

“Fr. Steven Avella has produced a serious, thoughtful, and engaging history of the Diocese of Des Moines. As you will see, the story of the Catholic Church in southwest Iowa is filled with men and women of great faith who enriched the lives of all people in this region through selfless engagement in education, medical services, and countless other charitable endeavors. This book shows how the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Des Moines has offered the love of Jesus Christ to the poor, the immigrant, and the farmer for over one hundred years. After reading this compelling history of Catholics in southwest Iowa, one can only hope that future harvests will be just as fruitful!”

+Timothy Cardinal Dolan  
Archdiocese of New York

“From the day Fr. Samuel Mazzuchelli first set foot on Iowa soil in the 1830s, Catholic bishops, priests, nuns, and laity have impacted the history of this state far beyond the number of the faithful. As Fr. Steven Avella has captured in this sweeping narrative of the Diocese of Des Moines, the moral impulses planted by those earliest religious pioneers would uplift generations. From its nineteenth-century origins, this exceptional twentieth-century legacy provided the foundation upon which Bishop Richard Pates would extend into the twenty-first century this tradition of peace and justice—the next chapter in Iowa’s Catholic odyssey.”

Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn (ret.)  
President, The World Food Prize

“Avella’s history of the Diocese of Des Moines from 1911 emphasizes the interplay of the sacred and the secular. The lively spirit of Catholicism from Bishops Dowling to Dingman is broadly illustrated in this excellent contribution to US church and local history.”

Mary Christine Athans, BVM, PhD  
Professor Emerita, The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity  
of the University of St. Thomas

“Fr. Steven Avella has produced an exceptional history of Catholicism in the American heartland. Based on rigorous, scholarly research and written in clear, compelling prose, Fr. Avella tells the story of the Diocese of Des Moines during the ten tumultuous decades of the twentieth century. This book will be of value not only to academic historians but also to general readers interested in the evolution of the Catholic Church in a diverse American diocese composed of small cities and big towns bound together by hundreds of bustling farms.”

Timothy Walch, PhD

Author of *Parish School: The History of American Catholicism  
from Colonial Times to the Present*

“This fascinating and well-researched volume not only informs us of the history of the Catholic Church in southwest Iowa, but describes the growth of religion in the US heartland. Avella’s history of the Diocese of Des Moines from 1911 emphasizes the interplay of the sacred and the secular.”

Most Rev. Jerome Hanus, OSB

Archbishop Emeritus of Dubuque

# The Catholic Church in Southwest Iowa

*A History of the Diocese of Des Moines*

Steven M. Avella



LITURGICAL PRESS

Collegeville, Minnesota

[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)

The production and printing of this book is a work made for hire between Liturgical Press and the Diocese of Des Moines.

Cover design by Monica Bokinskie. Cover art by James Downey.

Permission to use images in this book have been received from the collections of:

Library of Congress  
Archives of the Sisters of St. Dominic of Sinsinawa  
Archives of the Archdiocese of Dubuque  
Des Moines Public Library  
Historical Society of Des Moines  
Council Bluffs Public Library  
Archives of St. Benedict Abbey, Atchison  
Archives of the Congregation of the Humility of Mary  
Archives of the Diocese of Davenport  
Archives and Special Collections of Marquette University  
Catholic Church Extension Society  
Archives of the Diocese of Peoria  
Archives of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
Archives of the Sisters of St. Felix of Cantalice  
Archives of the Dominican Sisters of Adrian  
Mount Carmel Archives of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
Archivio Vaticano Segreto  
Archives of the School of Sisters of St. Francis

© 2018 by Steven M. Avella

Published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, except brief quotations in reviews, without written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN 978-0-8146-4471-3    ISBN 978-0-8146-8793-2 (e-book)

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9

---

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Avella, Steven M., author.

Title: The Catholic Church in southwest Iowa : a history of the Diocese of Des Moines / Steven M. Avella.

Description: Collegeville, Minnesota : Liturgical Press, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017055808 | ISBN 9780814644713

Subjects: LCSH: Catholic Church. Diocese of Des Moines (Iowa)—History. | Des Moines (Iowa)—Church history.

Classification: LCC BX1417.D47 A94 2018 | DDC 282/.7775—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017055808>

*To*  
*Bishop Richard E. Pates, Ninth Bishop of Des Moines*  
*“Ut Unum Sint”*



# Contents

- Foreword ix
- Acknowledgments xi
- Introduction xv
- Chapter 1* Building a Catholic Presence  
in the Hawkeye State 1
- Chapter 2* The Politics of Catholic Space:  
Carving a Niche in Southwest Iowa 57
- Chapter 3* “In a Place of Pasture He Hath Settled Me”:  
Austin Dowling and a New Diocese 73
- Chapter 4* “That I May Squeeze a Small Part  
in Your Hearts and Affections”:  
Thomas Drumm and Vital Expansion 105
- Chapter 5* “I Know I Shall Be the Happiest Bishop in America”:  
Gerald Bergan during Depression, War, Recovery 145
- Chapter 6* “It Is Good to Have a Home in Iowa”:  
Edward Daly and Maturation and Mobility 187
- Chapter 7* Transnational Changes and a New Iowa  
Catholicism 235
- Chapter 8* A Force for Justice 297
- Chapter 9* “Oh What a Splendid Day It Was”:  
The Papal Visit 335

Epilogue 359

Notes 363

Index 409

# Foreword

There is the story that missionaries, probably black-robed Jesuits, were seen centuries ago at the confluence of what now are called the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers. Observers asked, “Who are they?” The natives replied, “The Monks,” which in French is *Des Moines*.

From that moment emerged the makings of the Diocese of Des Moines, embracing as territory the southwest quadrant of Iowa. It was a relatively long period of gestation to diocesan status as parishes and institutions began to be established through the mother dioceses of Dubuque and Davenport. There were also the normal intrigue and ecclesiastical “gerrymandering” by those to be affected by its establishment. Finally, on October 11, 1911, Pope St. Pius X decreed that the Diocese of Des Moines was an ecclesiastical jurisdiction in its own right.

The diocese gradually grew with a catalogue of events involving the activities of some remarkably dedicated clergy, vowed religious, and loyal laity. Over time, there arose a unique spirit and character embracing lively human interplay that incarnated itself into the Body of Christ in the twenty-three counties of Southwest Iowa.

A top priority marking the diocesan centennial in 2011 was the eventual publication of an academic history. Father Steven Avella, a highly regarded and experienced historian from the faculty of Marquette University, was recruited for the task. Father Avella has lived up to expectations. His text is carefully researched and, at the same time, captures the human spirit of those who made what is the history of the Diocese of Des Moines.

Also to be credited for essential assistance with the historical rendition are members of the diocese who were unstinting with

gifts of memory and time. Many institutions opened their files and chests of memorabilia for this undertaking. Particularly noteworthy is the grant from the Edwin T. Meredith Foundation, under the leadership of Mell Meredith Frazier, E.T. Meredith IV, John Zieser, Cheri Cipperley, and Michael Frazier, which has made this publication possible. Appropriately, the parents of Mell Frazier and E.T. Meredith IV, Ted and Katie Meredith, played instrumental roles in the evolution of the diocese.

A bishop, as signified by his episcopal ring, is said to be married to his diocese. I was very fortunate to be matched with my bride—the Diocese of Des Moines. I am admittedly biased, but for my money, Des Moines is a great diocese. I hope you enjoy its history as captured in *The Catholic Church in Southwest Iowa* as much as I have.

Richard E. Pates  
Ninth Bishop of Des Moines

# Acknowledgments

I have accumulated many debts in putting together this history of the Diocese of Des Moines. First, my gratitude to His Excellency the Most Reverend Richard E. Pates for asking me to do this work. My invitation came through a mutual friend, Sister M. Christine Athans, BVM, a respected historian and theologian. Bishop Pates has been supportive and patient at every step of the way and generously shared the hospitality of his home with me. Within the bishop's office, diocesan chancellor Mr. Jason Kurth has been the go-to man for every need I have had. He has made the arrangements, opened the doors, and generously given me a tour of the Des Moines churches. When other duties overtook him, Mr. Adam Storey, vice chancellor, took over and helped see this book through to completion. Likewise, director of administrative services, Sister Jude Fitzpatrick, CHM, the overseer of the archives, has made the records available to me whenever I needed them. Sister Jude and the diocesan communications department were of great help in the selection of images for this book. The diocesan archivist, Ms. Lynn Wingert, has been on hand to help with questions. The cooperation and assistance I have had from everyone in the diocese has been outstanding.

I have received hospitality from Father Aquinas Nichols, Monsignor Frank Bognanno, Father John O. Bertogli, and Bishop Pates in Des Moines. Father Bertogli has been a good companion, often helping me to understand the "lay of the land" and taking time out of his busy schedule to enjoy an evening meal with me. In Peoria, I was the guest of the Conventual Franciscan Fathers, and in Atchison, Kansas, I enjoyed the hospitality of the guesthouse of St. Benedict's Abbey.

I have met and interviewed many priests: Monsignors Lawrence Beeson, Edward Pfeffer, Stephen Orr, and Frank Bognanno and Father David Polich, Father Daniel Kirby, and other pastors and permanent deacons who have opened doors for my visits. Father Kirby and Monsignor Beeson took precious time to give me a wonderful “heritage” tour of the diocese. Sister Mira Mosle, BVM, has been a wonderful source of information about the Dingman years. I had the opportunity to meet briefly with the former bishop, Joseph Charon. The late Father Jim Kiernan provided some important insights on my first draft. Monsignor Orr, Monsignor Beeson, and Sister M. Christine Athans, BVM, read this manuscript twice. My old friend and colleague, Dr. Joseph M. White, gave it a thorough reading and made many helpful suggestions. Timothy Walch, retired director of the Hoover Library and an old friend, also read the manuscript and provided a lot of encouragement. Mary Lou McGinn was a great help in matters related to the history of Council Bluffs. The maps and graphs were done by my former graduate student, Dr. Aaron Hyams, currently at Sam Houston State University in Texas. Sister Mira Mosle, BVM, Monsignor Bognanno, and my friend Douglas Firth Anderson of Northwestern College, read the second draft. Orr, Mosle, and Bognanno provided critical information about the papal visit and events during the term of Bishop Maurice Dingman. All of them offered helpful corrections, suggestions, and additional insights. I am deeply indebted to all of them.

I visited the following archives: the Archdiocese of Dubuque, where I had a chance to speak at length with now-retired Archbishop Jerome Hanus, OSB; the Diocese of Peoria, where my host was Sister Lea Stefancova, FSJB; the Diocese of Davenport, where I was warmly received by one of the best archivists I have ever met, Ms. Tyla Cole; the Archives of the Clerics of St. Viator, where Joan Sweeney was my contact. Sister Deanna Carr, BVM, and Jennifer Head of the BVM archives and Sister Joan Sheil of the Sisters of Humility provided important records from their archives. Sister Lois Hoh of the Sinsinawa Dominicans always promptly responded to my e-mail requests. R.C. McDonald of the Archives of the Dominican Province of St. Joseph sent me some very important information on Bishop Daly’s early years. Father Denis Meade, OSB, was my guide through the archives of the Benedictines of Atchison, Kansas. Monte Kniffen and his staff

helped me access the materials in the Sisters of Mercy Archives in Omaha, Nebraska. I am also grateful to the Mercy Heritage Center in Belmont, North Carolina, for their help. At Marquette University, my academic home, I was able to access the papers of Monsignor Luigi Ligutti and the Catholic Worker Movement in Des Moines, thanks to the good offices of Phil Runkel and Amy Cooper Cary. I would also like to thank the Department of History at Marquette University for providing research assistance and technical help to produce this text. Special thanks to David Schenk for his statistical work.

The US Passionists sent me helpful material from their collection. In Rome, I found other materials related to the retreat of the Passionist Fathers in Des Moines. The staffs at the State Historical Center in Des Moines and the Secret Vatican Archives in Rome were always of great assistance.

In Des Moines, local historians were most helpful. These included Mr. Archie Cook, an independent historian and docent; Mr. Bill R. Douglas, also an independent historian; Mary Neiderbach, who graciously shared many important materials with me from her work with the Community Development Department of Des Moines; and Karl Althaus, property description clerk for the Polk County auditor. Carol Aina, registrar at Dowling Catholic High School, sent me important statistics.

I am, of course, grateful to Liturgical Press for producing the book, in particular to Hans Christofferson, Stephanie Lancour, Julie Surma, and Colleen Stiller. I also extend sincere thanks to the Rt. Rev. John Klassen, OSB, of Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville for his help in securing the services of Liturgical Press. Special thanks also goes to Cindy Coan who produced the index.

Nearly everywhere I went in Iowa and beyond I was received with courtesy and hospitality. Virtually everyone responded to my requests positively and helpfully. Overall, Iowa people really do live up to their reputation of being down-to-earth and friendly. Because of them, I learned a lot about Iowa during this project and grew in admiration for the work of the Catholic Church in that state. I am grateful to Bishop Pates for asking me to do this work. It has been difficult at times, but always a joy.



# Introduction

Iowa is a lovely state with rolling hills, acres of corn, interesting cities, complicated politics, and a rich history. So many factors have contributed to the dense cultural fabric of the Hawkeye State. One of them is religion. Writing of the period before the turn of the twentieth century—but equally applicable today—Iowa historian Dorothy Schweider observed, the “social activities of Midwesterners, both rural and urban, centered around three institutions: family, church, and school.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, people of faith—from native peoples down to recently arrived Asian and African refugees—have brought with them their religious beliefs, practices, and morality. They have left their imprint on the state by transforming open spaces in the city and the country into holy places: churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples. They not only provide spiritual comfort and support but also offer other critical services: schools, social welfare organizations, and health-care facilities. Although difficult to disentangle from other motivations, religious beliefs—individual or institutional—exercise an important and sometimes significant influence on the values and public actions of individuals and groups. One does not have to share these varied beliefs to acknowledge their presence. They are part of the cultural heritage of the State of Iowa. This book attempts to write religion more deeply into the social and cultural history of the state. It uses the Roman Catholic Church—principally the twenty-three southwestern counties encompassed by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Des Moines—as a case study of this influence.

Modern life makes sharp distinctions between the secular and the sacred, assigning them each respective spheres. But like any binary

that tries to reduce what human beings do to simplistic divisions, this one often breaks down under deeper analysis. Sacred and secular, religion and society are really interdependent realities. The secular often touches on the sacred, while the sacred uses secular methods to accomplish its work. In pondering the history of a Roman Catholic diocese—a juridical entity that encompasses the lives of numerous people—one finds the opportunity to test the engagement of secular and sacred in a precise place, time, and set of events. The challenge of this book is to do just that. Rather than simply line up events and people chronologically, this text focuses on the impact of Catholicism in Iowa as a social, cultural, and spiritual force, particularly in the lives of the denizens of its twenty-three southwestern counties.

Catholicism in the territory encompassed by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Des Moines, as an institutional and spiritual force, was not as strong in this particular section of the state as in others. Indeed, when correlating the population statistics of these counties with the total Catholic population, it appears that Catholics were never more than 14 percent of the total population. Where people did claim a religious affiliation, they were predominately Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, and occasionally Mormons. The following chart tracks the respective populations of the twenty-three counties and the Catholic Church from 1900 to 2000:

County	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Mills	16,764	15,811	15,422	15,866	15,064	14,064	13,050	11,852	13,406	13,202	14,547
Montgomery	17,803	16,604	17,048	16,752	15,697	15,685	14,467	12,781	13,413	12,076	11,771
Adair	16,192	14,420	14,259	13,891	13,196	12,292	10,893	9,487	9,509	8,409	8,243
Union	19,928	16,616	17,268	17,435	16,280	15,651	13,712	13,557	13,858	12,750	12,309
Clarke	12,440	10,736	10,506	10,384	10,233	9,369	8,222	7,581	8,618	8,287	9,133
Lucas	16,126	13,462	15,686	15,114	14,571	12,069	10,923	10,163	10,313	9,070	9,422
Harrison	25,597	23,162	24,488	24,897	22,767	19,560	17,600	16,240	16,348	14,730	15,666
Shelby	17,932	16,552	16,065	17,131	16,720	15,942	15,825	15,528	15,043	13,230	13,173
Audubon	13,626	12,671	12,520	12,264	11,790	11,579	10,919	9,595	8,559	7,344	6,830
Guthrie	18,729	17,374	17,596	17,324	17,210	15,197	13,607	12,243	11,983	10,935	11,353
Dallas	23,058	23,628	25,120	25,493	24,649	23,661	24,123	26,085	29,513	29,755	40,750
Polk	82,624	110,438	154,029	172,837	195,835	226,010	266,315	286,130	303,170	327,140	374,601
Portawattamie	54,336	55,832	61,550	69,888	66,756	69,682	83,102	86,991	86,561	82,628	87,704
Cass	21,274	19,047	19,421	19,422	18,647	18,532	17,919	17,007	16,932	15,128	14,684
Madison	17,710	15,621	15,020	14,331	14,525	13,131	12,295	11,558	12,597	12,483	14,019
Warren	20,376	18,194	18,047	17,700	17,695	17,758	20,829	27,432	34,878	36,033	40,671
Taylor	18,784	16,312	15,514	14,859	14,258	12,420	10,288	8,790	8,353	7,114	6,958
Page	24,187	24,002	24,137	25,904	24,887	23,921	21,023	18,537	19,063	16,870	16,976
Adams	13,601	10,998	10,521	10,437	10,156	8,753	7,468	6,322	5,731	4,866	4,482
Fremont	18,546	15,623	15,447	15,533	14,645	12,323	10,282	9,282	9,401	8,226	8,010
Ringgold	15,325	12,904	12,919	11,966	11,137	9,528	7,910	6,373	6,112	5,420	5,469
Decatur	18,115	16,347	16,566	14,903	14,012	12,601	10,539	9,737	9,794	8,338	8,689
Wayne	17,491	16,184	15,378	13,787	13,308	11,737	9,800	8,405	8,199	7,067	6,730
TOTAL Pop.	520,564	512,538	564,527	588,118	594,038	601,465	631,111	641,656	671,354	671,101	742,190
Catholic total		25,000	36,370	37,959	41,090	50,154	72,050	80,106	80,059	95,180	96,492
% Catholic		5%	6%	6%	7%	8%	11%	12%	12%	14%	13%

Source: US Census and Official Catholic Directories

When dealing with the Catholic Church or religious bodies in general, however, numbers tell only a part of the story. Oftentimes, small religious groups, such as the Quakers or the Amish, exercise a wider social and cultural influence than their relative size would suggest. The Catholic Church has a strong institutional presence in the twenty-three southwestern counties of Iowa, and the Diocese of Des Moines today controls physical assets that are worth millions of dollars. Its human resources are probably greater in monetary value. It is also an economic force employing hundreds of men and women who administer churches, schools, hospitals, and other types of social provision. These bodies have budgets of various size and affect the local economy in significant ways. Through its institutional presence and its influence on the lives and imaginations of many inhabitants, the Catholic Church has a power to inspire, motivate, and significantly affect individuals and public life. Even people who formally leave or reject the church often carry the memories and thought-world of Catholicism.

I argue that Catholicism in southwest Iowa exercised a significant influence over this region despite its relatively small numbers. I further contend that Catholicism in southwest Iowa offers a case study of the impact of a visible religious minority on a wider environment. Other parts of America, for example, portions of the South, the Intermountain West, and the Pacific states (Oregon and Washington), have small Catholic populations but are equally visible and influential. The current population of Southwest Iowa is today concentrated in two urban centers—Des Moines and Council Bluffs—but its historic roots include a significant rural element.

Appreciating this history compels a delicate balancing act between the “internalist” and “externalist” dimensions of religious history. Explaining the Catholic Church as a social and cultural force demands a clear understanding of how the church understood what it was doing in the exercise of its presence and mission in the world. At the same time, it also requires some basic knowledge of how its practices were perceived by those outside its fold or even by its members. I have a rather clear understanding of the internals of Catholic life. I also appreciate how social and cultural historians provide another lens on these same developments and offer fascinating insights about gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity—as well as power, memory,

and global (transnational) concerns. Combining these two vantage points hopefully frames the people and events I describe in a wider context. It stresses that religious bodies of the size and significance of the Catholic Church do not exist in a vacuum but have a dialogic relationship with the world around them. This work demonstrates the scope and impact of Catholic agency in a geographically wide and culturally diverse area. Since the church is a case study, not every parish, Catholic group or activity, priest, sister, or layperson will be included here.

This is a different type of diocesan history. Instead of a yearbook-type narrative, it uses the church as a test case of the impact of religion on society. As such, it tries to avoid the exceptionalism of other diocesan texts, which write about the church as a self-contained entity. It attempts to place Catholicism in Southwest Iowa in a wider socio-cultural context, not only to help Catholics understand how their presence made a difference, but also to reach out to those who are interested in the role of religion in the history of the State of Iowa. It replicates traditional diocesan history by using the tenure of its bishops as chronological markers. While it acknowledges the significance of the men who held the office of bishop of Des Moines, they are, however, also considered in the same way we would examine the lives of political and economic figures of note. Local bishops have spiritual authority, but they also exercise a significant influence over personnel, finances, and institutional policies. In many instances, the typical American Catholic bishop has power greater than many CEOs of companies today.

The religious history of Iowa has influenced the state in significant and understudied ways. Native tribes practiced their religious traditions and customs long before Europeans came to this land beyond the Great River. Western religions entered the state in the seventeenth century, when French explorers brought with them Jesuit priests. The famous Father Jacques Marquette, the putative spiritual “founder” of many Midwestern communities, celebrated Mass in June 1673 on the banks of the Mississippi. Roman Catholics and Methodists took the lead in organizing religious institutions; in Dubuque, the Methodists opened a church in 1834, and a year later the Catholics did the same. Roman Catholic clerics such as Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, OP, and Father Charles Van Quickenborn organized the nucleus of what would

become a strong Roman Catholic presence in the eastern portion of the state. Other religious groups, especially Methodists, but also Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Disciples of Christ, created communities of faith in various parts of the state. Mormonism figured importantly on the Iowa religious landscape. Mormon pioneers pushing handcarts moved through Iowa and created enclaves in Lee County, Council Bluffs, and rural counties south of Des Moines. Dutch Reformed and Quaker settlements formed in the 1840s, as did the famous Amana Colonies, home of the Community of True Inspiration. Lutherans—who spoke Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, and German—came to Iowa, as did Jews and Muslims, in the nineteenth century. One of the nation’s oldest mosques exists in Cedar Rapids.

Religion was always a force to be reckoned with in Iowa’s history as more than 50 percent of Iowans consider themselves religious. Religious institutions and bodies have contributed to the sometimes contentious public debates over issues such as prohibition, divorce, care of the poor, abortion, homosexuality, and immigration. Religious forces make a strong showing as national presidential politics focus on the Iowa caucuses, and appeals to religious voting blocs become part of candidates’ repertoires as they campaign for Iowans to put them on the road to the White House.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout its history, the Roman Catholic Church in Iowa has had a pervasive influence in the state. As of 2016, there are 454 Roman Catholic parishes in Iowa, with a Catholic population of nearly 500,000 people, or 16.5 percent of the total population. Historically, many of these churches first served various immigrant groups, and they reflect architecture, art, devotional life, and music of the groups that created them. Catholic sponsorship created schools, health-care institutions, childcare facilities, and other forms of social provision. In October 1979, in one of the major moments in state and US Catholic history, the Sovereign Pontiff of the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, visited Iowa—one of the largest single gatherings in the state’s history. The records for social provision alone suggest that their influence goes beyond service to the Roman Catholic community, as schools and health-care institutions welcome people regardless of religious affiliation. At the present moment (2016) Catholics own or operate eighty-nine

elementary schools attended by more than twenty-one thousand children and twenty-one high schools with over 6,700 students. There are five Roman Catholic colleges or universities in the state, which enroll 9,453 students. These include Briar Cliff University (Sioux City), Clarke University (Dubuque), Mount Mercy University (Cedar Rapids), Loras College (Dubuque), and St. Ambrose University (Davenport). There is also a school of health sciences associated with Mercy Hospital in Des Moines. Catholics also run sixteen hospitals, ten homes for the aged, and eighteen social service centers. There are also a number of individual parishes that operate food pantries around the state; assist Latin American, Asian, and African refugees; counsel women released from prison; and contribute to the support of homeless shelters.

Bishops and priests have been local leaders and men of influence in many communities—rural and urban. A pious legend suggests that Dominican Samuel Mazzuchelli helped design the buildings of the old capitol in Iowa City (not true), although we do know he built some of the first church buildings in Dubuque, Davenport, and Muscatine. Some clerics, like Bishop Mathias Loras, contributed to Iowa's settlement by encouraging Catholic settlers to come to the Hawkeye State in the nineteenth century. In rural Iowa, priests were at times the mainstay of many communities, where they often served for long periods of time. Some pastors built huge churches, schools, and social halls—reflecting the strong “brick and mortar” ethos of Catholic Christianity. Others were personal confidants, intervention counselors, sympathetic ears to their parishioners and a voice of authority that sometimes resolved family feuds. In urban settings, they frequently took their place with city elders who directed the economic, political, and social affairs of large communities. Des Moines bishops also played important public roles. In the 1930s and 1940s, Bishop Gerald Bergan opened channels to ministers of other faiths, which helped create civic harmony. Bishop Maurice Dingman, a visible leader during the Farm Crisis of the 1980s, took strong stands on controversial public issues, such as federal agriculture policy, nuclear war, American foreign policy in Latin America, and economic justice. He also headed a committee to help build a new jail for Polk County.

In Iowa, as in other places where the Catholic Church expanded, the bishop and his coworkers were responsible first and foremost for

the preservation and transmission of the Catholic faith of the people in their jurisdiction. This meant making sure they had access to the Mass and the other sacraments (especially baptism, penance, and matrimony). This required financial resources, some of which came at first from generous European Catholics.

Catholicism in Iowa, as elsewhere in the United States, was transnational. It could not be otherwise. Indeed, many of the priests who gathered some of the first congregations for Mass, devotions, and other religious services were recruited from abroad, especially France and later Ireland and the German-speaking countries. A particularly strong cohort were Irish priests who would constitute one of the major sources of church personnel for years in Iowa and, along with Irish parishioners, imported not only Ireland's unique brand of Catholicism to Iowa's soil, but also sympathies for the home island's rocky road to independence. Irish Catholic tastes in church building, devotional practices, attitudes toward parochial schools, and public issues like prohibition were also transferred to the Iowa frontier.<sup>3</sup> Later, native-born clergy were raised up as the Catholic population grew, and institutions were created that encouraged and fostered vocations to the priesthood.

The work of vowed women religious played a critical role in Iowa's history. At a time when women were generally restricted from positions of higher authority in government and society, women religious effectively led and managed Catholic schools and colleges, built and administered large community operations, created health-care institutions, and offered shelter to young working women living in large cities. Many sisters from various communities have served in Iowa. Among those who have their general headquarters in the state are the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Family (Dubuque), the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Dubuque), the Presentation Sisters (Dubuque), Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (Trappistines) of Our Lady of the Mississippi (Dubuque), the Sisters of St. Francis (Clinton), and the Congregation of the Humility of Mary (Davenport)—all had houses of religious formation, colleges, and a significant institutional presence in the state. Other communities headquartered elsewhere included the Carmelite Sisters; Sisters of Mercy of Omaha, who ran hospitals and schools; and other educators, such as the School Sisters of St. Francis and the

Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, both of Milwaukee; the Sisters of St. Dominic of Sinsinawa Mound, Wisconsin; the Sisters of St. Dominic of Adrian, Michigan; the Sisters of the Precious Blood from Missouri; and the Benedictine Sisters from Atchison, Kansas.

Religious orders of men ran schools, counseling centers, parishes, and centers for prayer and meditation. These included the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), the Order of St. Benedict (Benedictines, Atchison, Kansas), the Congregation of the Passion (Passionists), the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), the Society of the Divine Savior (Salvatorians), and the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans). Dominicans, Passionists, Divine Word, and Salvatorians had training centers and ministries in Iowa. Irish Cistercians of the Strict Observance (Trappists) founded the Abbey of New Melleray in Peosta, Iowa, creating a large contemplative presence in the state and a place of spiritual rest for countless visitors. Trappists for many years were grain farmers. Today, they make caskets and sell caramels made by Trappistine nuns.

Apart from the human resources, the church contributed substantially to the built environment of Iowa. In a manner reminiscent of other places on ever-shifting Catholic frontiers, small houses of worship were built, which as time went on were replaced by “churches of suitable elegance”—many of them named for St. Patrick. Religious orders of women also were recruited to found schools, hospitals, and other institutions of social provision. Churches were often some of the most elegant structures in a community—many built in the neo-Gothic style that was favored in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In several places, these church structures rivaled some of the finest European buildings. Churches like St. Raphael’s in Dubuque, Sacred Heart Cathedral in Davenport, St. John’s Basilica in Des Moines, All Saints in Stuart, St. Patrick’s in Imogene, St. Joseph in Earling, and St. Ambrose Cathedral were or are places of artistic and architectural elegance. Many of these church structures occupy important space in urban or rural locations and function not only as houses of worship but also as meeting centers for groups of Catholics and others, where social and cultural events uplift and entertain communities.

In cities like Dubuque, Davenport, Sioux City, Cedar Rapids, Waterloo, Des Moines, and Council Bluffs, the church participated in the process of urbanization, erecting important structures that

contributed to the urban landscape but also shoring up social stability and providing critical services to communities. Indeed, cities would be concentrated images of the permeable boundaries between sacred and secular—the city contributing land, resources, and deference to church figures, and the church advancing urban priorities of social and moral order and urban beautification.

The Catholic presence also offers a window into the fortunes of rural Iowa (territorially most of the diocese). Indeed, the church was a strong presence in rural communities, many of which were put on the map by the advance of the railroad through Iowa. In many counties, especially railroad hubs or repair centers or county seats, railroads generated employment and even donations of land, which made possible the building of churches and schools. These Catholic communities also provided the farming population with a gathering point for community activity, a place to celebrate the passages of life, and schools. The presence of priests and sisters in Shelby County provided inspiring role models for many young men and women who embraced religious life.

This growth was not warmly welcomed in all parts of the state. Iowa has also welcomed those with strong anti-Catholic feelings. In 1887, the city of Clinton, Iowa, was the national headquarters of the American Protective Association (APA), which flourished for a time nationally. The APA viewed with alarm the growing numbers of Catholic immigrants and raised public alarms about Catholics in publicly funded jobs, for example, school teachers, police, and fire departments. Portions of Iowa were also quite receptive to the virulently anti-Catholic publication of the APA, *The Menace*, filled with outlandish conspiracy stories about “Catholic power,” and warmed-over invective from the Reformation era created problems for Catholics in various communities. The Ku Klux Klan also held sway in some of the southern counties of Iowa. They would be a direct threat to Catholic life in the Diocese of Des Moines.

Since the nineteenth century, southwest Iowa has always been in a state of social and economic flux. Business, commerce, and the links provided by state government or the railroad sustained its large cities. Catholicism flourished in these communities, fueled by the jobs and stability they offered. Rural areas and smaller towns managed to move forward as well. Other areas ministered to coal miners

who dug into Iowa's once rich deposits and made livelihoods for themselves and their immigrant families. Both coal mining and farming, however, became imperiled. Farm distress had been a constant in Iowa history, creating some sympathy for Populist activity in the late 1890s. Farm prices were always unstable, especially after World War I, and farming as a career option began to slowly fade from the agendas of younger Iowans. What later became known as the "Farm Crisis" was a slow, steady retreat from the family farm or, as Bishop Maurice Dingman put it, deterioration from "agriculture to agribusiness," which became one of the accompanying factors of the story of Iowa Catholicism. As farm income and population declined, the church of Southwest Iowa became increasingly urban and suburban.



This study was commissioned by Bishop Richard Pates as part of the celebration of the centenary of the Diocese of Des Moines in 2011. The bishop insisted the work be extensively researched and scholarly in approach. Broken into thematically arranged epochs, it uses the terms of various bishops as the gathering point for the myriad activities that comprised Des Moines's diocesan life. The narrative begins with the remote origins of Catholicism in Iowa and ends with the term of Bishop Maurice Dingman (1968–1987). Bishops William Bullock (1987–1993) and Joseph Charron, CPPS (1993–2007) are too close to present times to offer much historical perspective. This book's scope is defined by the sources available to the historian—hence it relies heavily on the archival collections in the diocesan chancery and other repositories; a careful reading of the diocesan and local newspapers, government records, and published sources; and substantial help from local historians, brother priests, women religious, and generous librarians and archivists. It covers the demographic growth of the diocese and the institutional response to that growth—especially the formation of new parishes and schools.

The author of this text is a Catholic priest and, as such, writes from both the assets and liabilities that status brings. On the one hand, the inner workings of the church are not strange or exotic to me. This is my "family" and I know the sometimes esoteric ways and

inner realities of church life quite well. My perspective may, however, be influenced by a life of Catholic practice and identity—in ways that may not appreciate how others see or experience the church. I have relied on the art and craft of fellow historians to create a broader understanding of the materials I have gathered for this book. I have tried to remain faithful to the sources that I have discovered and the mandate given by the diocese that commissioned this book. As one reviewer observed, the text has a “masculine feel.” Others have noted the lack of a lay voice. Of the former, I have tried to integrate the role and contributions of women, especially women religious, into the text. But the historical context of the diocese, at least until Bishop Dingman, sadly undervalued and underreported the role of women. This, of course, will not be the case when the sequel to this work is written, or an ambitious scholar decides to do a revision of this history. As for the lay voice, I have attempted to chronicle, where sources are available, the rise of important lay groups such as the Knights of Columbus, the Holy Name, and the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women. Nevertheless, records of Catholic lay organizations or even biographies of people who participated in major church events prior to Vatican II are not readily available. Stories in the Catholic press carry only announcements of fund-raisers, charity events, and public devotions. Some of these have been included in the text. But few journalists felt it necessary to ask about the faith and day-to-day life of the average Catholic. One could draw inferences from these reports, but without an actual person or persons to which I might attribute them, it would be nothing more than an educated guess.

The goal of this book attempts to do what historian William Cronon said of our profession: “Our core business [as historians] is resurrection; helping the past live again.”<sup>4</sup> I also hope that local Catholics may develop another way of thinking about their history and the impact of their collective presence in Iowa. By the same token, I wish to contribute a perspective on the fascinating history of religion in Iowa and other parts of the Midwest. Paraphrasing Meredith Wilson, “I really did give Iowa a try.”

Steven M. Avella