

## THE HISTORY OF A COLUMBARIUM

By Shirley Shaw – January 8, 2017

The idea of a constructing a Columbarium on Church grounds originated at St. Thomas Aquinas in or around 2013, when a parishioner met with and presented the idea to the Pastoral council. The idea itself was met with a great deal of skepticism, primarily due to lack of familiarity with Columbaria. It was also a time when cremation was just beginning to be a preferred way of internment.

A series of informational meetings were held after Masses on several weekends throughout the following year. As a result of those meetings, it became apparent that there was indeed interest within the community. An adequate number of parishioners made a commitment and/or wrote letters of support. Several members of the community stepped forward, without being asked, and volunteered to work actively to move the project forward. The miraculous thing about the committee is that each of those 7 members brought a special expertise, all of which were essential to the success of the project.

Before we could move ahead, we had to answer a series of questions presented to us by the pastoral council –Diocesan approval, Location, Costs, Community Interest, Management responsibility, etc. They were questions that defined procedure. It became very clear from the beginning that the project needed to be self-supporting. Armed with a great deal of confidence we proceeded.

Finding a location was not as simple as we had anticipated. In the final analysis, there was only one spot within all of the Church and grounds that would work very well. We had originally anticipated an indoor unit, only to discover that the “perfect places” within the building would not support the weight of a 120 niche structure. The Prayer Garden awaited us. Even there, we had to be certain that we could build clear of any utility lines.

In the meantime, the committee members were exploring other Columbaria of Churches within Ames and reviewing their policies, which was a big help when it was time to develop policies of our own. We were also contacting companies that install Columbaria to glean some idea of costs. In the final analysis, we chose Eickhoff Columbaria of Minnesota. They have installed structures in Ames and were highly regarded as well as easy to work with in an advisory capacity.

By the summer of 2015 we were in full forward movement. Our contractors were hired, policies were being drafted, interested parishioners were making commitments to purchase and soon gathered to sign purchase contracts and select their niche. There were a few hurdles along the way (always have an engineer on the committee!)

Our dedication was July, 2016, on a beautiful summer morning after 10:30 Mass. We had sold 70 niches by that time, more than enough to pay for the project. During the construction process, several of our parishioners had passed away. Their cremains were awaiting inurnment and are now in place. Several more have joined them. The question before us – When do start to plan for another one?

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Shirley Shaw	Paula Friederich
Ray Murray	Judy Amfahr
Bob Bourne	Kathy Glatz
Joan Grabenstetter	