulations," p. 201.

[53]Polak, "Educational Efforts," p. 47.

[54]Ibid., p. 57.

added handiwork in the weekly teaching schedule. This was a Notre Dame tradition that dated back to the seventeenth century. A weekly class hour was devoted to sewing, crocheting, embroidering, knitting, and darning for the girls and to manual training and basketry for the boys.[55] Mother Qualberta was intent on preserving the Czech language and culture in order to give the students a speaking and reading knowledge of the parents' language; hence, she included a "Czech Hour" in the weekly schedule. She compiled a simple Czech grammar and an accompanying teacher's manual to be used by the Sisters in the schools. Besides the grammar book Mother compiled a pre-primer called Budicek, (The Rouser) a thirty-one page pamphlet designed to awaken the interest of the child in the Czech language.[56]

This interest in keeping the Czech language alive was hindered by the Nebraska Language laws of the 1920's.

> Unfortunately, Nebraska was one of the most repressive states in the nation in its attack on foreign language-speaking citizens during World War I, and its ignominious place in that history is forever enshrined on the wrong side in the name of the case that permanently determined that foreign language people had some rights.[57]

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[55]Ibid., p. 60.

[56]Ibid., pp. 61, 67.

[57]Paul Olsen, Broken Hoops and Plains People. (Lincoln, Nebraska: Curriculum Development Center, 1976), p. x.

The state law that probably caused the greatest hardship for the Sisters was the Siman Law.[58] On January 15, 1919, Senator Harry E. Siman introduced a bill in the Nebraska Legislature that would consider it

> . . . unlawful to teach any school subject to any child in any other language than the English language in any private, denominational, parochial, or public school unless such child had a certificate from the county superintendent stating that he has successfully completed and mastered the courses of study taught in the first eight grades.[59]

On April 9, 1919, Governor McKelvie signed a bill providing that:

> No person, individually or as a teacher, shall, in any private, denominational, parochial, or public school, teach any subject to any persons in any language than the English language.
>
> Languages, other than the English language, may be taught as languages only after a pupil shall have attained and successfully passed the eighth grade as evidenced by a certificate of graduation issued by the county superintendent of the county in which the child resides.[60]

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[58]Senator Siman wanted the repeal of the Mockett Law of 1913 which stated: In every high school, city school or metropolitan school in this state the proper authorities of such school districts shall upon the written request when made at least three months before the opening of the fall term of such school by the parents or guardians of fifty pupils above the fourth grade then attending such school, employ competent teachers and provide for the teaching therein above the fourth grade, as an elective course of study, of such modern European language as may be designated in such request. Nelson, "Policies, Rules, and Regulations," p. 222.

[59]Jack W. Rodgers, "The Foreign Language Issue in Nebraska 1918-1923," Nebraska History 39 (March 1958): 12. (Hereafter cited as Rodgers, "The Foreign Language Issue".)

[60]Ibid.

Violation of the law was ". . . a misdemeanor as was punishable by a fine of not less than $25 nor more than $100 or by confinement of the county jail for not to exceed 30 days." Naturally, this law was odious to the Sisters of Notre Dame. As the keeper of the chronicle put it, "This law was and is a very repugnant one for anyone who loves his maternal tongue and who trusted the often lauded American freedom."[61]

The Sisters were not the only ones concerned about the law, for many Protestant clergymen objected to the measure. The religious and educational practices of the immigrant were in jeopardy and the result was a court battle. A group of Lutherans and one Catholic priest attempted to appeal the law.[62] After a battle in the lower courts, the Nebraska Supreme Court upheld the law. In Myer v Nebraska the case was appealed to the United States Supreme Court.[63] Justice James C. McReynolds, speaking for the majority in 1923, declared the law to be unconstitutional. In his words:

> A state law forbidding, under penalty, the teaching in any private, denominational, parochial, or public school of any modern language other than English to any child who has not attained and successfully passed the eighth grade invades the liberty guaranteed by the

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[61]Convent Chronicles, p. 35b.

[62]The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri v McKelvie, 104, Nebraska, 93.

[63]Rodgers, "The Foreign Language Issue," pp. 15-16.

> Fourteenth Amendment and exceeds the power of the state.[64]

The Court also pointed out that

> in the desire for Americanization of the foreign-born population it must not be overlooked that the spirit of America is liberty and toleration--the disposition to allow each person to live his own life in his own way unhampered by reasonable and arbitrary restrictions.[65]

The Court also held that the State Legislature could not interfere with the Constitutional rights of foreign language teachers in the pursuit of their vocation, the opportunity of pupils to acquire knowledge, and the right of parents to control the education of their children.[66] Following this decision, the Nebraska Legislature quietly voided the objectionable statute. The passions of the war years were ebbing and Nebraskans had new problems to face.[67]

Beyond the concern for curriculum and legal requirements, Mother Qualberta encouraged the Sisters to patience and understanding as teachers, to stress good study habits, and to help the children develop self-discipline. They were to be concerned with the slow learner and were to give

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[64]Dewey Ganzel, "Interpretation of School Laws by the Nebraska Supreme Court Governing the Rights and Perogatives of Parents, Pupils, and Teachers." (Masters Thesis, Department of School Administration, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1932), p. 14; Rodgers, "The Foreign Language Issue," p. 18.

[65]Ibid., Ganzel, "Interpretation of School Laws by The Nebraska Supreme Court," pp. 14-15.

[66]Ibid., p. 15.

[67]There is no mention in the Congregation's Chronicles about the repeal of the Siman Law.

these children a sense of personal worth.[68] Strong stress was to be placed upon respect for parental and other types of authority.

Reverend Mother Qualberta was Provincial Superior for nineteen years. In 1929, she requested to be released from her duties because of a severe hearing loss. She spent the next ten years writing a variety of books, pamphlets, letters, plays, articles, and being the Congregation's Archivist. Before her death on January 3, Mother Qualberta had laid the "foundation for solid Christian education among her compatriots in America and left it to her daughters to build the superstructure."[69]

Thus the Notre Dame Sisters by 1939 had become firmly established as educators in the United States. They owned their own Mother House and were teaching in twelve schools among the Czech people. The Sisters met state certification laws and were concerned both for the individual student and for the preservation of the Czech language and culture.

The following chapters will deal with the Notre Dame Sisters and their teaching apostolate to the Czech people in St. Adalbert and Assumption Parishes and the people of St. Therese Parish.

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[68]Polak, "Educational Efforts," p. 64.

[69]Ibid., pp. 64.

II. Settlement of the Czechoslovakian People in Omaha and the Establishment of St. Adalberts and Assumption Parishes

The first Bohemian immigrants came to the United States in 1850 with some settling in the East and others moving as far west as the Ohio Valley. From 1890-1924 a second massive migration from Bohemia landed in New York,[1] New Orleans, and Baltimore. Many went on to Wisconsin to establish farms. The desire to own their own land was a strong motivation for their movement west. There, land was available and cheap due to the Homestead Act of 1862 and the Timber Claim Act 1873.[2]

From Wisconsin numerous Czechs moved into Nebraska Plains. Omaha became both a gateway to opened farm land and the permanent home of some settlers. By 1919, 51,000 or ten percent of Nebraskan residents were foreign-born Czech.[3] This great influx of Eastern and Southern Europeans after 1910 changed the nature of the immigrant population of Omaha from predominantly Irish, German, and some

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[1]Capek, The Czechs in America, p. 35.

[2]John Kleinschmidt, "The Political Behavior of the Bohemian and Swedish Ethnic Groups in Nebraska, 1884-1900," (Master's Thesis, Department of History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1968), p. 28.

[3]Joseph Svoboda, "Czechs: The Love of Liberty," in Broken Hoops and Plains People, p. 153; Capek, The Czechs in America, pp. 61-62.

Scandinavian to Czech, Italian, Greeks, Russians and Poles. The Czechs were the largest immigrant group in the city. According to the 1920 census of Omaha and the recently annexed community of South Omaha, 4,305 foreign born Czechs and an additional 12,000 persons of immediate Czech descent resided in the city.[4]

The diverse ethnic atmosphere of the city did not quickly diminish for in 1932, one out of every seven Omahans, or 28,792 persons in a total population of 215,006 were born in a foreign country. The Czechs were still the largest foreign-born group in the city and were apparently relatively prosperous, for seventy-five percent of the Czech families owned their own homes.[5]

The Czechs that came to the U.S. and ultimately to the midwest were often rural lower middle class who had little or no opportunity to improve their economic or social status in the Old Country. They wanted more for their children. Some were farmers, others tradesmen, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, cabinetmakers, harness makers, and some unskilled laborers. They were self-reliant, able

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[4]Rose Rosicky, Comp., A History of Czechs in Nebraska (Omaha: National Printing Co., 1929), p. 175; Howard Chudacoff, Mobile Americans: Residential and Social Mobility in Omaha, 1880-1920 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 61-62.

[5]T. Earl Sullenger, The Immigrant in Omaha (Omaha: Municipal University of Omaha, 1932), p. 3.

to think and act for themselves, and they were deeply religious people.[6] They hoped to retain their Czech culture in America and the Czech language was their prime means for doing so. But the language survived only as long as there was a steady flow of first generation Czechs into the United States. By 1920 the quota laws curtailed that flow and consequently second and third generation Czechs were not inspired by new arrivals to keep the language alive nor was there the continuous need to use it.

Every immigrant group has attempted to some extent to reconstruct the European village on American soil. Neither the atmosphere of the urban center with its fluidity of movement and diversity of population, nor the rugged demands of the frontier allowed for such a reconstruction.[7] At every turn the immigrant encountered change--unfamiliarity. Immigration was an unsettling process, every phase of the immigrants' life was touched by it. He and his family needed to identify with a group that provided a link with the past and helped locate the family in the new and larger society; a group that would supply a standard of behavior and moral sanctions for his life in the new culture;[8]

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[6]Cada, Czech-American Catholics 1850-1920, p. 1; Capek, The Czechs in America, p. viii; Svoboda, "Czechs: The Love of Liberty," in Broken Hoops and Plains People, p. 157.

[7]Oscar Handlin, "Historical Perspectives on the American Ethnic Group," 90 Daedalus (Spring 1961): 223.

[8]Ibid., p. 224.

a group that would give some meaning to the struggle. The Catholic Church proved to be such a body first for the Irish in America then for many Southern and Eastern European immigrants. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the American Catholic Church weathered its own organizational crisis. The Church of the 1920's became concerned with respectability and acceptability. It set about to Americanize the immigrant within its own structures, the parish and the school, while hoping to maintain the Church's unity.

Some of the American hierarchy questioned how, with limited money and personnel, it was to serve and maintain unity among peoples who were vastly different in language and culture. The solution to the problem came from the immigrant himself, who established the national church. These immigrant groups, whether Poles or Bohemians or Italians, usually banded together and raised enough money to purchase property and to build a church; they then had to present proof to the local bishop that they could support the Church and a pastor. The Bishop responded by assigning a priest to the new parish[9] or an immigrant priest the people had recruited themselves. However, the deed of all the property was given to the bishop and registered in the name of the diocese. Thus, the local Church of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not built by bishops,

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[9]When a bishop of a diocese "validates faculties" of a priest, the bishop has given the priest power to function in his diocese.

religious orders or with endowments from rich American Catholics, but by the people first generating the initiative and resources, and then seeking the approval of the bishop. The various ethnic groups had tremendous community-building capability, and the Church was a central element in these efforts. The national parishes built by the immigrant groups were deliberate efforts to satisfy social, educational and religious needs and provided means for the bishop to maintain control while responding to the needs of his people. The national parishes, with no territorial boundaries other than ethnic location, were unique structures in the Church and a creative response to a difficult situation.[10]

The parish priests also played a significant role in the building of these national churches. They were the liaisons between the bishop and the people, and between the people and the greater society. They also shouldered much of the responsibility for keeping the Church financially sound and responsive to future needs.[11]

Thus, the Catholic Church provided identity in a massive society and met the cultural needs of the immigrant. Within its protective embrace the immigrant remained open to the greater society's economic and political life,[12]

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[10]David O'Brien, "Pastoral Leadership in the American Church."

[11]Ibid.

[12]Handlin, "Historical Perspectives on the American Ethnic Group," p. 227.

and thus a gradual process of assimilation was begun.

As early as 1877 Bishop James O'Connor of Omaha, attempted to recruit Czech clergy for the Omaha diocese and finally he was able to find three Czech clergymen who were willing to come to the Omaha diocese.[13] Others followed.

The Bishops felt the need to meet the Czech's religious needs because anti-Catholic Czech Benevolent Societies were offering comfort and support to immigrants. Many of them were turning to these societies in the absence of the local parish and clergy who understood their language, and thereby were leaving the Church. Bishop O'Connor established a Czech parish in 1877 to counteract the anti-Catholic sentiment and to preserve the faith. This first Czech Parish was Saint Wenceslaus which was later to sponsor the forming of both Assumption and Saint Adalbert's Parishes.[14]

In September, 1916, forty Czech families petitioned Archbishop J. J. Harty of the Omaha Diocese to form a new

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[13]Henry W. Casper, History of the Catholic Church in Nebraska-Catholic Chapters in Nebraska Immigration 1870-1900 (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1966), p. 108.

[14]Ibid., p. 111. The conflict between the Catholic Church and the Freethinkers dates back to the burning of John Hus in 1415 by the Church as a heretic. Hus and his followers attempted to reform the Church. They were condemned and consequently became strongly anti-Catholic Church and anti Clerical. The American clergy saw these benevolent societies as a threat to the immigrant's faith. Thus the American clergy sought to meet the religious needs of the Czech immigrant as quickly as possible.

national parish for Czech people who were living south of Hanscom Park. These families had been attending Saint Wenceslaus Church on South Fourteenth Street, and every Sunday they walked three miles to attend Church. Some became convinced of the need for a church on the west side of the railroad tracks after the people were involved in three serious accidents. Others argued that there was no need for a new church; their needs were being well satisfied at Saint Wenceslaus. No one felt inclined to join Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, the Irish Parish which was also being established on Thirty-second Avenue.[15] There was to be no mingling of the two nationalities. On September 25, 1916, members of the Catholic Workman Lodge No. 127, Anton Barak, Anton B. Chapek, John and Joseph Kotrba, Joseph Pecha, and Frank Novotny, formed a committee to purchase three lots and part of a fourth on South Thirtieth Street between Gold and Wright Streets for $1800.00. Some of the money for the land was a loan from Leo Hoffman, an Omaha mortician.[16] Archbishop Harty gave his blessing to the new parish in October, 1917 by appointing the Reverend Leopold Blaschko as pastor. Father Blaschko, as assistant pastor at St. Wenceslaus Church, had helped the people organize the new parish. Within the same month the parish was incorporated

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[15]Interview with Alice Kotrba Adams, February 16, 1977. Our Lady of Lourdes Parish is only eight blocks away from the present St. Adalbert's Church.

[16]Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Book for St. Adalbert's Parish, 1961, unpaginated, NDCA. (Hereafter cited as Twenty-fifth Anniversary Book for St. Adalbert's Parish).

under the name of St. Adalbert's Church of Omaha, with the Archbishop of Omaha as president of the corporation, the pastor as treasurer and secretary, and two laymen as trustees. St. Adalbert's Parish was the last group in the Omaha Diocese to receive permission to organize as a national parish; that is, a parish with no definite territorial boundaries serving a specific nationality. The "national parish" organizational method was discontinued by revised Canon Law in 1917.[17]

In the spring of 1918 the members of the parish began to excavate the lots for the building of the new church. By doing the excavating and laying of the concrete foundation themselves, the parishioners were able to save $2,000.00 of the estimated $18,000.00 building cost. In May the cornerstone was laid and by December the three-floor brick structure was ready. The church was located in the basement of the new building. The second floor and part of the third floor were classrooms and the rest of the third floor was the living quarters for the Sisters who would later assume the teaching responsibilities in the school. The first Mass in the new church was on Christmas Eve. Father Blaschko had prepared a magnificent celebration in true European style.[18]

The church and school were dedicated by Archbishop

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[17]Ibid.

[18]Interview with Sister Dorothy Pluhacek, January 12, 1977.

J. J. Harty on September 12, 1919. Delegates from other Catholic Workman Lodges and neighboring parishes met the St. Adalbert's Lodge on Twenty-fourth and Bancroft where they formed a procession and marched some twelve blocks to the new church. In the evening everyone celebrated with dancing and singing.[19]

After the rectory was purchased, the men of the parish built a parish social hall in 1919 and the hall became the center of social life in the parish--dances, Czech plays, and concerts were given in the hall for the enjoyment of all and to raise money for the new parish.

In 1919 the school was opened, but there were no Sisters to staff it. Restricted by the change in certification laws, the Notre Dame Sisters did not have enough teachers in 1919 to send to St. Adalbert's. Two lay women, both Czech Catholics, Miss Boer and Miss Lavee, were employed by the parish to teach in the school. In 1920 the Notre Dame Sisters were able to assume the administration of the school. They had left the orphanage in Fenton, Missouri, and were now settled in their new home, "Seven Oaks Farm". St. Adalbert's School was the Sisters' ninth mission in the United States. The school's faculty included Sister Hilda Dohalska, a Czech language teacher and sewing instructor; Sister Margaret Pustka, fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teacher; Agnes Barta, a young postulant,

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[19]Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Book for St. Adalbert's Parish.

first through fourth grade teacher; Anna Kalbac, another postulant, music teacher and director of the church choir; and Sister Boleslava Tomasek, housekeeper. The enrollment was sixty-nine, but in 1923 the school enrollment had increased so rapidly that a third Sister-teacher was needed.[20]

The Sisters were warmly and eagerly welcomed into the new parish because they shared the same immigrant culture with the people of St. Adalbert's Church.[21] The bond of the Czech nationality drew the Sisters and parishioners together, and that bond was strengthened by the warm and friendly manner of the Sisters. As members of the parish the Sisters were interested in every family and their needs.[22] As teachers the Sisters were aware of the children's educational potential and attempted to bring out the best in each student. They shared the parents' desire for their children's success in the New World.[23]

The parishioners generously responded to the material needs of the Sisters. Furnishings were provided for the convent quarters and every Christmas the parishioners

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[20]St. Adalbert's School Chronicles, 1920-1960, unpaginated, NDCA. (Hereafter cited as St. Adalbert's School Chronicles).

[21]Interview with Mrs. Margaret Kwasnieski, February 10, 1977.

[22]Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Book for St. Adalbert's Parish.

[23]Ibid.

gave the Sisters a food shower. Each teaching Sister earned a salary of $30.00 a month.

Strong ties between the Sisters and the parishioners developed in spite of the restrictive and cloistered nature of religious life at the time. The Sisters were not allowed to visit the homes of the parishioners, and were only allowed to receive parish visitors on business matters. Their life was very structured. They rose at 5:00 or 5:30 a.m., had prayers, went to Mass, ate breakfast, taught school until 3:00 p.m., worked after school, prayed, ate dinner, shared recreation, prayed, and the day ended at 9:00 p.m. or 9:30 p.m. with Grand Silence. Besides their teaching duties, the Sisters performed some janitorial services, did sacristy work, trained altar boys and directed the choir.[24]

Convent life was focused in the local Superior through whom the will of God was communicated to the other sisters.[25] The Sisters were permitted to read only religious books and school-related materials. Any other material (newspapers, etc.) was only to be read with the expressed permission of the Superior or only read by the Superior and a summary given to the Sisters.[26] This directive was in effect until 1950.

It must be remembered that many of the Sisters were

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[24]Convent Chronicles, pp. 33, 45.

[25]Circular Letter of Reverend Mother Gerard Nemec, December, 1920, Horazdovice, NDCA.

[26]Circular Letter, author unknown, April 8, 1924, NDCA.

also immigrants and that the administrative, authority structure of the Congregation was linked to Europe. The Sisters had the same frustrations of assimilation as did any other immigrant group. By the 1930's the Congregation, still predominantly European in structure, was teaching American-born children, not Americanized children. The greater world was changing. It would be almost thirty years before that change entered the convent walls.

In 1920 the curriculum of the two-room school was set up according to the state's general guidelines. It included: civics, reading, physiology, handwriting, math, English grammar and composition, physical education (calisthenics), geography, and religion (Doctrine and Bible study).[27] Religion was usually taught every day by the Sisters and once a week by the pastor. Initially there were four grades to a room. In 1923 the enrollment increased in each grade and there were three grades to a room and finally in 1936 enrollment was such that only two classes could be accommodated in a room. With each increase in enrollment more Sister-teachers were provided. One Sister stated that they were so busy teaching required subjects that there was not any time to experiment or develop new curriculum. The teacher dealt with learning disabilities as best she could. Often the slow learner

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[27]Interview with Mrs. L. Vlcek, February 14, 1977.

would be helped by his other classmates.[28]

In the 1920's Father Blaschko taught Czech language classes on Saturday mornings for two hours. He rented the basement of a house at 2934 Castelar Street, two blocks from the Church, for four dollars a month. The rent was paid by the Catholic Workman Lodge. In the 1930's Czech language classes were taught at the Catholic Sokol Hall on Eighteenth and Williams. Besides Czech grammar and writing, Father also taught religion.[29] Apparently, the Sisters did not teach the Czech language in the school as a distinct subject, for they came to the parish after the initial issue of the foreign language dispute had quieted. It can thus be surmised that they intended to encourage the Americanizing process. The children were still taught their Czech prayers, Czech songs, and they appeared in Czech plays.[30]

In spite of the foreign language controversy, the Czech language was still the language of the parish at prayer. Devotions were conducted in Czech, sermons were given in Czech and later in both English and Czech. All parish organizations began their meetings with prayer invocations in Czech language. The adult choir sang

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[28]Interview with Sister Loyola Samek, February 2, 1977.

[29]Interview with Mrs. L. Vlcek, who attended the school.

[30]Interview with Mrs. A. Adams, February 16, 1977, Mrs. Vlcek, Mrs. A. Schafer, February 14, 1977, and Sister Dorothy Pluhacek.

Czech songs at Mass, and the parish continued to produce Czech plays and concerts.[31]

Father Joseph Vitko, pastor after Father Blaschko, was also committed to preserving the Czech language. In 1936 when Father Vitko was taken ill, a young priest was sent to replace him, Father Clement Kubesh. Father Kubesh sought to compel the immigrant parish to Americanize. He banned the Czech language in church, and all sermons and devotions were to be in English. Father was very concerned that the parish would lose its second and third generation of Americans if the parish atmosphere remained European. The parish had only thirty-six families at this time, yet by 1941 over one hundred families were members.[32] Many of the younger parishioners agreed with Father Kubesh that there was a need to Americanize more rapidly and thus cooperated with him.

Parish life centered around the school, so school events were also parish events. Probably the most important functions were the yearly liturgical celebrations of the sacramental life of the parish such as First Communion. In this service, all seven year olds of the parish received the Holy Eucharist for the first time. The occasion called for great celebration with the entire parish attending the ceremony. The sacrament of Confirmation was only celebrated every three to five years in the parish when the eleven to

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[31]Interview with Mrs. Margaret Kwasnieski.

[32]Interview with Mrs. L. Vlcek.

thirteen year olds made a strong commitment to their Catholic faith. The Bishop would attend this ceremony and administer the sacrament.

The yearly Corpus Christi procession which emphasized the Holy Eucharist and the May Crowning Ceremony which emphasized devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary were celebrated by the entire parish and expressed various aspects of the Catholic faith. Eighth-grade graduation was another major event for the parish. The Sisters were usually responsible for such things as organizing the children's processions, decorating the altars, and preparing the choir. These various ceremonies, with their music, processions, and flowers, reflected the immigrant's old country traditions.

The Sisters trained the boys of the parish to serve at the altar, a position deemed a great honor. The Sisters organized sodalities for the girls which were religiously oriented groups that encouraged the girls to model their lives after that of the Blessed Mother.[33]

Academically the school provided adequate education for the children; generally parents felt that their children were prepared well for high school.[34] No emphasis was placed on going to a Catholic high school, for many parents could not afford the tuition. The Notre Dame Sisters did

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[33]St. Adalbert's School Chronicle, unpaginated.

[34]All interviewed agreed on this.

offer scholarships to Notre Dame Academy to girls who achieved academic excellence.

Each year the children were involved in Christmas programs, feastday programs for the pastor[35] and graduation programs. The operettas directed by the Sisters reflected the traditional Czech love for music, dancing, singing, and drama. They usually involved the entire school and were occasions for the parish to come together. The proceeds from the programs usually went toward needed items in the school or parish. In 1934 Father Vitko, upon the Bishop's request, organized a Boy Scout troop and baseball and basketball teams were organized in the late 1930's. The children had responsibilities in the school and the Sisters organized fire and safety patrols. In 1936, the children raised $525 for a new tubular fire escape for the school.[36]

Mission clubs were organized throughout the years as part of the great mission thrust the entire Church fostered for Africa, China, and Latin America. The Holy Childhood Association encouraged children to save their pennies, nickels, and dimes for the "ransom of pagan babies"; that is, the children's money would help finance missionary activities in Africa, China, and Latin America. Each child that participated in the drive was given a medal. In the

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[35]One day a year the school children would honor the pastor.

[36]St. Adalbert's School Chronicles, unpaginated.

1940-41 school year, St. Adalbert's School directed their missionary activity to the Sioux Indians in South Dakota. Eventually, in 1950, the Notre Dame Sisters opened a school on the Pine Ridge Reservation and needed financial help.[37]

Through the years the children sold seeds, magazine subscriptions, and chances to earn money for books and teaching aids. The parish had festivals, card parties, bingo, and ice cream socials to raise money. These events drew the parish together for a common objective and not only catered to the neighborhood, but also the greater public. The men's club of the parish usually furnished sports equipment for the school. In the 1920's and 30's there was no PTA or HSA (Home and School Association) in St. Adalbert's School, but parents worked hard to finance an adequate educational institution.[38]

Discipline in the school was strict. To an older generation looking back, it was reasonable for the Sisters administered the same type of discipline that the children experienced in their homes. The younger generations of the late 1930's and early 40's, when interviewed, felt it was very rigid. The school had maintained its European character through the years.[39] There were no scheduled yearly parent-teacher conferences. One woman, when interviewed,

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[37]Ibid.

[38]Interviews with Mrs. Adams and Mrs. Kwasnieski.

[39]Interviews with Mrs. Kwasnieski and Mrs. A. Schafer.

remembered that if Sister needed to see a parent because of a problem student, she would contact the parent.

The Reverend Joseph Ostdiek, superintendent of the Catholic Schools and Leon Smith, superintendent for the Omaha Public Schools, made yearly inspection visits to St. Adalbert's School. The School Chronicle only recorded that they were satisfied with the operation of the school and that it met state requirements of curriculum. There was apparently no problem with teacher certification.

In 1927, tragedy struck the parish; Father Blaschko at the age of forty-one was dead.[40] The parishioners deeply mourned his death. Father Joseph Vitko replaced Father Blaschko in May, 1927. A native of Chicago, Illinois, and also of Czechoslovakian descent, Father Vitko was educated at the Czech Catholic College in Lisle, Illinois and attended seminaries in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Orchard, Michigan. He was very European in attitude even though American-born. He expected only Bohemians to belong to the parish and to send their children to St. Adalbert's School. Anyone else wanting to attend had to

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[40]Father Blaschko was born on October 3, 1885 in Lomy Bohemia, a village near Jindrichv Hradec. In 1902, he came to the United States and worked on a farm in Stuart, Nebraska. Later he entered the seminary of Conception, Missouri and also attended the Gregorian University in Rome. He was ordained during World War I and assigned as assistant pastor to the Reverend Jan Vranek at St. Wenceslaus Church, Omaha, Nebraska. There he helped the forty families organize St. Adalbert's parish. Father Blaschko was very civic-minded and had joined the Hanscom Park Improvement Club, and helped in changing the district of "Sheely Town," the Polish ethnic ghetto that surrounded St. Adalbert's parish, into a

ask his permission.[41] Under his leadership the parish was going to remain a Czech national parish. In spite of his rigidity, he had a good working relationship with his parishioners, especially the youth of the parish. Despite poor health, Father Vitko often helped the struggling parish with his own finances.

Following Father Vitko's transfer in 1939, Father Francis Barta, a native Omahan reared in Assumption Parish, took his place.[42] As a young seminarian he had worked with the Notre Dame Sisters at Father Flanagan's Boys Home. The Sisters were happy to work with him again. Father Barta continued the Americanizing process in the parish begun by Father Kubesh.

St. Adalbert's Parish attempted to maintain the Czech cultural background through the 1920's and 1930's. Under Father Vitko's inspiration, the parish produced Czech plays and travelled to small towns in out-state

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fine residential area. Father Blaschko was a hard worker and lover of beauty. He transformed the parish grounds with beautiful flower beds and built a rock grotto to the Blessed Virgin Mary which was finished shortly before his death.

[41]Interview with Msgr. Roman Ulrich, April 1, 1977. According to the Church regulations for national parishes at least the husband or wife had to be of the same ethnic origin as the national parish group. If neither husband or wife were, they had to have permission to join the national parish.

[42]Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Book for St. Adalbert's Parish.

Nebraska to perform them. The parish had a thirty-five piece concert orchestra that frequently entertained and played for dances and weddings. An adult Church choir was always active.[43]

Establishing a parish was indeed a community affair, for as the men built the buildings, the women added the finer decorative touches. Everyone, no matter what age, worked to raise money for the new parish. The parish was a closely knit family-like group; everyone knew everyone else. Care for one another was evident as happiness and sorrow were shared--when one family celebrated, everyone celebrated; when one family grieved, everyone grieved.[44] Life was centered in the parish, for it provided the immigrant with identity and solidarity and protection from a greater society that could be cruel.

St. Adalbert's Parish was part of a larger neighborhood in which the Czechs were a minority among minorities. The Czech neighborhood extended east from 32nd Avenue to the railroad tracks, north to Martha Street and south to "F" Street. It was in the center of a Polish district called "Sheely Town." To the west of 32nd Avenue was the original settlement of some of the wealthy families of Omaha. The old Byron Reed Home, the Larkin family home, of Larkin Mortuary, and the Lipsey family home of Lipsey Produce

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[43]Interview with Mrs. L. Vlcek.

[44]Interview with Mrs. Ann Schafer, February 14, 1977.

Company were located in this area. When these families and others moved further west to Dundee, the homes were bought by prominent Irish Catholic families. A few Jewish families also moved into this area.[45]

The Czech neighborhood was more modest. These were the homes of people who worked in the packing houses or the brewery, or who were leather makers, construction workers, or laundry workers. Many of the mothers of the families worked as night cleaning ladies in office buildings, as day domestic help for wealthy families, or took in washing and ironing for a small wage.[46]

There was bitter rivalry between the parishioners of St. Adalbert's and those of Immaculate Conception Church, the Polish Church, over deciding criteria for parish membership. There also was a rivalry between the new "immigrant" church of St. Adalbert's and the "established" Irish church of Our Lady of Lourdes.[47] It was a subtle rivalry demonstrated by an attitude on the part of the established Irish-Americans that new immigrants were inferior. In later years the various nationalities mingled at social events such as ice cream socials, dances, and card parties, but each group still maintained its own national church.[48]

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[45]Interview with Mrs. Alice Adams.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Interview with Mrs. M. Kwasnieski.

The Czech neighborhood was self-contained. There was a dry goods store, two grocery stores, an ice house, two bars, their church, school, and parish hall. The Poles had their own business district in "Sheely Town."[49]

Upon the examination of Church records, and after interviewing several members of the parish, it became quite evident that St. Adalbert's neighborhood has a low rate of mobility. If people moved, and some did usually to accommodate a growing family, most of them relocated within the parish neighborhood.[50]

Thus, by 1940 St. Adalbert's Parish had an established school under the direction of the Notre Dame Sisters. It was an important education institution in the Omaha diocese during the next two decades.

The establishment of Assumption Church had begun earlier than that of St. Adalbert's but the Notre Dame Sisters did not assume administration of the school until 1921.

On August 30, 1891, the first Czech Benevolent Society of South Omaha was organized. The charter members of

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[49]Interview with Mrs. A. Adams.

[50]Examination of school record cards and parish membership lists confirm this. For example, Mrs. Alice Adams, daughter of Mr. John Kotrba, one of the petitioners for the parish in 1916, attended St. Adalbert's School. All of her children also did. Mrs. Ann Schafer's mother, daughter of Mr. Frank Novotny (one of the original petitioners in 1916) attended the school, as well as Mrs. Schafer herself and later her own seven children. Many similar examples of such continunity could be cited.

this organization were Peter Slegl, Joseph Vavra, Joseph Kipietz, John Beranek, Wenceslaus Vondra, Charles Becvar, John Prusha Sr., Anton Povondra, and Stephen Matcha.[51] It was this group that took the initiative to build a Czech Catholic Church in South Omaha. For many years these Czech Catholics attended St. Agnes Church at 23rd and "Q" Streets. Even though St. Agnes was an Irish national church, the bishop of Omaha assigned the assistant priest from St. Wenceslaus Parish to have Sunday services for the Czechs of South Omaha. Most of these priests assigned in the 1890's and early 1900's were well educated men from Czechoslovakia who were recruited by American bishops to serve the needs of the Catholic Czech immigrant.

In January 1893, the Reverend John Vranek, pastor of St. Wenceslaus Church, and his assistant, the newly-ordained Reverend Joseph Chundelak, were assigned to serve the Czech Catholics of St. Agnes Church. In the spring of 1893, these two men were instrumental in helping the Benevolent Society and other interested Czechs to gain permission to establish a Czech national parish of their own in South Omaha. Father Vranek presided at two organizational meetings held in St. Agnes' parish school. At the first meeting the Czechs unanimously decided to establish a parish and build their own Church, and at the second meeting the group

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[51]Joseph C. Panek, Comp., Assumption Church Golden Anniversary Booklet, 1894-1944. (Omaha: Tourek Publishing Co., 1944), unpaginated. (Hereafter cited as Golden Anniversary Booklet of Assumption Church).

decided that the new Church was to be built on the northwest corner of 22nd and Vyman Street (now 22nd and U Streets). The two-lot site was purchased for $1,100.[52] This location was only four blocks from St. Agnes Church. Bishop Richard Scannell gave his permission and blessing to the immigrant group and on December 24, 1893, he assigned the Reverend Charles Zak as assistant pastor of St. Agnes Church ". . . with the special commission to attend to the spiritual needs of the Czech Catholics of South Omaha."[53] This arrangement was used until the Czechs built their own Church.

On July 9, 1894, the articles of incorporation of Assumption Church were drawn up in accordance with Nebraska law. The parochial corporation consisted of Bishop Scannell as president, the Reverend William Coka, Vicar General of the diocese as vice-president, Father Zak, pastor, as treasurer-secretary and John Prusha, Sr., and Wenceslaus Barta, members of the parish, as trustees. The first meeting of the new corporation was held on September 2, 1894; the group decided to erect a Church on the 22nd and U Street property. The boundaries of the parish extended from 24th Street on the west to the river on the east; from Q Street on the north to Z Street on the south. These boundaries included the Brown Park area. (Area originally included from 20th Street to the Missouri River, later it

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

was extended to 24th Street).

The initial outlay of $3,000 for the project was borrowed from Mary A. Young of South Omaha.[54] The architect for the new church was O. M. Zandus, and the contractor was Joseph Cisar, Sr. Both men worked under the direction of Father Charles Hodyc. The new 40' x 60' wood frame church was completed and dedicated on January 6, 1895.

Within the next five years, the parish would have three pastors, Father Charles Zak, Father John Vlcek, and Father Anton Bednar. Father Bednar organized the parish's first festival in 1900. The event was so successful that the parish was able to pay $2,000 on the debt of the new church. The yearly parish festival is still a traditional event at Assumption Church. In 1902, the parish's longtime friend, Father Joseph Chundalek, was appointed pastor of Assumption Church and remained so until his death in 1918. Father Chunadelek immediately made needed improvements in the church. A new furnace and electric lights were installed, a new altar was donated by the ladies of the Blessed Mother Society, new pews, an altar railing and new organ were purchased, and the church building was enlarged to accomodate the growing parish.[55]

After the church was established, the parishioners

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

turned to the building of the second pillar of parish life--the parochial school. The parish school was (and still is in many instances) of utmost importance to the parishioners, for it was the primary interest of the parish to establish a Catholic school so that the children could learn the fundamentals of their religion. Up to 1907, most of the children attended Brown Park Public School, and some, if their parents could afford the tuition and book fees, attended St. Agnes School. In 1903, the property for a school was purchased by the Catholic Sokol #1 of South Omaha for $750 and donated to the parish. Between 1903 and 1906 the parish had a special collection drive for the building fund that netted $4,676. Many families donated from twenty to fifty dollars towards the building project. This was a considerable amount of money for an immigrant family to give when many of them were earning only one dollar a day in the packing houses and trying to support large families. By the spring of 1907, a new five-classroom school building with central heating and electric lighting was completed and ready for the coming school year.

School opened in September of 1908, staffed by the Benedictine Sisters of Lisle, Illinois, also immigrants from Czechoslovakia. The five classroom school was filled to capacity. The first eighth grade class consisting of Anna Vana, Frank G. Sterba, Albert Slegel, John Prusha, Jr., James Pavlik and Joseph Ficenec, graduated in June of

1909.[56] In 1914, because of the increasing enrollment, three classrooms were added to the school building. Again the parish had to borrow money to defray the $10,000 cost of the new addition.

Shortly after Father Chundelak celebrated his 25th ordination anniversary, he became seriously ill, and died on September 9, 1918. Within the next year the parish again experienced the loss of their pastor, Father Jan Stephan Broz, who died on September 2, 1919, almost one year after Father Chundelak's death.

Father John Krajicek was appointed pastor of Assumption Church in the fall of 1919.[57] He was immediately faced with a crisis. The Benedictine Sisters were being recalled to the Chicago diocese by Archbishop Mundelein to staff the growing parochial schools of that city. Archbishop Harty, Father Krajicek, and Reverend Mother Genevieve, O. S. B. petitioned the Notre Dame Sisters to teach in the school, but the Sisters did not have enough properly certified teachers to send. The Sisters regretted this, but the Chronicle recorded that,

> Perhaps God permitted this insufficiency of teachers for our own good. Many people in South Omaha were against us at the time, because they thought that on account of our pressure the Benedictine Sisters left their School.[58]

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[56]Golden Anniversary Booklet of Assumption Church.

[57]The Silver Jubilee of the Parish was not celebrated in 1919, because of the aftermath of World War I.

[58]Convent Chronicles, p. 31.

Assumption School was able to manage for the next two years with the help of the Mercy Sisters of Omaha. Yet due to a lack of personnel the Mercy Sisters were unable to make a permanent commitment to the parish.

In 1921, the Notre Dame Sisters were in a position to staff Assumption School. The parishioners remembered the Sisters arriving by streetcar with their suitcases and meeting them on 24th and Q Street to lead them to their new mission. The Sisters soon won the hearts of their fellow countrymen and a mutual bond of love and respect was established.

The new Notre Dame faculty of Assumption School was: Sister Qualbertina Vanek, principal, Sister Philomena Zmolek, Sister Bernarda Lutovsky, Sister Augustine, Sister Fidelis Kudrna, music teacher, Sister Boniface, housekeeper, Miss Barbara Ficenec, and Miss Ellen Atkins. The school enrollment was 257 children with each teacher assigned two grades of forty to fifty children.[59] The Sisters lived in the school building and the order received $300 a year for each teaching Sister. The parishioners were always generously bringing vegetables, meat or baked goods to the Sisters. Besides their teaching duties, the Sisters did some janitorial work, were responsible for the care of the altar linens, vestments, and decoration of the Church, and trained the altar boys.

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[59] Ibid., p. 38.

The pastor played a limited role in the school. He usually taught religion in the school once a week and he was the ultimate disciplinarian in serious cases, but he did not take part in the curriculum planning and development of the school. His role was that of spiritual father and often his energies were directed to building and maintaining the physical structures of the parish.[60]

The first few years in the school were difficult for the Sisters. In 1922-23, four of their pupils died of diptheria, and one of their own Sisters died, the first one since they had come to America. Disease and death, compounded by severe snow storms in the winter of 1923, closed the school and made the Sisters feel isolated in their new mission.[61] On the other hand, there was cause for rejoicing in 1924, when the parish hosted the Sisters' annual religious reception and profession ceremonies in August (this is the time when a young lady receives the habit and takes her vows). The parish held the event again in 1929, when nine young women received the religious habits; three of these were members of the parish, Marie Pavlik, Anna Smisek, and Barbara Ficenec.

In 1929, the school experienced its first official visitation by the authorities of the order. On May 1,

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[60]Interview with Sister Pauline Polak, March 4, 1977.

[61]Assumption School Chronicles, 1932-33, unpaginated. Another diptheria epedemic hit the school in 1931-32, but all victims recovered.

Reverend Mother General Salesia and her secretary, Sister Ermine, from Czechoslovakia, came to Assumption School. They were pleased with the work of the Sisters. In the spring of 1931, the Reverend Joseph Ostdiek, diocesan superintendent, made his first official visit to the school and also was pleased with the Sisters' work and the progress of the school. After this the school chronicle recorded yearly visits by the diocese and city inspectors. The inspectors usually talked with the principal and sometimes visited with the teachers and the children, checked the copyright dates of the textbooks and suggested the need for more library materials and visual aids for the classrooms.[62]

The curriculum of the school was based on the state curriculum guide and included spelling, math, geography, American and world history, bookkeeping, physiology, reading, penmenship, English grammar, and composition, civics, and art. Added to curriculum was religion (catechism and Bible history), sewing, manual training, and study of the Czech language and culture.[63] The Czech heritage was conveyed through the home and reflected in the Parish and school. The Benedictine Sisters in 1908 taught part of the school day in the Czech language and the other part in English. For many a kindergartener who did not speak English, the

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[62]No other criticisms are recorded in the Chronicles, and the school possesses no other records on the matter.

[63]Interview with Sister Dolores Pavlik, January 12, 1977.

Americanizing process consisted of learning a few English words each day. The upper grades had Czech writing and reading classes. Religion was taught from a Czech-English catechism and Bible stories were read in Czech as late as 1927. Both the Benedictine and the Notre Dame Sisters taught the children Czech songs, produced Czech plays, and helped the children learn an appreciation for Czech customs and tradition. One Sister felt that learning the Czech language which is a phonetic language gave the children a good background for reading and spelling. The children by necessity were bi-lingual. They needed the Czech language in order to communicate with their parents and they needed the English language for the broader world. The Sunday sermon and the various prayer devotions in the parish were still presented in Czech as late as the 1930's.

The Notre Dame Sisters began teaching at Assumption School after World War I, and with the end of the war there was an emphasis on being one hundred percent American. The Sisters only taught Czech songs, prayers and plays.[64] Father Joseph Ostdiek, superintendent of Catholic schools, was very concerned that the schools stay within the state curriculum guide lines. Given the recent European background of the Sisters, the pressure of the Americanization process

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[64]The Assumption School Chronicle did not mention the teaching of the Czech language in the school or the foreign language dispute.

upon them must have been tremendous.

The Sisters took the initiative to organize numerous extra-curricular activities. Christmas program was an annual school project, but the graduation program was the highlight of the year. Graduation was a splendid event with processions, flower girls and music. Through the years the school children enjoyed the music of the neighborhood band, art, Czech plays, sleigh parties, hayrack rides, picnics, and baseball games. In 1932, the parish team won first place in the city-wide tournament. The children took part in all religious events of the parish such as May crowning devotion to the Blessed Mother, Corpus Christi processions, and special liturgical services for Christmas and Easter seasons.[65] Usually the parents were invited to an open house at the school to see the academic work, art, sewing and manual training projects. They were entertained by the children in the all-school operetta usually held in the spring and produced to earn money for the school or the general parish fund. In 1932-33, the proceeds from the program went to buy a piano ($28.50) and to buy playground equipment and graduation booklets.[66] The students attended the annual Mission Day Carnival held at Notre Dame Academy for the overseas missions. It is remembered as a real

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[65]Interview with Mr. George Buglewicz, March 2, 1977.

[66]Interview with Sister Pauline Polak.

treat of games, roller skating and hiking.[67] Other mission activities the children took part in were the Advent and Lenten collections for the Holy Childhood Association.

In 1932, a drum and bugle corp was organized in the middle grades under the direction of E. T. Gordon. Each boy paid ten cents instrument rental and was required to attend practice each Friday after school. Often the drum and bugle corp marched in parades for the parish events.[68]

One memorable occasion for the school was the election of Pope Pius XII in 1932. The Sisters had the entire school listen to the election proceedings on the radio. One Sister remembers that in listening to the event the children experienced a feeling of solidarity with the universal church.[69]

The parents financially supported the school. They paid a monthly tuition of two dollars. Book rental was one dollar per year for the first child and fifty cents for the second child and any others after that. In 1931-32, they organized a fund drive to raise money for new library books. The school was well equipped for its day and the children usually had what they needed. The parish Men's Club supported the athletics program by donating equipment. Also, the Men's Club or one of the ladies lodges gave all

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[67]Interview with George Buglewicz.

[68]Assumption School Chronicles, 1932-33 unpaginated; Interview with George Buglewicz.

[69]Interview with Sister Pauline Polak.

the children candy at the Christmas season. The parents sponsored a food shower for the Sisters each year at Christmas and furnished the Sisters' quarters with the needed items. In 1933, Sister Regina, the principal, organized the first Parent-Teacher-Association at Assumption School. Sister was a very forward looking teacher and her action was courageous for she met strong opposition from her own Sisters who did not see that parental involvement in the school would be helpful. She was able to convince them that the organization would develop better communication between teachers and parents. William Kotrc was the first president of the Assumption Parent-Teacher-Association. Under his leadership and Sister Regina's direction, the parents became more active in the school. Each class was assigned at least two room-mothers who helped the teacher in whatever way they could. Once a month one classroom would invite their room-mothers for an afternoon of entertainment and refreshments.[70] The PTA sponsored the annual school picnic at Riverview Park. They donated two dollars a month toward the purchase of library books and in the 1936-37 school year the library had over six hundred volumes.

The Sisters always received support from the parents for a discipline that was stern yet fair. The children respected the Sisters and remembered them as having been very kindly. One person remarked that they never heard any

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[70]Ibid.

criticism of the Sisters. In that day no lay person would have questioned or criticized any of the authority structures of the Church.[71]

The school was the focal point for the parish and the Sisters were the heart of the school. The ties of nationality and religion bound the Sisters and the parishioners together in a common effort to preserve as much as possible of the Czech ethnic culture. The Sisters were strong witnesses of faith to the parish and were given great respect for their dedication to religious life and to teaching. They in turn taught the children respect for others and their opinions, to work hard, to be honest and to take only what one deserved or earned in life. This was a very humble approach to life; but humility was a very valued virtue in the Notre Dame Sisters' religious history and tradition. Besides Sister Regina, other outstanding teachers were Sister Emmanuela Karnik, a progressive teacher who developed an extensive manual training course for the seventh and eighth grade boys; and Sister Alexia Hobza, who shared her artistic talents with all. Another example of dedication was Sister Teresitta. She was an outstanding teacher who taught in an interesting and entertaining fashion. She was in charge of the altar boys and every year with the stipends the Sisters received she was able to

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[71]Interviews with Sister Dolores Pavlik and George Buglewicz.

give them a masquerade ball. When she died in 1943 her funeral was held at Assumption Church; the parish turned out en masse to show their love for her.[72]

One parishioner remembered that there were no frills to the education, only good basic instruction; yet they were never educationally deprived. The Sisters had a spirit of cooperation and joy among themselves that overflowed to the people. The Sisters are remembered as hard working teachers, even doing janitorial tasks when necessary. One Sister happily remembered her years at Assumption in the 1930's when life was more simple. They were able to enjoy life with the children, and on many an afternoon after school went with the children on hikes to the river to fish in the springtime or on sleigh rides in the winter.[73]

Assumption was always a very active parish. An adult choir was immediately organized by Mike and Mary Buglewicz who were the first organist and violinist for the choir. Under Father Kubesch's direction the choir perfected its talents. Father Anthony Tuma and John Franck directed the parish band which played for all occasions. One man whose father was a member of the Franck Band remembered that when his father died, one hundred twenty-five musicians marched from Beseda Hall, the parish social center, to the

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[72]Interview with Sister Pauline Polak.

[73]Ibid.; Interview with Sister Dolores Pavlik.

Church to honor their fellow musician.[74]

One time of the year that involved the entire parish was Holy Week. After the solemn Mass on Easter morning the priest, people, parish band and choir, and all the lodges and sodalities would march the three blocks from the Church to the parish hall to celebrate the central message of Christianity--the Resurrection of Jesus. This was a strong faith witness to the children and the parish bonds of religion and culture were strengthened.

The Saint Vincent de Paul Society, a group of men organized to help the less fortunate of the parish, was organized in November 1930. The group usually helped families with financial difficulties, such as paying the tuition.

Catholic Sokol Number one was organized in May of 1894 with thirty-one charter members. On August 27, 1898 this group participated in the famous Trans-Mississippi Exposition held in Omaha. The Catholic Sokol Union of America was organized in South Omaha in 1908. This Sokol held the first gymnastic tournament exhibition in Omaha in July, 1905. In 1915, the Catholic Sokol Girls (Sokolky) was organized in Assumption Parish by Anton Dvorak and Fred Janousek. The purpose of the Sokols was to provide a good spiritual and physical training program for the young people of the parish. The Catholic Sokols program was held

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[74]Interview with Louis Matcha, January 20, 1977.

at the parish hall and all the school children were encouraged to join.

By 1900, the Brown Park area was an established Czech neighborhood, and like other ethnic neighborhoods around the city, remained self-contained for some time. It had its own dry good stores, and variety stores, grocery stores, bakeries, taverns, shoe stores and fresh meat markets, and the packing houses on Q Street. Also the neighborhood bordered the business district of South Omaha, on 24th Street between Q and L Streets. Banks, larger department stores, doctors, lawyers, and dentists were available if needed.

The Irish of St. Agnes Parish were valued friends of the Czechs, but the Irish group of St. Mary's Parish located west of Assumption Church on 36th and R Streets were the arch rivals of the South Omaha Czechs. The "22nd Street Tigers" struggled often with the fighting Irish on 24th Street.[75] If the Czechs were not engaged in a feud with the Irish, it was because they were busy fighting with the Polish. There was rivalry with the public school children, but usually everyone minded their own business.

There was a Greek settlement on 24th and Q Street, along with some Spanish-American families and a few black families. There were basically no relations with the Greeks or the Spanish, but two black families are still

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[75]Interviews with George Buglewicz and Sister Pauline Polak.

remembered in the parish. The Johnson family lived in the neighborhood, but they were not Catholic and their children went to public school. Mr. Johnson was a real favortie of the children in the neighborhood. He drove a horse-drawn coal wagon and would allow the children to ride the horse. He also learned to speak Czech. His family still lives in the Assumption Parish neighborhood. A Mr. Steward, also a black man, worked in the packing house with many of the men and lived in the neighborhood. He organized one of the first sand lot baseball leagues in the neighborhood in the 1930's. He furnished the equipment and coached the team. It was a successful cooperative venture.[76]

The Czechs of South Omaha settled where the jobs were. Most of them worked in the packing houses of Swift, Armour, and Cudahy. Without higher education and not knowing the language most of them were happy to have a job. There were no professional people among the first immigrants and only a few businessmen. Most of the second generation Czechs married within the ethnic group and established homes in the Brown Park area.[77]

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[76] Ibid.

[77] From 1908-1963, there were 1,203 graduates from Assumption grade school; approximately 900, are still in the Omaha metropolitan area and about 500 of these can be found in or near the Brown Park neighborhood. The alumni roster shows that 29 Hazukas; 22 Kucireks and Staneks; 18 Kubats; 16 Ficenecos, Povondras, Smiseks and Vaceks; 14 Krajiceks and Novaks; 13 Bartas and Benaks; 12 Vodickas and Kramolisches; but only two Jones, two Smiths and two Browns.

Ten native families of the parish in 1963 had members of the third generation graduating from the school. The records also revealed that there were 24 known marriages

Through the 1920's and 1930's the parish was able to maintain a close knit unity and preserve its religious and cultural heritage. The children of the Czech immigrants usually married within the ethnic group and remained in the neighborhood to raise their families. Up to 1940, the immigrant was able to preserve his ethnic culture in the New World, but the experiences of a second world war would shatter the ethnic barriers.[78]

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between former schoolmates at Assumption. The above statistics seem to support the author's conclusion that the mobility rate in Assumption was low and that the Assumption neighborhood remained a stable neighborhood through the years. This data was gathered from Assumption Church and School records, Assumption Church, Omaha, Nebraska.

[78]The Notre Dame Sisters in 1937 opened a boarding school for girls ages 6-13. The elementary grade school located at the Notre Dame Motherhouse and was part of the Notre Dame Academy. By 1947, the school had 40 girls, but in 1953, the Sisters decided to discontinue the Notre Dame Grade School. The decision was made for a number of reasons: to accommodate the increasing high school enrollment at Notre Dame; to release Sister-novices to pursue their studies on a full time basis; and to release the Sister-teachers for the high school so the Congregation would not have to employ lay teachers.

III. Years of Challenge - 1940's
Years of Peace - 1950's

The events in Europe in 1939-1940 deeply touched the Notre Dame Sisters in America. Their Sisters in Czechoslovakia were at the mercy of Hitler and his army. There was the constant question of what would happen next. Communications with the Horazdovice Motherhouse were severed after October, 1941. The next four years were full of worry and uncertainty concerning the fate of the Sisters in Europe.

Even in the midst of Congregational difficulties, the American Sisters continued to respond to the needs of the Omaha diocesan schools, for in the summer of 1941, the Sisters were approached by the Reverend James O'Brien of St. Therese Parish in Omaha to teach in his parish's elementary grade school. The Ursuline Sisters had been teaching in the school, but in 1941, they were recalled to their Motherhouse in Louisville, Kentucky to meet the growing educational demands of their diocesan schools. The Notre Dame Sisters obtained permission from Bishop James Ryan to assume the administration of St. Therese School on July 21, 1941.[1] The Sisters signed a contract on

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[1]Monsignor Nicholas Wegner to Reverend Mother Agnes July 21, 1941. NDCA.

August 25, 1941, stating that they were able to supply two competent teachers and to conduct the school properly according to the state laws. The parish was to pay thirty dollars a month to each teaching sister and provide daily transportation back and forth from Notre Dame to St. Therese School.[2] Sister Xavier Hava and Sister Seraphine Kubesh were assigned to teach grades one to eight with an enrollment of seventy-five pupils.

Prior to the coming of the Sisters of Notre Dame, the parish had established its church and school. At the turn of the century the area northwest of the present Omaha airport consisted of truck gardens. Only a few families had settled there. By 1917, however, enough Catholic families were living in the area to merit the services of a priest for Sunday masses. There was no church building so two masses each Sunday were said in the home of Bridget Martin.[3] In 1918, a wood frame, one story building was erected at 15th and Ogden Street and dedicated as St. Michael's Church, with Father W. Nosbisch as pastor. St. Michael's was not an ethnic parish, for in 1918, there were a number of nationalities living there---Hungarians, Irish, a few Czechs, and some Germans. St. Therese had defined territorial limits which were Florence Boulevard to the west

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[2]Contract -- between St. Therese Parish and the Notre Dame Sisters, August 25, 1941, NDCA. This contract was for ten months.

[3]Bridget Martin lived at 4515 North 15th Street.

and the Missouri River to the east with Commercial Avenue to the south and Read Street to the north.[4]

The Church building was used for services on Sunday and converted into two classrooms during the week. Also, there were two small rooms in the rear of the building that served as the priest's living quarters. Archbishop J. J. Harty had engaged the services of two Ursuline Sisters to teach in the school in 1918. The enrollment was approximately thirty-five students.[5]

In 1921, the Reverend Joseph Falke was appointed pastor, and his first task was to cope with the growing neighborhood population. In the early 1920's, Hungarian immigrants, who had settled on the Union Pacific-owned land northeast of 6th and Pierce Street, were being removed because the railroad needed the land for its roundhouse and shop facilities.[6] The Hungarians moved to the area north of Carter Lake and east of Florence Boulevard which put them within the boundaries of St. Therese parish. They came to this particular region because some fellow Hungarians were already there and they were close to a Church and a school for their families. Thus, the neighborhood's largest ethnic group became the Hungarians, but they were not a dominant group. The neighborhood remained a

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[4]Interview with Father Patrick McCaslin.

[5]Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Bellus, January 11, 1977.

[6]Interviews with Mr. and Mrs. Geo. Barna, January 5, 1977; Interview with Veronica Bodnar, January 10, 1977.

conglomeration of ethnic groups working together.

In 1927, Father Falke began to build a new brick structure that was to serve as a parish hall (the basement), a church (the main floor), and a school (the second floor). Father undertook the venture thinking that the neighborhood population was going to continue to grow because a factory was going to be built in the area.

Father Falke went about collecting pledges of financial support for the building which would draw more people into the neighborhood. The structure was completed in 1931, and re-christened St. Therese in honor of the newly canonized St. Therese of France.[7] The proposed factory never materialized, the Great Depression hit the country, and people did not honor their pledges; therefore, St. Therese parish was left with a $125,000 debt. Father Falke struggled along until 1934, by which time he had been able to reduce the debt to $70,000.[8] In that year, the Reverend James O'Brien was appointed pastor. He was a young energetic priest with a shrewd sense for business. Yet in 1938, the parish was still $58,000 in debt. The significance of this can only be realized when one understands that in 1938, toward the end of the depression, St. Therese

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[7]St. Therese Church became the official diocesan shrine in honor of St. Therese of the Child Jesus.

[8]Confraternity of St. Therese and the novena offerings of people from all over the diocese helped reduce the debt, as well as the parishioners organizing money-making projects. Unidentified clipping, Ca. 1938, Corporation Minutes of St. Therese Church, 15th and Ogden, Omaha, Nebraska.

Parish had only about sixty-five families, most of whom were in the lower middle class income bracket and had large families, some numbering from ten to sixteen children, to support.

In 1938, Bishop James Ryan, at the request of Father O'Brien, allowed the formation of a committee of leading Catholic laymen of the city, with Francis P. Matthews as chairman, to find a solution to the extreme financial problem of St. Therese Parish.[9] The committee decided that the pastor, Father O'Brien, was to preach in each of the city's parishes on the plight of St. Therese and to request a donation from the parishioners. Bishop Ryan stated his approval of the committee's solution in a public letter: "The Catholics of Omaha must come to the aid of this small struggling group, in the interest of religion, education and of our own financial integrity."[10] Within the next two years Father O'Brien did as the committee suggested and the parish received generous donations from fellow Catholics. If the committee's solution had not worked the only other alternative would have been to close the parish and school.[11] The decision to maintain the church and the school was made in light of the moral

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[9]Laymen from St. Adalbert's Parish and Assumption Parish were on the Committee. Corporation Minutes of St. Therese Parish, p. 3, 1938.

[10]Unidentified clipping, Ca. 1938, Corporation Minutes of St. Therese Parish.

[11]Interview with Andrew Bellus.

responsibility of the parents to provide religious education for their children.

Probably the greatest contribution of the Sisters of Notre Dame to St. Therese's Parish was that they managed to keep the school operating against terrific financial odds during the 1940's and 1950's. The parish was becoming financially sound; but educational materials were few. There were textbooks, but no workbooks or library books or resource materials. The Sisters made up their own work-sheets each evening at Notre Dame. There was no money for a janitor, so the Sisters supervised the cleaning of the school. Children whose parents could not afford the tuition, were able to compensate the cost of tuition by helping the Sisters with the cleaning tasks.[12] Aside from their teaching duties, the Sisters were responsible for the parish choir, upkeep of the Church linens, the training of altar boys for Sunday services, and for the organization of a sodality for the seventh and eighth grade girls of the parish. The struggle was harsh, but as the keeper of the School Chronicle put it in 1946, "God helped to the end!"[13]

By 1943 Father O'Brien had managed to liquidate

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[12]Interview with Sister Seraphine Kubesh, January 12, 1977.

[13]St. Therese School Chronicles for 1945-1946, no pagination. NDCA. The first five years of the Chronicles are very short summaries for the Sisters were too busy to take time to record the events of the year. Interview with Sister Seraphine Kubesh.

over $58,000 of the parish debt.[14] The following year, his decade-long ministry to St. Therese ended with his transfer to St. Peter's Church in Omaha and the Reverend Joseph P. Myers succeeded him. Even though the threat of financial ruin was gone, the parish school still needed financial support. The parents of the school children were required to pay a tuition of fifty cents a month per child for the first three children in the family; any other children in the family were admitted tuition free. For non-parishioners the charge was $1.50 per month tuition for the first child, and a dollar tuition for each additional child. All children paid a yearly book rent according to the following rates: Grades five to eight paid $2.00 per child, grades three and four paid $1.50, grades one and two paid $1.00 per child, and kindergarteners were charged fifty cents. The tuition rates remained stable until 1952, when Father Myers introduced a building fund. The book rent was raised to $2.50 per child in grades five through eight, and $2.00 per child in grades one through four. Later it was raised to five dollars per child for all grades.[15]

St. Therese's school enrollment fluctuated from seventy-four pupils in 1944 to 120 in 1949. St. Therese became a three room school in 1944 and in 1946, 1950, 1952,

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[14]Interview with Sister Seraphine Kubesh, January 12, 1977.

[15]Interview with Mrs. Naomi Bodnar; School Chronicles. When the school offered a Kindergarten class, a $2.50 fee was charged.

and 1953, the kindergarten class was large enough to be a separate class with its own teacher. Finally in 1953, reflecting the post-war baby boom, the school enrollment increased to 171. All available classroom space was needed for grades one to eight, and the children were then required to attend the neighborhood public school for kindergarten classes.

Enrollment gradually increased in the 1950's and reached a peak of 194 in 1957-58. During the late 1950's, five Notre Dame Sisters taught at St. Therese's. A temporary classroom had to be set up in the basement of the building.[16]

As well as providing good academic education according to the state curriculum, the Sisters attempted to broaden the cultural horizons of the children. Their neighborhood setting offered little or no after school activities for the children. To remedy the situation the sisters took advantage of every opportunity offered by the diocese to involve the children in extra curricular activities, as well as scholastic activities. For example, St. Therese Parish always had a children's choir and the Sisters involved these youngsters in a city-wide diocesan choir under the direction of Reverend Francis Schmitt, director of the famous Boys Town Choir. Also, the Sisters took thirty-one of the choir members to hear the St. Cecilia

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[16]School Chronicles for 1956-57, 1957-58, no pagination.

Choir from Rome when they appeared in Omaha. Under the guidance of the Sisters, the children's choir participated in a yearly Christmas musical program, special programs for the pastor and entertained for the parents at Home and School Association meetings. Many parents still remember the program the children gave in honor of Omaha's Centennial in 1954.[17]

The Sisters had the children enter art poster and essay contests sponsored by various civic organizations in the city. Some children were honored with prizes. Fire Patrol and Safety Patrol responsibilities given to the children helped develop leadership, and the Sisters had firemen and policemen speak to the children on their roles in these programs. A civic club was organized by the seventh and eighth grade students in order to develop citizenship.[18] Arbor Day, traditionally an event of some importance in Nebraska, was observed by the planting of trees donated by Omaha Chamber of Commerce in 1956.

Achievement tests were given to measure growth and academic progress of each student. As a result of the testing, ability groupings were used during the 1957-58 school year. The groupings allowed the teachers to identify the slow learners and to work with them more effectively. The Rotary Club Award was introduced into the school in 1957.

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[17]School Chronicles, 1953-1954; Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Gene Harrington, January 7, 1977.

[18]St. Therese School Philosophy Statement. Author, date unknown, NDCA.

The award was given to the boy who demonstrated outstanding academic achievement, service, and leadership during his elementary grade school years.[19] The Sisters helped the eighth graders prepare diligently for high school entrance exams, and scholarships from Notre Dame Academy were usually awarded to girls of the parish each year. The religious growth and development of each student continued to be the Sisters' primary concern. In addition to the regular courses of study, the children were taught the doctrines of their faith and encouraged to live it daily.

For their own advancement, the Sisters were encouraged to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered to them, such as sharing sessions with the public school teachers on visual teaching aids, music and art workshops, Business Industry Education Day and State and diocesan Teachers' Conventions. In 1956, they became members of the National Catholic Education Association upon the request of the Reverend Roman Ulrich, superintendent of the Catholic Schools. During American Education Week the Sisters held personal conferences with each parent to explain the report card system and the achievement test scores. These were the first formal parent-teacher conferences; prior to this, the parents were invited to an open house at the school to view the classrooms and to see their

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[19]Recipients of this award are listed in the School Chronicles.

children's work.[20]

In 1941, the Reverend Joseph Ostdiek, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, visited the school and praised the Sisters for their work. His successor, the Reverend Paul Schneider, helped the school obtain much needed resource materials such as encyclopedias and dictionaries. The State Department of Education visited the school in 1952-53, and was pleased with the progress of the school, and suggested a new Nebraska History text. In 1955, Dr. Owen Knutzen visited the school and commented on the overcrowded classrooms (by then the enrollment had risen to 154), the inadequate library, and the lack of a physical education or athletic program.[21]

The financial circumstances of the school still demanded everyone's cooperation. The children worked hard to help the situation by selling Christmas cards, chances, magazines, seeds, and candy. With the profit from these sales the school was able to purchase some textbooks, encyclopedias, dictionaries, filmstrips, film projectors, record players, and playground equipment. Not only did they support their own school but also answered a financial request from the diocese. Reverend Paul Schneider, superintendent of Catholic Schools, asked the children of all

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[20]St. Therese School Chronicles, 1956-57, unpaginated.

[21]St. Therese School Chronicles, 1954-55, unpaginated.

schools to sell chances to help defray the expenses of a much-needed speech teacher for the diocesan schools. St. Therese School children worked hard and they were praised for their efforts; however, not enough money was raised. The services of a speech teacher would not be financially possible for the diocese until 1958.

The Sisters oriented the children to be of service to the civic community as well as to the parish community. Each year money was collected for the Omaha Community Chest fund, the Polio fund, Easter Seals, the March of Dimes, and the Red Cross. The children became very involved in the Red Cross projects and made annual holiday decorations for St. James Orphanage, St. Vincent's Home, and St. Joseph's Hospital. Finally, the children were taught to be mission-conscious and to share their abundance with the less fortunate peoples of the world. As early as 1944, the children were enrolled in the Holy Childhood Association and saved pennies, nickels, and dimes to help foreign missionaries "ransom the pagan children" of Africa and China.[22]

The parents took a vital interest in the school and its future. Many of the fathers were laborers and worked long, hard hours over many years to establish their homes. Their interest spread to their children who married, stayed

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[22]Money-making projects that demanded school time were curtailed in all schools by the Congregation's administrators in 1949. Projects such as selling Christmas cards that were done during after-school hours were allowed to continue.

within the parish, and sent their children to St. Therese School.[23]

In 1945 the first Parent-Teacher Association was organized in St. Therese School with Mrs. P. Hower as President, Mrs. Cherek as Vice-President, Mrs. Ben Menard as Secretary, and Mrs. E. Clifford as Treasurer.[24] There were ten other members. Through the 1940's and 1950's the Parent-Teacher Association's main purpose was to support the school by offering financial assistance. For example, each year the PTA gave the Sisters seventy dollars for minor school expenses, and donated from ten dollars to 125 dollars for library books. They sponsored the annual school picnic at Carter Lake in the spring. Their major money-making project in the 1950's was the parish bazaar. The bazaars usually netted from $1,180 in 1954 to $2,400 in 1958. The profits went to buy new school desks, and furnishings for a new basement classroom as well as school supplies. The Parent Teacher Association also helped to educate parents on health rules and childhood diseases. In 1957, they sponsored a food shower for the Sisters in appreciation for the Sisters' services. This, then, became an annual

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[23]Personal knowledge of the author.

[24]It is interesting to note that Mrs. Hower attended St. Michael's School and later St. Therese from 1919 to 1927. Her nine children also attended the school and even her grandchildren attended. The generations spanned from 1919 to 1973. Mrs. Menard's and Mrs. Clifford's children and grandchildren also attended St. Therese School. There are many more cases like these that give evidence that the neighborhood remained fairly stable. St. Therese School permanent records. St. Therese Church, Omaha, Nebraska.

event.[25]

The PTA in 1946 applied for government funds for a school hot lunch program. The funds were granted and two women from the parish were hired to operate the service. The price was fifteen cents per meal. The first three children in a family were required to pay, any members after that received lunch free. In 1953, the rates were changed to one dollar a week for one child, $1.75 for two children, $1.50 for three children, and $1.25 for four or more children in one family. These rates allowed large families to take advantage of the hot lunch program.

In summary, the entire parish channelled their energies into keeping the school solvent. Annual parish dinners, festivals, bazaars, card parties, talent shows (done by adults and children), boxing matches, and dances were held with this in mind.[26]

The Sisters continued to commute by taxi each day to St. Therese's from Notre Dame until September of 1949, when the parish purchased a house at 1416 Ogden Street, and remodelled it for the Sisters. The Sisters were overjoyed to have a home of their own in the parish which allowed

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[25]PTA changed to Home and School Association in 1956; no reason was given in Chronicle, but some thought it was to distinguish the Catholic education from the public schools.

[26]Interview with Mr. and Mrs. George Barna.

them to be more available to the people.[27] The people of the parish expressed similar sentiments. They appreciated the Sister's presence and their dedication to education. They provided a happy and interesting learning situation; yet they were firm disciplinarians. The children were well prepared for high school and were encouraged to go to college. The Sisters were more than teachers, they were friends. They were happy people who were approachable and made a person feel at ease. They were helpful and consoling to families during times of stress or sorrow, and the Sisters had a strong faith that left a lasting impression upon the people.[28] The Sisters were living examples of the Christian principles they taught the children, not mere academicians.

One Sister stated that the teaching situation was rugged at times because of the variety of family backgrounds (Hungarian, Irish, Spanish, Indian and Black) of the children and the fluctuating enrollment.[29] Also, the teaching situation was difficult at times because Father Myers was

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[27]Interview with Sister Agnes Marie Ostry, January 12, 1977.

[28]Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Bellus; Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Gene Harrington.

[29]St. Therese School record cards show that there was a core of stable families who remained in the neighborhood and sent all of their children to the school. Basically these were Hungarians and the Irish families. Also present each year was a number of families, some Spanish, some Indian, and some transient people who lived in the trailer courts who attended the school for perhaps one year or only part of the year and then moved on.

interested in helping students who had been rejected by other schools. The classroom teacher was not always prepared to help these children with serious learning difficulties.[30]

In considering the role of the Catholic school in the neighborhood, one must conclude that it was the center of activity for the parish. There were no other recreational facilities or social centers in the neighborhood, which was an isolated pocket. The Catholics built their social and religious events around St. Therese's, and other people in the area often admired them for their dedication to their Church and school.

The non-Catholics built their social life around the public school. The two groups accepted one another and often supported each other's money-making ventures.[31] Both groups joined the North East Improvement Club and worked together to improve the river bottom area. Their monthly meetings were held in St. Therese's School.[32] Through the years only three black families lived in the area, four or five Spanish families, two Jewish families, and three or four Indian families. The black, Spanish and Indian children attended St. Therese; the Jewish children attended

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[30]Interview with Sister Seraphine Kubesh, January 12, 1977.

[31]Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Bellus.

[32]Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Gene Harrington, January 7, 1977.

the public school.[33]

The administrators of St. Therese and Sherman School, the neighboring public school, usually cooperated with each other. For example, the Sisters tutored public school children after school upon request of the principal.

Two major events that affected the entire neighborhood, and thus the school, were the floods of 1943 and 1952. In April, 1943, the Missouri River reached its highest point in history, 30.5 feet. The area was covered with water up to 16th Street. Many of the parishioners' homes were damaged. The school was closed for seven days. After the danger, people returned to their homes and started to repair the damages. Again, in April of 1952, the raging waters of the Missouri threatened to overflow and people of St. Therese parish were evacuated from their homes. The people of Omaha worked furiously to reinforce the dikes and a second disaster was avoided.[34]

In summary, the 1940's and 50's were years of growth for St. Therese Parish School through the efforts of the Sisters, the pastor, and the parishioners. The 1960's would hold new challenges for the small parish.

Not only were the 1940's and 1950's years of growth for St. Therese Parish, but also for Assumption and St. Adalbert's parishes. The Notre Dame Sisters continued to

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[33]Interview with Mrs. Mary Ann Bellus Annin, January 10, 1977.

[34]School Chronicles, 1943-44 and 1952-53, unpaginated.

work to improve the educational quality of the schools.

In 1944, the Golden Anniversary of Assumption Parish, the school enrollment was 167. There were four full-time teaching Sisters working in the school. Within the next twenty years the enrollment would rise to 331 pupils. Seven Sister-teachers and one lay teacher carried the instructional load. The situation was similar at St. Adalbert's School. In 1944, there were 190 students, and some pupils were even turned away because of lack of space. There were five Sister-teachers in the school. In 1959, St. Adalbert's enrollment reached 358 pupils and the school had a teaching staff of seven Sister-teachers and two lay instructors. An examination of school permanent record cards from 1919 to 1959 of these two parishes reveals that Czech families tended to remain and make their permanent homes within the parish neighborhoods. Many of their children after they married tended to make their homes in the established Czech neighborhoods, and sent their children to the parish schools.[35]

After World War II, the nationality barriers of the immigrant groups had crumbled. Various ethnic groups which heretofore were isolated from one another were bound together as Americans in the war effort. The unity of the common

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[35]See Howard Chudacoff, Mobile American: Residential and Social Mobility in Omaha 1880 - 1920. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 76, who also notes this tendency toward neighborhood stability among Omaha Czechs.

cause to defeat the enemy and preserve the nation, broke down old barriers of mutual distrust and suspicion. Everyone was concerned with being American, not necessarily with being Czech, or Irish or Polish and ethnic differences were relegated to the background. Service men returning to Assumption and St. Adalbert's parishes in 1945 found the vestiges of the immigrant culture, such as language and religious customs, laid aside.[36] During the war the immigrant had proved his loyalty to his adopted land by assuming its language, customs and values. The immigrant was no longer an undesirable foreign element, but a fellow American. This change is reflected in the enrollment rosters of St. Adalbert's and Assumption schools which record Irish, Polish, Italian, and German names along with the Czech names. Assumption School began to receive an increasing number of Mexican-American children.[37]

In the 1950's an interesting phenomenon was present within the Churches. The priests no longer had to protect the immigrant parishioner, and the Church no longer had to worry about preserving its unity. In the Americanizing process the immigrants had gotten better jobs, had established homes and families and adopted American values, but they remained within the Church. The Church was secure. It experienced growth in membership; its schools were

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[36]Interview with George Buglewicz, March 2, 1977.

[37]School permanent record cards from 1927-1959.

operating efficiently, and there was an adequate supply of clergy and sisters to serve the parish. This was almost a complete reversal of the situation at the turn of the century. Life was good and peaceful. This sense of security allowed the schools to broaden their vision. The School Chronicles record more participation in citywide activities and students taking advantage of various educational opportunities offered in Omaha and Lincoln. The American Church's sense of security is also reflected in the heightened interest of the school in the activities of foreign missionaries. Missionaries were invited to the schools each year to educate the children to the needs of people in underdeveloped nations. The Sisters encouraged boys and girls to become missionary priests or sisters to serve the peoples of Africa and China. They attempted to interest young people, especially elementary grade school children, in the sisterhood or the priesthood. They distributed literature, showed films, and various congregations of Sisters and priests gave lectures on their apostolates within the Church.

The atmosphere of the parochial schools became more dynamic and open as renewal in religious communities began and the life style of the Sisters changed. No longer was Sister only in her classroom or convent; but she was out among the people of the parish, working with the parents to create a better school. The Sisters were encouraged to take advantage of educational opportunities. The Notre Dame Sisters in the Omaha parishes from 1955-1956 attended

the first Interdiocesan Teachers Convention in Omaha.[38] The Sisters were encouraged to do more professional reading and allowed to attend workshops concerning new educational methods, to attend Red Cross first-aid courses, and Civil Defense training sessions. In summer, many of them returned to college to further their own education. The broadening of the perspective and experiences of the teachers consequently expanded the horizons of their students and created a different learning environment.

The involvement in higher academic achievement and in extra-curricular activities reflected the Sisters' desire to render Catholic education equal in quality to public school education. In doing this, the Sisters did not sacrifice the teaching of religious beliefs or values, but sought to strengthen them and prepare the child for the challenges of a society in a global age.

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[38]The Lincoln, Grand Island, and Omaha dioceses joined forces to hold one convention for all their teachers. In 1956, the Sisters of the Omaha diocese stopped attending the State Teachers Convention because the rates for them had been raised from $3 per teacher to $15 per teacher.

IV. Accomplishment - Appraisal - Challenge

The immigrant coming to the shores of America at the turn of the century faced difficulties and challenges as did many immigrants before them. In their assimilation into the greater society, they were aided by the Catholic Church and its educational institution, the parochial school. The first three chapters of this thesis have given the historical developments of three immigrant Catholic parishes in Omaha. They have also told the story of the Notre Dame Sisters who taught in those parish schools, and the role these Sisters played in assisting the immigrant in his assimilation into American society. The questions now arise: is the assimilation[1] of the Catholic immigrant a reality or a theory? How successful was the Church's parochial school in helping the immigrant assimilate, and in what way did the Catholic immigrant assimilate into the greater American society? Before an evaluation of the assimilation process in St. Adalbert's, Assumption, and St. Therese's parishes can be duscussed, an examination of the assimilation process is necessary.

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[1]The term assimilation as used in this study refers to a minority group successfully adopting the culture of the dominant society to such a degree that the minority is no longer visible in the dominant society.

The American public initially felt that the "new immigration" of the late 1880's to the early 1900's would be easily assimilated into the highly urbanized, industrialized democratic society of America.[2] Through the decades various social scientists have developed numerous theories on why immigrant assimilation did not happen easily, or on how assimilation did happen, or on what kinds of assimilation occurred. Milton Gordon in his book, Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins, set forth three theories or concepts of assimilation that have at various times given explanation to why over forty-one million immigrants have become part of the mainstream of American life. His explanations of these assimilation theories may give some insights into what kind of assimilation took place in the Omaha parishes.[3]

The first of the assimilation concepts Gordon

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[2]The Southern and Eastern European, according to Milton Gordon, was more sociologically visible because of the closing of the frontier. There was no where to go but the city and the occupational demands of the economy and their own poverty made it inevitable that they would remain in the urban area, thus causing cultural problems. See Milton Gordon, Assimilation in America Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[3]The author is aware that Gordon is not the only researcher in this field, but for the purposes of this study, his theories seem most applicable.

discussed in Anglo-conformity.[4] The proponents of this pattern are committed to maintaining only Anglo-Saxon institutions, language, customs and values in America. The contend that the European immigrant, especially those from southern and eastern Europe, must totally renounce his old world culture and assume the Anglo-Saxon culture.[5] If the immigrant refused to do this, he was not to participate in any of the benefits of America. This sentiment found powerful concrete expression in the Americanization movement of 1918. This movement attempted to strip the immigrant of his culture and to cast him into a solid American mold, and this was to be done with all due haste.[6] The movement, as were other anti-Catholic movements since colonial times, was motivated by an irrational fear that the Catholic immigrants were agents of the Pope and came to overthrow the United States government in the name of Rome, or that these immigrants were restless and would stir up class conflict and cause communist revolution within the United States. The Americanizers found fortification against the foreign menace in the quota laws of the 1920's

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[4]Term coined by Steward and Mildred Cole. Milton Gordon, Assimilation in American Life, p. 85.

[5]Milton Gordon, Assimilation in American Life, p. 18.

[6]John Higham, Strangers in the Land, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 247.

which institutionalized Anglo-conformity.[7] Oscar Handlin concisely gives a more realistic motive for the movement:

> Nativism, for example, was not simply a battle of 'Americans' against immigrants. It was, rather, the effort of particular ethnic groups, whose position was challenged by events over which they had little control, to maintain their earlier dominance undercover of a fixed conception of Americanism.[8]

Anglo-conformity was the most powerful and effective of the assimilation ideologies.[9]

The second theory that Gordon discussed is that of the image of America as being a great melting pot into which all ethnic heritages are fused to produce a new American culture and heritage, distinctly unique and yet a blend of all. It was possible for all nationalities to be absorbed into the American fiber because they all had some cultural value. Frederick Jackson Turner's great frontier thesis was the basis for this belief. Turner saw the frontier as the cultural melting pot from which emerged the truly American character and heritage.[10] This theory of the "melting pot" assimilation is held to be true by most Americans.

Milton Gordon's third theory of assimilation is

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[7]Milton Gordon, "Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality," Daedalus 90 (Spring 1961), p. 270.

[8]Oscar Handlin, "Historical Perspectives on the American Ethnic Group," Daedalus 90; (Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1880). Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1959, p. 231.

[9]Milton Gordon, "Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality," Daedalus 90 (Spring 1961), p. 270.

[10]Ibid., p. 270, 271.

cultural pluralism[11] which is an attempt on the part of the immigrant to build, what Gordon calls "oases of familiarity in a strange land." The immigrant desired to transport part of the old world, in miniature, into the new world so that he could retain his language, institutions, customs and values. In doing this he would band together with his fellow immigrants for mutual protection and aid against the greater society.[12] In speaking of the Irish immigrants, Oscar Handlin said:

> Unable to participate in the normal associational affairs of the community, the Irish felt obliged to erect a society, to act together in their own way. In every contact therefore the group, acting apart from other sections of the community became intensely aware of its peculiar exclusive identity.[13]

The cultural pluralism approach presented problems for the immigrant parents with American born (or even European born) children who at times ridiculed the old country ways rather than sharing their parents' honor and love for them.

Assimilation, Gordon maintains, is of two types: behavioral assimilation or acculturation, and structural assimilation. Behavioral assimilation refers to the process of the immigrant ethnic group adopting the cultural behavior of the host society. For example, Czech immigrants

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[11] Ibid., p. 277. Term coined by Horace Kallen who was a Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University.

[12] Ibid., p. 274.

[13] Ibid., p. 274; taken from Oscar Handlin, The Boston Immigrant.

of South Omaha adopted the rugged individualism of the Americans in the packing houses in order to survive economically. Also, behavioral assimilation allows the immigrant to develop secondary relationships within the greater community such as business relationships. Structural assimilation refers to that process whereby the immigrant enters the social groups of the community such as clubs, fraternal organizations or civic groups and achieves primary relationship (family and close friends) within these groups. Religion often prevented the immigrant from achieving structural assimilation. The Protestant majority was usually not willing to mix with the Catholic minority and the Catholic minority was never encouraged to associate with Protestants. "The situation was a functionally complimentary standoff."[14] The Catholic immigrant needed the comfort of his Church, while the native American was not willing to fraternize with the alien. The second generation, children of immigrants, educated in the American way, often found the doors of the greater society closed to them because of their immigrant heritage. In frustration they returned to the embrace of their own people and developed their own comparable institutions, clubs, and recreation centers.[15]

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[14]Ibid., p. 281.

[15]For example, the Knights of Columbus paralleled the Freemasons, the Serra Club paralleled the Rotary Club, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society had functions similar to state welfare and private charitable agencies.

After his discussion of the concepts, Milton Gordon concluded that the immigrants had assimilated in behavior. They went through the actions of becoming Americans and participating in the economic and political life of America. Yet they were often not accepted by native Americans as equals and thus were forced back into the embrace of their own ethnic group.[16] As Gordon said,

> . . . within the ethnic group there develops a network of organizations and informal social relationships which permits and encourages the members of the ethnic group to remain within the confines of the group for all of their primary relationships and some of their secondary relationships throughout all the stages of the life cycle. From the cradle in the sectarian hospital to the child's play group, the social clique in high school, the fraternity and religious center in college, the dating group within which he searches for a spouse, the marriage partner, the neighborhood of his residence, the church affiliation and the church clubs, the men's and the women's social and service organizations, the adult clique of 'marrieds', the vacation resort, and then, as the age cycle nears completion, the rest home for the elderly and finally, the sectarian cemetery-in all these activities and relationships which are close to the core of personality and selfhood--the member of the ethnic group may if he wishes follow a path which never takes him across the boundaries of his ethnic structural network.[17]

Upon the examination of Milton Gordon's theories of assimilation, the question arises which ideology of assimilation did the United States Catholic Church embrace both on the national and local level? It must be noted

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[16]Gordon, Assimilation in American Life, p. 37.

[17]Ibid., p. 280.

that the American hierarchy never questioned whether the new immigrant should or should not assimilate into the mainstream of American life, but rather was concerned with how the immigrant should assimilate without losing his Catholic faith or identity. An overview of the historical events of the United States Catholic Church from the 1880's to 1950 will show that a pattern of assimilation emerged and was reinforced.

From 1822-1922, the United States Catholic Church was considered a mission church[18] even though the Church had doubled in size from 35,000 in 1790 to twelve million in 1900.[19] This tremendous growth was the result of both the "old" (Irish-German) and "new immigration" (eastern and southern Europe) coming into the United States. Even though the Church's membership increased in that period, its national influence did not grow in proportion. The reason for this lack of influence was that all the Church's energies of personnel, money, and facilities were being directed to meet wave after wave of new immigrants coming into the

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[18]John T. Ellis, American Catholicism, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 130-131. Pope Pius X had officially declared the United States Church on an equal basis with the Catholic Church in the European countries in 1908, but European clergy and sisters were still being recruited for American parishes as late as the 1920's.

[19]Andrew Greeley, The Catholic Experience, (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967), p. 150; John T. Ellis, American Catholicism, p. 42.

United States dioceses. Also, historically, a strong anti-Catholic bias had prevented Catholics from assuming leadership positions in the society regardless of their qualifications.[20] In retrospect, it can be observed that this anti-Catholic bias had a positive effect for the Church; it helped maintain the immigrants' strong attachment to the Church during the crucial 1920's and 1930's.

In 1884, the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore presented a solution to the Church's tremendous immigrant assimilation problem. The Council decreed that each United States parish was morally obligated to establish a parochial school for their parishioners' children. The local parish was to organize, raise the capital and obtain the personnel for the venture.[21] Until about 1940, the parochial school successfully achieved its purpose of assimilating the immigrant child, while at the same time being a link with the immigrant's ethnic heritage. For example, the Council suggested that the immigrant child be taught the language and the history of both his mother country and his adopted country. He was taught to honor both traditions, but to embrace the American tradition.[22] The parochial school was a "hot house" environment in which the immigrant was gradually guided away from the culture of the homeland and

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[20]Ellis, American Catholicism, p. 140.

[21]Peter and Alice Rossi, "Some Effects of Parochial School Education in America," Daedalus 90 (Spring 1961): 302, 304, 305.

[22]Greely, The Catholic Experience, p. 191.

introduced to American customs, values, and languages. The agents of this assimilation process were the Sisters who taught in the parochial schools.

How did each local parish take the broad decree of the Council and apply it to their specific local situation, to the needs of their particular ethnic membership? An examination of the work of the Notre Dame Sisters in Assumption and St. Adalbert's parish shcools between about 1920 and 1940, and in St. Therese's School after 1941 may suggest an answer.

Assumption and St. Adalbert's parishes were established in 1894 and 1916 respectively, close to the peak of European immigration. They had two goals, first to preserve the Catholic faith of the Czech immigrant and to educate and pass that faith on to his children, and secondly to propagate the Czech culture. The first goal, the Sisters were able to achieve. The second goal was hindered by the Americanization process. For the Czech, keeping the Czech language alive was the primary way of keeping the Czech culture alive.[23] But the 1919 anti-foreign language legislation curtailed the teaching of the Old World tongue. The Czechs were right in assuming that when the Czech language was no longer taught to the

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[23]Joseph Svoboda, "Czechs: The Love of Liberty," in Broken Hoops and Plains People, p. 167.

succeeding generation, assimilation was inevitable. Whether the child of immigrant parents was born in Europe or in the United States, school registration was the start of the assimilation process.[24]

From 1929 to 1940, St. Adalbert's and Assumption schools experienced fluctuating enrollments[25] and great financial strain upon parish resources. The Great Depression halted all plans for building expansion. In this time of great economic struggle, and in some cases poverty and ruin, the parishioners developed a stronger community spirit based not only on common nationality, but on a common goal -- personal as well as institutional survival. Parents continued to maintain the parish schools, because of their moral obligation to do so and because of a strong belief that education was their children's way to the better life. The Notre Dame Sisters contributed to ease the struggle by not taking their complete salaries.[26]

Between 1942 and 1945, the people of these parishes joined other Americans in a full commitment to the war. The schools continued to struggle financially, but were thoroughly American in thought and action. With total war

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[24]Thomas Capek, The Czechs in America, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1920), p. 2.

[25]See Appendix.

[26]Convent Chronicles, p. 90b. The Sisters were still receiving thirty dollars a month per teaching Sister. In 1931, they excused the parishes from $1,383.06 in salaries.

the entire world changed; no one was left untouched by its effects. It was now an international world with the United States emerging as a super power with super responsibilities and in conflict with a super enemy. The American allegiance was paramount. For second and third generation Czechs, who had no memories of Czechoslovakia or sentimental attachment to it, to proclaim their American loyalty was the natural thing to do. Nor did the acceleration of Americanization end with the defeat of the Axis powers, for the Cold War and the threat of nuclear conflict continued the thrust toward national unity and ethnic barriers and differences continued to diminish. This does not mean to say that these distinctions were completely eliminated, but they were no longer the primary concern of the Catholic hierarchy. Yet for the Notre Dame Sisters, this was a difficult time, for the future of their order in Europe was uncertain. Their Sisters of German nationality were expelled from Czechoslovakia and relocated in Bavaria,[27] and the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 threw great doubt upon the status of the Sisters in that nation.

In the late 1940's Catholics did share in the benefits of the burgeoning American economy.[28] Because of the tremendous increase in school enrollments brought on by the post-war baby boom, both St. Adalbert's and Assumption

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[27]Ibid.

[28]Milton Gordon, Assimilation in American Life, p. 208.

parishes undertook new building projects.

The 1950's were a settling period for the parochial schools. The immigrant was basically assimilated; hence, the purpose for which the parochial school came into existence was no longer a reality. The objectives of the schools now had to be re-examined. New motivation had to be developed for the continuance of the parochial school. The emphasis shifted from protecting the immigrant and preserving the faith to developing quality education in a religious-oriented atmosphere.[29] The diocese established curriculum development and planning committees made up of the teachers of various Omaha diocesan schools. More emphasis and study was done on developing better religious education programs within the schools.

St. Therese's parish school had embraced cultural pluralism from the beginning. The Sisters' role from 1941 to 1960 was to take part in the social assimilation of the students of St. Therese by involving them with other schools in the city, with educational opportunities of their city and state. As noted previously, St. Therese Parish School was isolated in a geographic pocket colloquially called the "river bottom area". It was tucked in

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[29]Rossi, "Some Effects of Parochial School Education in America," p. 304. According to Rossi's research, the denominational school is not well suited to last over a long period of time given the process of assimilation, for ethnic origins dissipate and the system has to find new motivation for existence.

between the growing industrial area of Omaha, on the south, the river and the airport development on the east, and the "more-well-to-do", upper middle class area on the "hill", Florence Boulevard. Through the school the Sisters helped the children grow in their social relationships, increase their self-confidence when interacting with other schools, and to value their own personal worth.

Catholic immigrant assimilation was achieved through official Church policies that produced the effects of cultural pluralism. The agents who effected this process were not the bishops or the parish priests nor the adult parishioners themselves, but the Sister-teacher, who operated the local parochial schools. In the case of St. Adalbert's, Assumption, and St. Therese schools, these agents of assimilation were the Notre Dame Sisters. Their role in this historical process of assimilation has often been overlooked as well as that of many other religious Congregations of Sisters in similar circumstances. They, because of the restrictions of their religious lifestyle, usually remained in the background, and people often did not realize the leadership these women exercised during a very difficult and crucial period in the history of the American Catholic Church.

Even though some of the Notre Dame Sisters were immigrants, they did not come to the United States for the same reasons that other Europeans did. They came with a mission -- and that mission was to serve the Czech

immigrants in the Midwest. Their lifestyle of prayer, poverty, humility, hospitality, risk, celibacy, and obedience made it possible for them to meet the educational needs of the immigrant. Their own immigrant experience helped them to understand the frustrations of their fellow Czechs, but also convinced them that assimilation into the American society was a necessity. Yet religious belief and identity was never to be sacrificed for assimilation. The Sisters possessed a sense of personal security that they transmitted to their students. In a classroom atmosphere of warmth and acceptance the students found it easier to deal with the tensions created by living in two cultures. Even though the Sisters administered a rigid and harsh discipline at times, these actions did not prevent a strong bond of affection from developing between the Sisters and their students.[30] The Sisters possessed an ability to respond to the needs of people. They could offer comfort and understanding to the Czech parents who realized that their children would not fully embrace the Czech heritage, but rather the American heritage. This ability to be sensitive to the people of the parishes as they struggled to assimilate was complimented by the Sisters' insight into knowing that assimilation was inevitable.

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[30]The discipline the Sisters administered was of the same quality that children would have received from their parents in those days.

The ability to assess a situation and make appropriate judgments was demonstrated by the Sisters when they perceived that the short range goals of cultural preservation had been met and a new rationale for parochial schools was needed. They realized the need for quality religious education and the need to update their own teaching techniques. They went about the necessary tasks of evaluating the present structure, updating them and developing long range planning in order to provide a valuable Catholic school system.

Finally the Sisters' greatest contribution to the immigrant child was their belief that each child deserved the best they had to offer educationally in order for that child to attain personal fulfillment and success in later life.[31]

The United States Catholic Church, through her school system met the challenge of immigrant assimilation, which then allowed her to meet the pressing concerns of the 1960's and 1970's.

The 1960's were a unique period in the history of the United States Catholic Church. In the early 1960's

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[31]In interviews with present and former students, the author always received the warmest praise for the work of the Sisters in the three Omaha schools studied. Traditionally, the laity of the Catholic Church viewed the clergy and religions with such awesome respect that to criticize their actions was unacceptable. Thus some of those interviewed were reluctant to be completely candid at times on some issues. Oral history, like any other method, has its limitations.

the parochial schools reached their peak enrollments, but by the late 1960's the enrollments were declining. As enrollments declined, educational costs per pupil rose. While Catholic school enrollment was declining, so was the membership in Religious Congregations, which meant that the main source of teachers was no longer available. Lay teachers had to be hired in the schools, and their salaries caused the cost of education to rise even higher. The crisis in Catholic education rather than subsiding became more acute in the 1970's.

The 1970's have been a re-evaluation period for the entire Church, for she had taken a very critical look at all her institutions. The 1980's may see some of the results of the Catholic Church's critical evaluation and renewal of herself.

One virtue the Catholic Church has always possessed is hope. And, the Notre Dame Sisters express their hope in the future and their continued mission to God's people with these words:

> As we the Sisters of Notre Dame continue to respond to the call of Christ, we commit ourselves to building a world Christian community of love and support for each person by meeting unmet needs. In the spirit of Christ and our founders we will alleviate the pains of alienation and eradicate its causes by enabling persons to be reconciled to God, themselves, and others through a lifestyle of prayer, simplicity, hospitality, service and risk.[32]

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[32]Vision Goal Statement of the Notre Dame Sisters, written by the Sisters in 1974, NDCA.

APPENDIX A--ENROLLMENT STATISTICS OF ST. ADALBERT'S 1920-1961

Year	Pupils	Residents	Music	Total
1920-21	66	None	13	79
1921-22	73		14	87
1922-23	75		16	91
1923-24	90		12	102
1924-25	85		6	91
1925-26	80		5	85
1926-27	75		2	77
1927-28	89		2	91
1928-29	72		3	75
1929-30	72		1	73
1930-31	88		0	88
1931-32	77		0	77
1932-33	73		0	73
1933-34	69		0	69
1934-35	67		0	67
1935-36	65		7	72
1936-37	75		8	83
1937-38	63		4	67
1938-39	98		2	100
1939-40	104		2	106
1940-41	109		0	109
1941-42	155		1	156
1942-43	164		4	168
1943-44	175		16	181
1944-45	201		17	218
1945-46	186		0	186
1946-47	203		0	203
1947-48	210		0	210
1948-49	201		0	201
1949-50	209		7	216
1950-51	210		5	215
1951-52	226		5	231
1952-53	232		0	232
1953-54	257		1	258
1954-55	287		0	287
1955-56	283		0	283
1956-57	313		0	313
1957-58	395		0	395
1958-59	360		0	360
1959-60	363		0	363
1960-61	398		0	398

APPENDIX B--ENROLLMENT STATISTICS OF ASSUMPTION 1921-1961

Year	Pupils	Residents	Music	Total
1921-22	267	None	11	278
1922-23	264		22	286
1923-24	269		21	290
1924-25	260		20	280
1925-26	256		18	274
1926-27	255		12	267
1927-28	248		15	263
1928-29	243		11	254
1929-30	248		17	265
1930-31	209		8	217
1931-32	216		7	223
1932-33	211		5	216
1933-34	209		4	213
1934-35	180		6	186
1935-36	203		5	208
1936-37	206		6	212
1937-38	176		0	176
1938-39	172		0	172
1939-40	174		0	174
1940-41	164		5	169
1941-42	220		7	227
1942-43	179		0	179
1943-44	172		7	179
1944-45	170		7	177
1945-46	178		11	189
1946-47	192		13	205
1947-48	211		10	221
1948-49	217		0	217
1949-50	207		0	207
1950-51	200		0	200
1951-52	220		0	220
1952-53	263		27	290
1953-54	229		0	229
1954-55	236		45	281
1955-56	267		0	267
1956-57	280		0	280
1957-58	348		0	348
1958-59	319		0	319
1959-60	331		0	331
1960-61	384		0	384

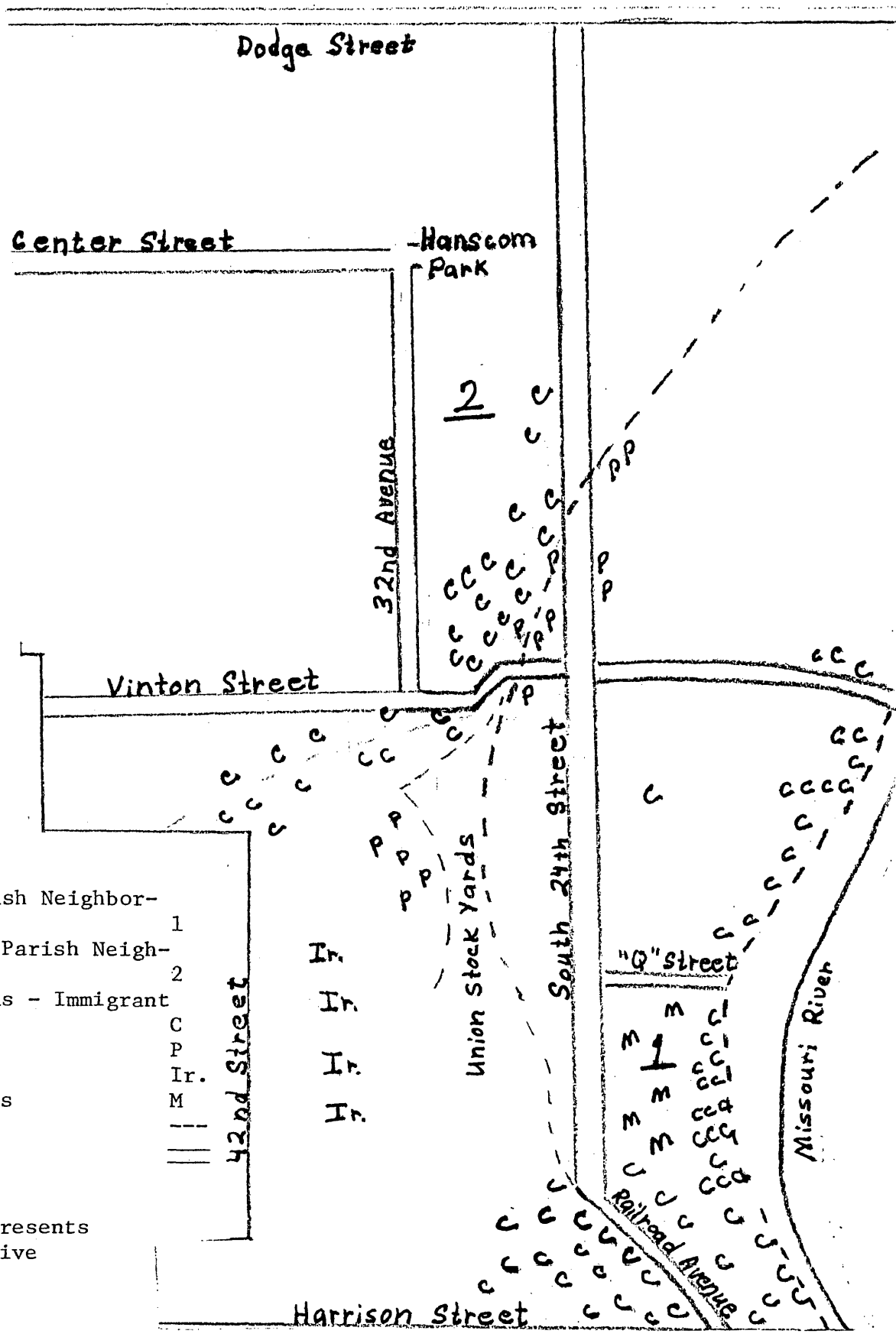
APPENDIX C--ENROLLMENT STATISTICS OF ST. THERESE'S 1941-1961

Year	Pupils	Residents	Music	Total
1941-42	72	None	None	72
1942-43	68			68
1943-44	68			68
1944-45	74			74
1945-46	87			87
1946-47	100			100
1947-48	112			112
1948-49	99/100*			99/100
1949-50	112/120*			112/120
1950-51	140			140
1951-52	140			140
1952-53	157			157
1953-54	171			171
1954-55	162			162
1955-56	154			154
1956-57	177			177
1957-58	194			194
1958-59	175			175
1959-60	174			174
1960-61	212			212

*Enrollment changed from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year.

MAP I*

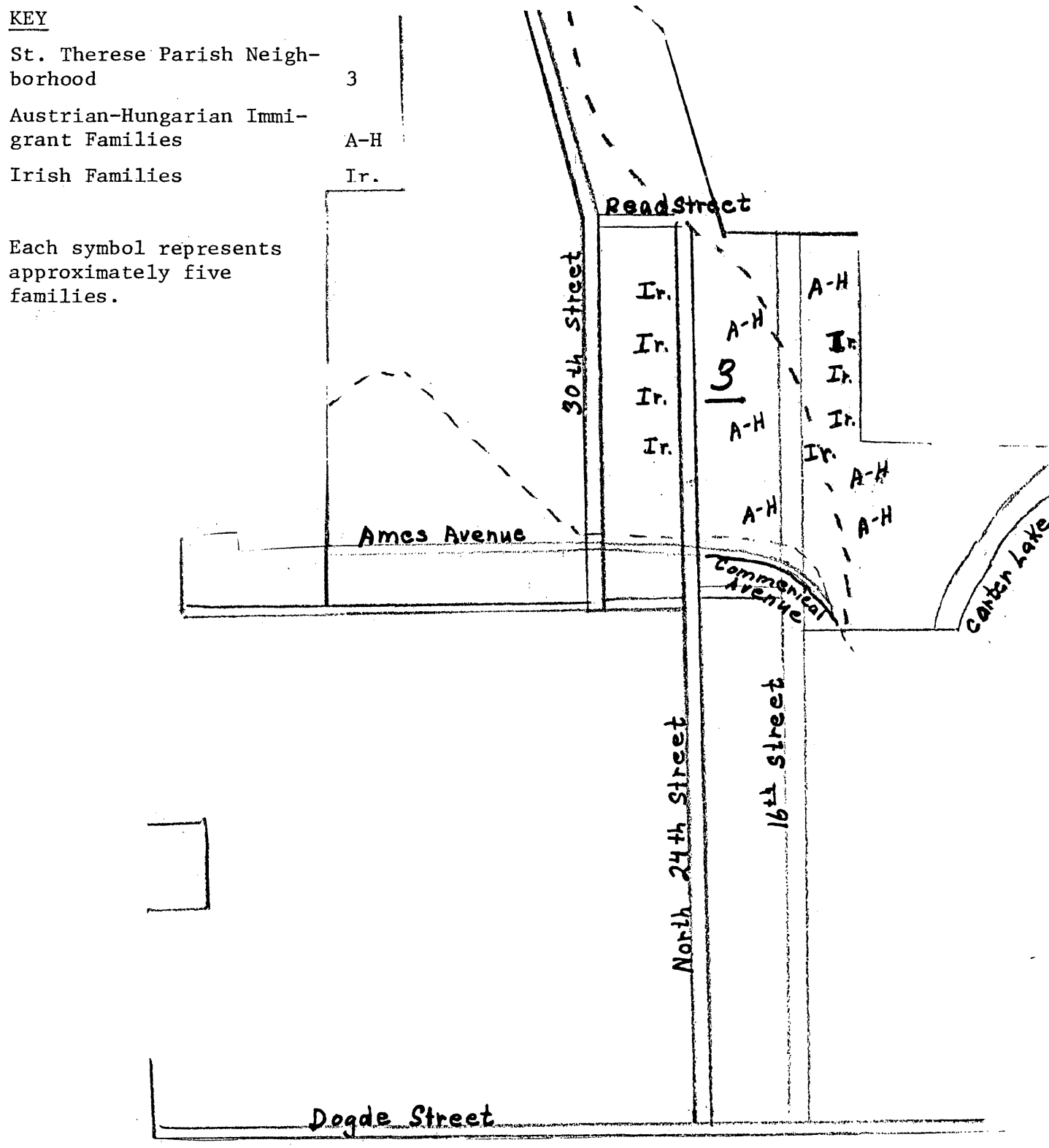
Distribution of Immigrant Families South of Dodge Street



*T. Earl Sullenger, The Immigrant in Omaha [Omaha, Nebraska: Municipal University of Omaha, Bureau of Social Research Monograph, (1932)], p. 10.

MAP II*

Distribution of Immigrant Families North of Dodge Street



*T. Earl Sullenger, The Immigrant in Omaha [Omaha, Nebraska: Municipal University of Omaha, Bureau of Social Research Monograph, (1932)], p. 11.

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