

The new addition fieldstone wall (right) with its protruding mortar joint is a perfect match to the convent wall (left) constructed in 1910. Granite outcroppings deposited by glaciers throughout Michigan were formed hundreds of millions of years ago. Those collected from farmers' fields today are virtually the same as those collected hundreds of years ago and those collected hundreds of years in the future.

Parishioners gathered stones from their fields for the 1906 church. Carl Straus' Great Uncle George Straus was among those on the construction team. Nearly 100 years later, Carl Straus' two sons, Brian and Erick led the crew to build the 6000 sf addition using 500 ton of stone, connecting the convent to the original church. They studied the existing walls to replicate the pattern.

The distinctive mortar joint is first raked out to approximately 1/4" and then a mortar rope is placed with a convex stone header.

In the undulating to moderately sloping moraines of Central Michigan, there is a small town, a tiny village of neat houses, a gas station, a country hardware, two taverns and an exceptional country parish church. St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church in Beal City, just northwest of Mt. Pleasant, rises up from a moraine as a landmark seen for miles and is a reminder that faith continues to be an important part of this community.

The first church on this site was built in 1882. It burned to the ground in December of 1886. During a thunderstorm in May of 1905, the second church was struck by lightning and also burned to the ground. The present church is a testament to the character, integrity and tenacity of those who settled here in the late 1800s. What they built was intended to be as fireproof as anything could be in 1907.

There are really two significant buildings in the village. The church and the convent next door, finished in 1907 and 1910 respectively, by local stonemasons and carpenters in a modest German Gothic style. The exterior walls are constructed entirely of roughly-squared split granite laid in a random ashlar coursing in colors of gray, gold, buff and black. The stonework is exceptional with some stones as large as 2' to 3'. Decorative pointed arched windows, stepped buttresses, cut stone sills and square finials, and decorative mosaic field stone infill panels represent a commitment to the building by

the original parish. It was clearly a major undertaking for these people in 1906.

In 1999, 93 years later, things needed to change. The days of the 2500 sf convent as a home were numbered. The nave was in accordance with the liturgical norms of a previous century. Most of the original metal roof had been replaced by something far inferior. Furnaces were on their last legs. Stained glass windows were in need of major repairs. Bathrooms were not up to code. Barrier-free access was nonexistent. Appropriate space for weddings, adult baptisms, wakes, funerals and overflow seating was lacking. St. Joseph's was looking for a way to address present parish needs with a clear vision for its future. If it was done right, a gathering space would be a great complement to the existing church.

## A PERFECT MATCH

created millions of years ago  
BY KEN RICHMOND, AIA

St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church, Beal City  
**ARCHITECT** Richmond Architects, Traverse City  
**CONSULTING ARCHITECT** Architecture Technology, Traverse City  
**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER** CTM Technology, Traverse City  
**GENERAL CONTRACTOR** JBS Contracting, Mt. Pleasant  
**MASON CONTRACTOR** Straus Masonry, Weidman  
**MASONRY SUPPLIERS** 4D, an Oldcastle company, Bay City; Lafarge North America, Lansing; Superior Precast Products, Kalamazoo; Grace Perm-A-Barrier, Williams Products, Wire-Bond from Masonpro, Northville

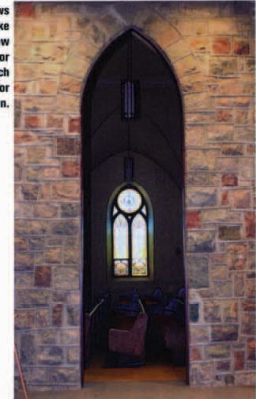
The project had its beginnings with St. Joseph's Pastoral Council, the pastor Fr. John Cotter and the Building Committee formed in 2001. They were joined by architects Ken Richmond, AIA, and Rick Skendzel, AIA, of Traverse City with their engineers Dave Chryst of CTM (structural) and Steve Bizon and John Block of Rhoades Engineering (MEP) of Traverse City, Brother Frank Kacmarcik, O.S.B., liturgical artist, consultant and designer, as the team to solve the problem. Brother Frank was a Benedictine from St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN. JBS Contracting, Straus Masonry, SchaFour Builders, Schafer & Finnerty Builders and Block Electric were the local contractors selected to build it.

The solution, filling in the open space between the church and the convent with a new barrier free entry and gathering

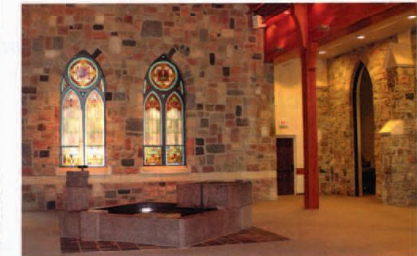


Brian Straus noted that all the people in town kept track as the construction progressed. Some brought chairs and would stay awhile, fascinated by the process. In 1906, masons worked on wood scaffolding using a team of horses with rope and pulley to lift the stone. Today, masons work efficiently and with optimum ergonomics on hydraulic scaffolding with cranes and hydroscopic telehandlers to lift the stone. Stones range from basketball size to 36" in diameter. Each was split and blocked as needed. They were spaced randomly to mix color and size. According to Straus, laying the stone is not as physically demanding as laying block, but requires much more of the brain to keep both horizontal and vertical joints from being too long, to dress each stone to a 7" veneer and fill in behind it with chips and mortar and have each plumb to avoid bellies and humps in the finished wall. It may take three hours to read the grain, block a stone and rock its face to bring the color out. Each mason cuts his own stone. Hand tools work the best.

Stained glass windows were removed to make entranceways into the new gathering space. This exterior wall of the historic church now becomes the new interior wall of the addition.



Photography by Marylyn Dress



A new stonewall containing stained glass windows, removed from the church to create entranceways into the gathering space, creates a backdrop for the 6-ton granite baptismal font. The 7" stone veneer is backed with CMU which serves as the shear wall.

space was not so obvious as it appears now that it is complete. But once the idea was on the table, it was quickly accepted and the plans developed. Connecting these two historic structures sensitively, making a new main entrance while not disturbing the balance of the original buildings to each other and matching the original historic stonework would be the key to making this work. It had to match exactly or be completely different. Even other materials would have to be considered in case this could not be done. The parish was convinced it could be. In fact, the Straus family, who were involved in the 1906 church construction, was still active in the church (and still active in the masonry business too) and yes they would do the work and, by the way, affordably. "We were concerned that the