Lebeau Parish Celebrates 75th Year of Its Church

Lebeau — The 75th anniversary of Immaculate Conception Parish here will be observed Sunday, Sept. 3, with a solemn Mass of Thanksgiving at 4:00 p.m.

Bishop Maurice Schexnayder of Lafayette will be in attendance as well as Father Matthew O'Rourke, S.S.J., superior general of the Josephite order. Father George Hanks, S.S.J., will deliver the homily, it was announced by Father Joseph LeFrois, S.S.J., pastor.

The parish was established in 1897 by Archbishop Francis Janssens of New Orleans with Father Pierre Oscar Lebeau as first pastor. The area was known then as Petite Prairie. Father Lebeau was a native of Louisiana, born in Chenal, Point Coupee Parish, in 1870. He had been ordained for the Josephite order in 1895 and two years later was sent to this community to take charge of the first Josephite mission in the south. He said his first Mass here on the first Sunday of September, 1897.

Served From Washington
Since 1874, the priests from the parish at Washington had served the area. An old store building had been purchased and the priests came once a month to say a weekday Mass and administer other sacraments as needed. The parish records show that Bishop Janssens came to Petite Prairie in 1891 to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to a class of 120.

Father Lebeau established a school in 1900 and the first teachers were Sisters of the Holy Family. They worked until 1912 when their convent burned and as there was no money to rebuild, the sisters returned to New Orleans.

Father John O'Connell, S.S.J., succeeded Father Lebeau in 1909 and it was during his pastorate the name of the town was changed to Lebeau in memory of the first pastor who is buried near the church.

During the pastorate of Father Pacific Roy, S.S.J. (1913-1927), lay teachers conducted the school and were paid with assistance from Mother Katherine Drexel, foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, who financed many rural schools in Louisiana and elsewhere.

Father John Mulkeen, S.S.J., who was appointed in 1927, built a new rectory and engaged the Sisters of the Holy Ghost and Mary Immaculate to conduct the school. They have been in charge ever since. Father Mulkeen also renovated the church and built Sacred Heart chapel at Prairie Rideau.