

Vintage Ambry Installed in St. Mary's Church

Relics moved into former ambry

A vintage ambry now adorns St. Mary's Church of Remsen. It is mounted on the wall just north of the side altar of our Blessed Mother on the northern side of the sanctuary.

An ambry is an ornate cabinet used to house sacred oils in Catholic churches.



*Vintage ambry in St. Mary's Church,
Remsen, Iowa*

The ambry is a gift of the good folks of St. Benedict's Parish of St. Benedict, Iowa. After the recent closures of many churches throughout the Diocese of Sioux City, St. Benedict's Church was closed and its parish assumed into St. Joseph's in Wesley. The people of St. Benedict have been working hard to find new homes for the sacred items from St. Benedict.

Said Deacon Rick Roder of St. Mary's, "Father Brian Hughes is an expert of church architecture and art. He contacted Fr. McCarthy and myself suggesting that we consider requesting this ambry since he knew that we were currently using a contemporary one that does not match the wealth of vintage furnishings in our church. We took a look at the situation and came to agree with him. Father and I decided that we also needed a home for some relics that have been 'floating' around the church. So we decided to install the ambry and use the former ambry to hold our sacred relics."

A sacred relic is a part of a saint's body (first class) or something he or she has touched (second class) or something that has been touched to a first or second class relic (third class). The former ambry, which has glass sides, stands in the south sacristy next to the altar of St. Joseph, near the presider's chair. The parish has two relics, which have been placed in the former ambry. One, held in the larger of the two reliquaries, is a first class relic of the most famed of Catholic saints, Francis of Assisi. The smaller of the

two reliquaries contains a first class relic of St. Pius X, who is well known for moving the age for First Holy Communion down to a much earlier age, usually second grade.

The wood of the vintage ambry nicely matches the vintage wood of St. Mary's. The door is adorned with the familiar "IHS," an abbreviation for the name Jesus.

The oils contained within the ambry are the Sacred Chrism, the Oil of the Infirm, and the Oil of Catechumens. Each oil is newly consecrated by Bishop Nickless at the annual Chrism Mass, which this year will be held on March 22 at the Cathedral of the Epiphany in Sioux City. The oils each have vital roles to play in the Sacraments.

The ambry's former home had a deep and rich history. St. Benedict's Parish, located just southeast of Algona in the far northeast of the Sioux City Diocese, was first pastored by a Benedictine monk, Fr. Eberhard Gahr, in 1877. The church the ambry came out of was constructed in 1894; thus the ambry was probably crafted in the 1890s. Fr. Gahr, born in Bavaria, Germany, served in several states before starting St. Benedict's Parish. He later served closer to Remsen from 1889 to 1892 in St. Anthony's Parish of Hospers. Certainly some Remsenites got to know Fr. Gahr; those who did almost certainly spoke German with him and reminisced about the "Old Country."

St. Mary's parishioner Gary Holzman carried out the installation on January 30. The oils and relics were moved into their new homes on January 31. Parishioners who wish to see the simple inside of the ambry are asked to contact Deacon Roder.