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CORDWOOD AND CALUMNY

Holy Cross in Missouri  
1872-1874

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by

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Brothers of Holy Cross  
Mountain View, California

1990

A widow's determination to fulfill her husband's last wishes and to publicly honor him in a special way led to a Holy Cross apostolate in St. Joseph, Missouri, which though initiated with high hopes and enthusiasm in 1872, was to meet numerous difficulties and frustrations leading to its discontinuation only two years later.

St. Joseph is located on the Missouri River about fifty miles north of Kansas City. It traces its origins to a trading post established by Joseph Robidoux in 1826. In the mid-1800s it became an important supply depot for the many wagon trains headed west to Oregon and to the California Gold Rush. It flourished and in 1851 was chartered as a city.

One of the early settlers at St. Joseph was John Corby, a native of Limerick, Ireland, who opened a dry goods retail business there in 1844. Subsequently he made a fortune in banking, real estate, and railroads and was noted as a generous philanthropist. After his death in 1870 his widow, Amanda Musick Corby, in line with the request made by her husband shortly before his death, proceeded to give a 160-acre tract of her land about three miles north of the city on Amazonia Road, to the Diocese of St. Joseph in the person of Bishop John Hogan. The bishop would then be free to deed the property, worth about \$10,000, to some religious congregation for appropriate use but restricted by certain conditions. A ten-acre portion of the property was to be set aside as the site of a memorial chapel Mrs. Corby planned to build at a cost of \$40,000 and to be named St. John's Chapel. Conditions also required the establishment of a cemetery on the land. Should stipulations of the deed not be fulfilled, the property was to revert to the grantor—the bishop.

In November 1871 an agreement was made with the Alexian Brothers of St. Louis, Missouri, which on April 17, 1872, was superseded by a contract signed by Bishop Hogan and Brother Paulus, superior of the Brothers. It described the property and conditions of ownership as follows:

The southwest quarter of Section 29, Township 58, Range 35. Except 10 14/100 acres including the right of sufficient and suitable roadway or approach to said reservation. The conditions of this deed are as follows: 1st. That it be used as a Catholic Cemetery. 2nd. Daily Mass as required in deed from Amanda Corby to this Grantor. 3rd. Grantees shall keep, ornament and repair said 10 14/100 acres. 4th. In case of vacation

of the premises by said Grantees, or their failure to keep the covenants hereof, or their cessation as an Ecclesiastical body, the premises shall revert to Grantor.

Whether or not any Alexians ever actually established themselves in St. Joseph is not known, but apparently the construction of a two-story house was started by them as will be seen below. However, the Brothers had second thoughts about the project and withdrew at least by October 1872.

A description of the property, conditions of ownership, and possible uses, the author of which is unknown, but bearing indication that it was from St. Joseph Cathedral can be found at the University of Notre Dame where it was probably sent when the property was offered to the Congregation of Holy Cross. It is dated October 4, 1872, and reads:

Description of property donated to the Church by Mrs Amanda Corby, and what purposes, conditions, &c.

160 acres of rich, rolling land, elevated sufficiently and very favorably for building. About one half the tract is clear; the other half well covered with valuable timber. **Water is abundant, and stone** for building purposes. The land is situated three miles northward from St. Joseph Cathedral. Value of the land about \$8,000. There is on it a new two story respectable looking house of about ten or a dozen rooms; \$3,500 cost; debt on house of \$2,000 payment of which is not absolutely obligatory; this is the only encumbrance on the property. There is also on the grounds, and very eligibly situated, a beautiful Gothic Chapel approaching completion and estimated to cost \$40,000; all of which will be paid, and the building completed.

The perpetual possession of all the above property will be given upon the following pious conditions. A daily Mass in perpetuity for the intention of the donor. That it be devoted to the sacred purposes of a church yard or burial ground for the Catholics of St. Joseph, who however will be required to pay what is right and reasonable to improve said cemetery and keep it respectably in order. The right of interment in the chapel of the remains of Mr. John Corby and Father Scanlon deceased, also of Mrs. Corby and family and the present bishop of St. Joseph.

The Cemetery to be called St. John's Cemetery. The chapel may be used as a parish church for the congregation now forming around it. St. Roch's French congregation, consisting at present of about 30 families, chapel two miles distant, will be attended from this place.

The Bishop thinks this a very suitable place for a theological or preparatory Seminary for young men aspiring to the Priesthood, of which institutions we have great need all over America

and especially in the Western States. The dioceses of St. Joseph, Omaha, Santa Fe, Dubuque, and many other dioceses and vicariates around are almost destitute of such institutions-- the only hope of sustaining the Church by an efficient Priesthood. By all means the diocese of St. Joseph should have such an institution and this is the place for it. A very eligible farm with improvements already exceeding in value, together with the ground, the sum of \$50,000; which sum at four per cent would yield annual interest amounting to \$2,000. If we deduct from this \$2,000, the honorarium for saying the Mass at one dollar per day, there would remain \$1,635 to found some free places for the diocese if the Seminary were numerously attended and in a flourishing condition. The daily Mass, however, and the keeping of the Cemetery are the only conditions absolutely of obligation. The Bishop prefers a Religious Order of Priests as his diocese is very destitute of Priests. But if these will not undertake the foundation his preference is next for the Christian Brothers who might use the place for a novitiate, or College including a preparatory department for aspirants to the Priesthood.

Shortly before December 1872 Holy Cross accepted the offer and Brother Adolphus (Patrick) Walsh arrived in St. Joseph on December 17 to take possession of the property. On December 20 Brother Adolphus, a native of Ireland who entered the Congregation in 1856, wrote to Father Edward Sorin, superior general, giving his first impressions of the new mission and detailing his reception at St. Joseph.

On arriving here I found the Rt. Rev. Bishop absent and he did not return till three days after. While waiting for his return I called to see Mrs. Corby. She received me very friendly. Said she had nothing to say in reference to our management of the property, but expressed her wish that Rev. F. Corby would come here on account of his being a namesake of her deceased husband. She offered to send her nephew who is staying with her to show me the premises. He and I went out there next day. The sites of the house & chapel are nice. But the approaches to the grounds are difficult--almost impassable in thaw or wet weather and are likely to be so for years to come. The Bishop, Mrs. Corby and a few prominent citizens are endeavoring to get a grant of a direct road to the place. As to its location for a school or Seminary, I have now only to say that improvements necessary to render the place attractive should be commenced with as little delay as possible. For this and to begin with, an outlay of from \$500 to \$600 is necessary. First of all, a well or cistern or both must be sunk as no water is near the house. Also a water closet and the house & chapel grounds inclosed by a suitable fence.

Cutting down some of the timber on the land for fuel should begin at once. Then the house is to be furnished & provisioned. To do all this (without which we can not go to live in the house) I see only two ways to obtain funds, viz., to mortgage the property, if necessary, to borrow the



money, or have you to send us funds. The Bishop proposes to me to get some of the timber cut down & sell it for funds. but I would not approve of selling off the timber & paying perhaps a higher price for fuel afterwards. If we were once started Mrs. Corby might yet help us--others also perhaps.

While waiting for a little moderation of the weather which at present is very cold here, I ask your opinion & advice, and if you will, take no further step till you send on someone else. There is no time to be lost and I wish to be doing something. And as to our prospect of success in such a place and on such a mission, I leave those of better judgement to pronounce on.

I stay in the Bishop's house since I came here. When I went to present my credentials to him he received me with as much courtesy as if I were a Bishop. At the end of some conversation relative to my mission he said I must make his house my home till our own house is ready for use. He then assigned me a room which I begrudge myself to occupy, and to sit at the same table with himself & his Priests. He does not leave me trusting to the attention of his servants. He comes to my room at night with a lamp in his hand to see if anything be wanting to make me comfortable. I really feel ashamed of so much attention from one so far above me. When you write to him please say something in appreciation of so much kindness.

He says he mailed the deed for you yesterday--says it is recorded here. I am anxious to hear from you to know if all are well at home.

Some idea of what Brother Adolphus saw upon reporting to the bishop in St. Joseph can be gained from a description of the pro-cathedral and its surroundings as written by Bishop Hogan himself recalling when he was appointed first bishop there four years earlier, before he initiated improvement of the property.

The church edifices were of the poorest kind. The largest, the pro-cathedral was a low, narrow, squalid brick house, built in three different sections, and at three different times. The floor was below the street level, and much of it quite underground. The walls and roof were held together by wooden stanchions bolted outside on the walls, and by hog chains inside, athwart the little building. The site was in a hollow, in the curve of an open sewer or creek, the overflow from which every rain poured mud and muck through the doors and chinky foundations in upon the floor of the rickety structure. Around the church was a dense growth of weeds, shrubs, and low intertangled shade trees; moss-covered from the constant wet of the overflow of the creek, as were likewise the walls of the building. There had been at one time a fence around the church, but it was now a jagged outline of rents and gaps; evidently made so by the assaults of droves of hogs that frequented the place, and that took great delight in ploughing up the soft mold with their long snouts, and rubbing their mucky backs and sides against the church walls, doors, and door posts. The hogs were in possession, and judging by their diligence, the palm was theirs for unequalled church-going qualities

As can be seen from the above letter of Brother Adolphus details of financing the new undertaking had not been carefully worked out at Notre Dame before the project was undertaken. However, Brother Adolphus, a rather impulsive and impatient person, was eager to get the operation underway. Just two days after his first letter he wrote to Brother Edward Fitzpatrick, the community treasurer, repeating his observations and adding that whatever priest was to be sent should come immediately "with a view that we would consult together while the severe weather and all the horses of the city being now laid up with the disease among them prevents me from getting anything done." Then, on December 26, 1872, he wrote again to Father Sorin and after repeating what he had written earlier, continued:

. . . my daily expectation to hear from you or see him [i.e., the priest] come has been in vain till I got your letter this morning which astonished me on seeing by it that my letter home had not been recd. while the tone in which you write has not a little wounded my feelings it being indicative of your suspicion that I "ran away from my post of obedience" or been guilty of misdemeanor. But let that pass. I accept it at your hands.

Now for the 3rd time, please let me know how I am to get the needed funds. Will I expect the money from home, or, will I try to borrow it here by mortgaging the property if need be. You will find in my two last letters what is to be done here. Wherever they were delayed they must have reached you by this time. If not, I'll repeat the items to you. A room is prepared in the Bishop's house for the Priest you are to send. The good Bishop says he won't have us go anywhere else till we have our house furnished & fit to live in.

I have two men engaged to cut down some of the timber on the land, and another to dig a well. But the weather is so terrible that no one likes to go at any outdoor work. The people, however, who are accustomed to the climate think the cold will soon moderate.

The Bishop has two Seminarians here and wishes to know from you if you would take charge of finishing their education (in theology) for him and if so whether here or at N.D.; & on what terms. Please let him know. If you would send one capable of teaching them, in my opinion, it would be better as it may be perhaps a first step towards the opening of a seminary here. And the Bishop says he is sure if we have it once opened it will be largely patronized.

Only three days later the Brother again expressed his impatience at not receiving instructions from Notre Dame, and on New Year's Day, 1873, the distraught man turned to Father Alexis Granger, the provincial, complaining that he feels "very unpleasant" as he has been at

the place going on three weeks and have "done nothing yet beyond speculating what's to be done & how it is to be done." He then repeats at length the details he gave in his letter to Father Sorin.

On the day following, Brother Adolphus finally received a letter from Father Sorin and it contained forty dollars. He acknowledged it immediately.

To say that I thank you for your Christmas gift of \$40.00 would be too feeble an expression of my appreciation of it. It has just come in time as I have the first payment to make next Saturday to some men I have chopping wood.

Weak instrument as I am to begin our undertaking here, I can only say that I am not & will not be here an idle spectator till you see fit to send someone of more ability for the work to help me. At present & since I came here all outdoor work is suspended by the severe weather. . . . I have men engaged for the indispensable work on the grounds preparatory to our going to live there. . . . However, tho now everything looks gloomy around me, I think our prospect of succeeding is good if we were but once living in the place.

As additional expenses were piling up, Brother Adolphus wrote to the Superior General on January 20, 1873:

I have eagerly waited in daily expectation for the instructions I asked you for as to how I am to get the money to pay for the preparations I told you were indispensable to our opening here. Meanwhile, I have endeavored to be at work. Despite the severe weather the difficulty I have to contend with in getting men to work in such weather & so far from the City, I have the water closets built & the carpenters at work on a stable in which are to be two horse stalls, two cow stalls & the rest of the building divided between a wagon & wood shed--the four divisions separated by partitions with a loft on the whole for fodder.

In view of our having soon to build a larger house, I could not now tell the most suitable location for a well, and yielding to suggestions from many who say cistern water here is preferable, I am getting two cisterns built each 20 ft. deep & 7 in diameter. The builder expects to have both finished this week. The aggregate of cisterns, stalls & closets is about \$550.00. The lowest that I could possibly get them built for without building anything shabby that would mar the attractiveness of the premises. I have clothing bought for six beds & a woman employed in sewing them & will also be finished this week costing with towels & table cloth \$126.00. This amt. together with the \$550.00 for cisterns &c. I need immediately as each of the parties to whom it is due wants his portion.

While expecting your instructions above referred to, I ascertained bank quotations here in case I should have to know. The ordinary legal premium in the state on loans is 10%.

From the 1st Jan. inst. till 1st of March no bank in the city is lending money except to Pork packers who are trading extensively in this section & whom the bankers are bound by contract to supply at from 13% to 15%. From this you see if the money has to be borrowed you had better borrow in some eastern bank at from 6% to 8%. Besides what I here mention & to pay for which I want the above amount there is furniture to be paid for of which I have already given you a rough estimate with several little utensils such as farm & garden implements &c. Then we must have a team of horses--one at least indispensable & a wagon, also a cow. There are two log houses on the farm which I intend to repair with a part of the clear land rent for a share of the crop. Altogether. not including provisions, we must expend at least \$1500.00 before we can open a school. Of this, however, I only want now the amt. I have stated due of me at present, which please send me immediately.

Your kind remittance & that of Bro. Edward--in all \$103.00--

I have assigned and reserved for the wood choppers whom I have to pay every Saturday. The Bhp. has given me the policy of insurance on the house for \$2,000.00 on which the premium, \$15.00, will be due on the 1st of Feb. Please say whether I shall drop the insur. or pay the premium. The property is taxed \$75.55 of which the next payment must be made the 1st of April. . . .

The Brother subsequently received a reply from Father Sorin which offended him deeply. In his letter of January 30, 1873, he wrote Father Sorin:

. . . It makes me feel bad to be obliged to say that anything from your hands could cause me anything but pleasure; for this letter makes me feel most unpleasant. Instead of finding in it what I have been so anxiously expecting to meet the expenses I have incurred it gives me to understand that you disapprove of what I have been trying to do here in piercing frost & deep snow in which I have been often nearly up to my waist & living most of the time on two meals a day having no way of getting any dinner. Of this I do not boast or complain. I understand it cheerfully & courageously, fully impressed with the thought that I was doing what obedience demanded of me.

You ask why I am in such hurry. It is true you did not tell me before I left home what I was to do here, nor have you told me since although I asked you in each of my letters for instructions. Nevertheless, I did not think you sent me to be here doing nothing but eating & sleeping. Nor has it ever been my habit before or since I joined a community where I saw anything I ought to do, to stand idly looking at it. Now I see plenty here for me to do & altho, seeing that I came at least three months too soon on acct. of the severe winter, yet as I happened to come, I try to make the best I can of it. Besides you said in your 1st letter to me that you would "send a Priest here as soon as I had accommodat. for him." In your second you spoke still plainer in the words

"Meanwhile, go to work, not only as a man but rather as a Religious." "Move on & keep yourself actively employed."

Again, the Bishop told me you said in a letter to him you'd send a Priest or two in the opening of the Spring.

Still another reason for my "hurry." I am feeling ashamed of being trespassing so long on the good Bhp. I have, besides several indications of his wish that we would be occupying the house.

And what else, V. Rev. Father, could I infer from your own above words but that you wished me to be at work? What else had I here to work at but what I am doing?

You say you wonder at my building two cisterns as there has been no rain for 5 mos. past. The cisterns cost less than one well would. And many here who have experienced it tell me that cistern water in this section is better than well water. We had rain enough here last week to nearly fill both if finished. As for furniture, bedding, &c., I've made no engagement binding me to pay for it or take them till we are ready for them, so it is with a horse, wagon, cow, &c. I spoke of these as being necessary when we open. However unpleasant your disapproval is to me, I have the gratification to know & feel that I have not incurred an extravagant expense by what I have done, that all will prove satisfactory, and once done they won't have to be made again. There is yet enough waiting for the time of opening. Once more then, please see that the sum I asked for is sent me without further delay. Don't leave me exposed to the displeasure--perhaps insult--of those to whom it is due.

Why have you not told me what to do about the Insurance? The agent has already notified me I'll let it drop till you tell me. . . .

It will be recalled that a part of the agreement made with Bishop Hogan was that Holy Cross was to have the care of "the French settlement" located in "the French bottoms," a low-lying area about three miles from the establishment near the Missouri River. While awaiting the assignment of a Priest from Notre Dame to minister to these people, Brother Adolphus occasionally found time to visit them. In a letter of March 26, 1873, he reported to Father Sorin that he found these French settlers "as a whole sincere good Catholics" but that "while they are without a Priest several of them have turned over with a Baptist preacher who is among them every Sunday." He continued:

As an instance of this man's mischief; on my first visit there I learned that three Catholic girls (sisters) had given him their names to be baptized by him yesterday (Sunday). I went to their residence & talked a while alone with their father who seemed indifferent; then with the girls themselves & their mother (a Protestant). I went there again last Saturday & again yesterday, and gave a little instruction on the catechism in their little chapel. As another instance of the protection



of Our Blessed Mother, these three girls disappointed this preacher yesterday. They are yet saved for the Church.

As, according to the Bp., the duty of providing for the spiritual wants of these good people devolves on you now. you cannot send them a Priest too soon. And not only a Priest, but also a teacher is absolutely necessary to them as a little instruction on Sunday only is inadequate to their wants especially at present to prepare numbers of them of age to make their First Communion.

As there is not even a pathway between our place to this settlement, I have spoken to the people about opening one for us. They say they will do it. . . .

By early May 1873 a French-speaking Holy Cross priest was assigned to St. Joseph--Father William Demers, a 48-year-old French Canadian. A native of St. Nicolas in the Province of Quebec, he had received the Habit in September 1863 and had been ordained two years later. He came to Missouri from Indiana where he had been serving at St. Vincent's Church in Fort Wayne.

Assigned to the establishment at the same time as the priest was Brother Leonard (Patrick) Grimes, 30, an Irishman who had been a farmer at Notre Dame.

Judging from a letter written by Father Demers to Father Sorin on May 8, 1873, the former was not happy with the situation or with Brother Adolphus. He wrote in part:

Since I have arrived here, the more I look around the more I discover things to do. It cannot go on like this. We already have spent \$400.00 for work in and outside the house and you can't tell it. . . .

Now, for the school, it is impossible to hold classes in the existing house. It is too small. There are only four non-occupied rooms. Besides they are bedrooms with only one window. One of them could be used as a small dormitory; it could hold four or five beds; it's on the second floor. So, we need to build a school which will cost between nine hundred and a thousand dollars. . . .

Brother Leonard is valuable for the garden, and he is a good religious. Brother Adolphus goes five times to town to buy ten articles. He knows how to give orders, but that does not accomplish the work. We really need Brother Maximus here to take care of the farm. I am willing to divide myself in four, but unfortunately, I can only be in but one place at a time.

So, Reverend Father, see what you can do for us here, right away. It is already too late to sow and plant. Brother Leonard is planting a few vegetables today. . . .

In July 1873 Father John Toohey was deputed to make the Regular Visit of the St. Joseph establishment. The latter's report gives a clear description of the place.

Turning first to the French congregation at St. Roch's he estimates that there are thirty families there of which only ten could be called upon to support a priest. The others have either abandoned the Church or are too poor to help financially. During his first three months serving there, Father Demers had been given only twenty dollars by the parishoners. A Sunday collection averaged about one dollar. However, Father Toohey remarks, "In a spiritual point of view those poor people are certainly to be pitied. Though they live only three miles from town, most of them had totally neglected attendance at church and approaching the sacraments, and some of them even had allowed themselves to be seduced by Protestant ministers who have been at work amongst them. There is here then a field for the exercise of apostolic zeal."

The Visitor describes St. Roch's Chapel as a small building capable of holding about 150 persons. He continues:

To reach it, a journey of six miles must be made over roads which after rain are next to impossible, up hill and down hollow.

Father Toohey concludes that the mission cannot support a priest "more especially as he must have a horse to enable him to visit his parish."

Moving on to "The Establishment" he has this to report:

The Cemetery does not exist at all as a cemetery. The ground destined for that purpose will suit very well when the trees are cut down and the place cleared and laid out. But as a Catholic Cemetery already exists which is only two miles from the city, and the roads to which are at least as good as those leading to our place, it may not be very easy to persuade the citizens to abandon their old burying ground for the new one. The only thing that could be done in that direction at present would be to cut down the timber, which seems to be very good, and sell it.

Corby's Chapel as it is called, will be a really beautiful edifice when it is completed. It is built entirely of stone. At present the men are at work plastering the inside. The windows are yet to be put in, the flooring to be laid, the altar to be erected, and pews to be put in. The altar, which is to be of stone, and, in beauty, is to be in keeping with the chapel, will be ready as soon as the place is prepared to receive it. I am told that the pews are already made. The building is roofed and finished on the outside.

The Dwelling House is a very neat two-story frame building erected by the Alexian Brothers at an expense of \$4,000.00.



There are five rooms upstairs and six rooms downstairs. One of the rooms on the ground floor is used as a kitchen, one is occupied by the house-keeper, one serves as a chapel, and one as a parlor. The fifth room which is quite small and is entered from the parlor is occupied by F. Demers. Of the six rooms upstairs, two might serve as small class rooms. Both on the upper and lower story there is a hall or passage about 8 feet wide running through the center of the building. Besides this building and the chapel, there is no other edifice on the property except the stable, and a cabin, which with a piece of ground, is rented at \$4.00 per mo. The stable and privies were put up by Bro. Adolphus at an expense of about \$800.00. With present accommodations I see no possibility of having a boarding school here, and if a day-school should be opened, desks &c. must be provided.

The Christian Brothers have a fine boarding and day-school in town. Still, Bro. Adolphus assures me that he could have some day-scholars from the neighborhood as well as some boarders if there were only the means of receiving them. For my part I would not be in a particular hurry to take boarders. The community here has been living on salt pork and the products of their garden. It is not very convenient to go daily to town for fresh meat and other provisions, so that boarders would soon tire of such fare as could be provided for them under existing circumstances.

About Forty Acres of Land are cleared, and have been under cultivation for many years past; and as this portion was rented out, I am assured that the former occupants have left the soil quite worn out. They strove to obtain as much from the soil as it would yield without caring whether they exhausted it or not. The rest of the land is covered with trees.

The accounts of the hilly state of this land are not exaggerated. When it rains the soil is washed away, as is evident by the chasms to be met with in all directions. The farms which I have seen in this neighborhood are all situated on the sides of acclivities steeper than any to be met with between Notre Dame and St. Joseph Farm.

The only resources which I can see at present would be from the cutting down and sale of wood and from opening a small day-school. The wood might be cut down in the part destined in future for a cemetery and sold as fire wood at a profit of perhaps \$2.00 a cord. Some of it also might be serviceable for building purposes, but the difficulty is to have it carried to the mills.

There is a Stone Quarry on the property which might be turned to some account were the roads better than they are. It will no doubt be of service when we ourselves are building here.

The Visitor's report ended with a brief financial statement:

Receipts

from sale of Wood	\$ 212.50
from Bishop	100.00
Borrowed from Bank	1100.00
Besides the sums obtained from Notre Dame	
Expenditures have been	1899.55
There remains due by the House about	140.00
Cash on hand	65.00

It is not known how this information was received by the Council at Notre Dame, but it is unlikely that the members were impressed with the picture.

For some unknown reason Father Toohey did not make a courtesy call on Mrs. Corby a fact duly noted by that lady when she talking later to Father Demers.

In mid-1873 Bishop Hogan put Brother Adolphus in touch with Jacob Strausser (or Stroesser), a young man in Kansas who wished to enter the Religious life. After corresponding with him, Brother Adolphus obtained permission from Father Granger to accept him on trial at St. Joseph. This postulant was a native of Luxembourg where he was born in 1848. In the words of Brother Adolphus he proved to be "an excellent young man and a great help to us." Father Demers in a letter to Father Granger describes the postulant as "an excellent subject who works like two and prays like four."

The provincial permitted Father Demers to give the postulant the habit in a ceremony on August 24, 1873. The latter was now to be known as Brother Damian. Brother Adolphus gave some lessons every day to the young Brother along with their housekeeper's boy. In December 1873 Brother Damian traveled from St. Joseph to Notre Dame to commence his novitiate. Eventually he pronounced perpetual vows on August 15, 1875. He served the community chiefly as a farmer in the years that followed and died at Notre Dame on July 14, 1906.

Reverting to 1873: Father Demers in a letter of August 11 inferred to Father Granger that tension continued in the house between Brother Adolphus and himself, and he suggests a solution, at the same time giving a rather bleak appraisal of his little mission for the French people on the river.

As my position here is not very pleasant, and as twelve or fifteen families could support me if I stay with them, I think that I will go there, since all I have to do is take care of that small mission. You probably will send a priest here in September; he can say Mass for the Brothers, and I will be able to devote myself to the mission.

Out of the thirty French families that I have found here, 8 or 9 don't come to church, and 10 or 11 are poor and need to receive more than to give. Brother Adolphus does not want to let me take the wagon to get there, so they have to come after me; they are upset about that. That's why they want to build a sacristy right away, and a room for the priest that would be a small addition to the church.

There is nothing new except that 25 children will make their First Communion on Assumption Day (children of 15, 18, and 19 years of age). The Bishop will come at 4 p.m. to confirm them. This good Bishop came last week with General Shields for a visit. I don't regret the bottle of wine they drank. Monseigneur is always so kind. He wants to become a Brother, he says.

Our Brother and the postulant will go on retreat this evening. As for me, I am leaving for the mission, so I can prepare the children who know nothing for Friday.

I preached an hour yesterday on temperance; that was not without reason.

Father Granger's reply is not known, but apparently Father Demers was told to stay where he was. On September 11, 1873, he wrote to Father Sorin who had just returned from a trip to Europe.

I would be a lot happier if I could tell you that we had fulfilled our dreams, but our means, or rather, the circumstances, do not run hand in hand with our will. . . .

I don't believe that you sent me here four months ago to be a farmer. You didn't either, I am sure.

I have asked Monseigneur to give me a couple of small missions to take care of in order to keep busy and be able to support myself, but he didn't answer me.

Mrs. Corby pays us a visit quite often, but her visits amount to drinking a glass of our wine. We explained our position to her three months ago, telling her that we needed \$2,000 to start. She told us that we would have to pay between 15 to 20 percent interest. I told her that before I pay that kind of interest, I would return to South Bend.

Brother Adolphus needs moral support these days; the poor Brother is doing his best, I believe.

Would you come and judge for yourself, because the orders we receive from Notre Dame do not fit our situation. Besides, I believe that things would be much better if you could visit the people here.

Four days after this letter Brother Adolphus also wrote to the Superior giving his views of the problems and also pleaded for Father Sorin to come and see the place for himself.

As I presume you know, the Rev. Father & Bro. sent here last May, came without a dollar notwithstanding all I had said about their coming provided with funds to enable us to start to live out here. This left us nothing to do but to buy on credit furniture, provisions, cow, horses, wagon, harness, farming & garden tools & implements. N. Dame having refused us to aid us to pay this debt, we had to borrow in the bank \$1100 which becomes due on the 27th of this month. We had been counting on a school in Sept. to help, at least, to pay this debt. Now we have no school, nor any other resource to meet this debt but leave it entirely to N.D. Please, then, have it seen to in time. There are no means here, and we have yet to provide for the winter now approaching, having no stoves or bedding but what was barely enough for the summer. Having no crop beyond a little of vegetables we have to buy everything including feed & fodder for our cow & horse. We have to pay our housekeeper \$2.00 a week.

We are getting some of the timber on the land cut down for which we have to pay \$1.00 a cord & which we sell at two prices-- \$3.00 & \$2.50 or an average of \$1.75 to the cord after paying the choppers. This is our only resource.

Mrs. Corby has not done us one cent's worth of any favor. She offered to lend us money at 10% when we wanted to borrow. She says she expects to have the church ready for service in a few weeks. As for the cemetery there is not a word about it. From all I have learned, the majority of the people are opposed to it, and the Rt. Rev. Bp. has told me he does not intend to force them to transfer their dead out here from the old & present cemetery, but will leave it to their own choice. Whenever it is undertaken, \$500 at least will be necessary to prepare our intended cemetery here.

The grant of the contemplated road to these grounds is now pending in the county court, and although the prospect of its being granted is favorable, yet from the amount of opposition to it, it still stands uncertain. Its grant or default will be decided next month.

Here, Very Rev. & dear Father, is an outline of the situation & only an outline; for no writing, no delegate, can give you a full conception of this undertaking without your personal observations. Please, then, come & come with as little delay as possible. . . .

In his response to Brother Adolphus' letter, Father Sorin apparently placed the blame for the financial problems directly on the Brother, and he stated that he has decided to appoint Brother Adolphus as a canvasser for the Ave Maria and thus he can do his part in collecting funds to help pay the debt. On September 26, 1873, the Brother wrote at length justifying his actions concerning the debt and strongly reacted against the proposed re-assignment.

. . . And now, as if we all had been guilty of an act disastrous to the Congregation & of which I alone am to suffer the penalty,

you condemn me to travel as canvasser. . . . Ah! Very Rev. Father, your letter conveying this penalty is to me like a thunderbolt. I know of no circumstance that could deject me more, for the sole reason that I am forced by incapacity to implore your charity to retract the penalty. I think you know me long enough to know how incompetent I am to canvass. . . . Without wasting time enumerating causes for my incapacity. . . I will only mention one which--besides my advanced age-- is of itself enough to incapacitate me. A canvasser must discharge his duty on foot. My daily long walk to & from these premises last winter & spring so foundered me that last April I found I could no longer stand it & had to give it up. From this decrepitness I have not since recovered, perhaps would not during the remainder of my life. I never complained of this to anyone & would not mention it now if it had not become necessary. Apart from this, the healthy constitution with which God has blessed me is not in the least impaired since I saw you.

I feel capable of any duty which obedience has assigned me while in the Community whether bodily labor or teaching, but, spare me from canvassing for the Ave Maria.

In the meantime Father Sorin wrote to Father Demers saying he would visit St. Joseph in early October. In his reply the latter wrote on September 29, 1873:

Since I last wrote to you I have bought a bell for the little French mission. I was to bless that bell yesterday, but the rain and bad weather kept me from doing it. Then I took it on myself to announce your arrival for Sunday, the 5th of October. I had two good reasons to postpone the ceremony, I told them. First, that we were short of three godfathers and godmothers for said bell; then that I was expecting our Father General. That way the festivity would be more solemn. Everyone applauded. . . .

Despite the preparations the date for Father Sorin's promised visit came and passed without his appearance. The reason is not recorded. In three subsequent letters written by Brother Adolphus during October, Father Sorin was again strongly urged to come to St. Joseph. Then on November 8 Father Demers wrote to the Father General to tell him of a number of things that are going wrong and to repeat that Mrs. Corby and the bishop want to see him.

The new road goes through our land almost all the way. We are working on that road ourselves, and into the bargain have to pay taxes. . . .

We don't have an inch of ground plowed, so next year, as we did this year, we will live on our debts. Brother Adolphus goes to town every day, sometimes twice a day. I can't imagine what he is doing there. Anyhow, he doesn't bring much back to the house. We sure live up to our vow

of poverty. I believe, however, that the poor Brother is doing his best, but he was not made to be a businessman.

. . .

We have paid \$1000 for work around the house that we could have done ourselves in two months. Our horse has been harnessed every day for six months, and there is about a week's work to do. . . . I gave Brother Adolphus \$53.00 in cash. Paid for supplies for the house: groceries \$52.50. For me: boots, newspapers, stationery: \$21.75 including \$4.50 for a gallon of wine and a small barrel of beer for our celebration. I invited five godfathers for the bell which I had blessed for this celebration.

Since I have been here I received one hundred dollars from the mission. The deficit is the church's money.

I am sure that we have sold 8 or 9 hundred cords of wood in the last five months. I can't see where the money went; I have not seen any books yet; it is true that it is not any of my business. Brother Adolphus told me that he is the unhappiest that he has ever been in his whole life. I believe him.

During early November 1873 both Brother Adolphus and Father Demers continued to write to Notre Dame complaining about various problems both institutional and personal. Then around the middle of the month Brother Adolphus was called back to Notre Dame for re-assignment. It is not known if his earlier pleas to be spared from the canvassing job was heeded by Father Sorin.

Father Demers was now in charge at St. Joseph, but he was not too happy. He wrote on November 18:

I am sending you the reports left to me by Brother Adolphus. This is all I got to see since May. He would not say anything else.

I just met the woodcutters; we owed them 60 dollars. I found about 120 cords of firewood, 2/3 of that is white wood, and we sell that wood in the summer to bake bricks and lime.

Besides the \$1,100 we borrowed at the bank, we owe \$300.00 the 1st of December. The taxes and insurance on the house are due soon. We have debts in town. I don't know how much. He owes 40 or 50 dollars to one place. I'll go see about it tomorrow. . . .

There is nothing in the house except 35 lbs. of flour and a few small pigs that I bought last spring. It is ridiculous. We have, I believe, three bushels of apples. That's all the dessert we have on the table.

When I made a few remarks, he called me "Baby." I told him that he knew nothing about business. He was not happy. So, will you tell me what to do with all these matters.

If you could provide me with a thousand dollars, I think I could pay the five or six hundred during the winter.

. . .



Brother Adolphus in an undated letter to Father Sorin which does not reveal from where it was written gave one last assessment of the Missouri undertaking. It is interesting to compare its contents with the letters from Father Demers.

. . . I am well acquainted with the run & requirements of the establishment. There is none there suitable for its transactions. None that has even any tact or care for order or cleanliness in the house or about the premises; not to take pains to preserve objects such as garden & farm implements &c. from loss or damage.

Although I had its appropriate place for every little object & tool we had for our use, instead of being carefully put up by those who might use them, I would find them carelessly thrown about till I would gather them up myself. I make all due allowance for Bro. Leonard who went there an invalid & continued so the greater part of the time since, which may account for his apparent disregard for regularity at exercises &c. But it often seemed to me he could have done better. I may be mistaken. Rev. F. Demers as a Priest & a religious is, I think, a good little man, well adapted by his zeal for his little congregation. But besides various little weaknesses displayed by him which I will here omit, his limited acquaintance with the English disqualifies him, of itself, for the place, beyond reading Mass & hearing confession in the discharge of which both functions I could not help admiring him.

From my knowledge of the place & of public sentiment there in our regard, I can say that your prospect there is good provided you send there efficient & able members, a Superior & order a council, without whose deliberations nothing, at least of importance, should be done. Hitherto all this has been wanting there. I, a few times, invited the Bro. to Rev. F. Demers' room in order to take counsel together; but neither seemed to care about it.

I am fully satisfied that, besides ability for the transaction of the establishment. it is much to its advantage to have one there able to talk to the English-speaking visitors in order that by civil reception they may return with a favorable impression of the place & its conductors. Visitors there are daily--numerous on Sundays, very many of them non-Catholics. They have afforded me opportunities of making many friendly acquaintances with the place. Many of them tendered me the promise of their support & patronage when school opens there.

Some testified their friendship & interest by bringing me little presents, such as poultry & even such a thing as a little sow. Nearly all the farm & garden implements I had there are the gifts of one or two. Several offered me their voluntary services if ever for the support of the est., we would try to get up a fair or picnic. . . .

I give these few instances out of many as an evidence of the sentiments entertained there toward your undertaking. Though I am no more there it does not lessen my interest in



the success in which you have no cause to fear if properly worked & managed. The sooner you send there one capable of this, the better. The longer you leave the place dependent on those there, the worse for the place. Besides conducting properly the est. a good English preacher can do much good there once the church is ready for service. From my knowledge of the sentiments of our Protestant neighbors there, I am certain a good preacher can make many conversions among them.

On November 29 an exasperated Father Demers wrote to Father Sorin listing more confusing accounts left by Brother Adolphus. Apparently Father Sorin instructed Father Granger to have the Brother make whatever clarifications he could, and on December 11 the latter wrote to Father Demers giving the details on a number of transactions and stated:

I am sorry I was not left there till I would collect all these bills. I could do so without trouble. I knew some of those men would try to take advantage of you in my absence & cheat you out of the money.

In the meantime--on December 4--Father Sorin wrote to Bishop Hogan:

I have learned that good Mrs. Corby was very much displeased because we were not carrying out the object for which she had given her property, viz., a graveyard or burying ground which she had expected to see prepared before this.

Now, my Venerable Bishop, you know yourself that this question of a new burying ground concerns you first and us next. We cannot go to the expense of preparing it without being assured of having some call for it, or in other words, someone to bury in it as long as there is or will be another place for burials, there can be no assurance for the sale of any lots & therefore no encouragement for an outlay of money that might never be justified.

I have a beautiful plan of a new burying ground which a Rt. Rev. Bishop has lately forwarded me. But it will require a considerable expense to execute it. Still I would not shrink from it if Your Lordship really intends enabling us to fulfill the first conditions of the grant; & I should not hesitate in saying that we shall take upon us to prepare the place for burials for the epoch at which you declare any other place interdicted for Christian sepulture. It is unnecessary for me to remark that I could not be a party establishing a second place for the dead with the faculty to each family to choose between the two. I would rather wait until the old one be filled instead of countenancing a competition which should not go beyond the extinction of life. To resume my argument in two words, I beg leave to say that the arrangement of this affair lies between you & Mrs. Corby. When the assurance above mentioned shall

have been given us, we shall deem it our own part to carry out the intention of the donor.

It is not known just what the bishop's reply to this rather testy letter was, but apparently he told Father Sorin to send him the cemetery plan he mentioned, for on December 21, 1873, Father Demers reported to the Father General that the plan had been received but that the bishop said that it was unacceptable unless an outlay of \$3,000 was made. A week later he wrote that Mrs. Corby stated that the plan "can't work that way on the plot as it is, and won't hear of the Chapel being in the middle on the reserve."

It was also in his letter of December 21 that Father Demers announced that "tomorrow I am sending you Brother Leonard for good reasons," that he was going to fire the housekeeper, and that he would be doing the housekeeping himself. He does not explain these actions, but a week later he wrote:

The housekeeper is leaving Monday. . . . I have no use for a scoundrel in the house. I am taking in a family of four persons until March. He is the cantor at the mission. He serves Mass in the morning and takes care of the animals when I am not here

If you could only see me now with an old man of 64 years who hasn't been to Confession for 21 years who stinks badly. I think you would feel very sorry for me. Since the Brothers left, I say Mass alone with that old stinker.

During the early part of 1874 Father Demers continued to have financial problems over old bills and worries for the future, and he still blamed Brother Adolphus for much of the trouble. However, he still hopes to save the place and eventually to see a school built on the property. In the meantime he is not idle in trying to realize a few dollars for the establishment whenever he can. He wrote to Father Sorin on March 10:

. . . I am going to spend a little on a horse in order to deliver firewood to town, so I can make a little money. I have 100 dollars that I would like to pay to the Bank on the \$800. That sum is bothering me, and besides it is in my name now.

There is nothing new here. I have a man working for me; his wife does the cooking. It is a young couple that I married last summer. I rented out an old piece of ground for 100 dollars. They pay me cutting 100 cords of firewood. If your Reverence does not come or write, I will have 20 acres of new ground plowed, and I will have a small garden for our own use. I also hope to finish paying dear Bro. Adolphus' bill of 250 dollars. At least, no one has brought me any new bills since last month. I have put up

a piece of land for sale. It is uncultivable but would bring 500 or 600 cords of firewood. I am asking 2000 dollars for it, and I say that it is for my college.

On the very next day Father Demers acknowledged the receipt of a letter March 5 from Father Sorin in which the latter notified him that he will be recalled to Notre Dame. Father Demers hastened to protest that

Your are the master who can call me back when you wish, but I won't be able to pay the famous 700 dollar note to the bank soon. I need 3 more months to clear up things here, unless someone a little skillful is coming to replace me.

However, I think, for the honor of our Congregation, and before taking any decision, that you should come yourself, because everyone will cry on high.

Father Sorin did not go to Missouri, but he apparently agreed that Father Demers should remain there for the time being.

On June 28 Father Demers wrote to Father Granger expressing his hope to salvage the operation and proceed at least on a more modest scale than originally envisioned.

Here is my plan: You would send me two good Brothers-- one a professor and the other one for manual work, and with a hired man, I could maybe get the establishment started. Mrs. Corby would like that. With \$100 I could get the cemetery started, and maybe by selling plots we could continue to work there. The day before I got Brother Edward's letter, I paid \$30 for repairs on an old house. That will give us about \$4 a month. Also, I had paid \$50 for my subscription to the new road. I have \$200 that I will pay at the Bank tomorrow (what's left from the \$1100 that Brother Adolphus owed when he left).

I don't owe one cent now. As you told me that the Very Rev. Father had not given his last word, will you take into consideration these plans that I have suggested and allow me to stay a few more months in order to try again on a smaller scale? I am not as ambitious as Brother Adolphus, and I think it still would be soon enough to leave next year.

This letter contains the last mention of Brother Adolphus by Father Demers. The Brother had gone on to other community duties and it was at the College of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Watertown, Wisconsin, that he died in March 1888 following a pulmonary illness.

In the above letter Father Demers also told the provincial that St. John's Chapel was dedicated on June 24 in a beautiful celebration.



ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL

(Commonly known as "the Corby Chapel")



Rev. William Demers, C.S.C.



John Corby's body was to be re-interred there in the very near future. The priest did comment that he would find saying the daily Mass for the donor according to the original conditions of the transfer of the property to be a "heavy burden" to him.

Photographs of the church (commonly known as "the Corby Chapel") taken at a later date show it to have been a very impressive and beautiful edifice. The anonymous author of History of Buchanan County, Missouri published in 1881, described it in these words:

This is, perhaps, the most elegant and complete structure of the kind in Missouri. . . . The principal material of which this rare specimen of architectural beauty is constructed is our native limestone. . . .

The church is a gothic structure, built in the shape of a Latin cross, measuring in the clear eighty-four feet nine inches in length, and forty-eight feet nine inches across the transepts, and is capable of seating an audience of three hundred and fifty persons. The aisles are separated from the nave of the church, or rather, the limit of aisles is marked by rows of massive cast iron columns, painted in representation of stone, the only feature of the entire building that is not really what it appears to be. These pillars support the elaborately decorated arches of the groined roof, which reflect with wonderfully beautiful effect the mellow light streaming through the variegated panes of the tall lancet windows by which the church is lighted. The pulpit, altar, font, etc., are all of massive sandstone. Even the mullions of the windows are of that solid material while the window sashes are of iron. The aisles and chancel are paved with a beautiful variety of tassellated tiling of different colors, imported from the manufactory at Stoke-upon-Trent in England. The doors, seats and light stairway leading to the organ loft, are the only features of the entire structure that are made of wood.

The building is absolutely incombustible. The sixteen windows by which the church is lighted are glazed with stained glass of very superior quality and beauty of design. The frescoing of the groined arches is chaste and elaborate in design and reflects, in the execution, great credit on the artist. The walls of the aisles are decorated with full length paintings of the twelve apostles--six on each side. These are admirably executed, and all have the appearance of sculptures in alto relievo.

In the sacristy or vestry, north of the altar, are depicted on the walls, in the same style of art, two scenes from the life of Christ, viz., the Women at the Sepulchre and the Ascension.

The external appearance of the building is solid and massive, and suggestive of the character of the ecclesiastical architecture of the old world. The roof is of slate. There is no steeple.



Nor does this appear in the least a defect. On the summit of the east gable, at which is the front entrance, rises a small, but massive belfry, plain and in perfect keeping with the solid character of the edifice. On the northwest corner of the building, below a niche in the outer wall, on a plain tablet of sandstone, flanked by two columns in bas relief, appears the inscription, "Erected to the Memory of John Corby, 1871." The cost of this structure, sometimes styled the Corby Memorial Church, was nearly fifty thousand dollars.<sup>2</sup>

On August 5, 1874, Father Demers received a telegram from Father Granger instructing him to return to Notre Dame. He hastened to ask for clarification of details:

Am I to leave all the furniture in the house and go to Notre Dame, or do you order me to sell the little we have and abandon the place? I have two or three hundred dollars, and I will collect \$200 in three weeks.

I find it hard to leave all this as I have worked so hard for it.

I have sold our horse last week for \$80. I only collected half. Same for the household goods; I cannot sacrifice that in one day! So, will you tell me if I should leave with or without baggage before I sell the household goods?

I have shown no one the decision made by the Council at Notre Dame.

Once again the departure was postponed. However, in mid-August he did make a brief trip to Notre Dame taking with him some of his belongings.

Then, in the midst of all these financial and administrative problems a new one arose which could have brought ruination on the character of Father Demers if it had not been challenged promptly.

On August 21, 1874, the St. Louis Democrat published a lengthy article headed: More Wickedness: A Handsome Catholic Priest at St. Joseph Is Alleged to Have Led Astray a Lamb of His Flock: An Attempt to Hush the Matter Up. The article proper is prefaced with the observation that the paper's readers must be tired of the "Beecher business" [a recent scandal involving a Protestant minister] and will be happy to have a diversion and that "especially will this be welcome to a class of Protestant readers, for the saying that misery loves company holds true in this as well as other respects."

The article read:

A Tall, Fine-Looking Priest in charge of one of the churches near the city, has, it is said, so far forgotten his high and holy calling, and vows of chastity as to lead from virtue's path one of the fair lambs of his flock. The victim of the wolf in sheep's clothing is about 21 years old, and the daughter of a small farmer residing near the city. She, it is said, is soon to become a mother, and boldly alleges that the priest is the father of her prospective child. Some of the members of the congregation, indignant at the betrayal of the confidence of the poor girl, wanted to make the holy Father leave the pastorate, but

a wealthy high-toned lady, one of the principal members of the church in this vicinity, put her veto on any such proceedings for the time being, and the handsome priest still officiates at the altar. Whether any action by the unworthy priest is contemplated by the church dignitaries your correspondent has no means of knowing; he simply states the facts as he gleaned them from a responsible party who interviewed the unfortunate girl in relation to the conduct of this man. The affair has created

A great deal of scandal in the community, and the question is, what will the church do about it? Will they punish and cast out the unfaithful minister, or will they follow illustrious Protestant examples and whitewash the good-looking, long-haired saint? This is an unlucky year for wolves in sheep's clothing, and there is no telling how many more are hanging on to the "ragged edge of despair," and "even wishing they were dead." 3

The story was brought closer to home when the St. Joseph Herald copied the article verbatim and ran it on August 23. 4

Father Demers told Father Sorin about the unfortunate developments in a letter on September 1, 1874.

Here is something that might interest you. You will find out what kind of people I live amongst; what I am accused of.

Monseigneur himself presses the matter. He sent for me twice to sign my name on certain documents. Everybody thought that I had deserted last week, because Mrs. Corby sent someone to the house the Sunday I was in South Bend. It was true that I took four big boxes of things.

With the Bishop's approval, I call the author of that article a liar, and force him to make known this odious lie. Or I will sue the editor of the famous Herald

The St. Louis and the St. Joseph newspapers are hot on this subject. I have sent a card to three of these papers. The Herald's editor says that he gave no name and that it wasn't me. I told him that it was too late to make anyone believe such a stupid thing; I am the only priest in the environs of St. Joseph. . . . The Bishop told me, "My dear Father, this is a serious matter and of more consequence than you think, etc., etc."

So, next week we will have a general meeting of all the city, and we will pass some resolutions to condemn the Herald and its editors.



On September 7, the St. Louis Democrat published an account of the origin of the story in the form of a letter received by the editor from L. Hensel, a correspondent for that paper:

St. Joseph, Mo., Sept. 1, 1874

To the Editor of the Democrat:

Yours of August 31st is received, asking me to give the source of my information in regard to the St. Joseph scandal, and also to state whether the alleged criminality of the priest referred to is true.

In answer to your request I will state that I got the first intimation of the facts set forth in my communication from Major John L. Bitteringer, managing editor of the St. Joseph Herald, who told me that such a scandal existed, and that G. W. Buckingham, city editor of the Herald, had written it up in full, and that I could have the use of his manuscript if I wanted to send the scandal to the Democrat. I told him that if the story was true I should most assuredly send it to the Democrat, as that was my business to furnish news. Buckingham gave me the most positive assurance that the story was true, told me that he had seen and talked to the girl, and that he would not have written the story up if it was not true. He sent me to the foreman of the office to get his manuscript, which would make somewhere near two columns of the Herald.

I read the manuscript over carefully, and then wrote the article for the Democrat, simply confining myself to the facts as set forth in his article, without giving any names or making any attempt at embellishment. I have not seen Major Bitteringer since the night I wrote the article, but have called twice on Buckingham to give me the name of the girl, so that I might in person substantiate the truth of the statements.

This he peremptorily declined to do, and now says that he was mistaken; that no priest in this vicinity is guilty, to his knowledge, of the crime alleged, and that the aspersion cast upon a well known lady of this city is untrue. I have used my best endeavors to find out if there is any foundation for the scandal, and am compelled after due investigation, to say that I do not believe there is a word of truth in the infamous statements.

I am not a member of any church, and have as high regard for the Catholic clergy as the ministers of any other denomination. I am not acquainted with any of the parties implicated in the scandal, and can have no possible motive to publish anything derogatory to their good name. I have been a newspaper correspondent for more than twenty years, and have never been given to publishing scandals or sensation items. I should not have published the statement complained of had I not been positively assured of its truth by old newspaper men, who must know their responsibility in giving publicity to matters of that kind. I can only express my regret that I was misled in this instance, and sorry that the church

or anybody else should be unjustly maligned through any correspondence of mine. Yours truly, L. Hensel<sup>5</sup>

The St. Joseph Herald also ran a retraction on September 17 concluding with "it is proved to be nothing but a malicious slander from beginning to end. . . . Surely, if the devil gets his own, he will fasten his hooks securely on the slanderer." <sup>6</sup>

On that same day Bishop Hogan wrote to Father Sorin about the affair.

You are no doubt aware that a very foul and malicious lie has been uttered and published against Father Demers, the particulars of which and of its reputation I give in order that knowing all the circumstances you would be able rightly to direct Father Demers whether he sue for defamation of character or not, since the matter has now come to that point.

The last week of July a newspaper reporter being here and employed by the St. Joseph Herald, deriving his information I know not from what source, wrote a lengthy article for publication in which he states that The Order of the Holy Cross from Notre Dame, Indiana, came here and took possession of the church built by Mrs. Corby, and that a member of said Order, the pastor of the church, seduced a young girl of his flock; also that his indignant congregation demanded his removal which Mrs. Corby prevented by interfering and causing him to be kept in his pastoral charge and officiating at the altar notwithstanding his infamous crime.

The Herald refused to publish the slander but gave it up to a correspondent of the St. Louis Democrat who abridged it and published it anonymously, from which paper it was copied and published in the St. Joseph Herald. All these publications I send you herewith. You will observe that the publications of the St. Joseph Gazette are in defense of Father Demers, whereas the St. Louis Democrat and the St. Joseph Herald are the libelers. The St. Louis Democrat has retracted, apologized, and given the source of its information as well as the names of its authors; which we deem sufficient and have (for my part) pardoned it and its correspondent. The St. Joseph Herald acquits Father Demers from the imputed crime, but does not apologize for having defamed him, and refuses to give its author and source of information as the St. Louis paper. The question is: since that paper has positively refused to apologize and give its authors, shall we compel it to do so under pressure of law suit for defamation, or do you think that Father Demers has done enough by indicating his innocence without shaming and punishing the guilty whoever they found to be.

He is urged by many to prosecute, and by some to pardon his calumniators. I decline to advise which course to adopt, believing that to be your duty. No time can be lost. The ablest lawyer in this city has Father Demers in hand. He will undertake the prosecution for \$250 fees to be paid in

any event, and for twenty per cent of damages that may be recovered.

P.S.: Buckingham, the newspaper correspondent of the St. Joseph Herald, upon whom as author the responsibility seems to rest, is not financially responsible for anything as having no property. Bitteringer & Wickendon, editors and proprietors of the Herald, are sufficiently responsible for the amount of damages that may be claimed.

To what extent a jury will hold them responsible you may form the best judgment from what they have published which is herein laid before you. There will, it is said, be much strong evidence, besides their publication, to prove that the calumny can be traced to them as authors, and as far as I know there is no certainty that it can be traced to any one beyond them. All statements and reports published verbally or in the newspapers go to the Herald office for their source. Outside that there is no known source but Buckingham, and it is likely that he may be compelled by the testimony to be addressed to admit that his instructions to write the article were also his only sources of information.

When Father Demers wrote to the Superior General on September 18 he seemed to be just about to institute the lawsuit for \$50,000 damages. However, this plan changed after Father Sorin received the following letter of September 27 from the Bishop:

You are no doubt aware by this time that Father Demers is hard pressed and urged on to sue the St. Joseph Herald proprietors for libel. I wish to say that the lies against him being fully denied and retracted, there remains no longer any good reason why a priest should implicate himself and a whole community in a strife that would be most bitter and also interminable; especially since those who insist on the suit do so for the reason that they have motives of their own which Father Demers cannot well share in to gratify. Besides, in such a lawsuit the value of the character of a priest will be determined by an anti-Catholic jury, and altogether from worldly standpoints; and into the estimate will be brought, for the purpose of lowering it, every real known scandal given by priests all over the country of which there are not a few that cannot be denied. If we add to this the important fact almost certain to come to pass, that the suit will be taken by a Change of Venue from this to other adjoining counties in which there being but few or no Catholics, a verdict amounting to nothing for Father Demers will be surely rendered, whilst the costs which he will have to pay will be multiplied. And above and before all there is the example of Our Savior as well as his Blessed Words: "Pray for those who persecute and calumniate you."

It did appear necessary for a time to punish the Proprietors of the Herald, because, as was very generally but erroneously supposed, the authorship of the lie seemed to rest with them. But it is now well known and proved that they were deceived by others--infidels and unscrupulously

bigotted Protestants who through hatred of the Church and spite against its progress here impelled the newspaper men to publish what the slanderers vouched for and which cannot be well traced to any responsible or respectable source. And Father Demers would have an endless task by pursuing the rumor, and confronting one after another of those who circulated it; which would be all to no purpose, except to increase his own trouble since the newspapers have so fully and publicly retracted and apologized for the libel.

These are the views I take of this matter. And, if you please to stop the suit provided these reasons or others that may occur to yourself seem good to you, I hope in writing to Father Demers or anyone here you will speak from yourself and not give my name or allude to me as influencing or directing you in the matter.

Apparently Father Sorin saw the wisdom in the bishop's suggestion that the lawsuit be dropped and instructed Father Demers to do just that for there is no further mention of the unpleasant affair in later correspondence.

When Bishop Hogan learned in late October 1874 that Father Demers was to be recalled to Notre Dame he appealed to Father Sorin that the priest be permitted to continue working in his diocese offering him the parish in Carrollton about a hundred miles southeast of St. Joseph. Subsequently Father Demers did go to Carrollton from where he reported that prospects were good. However, he was called back to Indiana within just a month or two. From there he went on to other assignments in the Congregation and even spent some time in a Trappist monastery in France testing his vocation for that life. He died at Notre Dame on December 22, 1896.

With the departure of Father Demers the two-year apostolate of Holy Cross in western Missouri came to an end. Once again, despite the good will of those sent, the finances and lack of a clear plan of action at the outset of the undertaking, took their toll as they did in several other nineteenth century endeavors of the Congregation in America. It is a mystery why Father Sorin never responded to the often repeated pleas of Brother Adolphus and Father Demers to visit St. Joseph and view the situation on site. Father Sorin's replies to the letters from the Brother and the priest are not extant, so in all fairness he cannot be fairly judged in this matter.

As early as June 5, 1874, the minutes of the Provincial Council reveal that it had decided "to relinquish the Establishment at

St. Joseph, Mo., for the reason that there is no means in that locality to establish an educational Institution, and the Community is unable to advance so large a sum as would be required for that purpose." However, it was not until November 23, 1874, that the final step was taken. The minutes for the meeting on that date to which Father Demers was called read:

. . . Rev. Father Demers related an account of his experience of the Establishment of St. Joseph, Mo. From the account given it was evident that there is no prospect of founding an establishment at that place; therefore, it was determined to suppress it and convey the Deed back to the Rt. Rev. Bishop.

When Bishop Hogan received the deed he wrote an angry letter to Father Sorin on December 1, 1874.

Your deed of the Cemetery property here, made to me without my knowledge or consent, and sent to me through the post office, has come to hand. I do not by any means accept it as releasing you from stipulated obligations; for this, among other reasons, because the conveyance does not give back to me what I gave you. You still owe for the wood you sold off the place, the sum of four thousand dollars or thereabout, pending the nonpayment of which I hold you to the obligation of the daily Mass, without ever implying that this is your only liability. How you could retain the property solely for the purpose, as it appears, of denuding it of its pecuniary value, and then return it in its shorn condition, without complying in the least with the condition of the gift, is what I cannot see. Regretting the painful circumstances compelling me to write this letter which does not express one half of what I think it would be too little to say, I remain. . . .

Father Sorin responded in a rather cool note on December 4.

Msgr.: Your letter of the 1st inst. surprises us more than I care to express. You seem to treat my accompanying note with complete contempt. But perhaps you failed to see it. I shall wait for your reply to its contents.

Just how this embarrassing situation was resolved is not known, but apparently both parties were eventually satisfied.

In the meantime another sharp letter was delivered to Father Sorin. This time it was from B. R. Vineyard, Mrs. Corby's attorney. Writing on December 3, 1874, he also castigated the addressee.

Persuant to instructions from my client, Mrs. Amanda Corby, and before proceeding further, I write to you, as a usual courtesy, to ask you to pay the damages caused by your accepting and misusing and then abandoning the St. John's Cemetery property near this city, of which property



and the sacred trusts connected with it, she is, as in duty bound, the guardian. She holds you responsible; for the transfer of the property, with the stipulated obligations and purposes, was made to you by Bishop Hogan, with her knowledge, consent and approval.

The price of the wood you sold off of the property, valued at \$3700.00, she claims as a first indemnity; and, secondly, what may be agreed upon as just for the violation of the contract, against the express stipulations of which, you used the property just long enough and solely (as your conduct would indicate) for the purpose of selling the wood that was on it; whereas it was given to you, and you accepted it, for another purpose, towards which you have done nothing. Believing that I have hereby laid this whole matter before you with sufficient clearness, and soliciting an early response, I am, . . .

There is no way of knowing what Father Sorin's reply to the lawyer was, but perhaps it can be assumed that he told him the matter was being handled through the bishop. At least the archives contains no further correspondence from the lawyer.

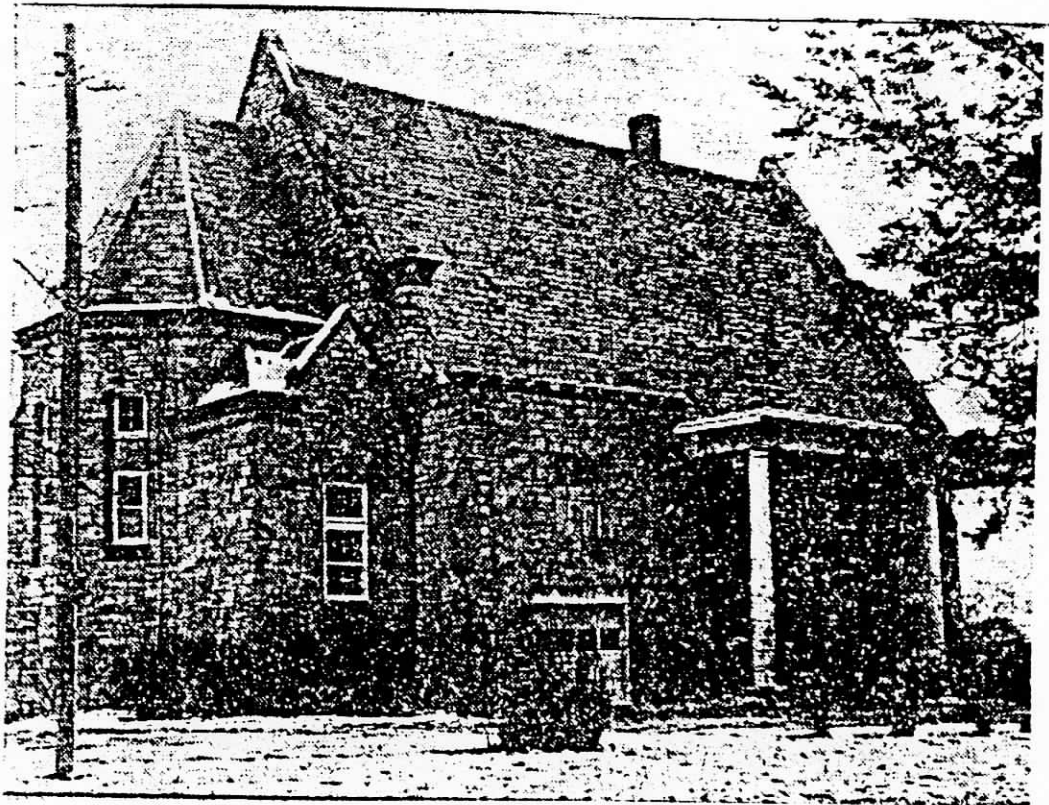
When Bishop Hogan transferred to the See of Kansas City in September 1880, he deeded the property to his successor Bishop Maurice Burke. The latter decided that the place was not suitable for a cemetery, and he deeded it back to Mrs. Corby. In 1898 Mrs Corby deeded the property to the Daughters of Charity who considered it briefly as a prospective site for an orphanage, a plan which did not materialize. In 1906 the ten acres on which the chapel stood was deeded back to the Corby estate. The surrounding 110 acres was leased out by the Sisters for farm purposes.

Mass was not celebrated regularly in the chapel, but the Corby family continued for some years to bury their dead in its crypts. In addition to John and Amanda Corby, others interred there were: Mrs. Corby's sister, Mrs. Silda Forsee, and the latter's husband, Dr. E. B. Forsee; Mrs. Corby's mother, Margaret Harris; and the latter's second husband, Sidney Harris; Joseph Musick, brother of Mrs. Corby, Joseph A. Corby, brother of John Corby, and the former's wife Elizabeth; and Mrs. Joseph E. Corby, wife of John Corby's nephew. Also, interred at the foot of a side altar were two diocesan priests, Fathers John Hayes and Thaddeus Brogan. Eventually, in 1941, all these bodies were re-interred in Mount Olivet Cemetery in St. Joseph following extensive vandalism in the interior of the Corby Chapel.

St. Roch's, the little French church, met a sadder fate. In 1880 a devastating flood swept it and other nearby buildings into the Missouri River.

In 1944 St. John's Chapel and its ten-acre tract was sold by the Corby estate to Dr. W. E. Hartsock. At the same time the Daughters of Charity sold him the adjoining 110-acres they had held for some years. The chapel was remodeled by the new owner into an impressive residence and is still used as such by its present (1990) owner, Christopher Ehlert.

About the only thing recognizable from Mrs. Corby's memorial to her husband is the chapel bell--and it hangs in St. Peter's Lutheran Church in St. Joseph to whom it was given by Doctor Hartsock.



The chapel as remodeled into a residence

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Joseph Hogan, On the Mission in Missouri, 1857-1869 (Kansas City, Missouri, James Heilmann, 1892), 203-204.

<sup>2</sup> History of Buchanan County, Missouri: Containing a history of the County, its cities, towns, etc. (St. Joseph, Missouri, St. Joseph Steam Printing Co., 1881 [Reprinted by Ramfre Press, Cape Girardeaux, Missouri, 1974]), 474-475.

<sup>3</sup> St. Louis Democrat (St. Louis, Missouri), August 21, 1874, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> St. Joseph Morning Herald (St. Joseph, Missouri), August 23, 1874, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> St. Louis Democrat, (St. Louis, Missouri). September 7, 1874, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> St. Joseph Morning Herald (St. Joseph, Missouri), September 17, 1874, p. 2.

#### SOURCES

The original of all letters, documents, reports, and Council minutes quoted in the text are in the archives of the Indiana Province, Congregation of Holy Cross, Notre Dame, Indiana, unless otherwise noted below.

The English translations of the letters of Father Demers from the original French are in the archives of the Diocese of Kansas City, Kansas City, Missouri as are a number of miscellaneous original photographs and clippings and photocopies of local newspapers and books provided by Mr. Ben Knapp, archival assistant there.

The original photograph of Father Demers is in the Archives, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana.

Microfilms of the St. Louis Democrat and the St. Joseph Morning Herald were borrowed from the State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

Documents referring to the Alexian Brothers are in the archives of the Alexian Brothers, Elk Grove Village, Illinois, from where copies were provided by Brother Roy Godwin, C.F.A.

Background on Holy Cross members was obtained from the General Archives, Congregation of Holy Cross, Rome, and from the Archives, Midwest Province, Brothers of Holy Cross, Notre Dame, Indiana.

Information on burials of members of the Corby family was provided by Mr. William Spalding, superintendent of Mount Olivet Cemetery, St. Joseph, Missouri.