

# Decision to Close One Catholic Church Becomes an Opportunity for Iowa's Newest

Saint Mary of the Visitation Catholic Church in New Hampton had been home to a Catholic parish since the early 1890s. However, in the early 2000s, it became one of two centers in the Holy Family Parish that also includes New Hampton's Saint Joseph Catholic Church.

The Holy Family Pastoral Council voted in early 2013 to close its Saint Mary Center. Officials said, like many towns its size, New Hampton can no longer afford to run two separate centers. Since the decision, Holy Family officials have been looking at how best to use Saint Mary and its related properties.

After hearing this news, Karen Schwickerath, a member of Holy Family, contacted her brother Jim Roths to share about the closing of their home parish, Saint Mary, and of the opportunity for his current parish, Saint Luke the Evangelist Catholic Church in Ankeny.

Founded in December 2010 by Des Moines Bishop Richard Pates, Saint Luke is currently conducting its first capital campaign, "Together We Build", and will start construction in 2014 on Phase One which will include a Worship Center and Elementary School. Looking for opportunities to make dollars stretch further and to be a good steward of our environment, Roths shared the news on Saint Mary with Saint Luke Pastor Father Larry Hoffmann.

Father Hoffmann reached out Holy Family Pastor Father Mark Osterhaus and planned a visit to New Hampton with a small delegation to see what was available. What instantly appeared most viable were the pews. After reaching a financial agreement, the real work began to get the pews to their new parish community.

In the early hours of December 13th, nearly three weeks after the last Mass was celebrated at Saint Mary by Dubuque Archbishop Michael Jackels, Father Hoffman, eight members of Saint Luke's Father Richard E. Gubbels Council 15603 of the Knights of Columbus, and two additional Saint Luke parishioners traveled to New Hampton to begin the pew removal. Ten hours later, the majority of the pews had been loaded into a donated semi-tractor trailer. On December 14th, five other Council 15603 Knights traveled to New Hampton to finish the last removal and clean up. While the removal only took two days, the total volunteer time encompassed 142 hours. This does not include the many hours of preparation that began with a simple conversation between a sister and her brother.

The pews are now in storage in Central Iowa. They will be shipped in workable quantities throughout 2014 to Iowa Prison Industries who will splice and refinish them to match the interior design of the new Saint Luke Worship Center, which is expected to open either Advent 2014 or Easter 2015.

And while Saint Mary may be gone, part of its proud legacy lives on in the new Saint Luke.

Phase 2:

On Saturday, January 25, 2014 members of Council 15603 moved the pews St. Luke's purchases out of the semi-trailer they have been stored in since we purchased them into a storage building Tom and Pat Brady have on their farm for safe keeping until Iowa Prison Industries can refinish and splice them for us to use in our new worship space when it is completed.